

APPLICANT RESPONSE 10-14-21

Date: September 29, 2021
To: City of Austin Design Commission
From: Planning & Urban Design Working Group
Subject: Density Bonus Working Group review of 415 Colorado Street for substantial compliance with the Urban Design Guidelines

Meeting date: September 17, 2021; 12:00 pm; Virtual Microsoft Teams Meeting
Applicant: Michele Rogerson Lynch

The project location is located at 415 Colorado Street.

The project includes mixed use of office (107,860 sf) and residential (426,968 sf). 15,799 sf is assigned to Common Areas, the total FAR gsf totaling 550,627. The project also includes 11 parking levels (none underground).

The applicant is seeking a Density Bonus to raise the FAR from 8:1 to 25:1. The site is 22,080 sf (0.507 acres) with a current allowable building size of 176,641 based on the 8:1 FAR.

The total building height is 668'-0" (47 floors). The maximum height achievable under the Density Bonus program in this portion of Downtown is unlimited.

Per the Density Bonus Program ordinance, the applicant is required to meet the three gatekeeper requirements:

- Substantially comply with the City's Urban Design Guidelines
- Provide streetscape improvements along all public street frontages consistent with the Great Streets Program Standards
- Applicant must commit to a minimum of 2-star green building rating (3-star proposed).

WORKING GROUP COMMENTS REGARDING COMPLIANCE WITH THE URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

AREA WIDE GUIDELINES

1. Create dense development –
25:1 far is being requested. Project complies with this Section.
2. **Create mixed-use development –
Office and residential uses are proposed as mixed use but there does not appear to be a "mixed income" component as mentioned in the Guidelines. Project partially complies with this Section.**

RESPONSE:

The project fully complies with this section. We believe full credit should be given to the project for the reasons below:

1. **The project meets and exceeds the mixed-use requirements**
 - a) **The project includes 107,000 square feet of office and 328 residential units. The street level will have both an office lobby, a residential lobby with a residential lounge and a location for a street vendor with outdoor seating; and**
 - b) **Two uses (office and residential) are provided on a quarter of a block. The Urban Design Guidelines require two uses per half block. The project exceeds the requirement by providing twice as many uses than required per site area.**
2. **The Urban Design Guidelines mention "a mixed income environment" but do not state that a mixed income environment is recommended or required for "AW-2 Create Mixed Use Development". Even though a mixed income environment is not required,**

we would like to clarify how the projects supports a mixed income environment in downtown Austin.

- a) The project provides over 100,000 SF of office space along with base building operations. This creates an economically diverse, mixed income environment by employing people at different income levels. It includes concierge, building security, janitorial staff, building management, leasing staff, and building engineers for the base building;
- b) Each company officing in the building will further contribute to the mixed income environment by employing people at different income levels, like receptionists, accountants, professional staff, human resources, and company management;
- c) Instead of providing a restaurant space that, given the downtown location, may be less affordable for lower income levels, the building plans have been revised to collaborate with a street food vendor that can set up directly outside the building to provide food at various times of the day. This further supports a mixed income environment. The street vendor location has been indicated on the plans;
- d) The project provides more ground floor exterior space than what is required under the great streets program. The generous exterior space will allow for this function to occur and provide additional space for people to gather; and
- e) The building further supports a mixed income environment by contributing \$3.75 Million to the affordable housing fund. This money can be used to fund affordable housing communities in downtown and where they are most needed.

3. Limit development which closes downtown streets –
This project is not permanently closing down any streets. Project complies with this Section.
4. Buffer neighborhood edges-
There are no adjacent neighbor edges. Not applicable.
5. Incorporate civic art in both public and private development –
This project is proposing public art on the street corner. Project complies with this Section.
6. Protect important public views –
Since project is already surrounded by high-rises, there are no important public views to protect. Not applicable.
7. Avoid historical misrepresentations –
Project complies with this Section.
8. **Respect adjacent historic buildings-**
It was not shown how the building facade relates to the adjacent building (south side) that is over 50 years old. Project does not comply with this Section.

RESPONSE:

The Urban Design Guidelines require dense developments to respond to adjacent historically zoned buildings. The adjacent building is located at 407 Colorado and is zoned for CBD and not a historically zoned building. Therefore, this section is N/A. We believe the point removed should be restored for this category:

9. Acknowledge that rooftops are not seen from other buildings and the street –
It was mentioned that all rooftop equipment will be enclosed. Project complies with this Section.
10. Avoid the development of theme environments-
Project complies with this Section.

11. Recycle existing building stock –

An example of recycling the wood trusses was not included in the presentation. Project does not comply with this Section.

RESPONSE:

The presentation has been updated to show an example of how the existing wood trusses are reused in the new project. We believe credit should be given in this category.

Project complies with 6.5 of the 9 applicable Area Wide Guidelines.

We believe the project complies with 8 of 8 of the applicable Area Wide Guidelines.

GUIDELINES FOR THE PUBLIC STREETSCAPE

1. Protect the pedestrian where the building meets the street-
Facades on both streets are inset to provide pedestrian overhead protection. Project complies with this Section.
2. Minimize curb cuts-
There is one curb cut planned. Project complies with this Section.
3. Create a potential for two-way streets-
Colorado St is currently a two-way street. If West 5th Street became two-way, this project would not be affected. Project complies with this section.
4. **Reinforce pedestrian activity-**
Beyond implementing the minimum required Great Streets components and a public art piece on the street corner, not enough emphasis is given to reinforcing pedestrian activity at the streetscape for the general public (community benefit). When the office/residential lobbies close for the day, this building, on a vital street corner, will be a dead-zone for the general public who frequent the area after business hours. Therefore, some retail component (especially food oriented), would benefit the general public as well as the office/residential tenants of the building. Project does not comply with this Section.

RESPONSE:

The project complies with this section as outlined below. We believe credit should be given in this category:

1. Great Streets require 10' clear sidewalks. The sidewalk along 5th provides a minimum continuous width of over 11', with many areas wider. Over 50% of the sidewalk along Colorado (not including the drive aisle) is wider than 10';
2. Sidewalks abut the back of curb continuously along 5th Street and for over 50% along Colorado Street (minus the access drive);
3. Pedestrian connections are provided along Colorado and along 5th street so there are no blocks without pedestrian connections;
4. Pedestrian movement is enhanced through the use of pavers patterns and textures responding to the building design, accentuating access to building entries, while also providing transitions to the notify pedestrians of the vehicular cross traffic at the access drive;
5. The project further reinforces pedestrian activity through the building's design and programming of the ground floor. Both residential and office lobbies are located on the ground floor and are designed to not only act as a lobby space, but also as a gathering space for residents and their guest and for office tenants and office visitors. The density of the building will add about a thousand people to this block, which will greatly increase pedestrian activity when people walk in and out of the building. Outdoor seating will also be provided.

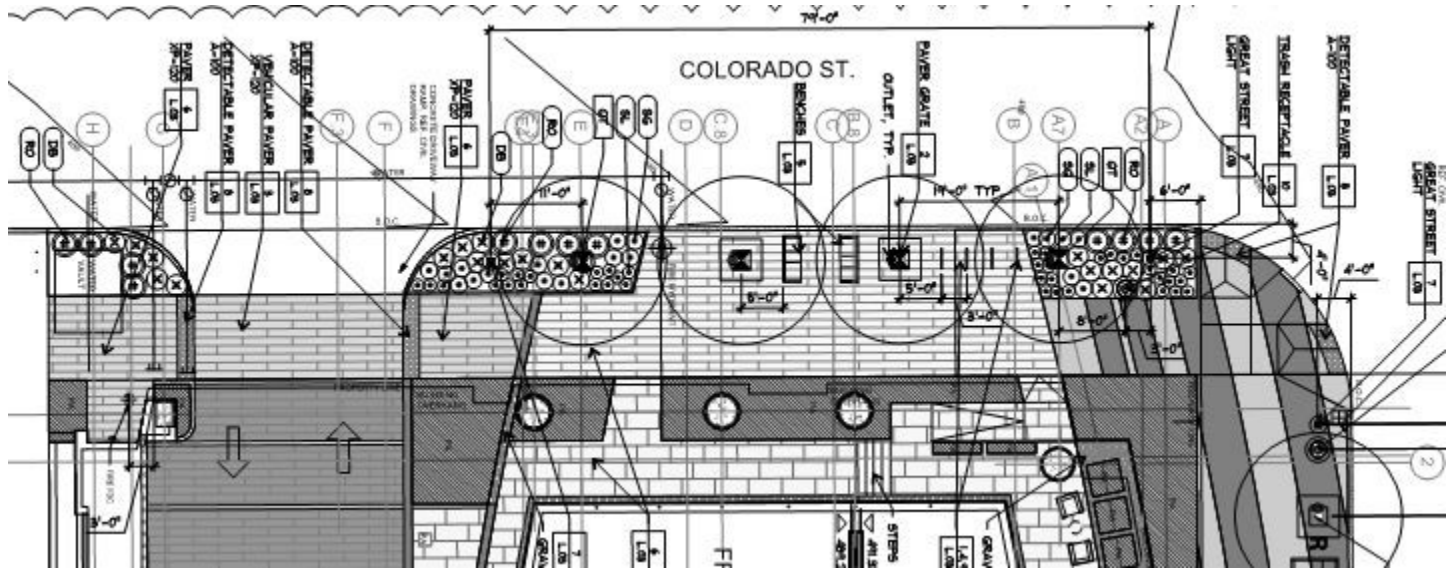
The residential lobby will be open 24 hours and will have activity throughout the day when residents leave and return to their home. There will be increased activity in the mornings, during lunch, and in the evenings when people enter and leave the building to walk or rideshare to their workplace downtown and to local restaurants. The office lobby will be active during the day when tenants come to work, go to lunch, go home, leave for meetings, and when visitors enter and leave the building. Additional outdoor seating is provided in front of the residential and the office lobby. This seating exceeds Great Streets requirements;

6. The building addresses the streetscape by eroding the division between interior and exterior space to create a visually unified experience and to improve the connection to the city. This is done using a continuous structural glass wall with low iron clear glass that allows the interior space to be part of the exterior space and vice versa. This design strategy creates more depth and reinforces visual connection between interior and exterior spaces. Artwork displayed in the lobbies can not only be observed from the interior but can also be observed from the pedestrian realm. The use of continuous glazing on the ground level makes the building feel inviting and visually opens it up to the pedestrian realm. An exhibit has been added in the presentation to showcase the design strategy; and
 7. The Urban Design Guidelines encourage street vendors. The building plans are revised to indicate a location for a street vendor to provide food in the pedestrian realm at different hours of the day. The street vendor is a benefit to the general public as well as building residents and tenants. Outdoor seating is provided adjacent to the food vendor.
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5. Enhance key transit stops-
There are no transit stops on site this. Not applicable to this project.
 6. Enhance the streetscape-
Great Streets Program is fully implemented and additional components have been added. Project complies with this Section.
 7. Avoid conflicts between pedestrians and utility equipment-
There are no conflicts between pedestrians and utility equipment. Project complies with this section.
 8. Install street trees-
Trees were not discussed but it appears that street trees are provided. Project complies with this Section.
 9. Provide pedestrian-scaled lighting-
Project complies with this Section.
 10. **Provide protection from cars/promote curbside parking-**
Pedestrians are protected at sidewalk but no curbside parking provided, especially for ride-share pickup and drop-off. Project partially complies with this Section.

RESPONSE:

The project complies with this section as outlined below. We believe full credit should be given in this category:

1. Curbside parking is provided along Colorado Street (as exists today). See below exhibit. The parking spaces can be used for ride share pick up and drop off
2. The proposed sidewalk configuration was encouraged by the transportation department, and we were instructed to remove the pull in shown on the original design. Great streets also preferred sidewalk space over the pull in space.



Screen mechanical and utility equipment-

Equipment is either screened and/or within building envelope. Project complies with this Section.

11. Provide generous street-level windows-

Large windows are shown at street level. Project complies with this Section.

12. Install pedestrian-friendly materials at street level-

The street level materials appear to be pedestrian friendly. Project complies with this Section.

Project complies with 10.5 of the 12 applicable Public Streetscape Guidelines.

We believe the project complies with 12 of 12 of the applicable Public Streetscape Guidelines.

PLAZAS AND OPEN SPACE GUIDELINES

1. Treat the four Squares with special consideration- Not applicable.
2. Contribute to an open space network- Not applicable.
3. Emphasize connections to parks and greenways- Applicant proposes that they comply with this Guideline but the Guideline itself is not referring to connections to a greater network of paths that eventually lead to a park or greenway. Not applicable.
4. Incorporate open space into residential development (pool, deck, dog area)- Terraces provide open space for the tenants of the building. Project complies with this Section.
5. Develop green roofs- Green roofs are provided at rooftop amenity decks and terraces. Project complies with this Section.
6. Provide plazas in high use areas- Not applicable.
7. Determine plaza function, size and activity- Not applicable.
8. Respond to microclimate in plaza design- Not applicable.
9. Consider views, circulation, boundaries and subspaces in plaza design- Not applicable.
10. Provide an appropriate amount of plaza seating- Not applicable.
11. Provide visual and spatial complexity in plaza design- Not applicable.
12. Use plants to enliven urban spaces- Urban spaces are enlivened by the use of plants. Project complies with this Section.
13. Provide interactive civic art and fountains in plaza- Not applicable.
14. Provide food service for plaza participants- Not applicable.
15. Increase safety in plazas through wayfinding, lighting and visibility- Not applicable.
16. Consider plaza operations and maintenance- Not applicable.

Project complies with 3 of the 3 applicable Plaza and Open Space Guidelines.

GUIDELINES FOR BUILDINGS

1. **Build to the street-**

Building built to the street but inset at street level affording pedestrians overhead protection.

RESPONSE:

The project complies with this section, and we believe that credit should be given to the project for the reasons below:

1. **The building is set back at the ground level to provide wider sidewalks to enhance the pedestrian realm and provide pedestrian overhead protection;**
2. **Building facades are designed as part of the public realm (see response to PS-4 above); and**
3. **Ground level columns along Colorado street and a portion of 5th street create an arcade, which the Urban Design Guidelines define as a covered public sidewalk,**

typically carved from the ground floor of a building and adjacent to a public street. The presentation includes an exhibit showing the arcade.

2. Provide multi-tenant, pedestrian-oriented development at the street level-
Project has large office and residential lobbies at street level but appears to be limited to the tenants of the building and has no elements that engage pedestrians (general public) within those lobbies. The Guidelines limit street level frontage that does not encourage walk-in traffic to 25%. Project does not comply with this Section.

RESPONSE:

The project complies with this section. We believe that credit should be given to the project for the reasons below:

1. Building lobbies are located on the ground floor and provide pedestrian oriented uses along both Colorado and 5th street;
 2. The Urban Design Guidelines state that walk-in traffic is required for 75% of ground floor uses, but do not state that the walk-in traffic must be comprised of the general public. Given the high density of the building with around 1,000 inhabitants, the building will generate walk-in traffic from residents, office tenants, and office visitors. Residents and office tenants are pedestrians just like anyone else walking down the street and this building is their home and/or workplace that they exit and enter daily. Given the downtown location of the project, people will walk, bike, or rideshare to and from work, leave the building to grab lunch or dinner downtown and enjoy the nightlife at 6th street. We believe a large majority of this traffic will be by pedestrians, not cars. This satisfies the intent of the Urban Design Guidelines which is trying to avoid vehicular traffic from drive through operations as stated in the Urban Design Guidelines; and
 3. The project will also engage with a street food vendor to provide food at various times and the plans have been revised to show this location. This will further increase pedestrian traffic on the site and add a retail-oriented component serving the general public, residents and office tenants.
3. Accentuate primary entrances-
Primary entrances are well accentuated. Project complies with this Section.
 4. Encourage the inclusion of local character-
Local character will be provided through artwork displayed in the street level lobbies. Project complies with this Section.
 5. Control on-site parking-
All parking is in garage. Design screens automobiles. Project complies with this Section.
 6. Create quality construction- Project complies with this Section.
 7. Create buildings with human scale-
The building itself at street level is beyond human scale but the streetscape elements do provide a more human scale feeling. Project partially complies with this Section.

RESPONSE:

The project complies with this section. We believe that full credit should be given to the project for the reasons below:

1. The building is designed with different scales to achieve different objectives. It is designed primarily from 3 vantage points, the first being the pedestrian vantage point at ground level directly adjacent to the building, the second being the pedestrian and

vehicular vantage point from across the street and within a few blocks of the building, the third being the view from far away affecting how the building sits in the skyline. The building is massed to provide visual interest, a sense of scale and relief along the streetscape;

2. The building takes up less site area on the ground level than the existing buildings and creates more space for pedestrians on the ground level;
3. The building facade is set back on the ground level to reduce the towering effect of the building above and to avoid monolithic vertical extrusions of the maximum footprint. This strategy creates a canopy that brings down the scale of the 47-story building to a much smaller scale that responds to the scale of the adjacent one and two story buildings and to the scale of the high-rise office building across Colorado Street. This is a deliberate strategy to align with the massing on adjacent sites and to tie the building into the existing urban fabric. We added a slide to our presentation that shows this in more detail;
4. The building features a highly transparent glass wall at the ground level. It is designed to disappear, so that the lobby interior helps to establish a more pedestrian scale by creating a room with furniture, lighting, artwork, all at a human scale while at the same time being appropriately sized for a 47-story building. The presentation includes an exhibit with a building section to illustrate this strategy; and
5. The lower two floors are differentiated architecturally from the upper floors. A larger scale “super grid” is used on the upper floors to further scale down the massing of the building to a more comprehensible scale. Programmatic changes are expressed on the facade, like the residential amenity space or sky lounge terrace. The roof parapet is curved to help the building establish an identify in the skyline.

Project complies with 5 of the 7 Building Guidelines.

We believe the project complies with 7 of the 7 applicable Building Guidelines.

Positive attributes of the project are that it is densifying and activating 3 lots that are currently underutilized. And it provides a nice living and work environment for its tenants/ inhabitants.

Concerns primarily center on the lack of opportunities for the pedestrians (general public) to engage with the building at street level. The large lobbies do not provide any amenities for pedestrians (other than tenants of the building), whereas most density-bonus projects provide some type of retail establishment that can be enjoyed by the walk-in general public. Decreasing the lobby sizes or moving some of the street level functions to another level to accommodate some retails is recommended.

And while this project quantitatively complied with 25 out of 31 applicable guidelines, the lack of retail or other methods for the building to activate the streetscape for the entire community, and not just the tenants/inhabitants who live/work there, is a major concern. The Design Commission’s main responsibility is to protect the public realm by enhancing it for a safe, beautiful and enjoyable pedestrian experience for all Austinites and it has found that including some type of retail at street level best enhances and activates the public streetscape.

Based upon the above responses, we should now be meeting 30 of 30 items and therefore be substantially compliant with the Urban Design Guidelines.

Therefore, we cannot recommend that this project, as presented, is in substantial compliance with the Urban Design Guidelines.

The Working Group appreciates the opportunity to preliminarily review and comment on this project and we look forward to a continued collaborative process while moving this project forward.

Respectfully,

EVAN K TANIGUCHI

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Planning & Urban Design Working Group of the Design Commission