

## Planning and Urban Development Department Planning Division



**Subject:** B-7 Design Review – Midtown development

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**Date of Review:** Monday, December 1, 2014

The Midtown project includes four separate, mixed-use buildings. The project was reviewed against the *B-7 Bayside Mixed Use Urban District Zone* (Section (f) and Appendix 4 of the Design Manual). Upon preliminary staff review in combination with project meetings held with the design team, staff has the following comments regarding the design of the four buildings as proposed.

### **Findings of the Design Review:**

There are some **outstanding questions and comments** – please refer to comments below.

#### Principles and Standards of concern

- **Gateways, Views, and Landmarks (A-3 and A-4):** There are several view corridors and approaches to these four buildings that currently are not being taken advantage of in the architecture. One example is the view of MidtownFour as seen coming down Elm Street where the building will be in prominent view. In most cases, the architecture currently does not acknowledge or correspond to these corridors and should be revised to highlight, emphasize, and celebrate them. MidtownOne and Two do have elements, such as the tower or façade design, that acknowledge the approach corners and intersections. It is MidtownThree and Four that lack this kind of recognition of its context.
- **Pedestrian Environment and Mid-block Permeability (A-5, B-3):** MidtownThree is of particular concern for the length of the building. Although it is true that the building across the street, and several others within the neighborhood, are also block-long buildings, the difference is the uses of the proposed buildings and the changing character of the neighborhood. While historically industrial and not concerned with providing a walkable, pedestrian-friendly environment, the *New Vision for Bayside* and the B-7 Standards make quite clear that the character of the neighborhood is shifting towards including mixed-use and residential character with a desire for a pedestrian-friendly environment. The long, continuous building is problematic from this perspective. Currently, there is not enough variation in the program or design of the building to provide a varied and enjoyable pedestrian experience. MidtownOne and Two are more successful at this by breaking the buildings and providing a mews. Staff is strongly in favor of strategies, such as mid-block permeability, multiple buildings, or a more varied architecture to alleviate some of these concerns.
- **Architectural Design (E-1):** Although the Bayside neighborhood can easily accommodate contemporary design and a mix of materials, most of the architectural design in this

project is a-contextual – meaning, these buildings could exist anywhere and do not seem to have particular reference to Portland architecture or context. Though it is true that there are not many existing buildings around the site to provide reference, graphic representation of the project showing the surrounding context, buildings, and streetscape is important and is currently lacking. It is difficult for staff to access how appropriate the architecture is for the neighborhood without these kinds of contextual images.

More specifically, there are design characteristics of MidtownThree that staff do not feel are successful – the decorative bands on the upper floors do not add to the design and are gratuitous. The building overall is monotonous and lacks an authentic variation in massing, articulation, and materiality.

- Entrances (E-6): In the case of MidtownThree and Four, the entrances are not adequately emphasized in the architecture. We find MidtownFour to be especially awkward in its relationship to the street and the placement of entrances compared to desire lines and expected use. Staff feels that especially in large buildings such as these, not only should the entrances be oriented to the street, but they should be appropriately scaled and emphasized to differentiate them from the other components of the facades. As expressed earlier, there should also be consideration for building approaches and how to use view corridors to locate and emphasize these entrances. This will serve as another way to add visual interest and articulation to the overall architecture.
- Continuity of Street Level Uses, Active Uses, Bayside Trail, Storefronts (B-7, C-3, D-2, E-8): As expressed in all these standards, the expectation is for buildings to engage with the street and provide active uses and facades that accommodate physical and visual activity. Having frontage on streets as well as the trail provides a challenge, however, there is an expectation of activity on both. Where storefront is shown on building faces to the trail, at least 50% of that storefront should be active and provide at least one door. The Standard E-8 Storefronts, for example, requires storefronts to be transparent. In MidtownFour, the relationship of the retail to the street and trail is awkward and does not seem to reflect how people will approach the building -
- Materials (E-12): The material palette of the neighborhood is varied, though there historically has been significant use of brick and concrete in this neighborhood. Staff's concern regarding the proposed materials has to do with the literally longevity of the buildings as well as the perception of quality and timelessness. The detailing and materiality of the first two floors is especially critical and we are not in support of materials such as vinyl or EIFS for these buildings.