



Austin Design Commission

To: City of Austin Staff

May 27, 2014

From: Austin Design Commission

Re: Review of the 7th & Congress Hotel Project for substantial compliance with the Urban Design Guidelines

Meeting date: May 27, 2014

Applicant: Finley Company

The applicant is seeking a density bonus to raise the FAR from 8:1 to 23:1 FAR (within 25:1 maximum allowance). This portion of downtown has a height limit of: Unlimited. The following code modifications are being requested through a rezoning from CBD to CBD-CURE:

1. Modify the distance within Congress Avenue from 60 feet to 40 feet that: (a) the minimum structure height is 30 feet; and (b) the maximum structure height is 90 feet.
2. Modify the number of off-street loading spaces required to one space, and that the one off-street loading space provided may be 10' x 30'.

Per ordinance, the applicant is required to provide streetscape improvements along all public street frontages consistent with the Great Streets Standards, and the applicant shall commit to a minimum of 2 star green building rating. The Mayor and Council and the Planning & Development Review Director is to determine appropriate bonus area and in light of community benefits to be provided.

Positive attributes of the project include:

1. Hotel lobby located on an upper level, freeing more ground levels space for active uses.
2. Building podium levels above ground level are occupied space with active uses, instead of parking garage.
3. The façade at street level relates to the area character and presents a human scale.

One concern has been the fire wall that faces south to adjacent lots. This wall cannot have windows, and it is a large wall, due to the height of the building. The Working Group noted improvements the applicant has made since previous public hearings. The south fire wall is to consist of at least 2 materials with reveal lines to break up the scale. A light well allows units to have light, and the light well includes one window per floor facing south.

Additionally, as conversations continue with Austin Energy on the electrical vault and with the transportation department on loading and parking, it is important that street trees, a pedestrian friendly environment, and a Great Streets streetscape be maintained. The applicant notes that loading needs are being minimized with on-site laundry and no event space within the building.

We recommend that the project, as presented, is in substantial compliance with the Urban Design Guidelines.

Respectfully,

Dean Almy, Chair

City of Austin Design Commission

Dean Almy,
Chair

Evan Taniguchi,
Vice Chair

Hope Hasbrouck,
Secretary

Juan Cotera

James Shieh

Bart Whatley

Jeannie Wiginton

George Adams
Executive Liaison

Jorge E. Rousselin
Staff Liaison