

Downtown Commission Review

TO: Downtown Commission Members and Applicant
DATE: August 12, 2016 (meeting date)
PREPARED BY: Jessica Bernstein, Urban Planner II
APPLICANT: Himanshu Karvir
SUBJECT: Design Review for Element Hotel - 16-07071 PZ

Summary:

The applicant is requesting design review for the construction of a new hotel in the Central Business District (CBD). This project is considered a Level II review pursuant to Section 7-5-9.1 of the UDO.

Review:

Site - The project site consists of one parcel with a portion of the adjacent parcel (total area yet to be determined), located at 31 College Place, just outside of the Beaucatcher Tunnel. The site has its primary frontage on College Street and backs up to I-240 to the north. The project site is outside of the traditional downtown core but is situated along a Key Pedestrian Street and is within the intermediate height zone.

Overall Project Proposal - The applicant is proposing to construct a new hotel with approximately 100 rooms. The building is seven stories (approximately 85 feet to the top of the tallest architectural element and about 68 feet to the highest occupied level).

Access, Sidewalks, Parking – Access will be via the existing driveway into the shared surface parking lot. The applicant will be upgrading a large portion of the surface parking, including restriping and landscaping. There are between 39-54 spaces within the upgraded parking area and an additional 17 spaces structured below the building.

The project includes widening the sidewalk along the project frontage to a minimum of 10 feet. The sidewalk also leads into the site where there is a small retail space at the corner of the building, providing a visible access point from the Key Pedestrian Street. This area is also enhanced with an outdoor patio and covered by a guest balcony space above, activating the southwest corner of the building.

Landscaping - Landscaping for the project includes street trees, parking lot landscaping and a street buffer.

UDO Compliance: The proposed design meets with the UDO requirements except as listed below.

Pedestrian entrances: As noted above, the design includes a highly visible public pedestrian entrance into a retail space from College Street.

Windows, doors and other openings: The designs are compliant on applicable frontages with respect to fenestration, showing 70% along College Street (reassessed at the six foot height level) and greater than 20% on all upper elevations. Along the ground level on College Street, there are screened openings to the parking level and significant glass on the level above, which due to the grade fall across the site, functions more as a “ground level” at the eastern end of the structure.

Screening of Mechanical Equipment: The architect has chosen to screen the mechanical equipment with a metal louver surround as shown on plans.

Street Wall: The project is located outside of the Traditional Core and the width of the ROW is greater than the height of the building, so no street wall step back is required.

The following modification is being evaluated as a part of the TRC review:

1. **Driveway Width** - Per Section 7-8-18(f)(11), the maximum driveway width in the CBD is 24 feet. The applicant is requesting to keep the existing wider driveway width (40 feet) based on the multiple users and directions accessed by the driveway. This modification is evaluated by the City Traffic Engineer.

The following variance will be decided by the Planning & Zoning Commission with recommendation from the DTC:

1. **Lot Coverage** – Per Section 7-8-18(f)(13)(c), a new building is required to be constructed along a minimum of 80 percent of the frontage line of the lot. Because this project includes a lot recombination, it could be technically possible to draw the new lot line in such a way that the standard would be met, however it makes better sense to create a more regular lot boundary and coordinate shared access of the driveway and parking area with the other existing users of the site and request the variance.

Materials and Design Organization: The materials are indicated on plans to gray stone and metal screens on the (public) ground level and brown brick on second level. After a wide alabaster band to aid in differentiating the base of the building, the upper levels rely more on vertical emphasis to break up the massing of the structure, using areas of alabaster, black or graphite EIFS and brown brick. Metal awnings and balconies are focused on the southwestern end of the building and draw attention to the public entry points. The cap consists of a wide horizontal cornice. *Signage/ lighting are not considered under this review.*

Design Guidelines:

The proposed building meets most aspects of the Design Guidelines. While pedestrian activity can sometimes be overlooked by hotel uses which tend to be more oriented to vehicular access, the project includes a retail space at the most visible corner and widened sidewalks that will be beneficial both to visitors as well as pedestrians travelling along this corridor. As mentioned above, the design integrates a variety of materials and large expanses of glass to break up the façade. There is not a very cohesive development pattern in the vicinity to draw from for relating to form, building height or materials. Also while surface parking lots are not the ideal for the CBD, this project needs to work within the existing situation of multiple users on the same shared site and the proposal will upgrade and improve the adjacent parking field, softening it from the street.

Positive or compliant aspects of the design with the Guidelines include:

- Surface parking masked by landscaping to soften edges (5B)
- Inclusion of pervious materials (tentative) (6B) and placing dumpster away from street side (7B)
- Incorporate awnings at the pedestrian entrance and doors with large areas of glass (11B/C)
- Screening of rooftop equipment (14A)
- Provide a clear differentiation between ground floor and upper levels with material and module changes (1D)

Some challenges or weak points in compliance with the Guidelines include:

- Surface parking should be hidden by a habitable building (5A)
- Encourage granite curbing (8D)

Design Review Committee

The applicant met with the Design Review Committee on two occasions and many of the suggestions provided by the group have been incorporated into the design, including activation of the public retail space at the corner, additional structural awnings for visual interest and to draw attention to entry points and adding more windows on upper levels. Additionally, the Design Review Committee was supportive of the variance request for lot coverage rather than meeting compliance by creating an awkward lot configuration.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval of the design for the building and site as shown, as well as the requested variance and modification, as the project meets the goals of the UDO and the intent of the design guidelines.

Suggested Motion: I move to recommend approval of the design for the Element Hotel as presented, including the requested variance, based on site plans, elevations and materials provided and the discussion heard during this review (including the following conditions, if any).