



Austin Design Commission

Date: July 24, 2017

To: City of Austin Planning and Zoning Director and Staff

Subject: Review of 3rd & Colorado for substantial compliance with the Urban Design Guidelines (one of the three Gatekeeper Requirements for the Density Bonus Program)

Applicant: Michael J. Whellan (Graves, Dougherty, Hearson & Moody, PC)

DC Action: The motion to adopt the recommendation letter of the Working Group that finds the project substantially compliant with the Urban Design Guidelines was made by B. Whatley; second by E. Taniguchi; passed on a vote of [8-1]. M. Henao-Robledo voted against; K. Halloran and A. Coleman not present.

The project location is 300 Colorado Street. The project includes uses of Residential, Retail/Restaurant. There are 315 dwelling units and approximately 360 parking spaces.

The applicant is seeking a density bonus to raise the FAR from 8:1 to 25:1 FAR (within 25:1 maximum allowance). The lot area is 17,712 sf, and the total project area is 357,000 res sf + 7,200 retail sf (429,000 total sf FAR). The total building height is 518 ft (44 stories). The maximum height achievable under the density bonus program in this portion of downtown is unlimited feet.

The Design Commission provides advisory recommendations to the city council to assist in developing public policy and to department directors on administratively approved projects (city projects, density bonus) to promote excellence in the design and development of the urban environment. The commission seeks to foster a pedestrian-oriented, walkable city.

Per the downtown density bonus ordinance, the applicant is required to meet three gatekeeper requirements:

1. substantially comply with the Urban Design Guidelines,
2. provide streetscape improvements along all public street frontages consistent with the Great Streets Standards, and
3. commit to a minimum of 2 star green building rating.

Once the gatekeeper requirements are met, the Planning and Zoning Director calculates the development bonus fee, which may vary by use and district. Currently, the development bonus fee for residential projects ranges from \$3-\$10 per square foot of bonus area. Commercial project fees are currently set at \$0.

The applicant may choose to pay the development bonus fee in full, or to apply at least 50% of the development bonus fee to Affordable Housing Community Benefit requirements (e.g., affordable housing onsite, fee-in-lieu, family-friendly housing).

David Carroll, Chair

Martha Gonzalez, Vice Chair

Aan Coleman

Beau Frail

Samuel Franco

Katie Halloran

Conor Kenny

Ben Luckens

Melissa Henao-Robledo

Evan Taniguchi

Bart Whatley

Katie Mulholland,
Executive Liaison

Nichole Koerth,
Staff Liaison

The remaining fee may be applied to a menu of Community Benefits options (e.g., affordable housing onsite or fee-in-lieu, family-friendly housing, day care, historic preservation, open space, plaza, green building, green roof, cultural uses, live music venue).

Projects with entitlement requests that meet the program requirements are administratively approved by the Planning & Zoning Director. For projects with requests that exceed the program, the Mayor and Council determine appropriate bonus area and in light of the Community Benefits requirements provided.

The Design Commission reviews downtown density bonus projects against the first gatekeeper requirement and provides a recommendation on a finding of substantial compliance with the Urban Design Guidelines to the Planning and Zoning Director.

Positive attributes of the project include: West party wall allowing an adjoining building, quality materials (stone, glass, aluminum at street level), building services located to alley for maximum active space at street, no residential amenity areas at ground level make way for more retail/restaurant space, above grade parking level façade materials integrated into overall building, only one curb cut located on Colorado Street.

Concerns/suggestions for the project: There are no Community Benefits being provided onsite. The applicant has opted to pay the fee-in-lieu. Furthermore, the relationship of the existing building to the Warehouse District, and potential for local historical designation, as described in the Downtown Austin Plan (DAP) is of note. The existing building is identified as a Priority in the DAP. The Working Group also found the lack of a detailed landscape plan made it difficult to fully envision the streetscape. Lastly, rooftop amenities are of private use only.

We are also curious about the perceived reduction of public benefits when a Great Streets streetscape is already in place and existing trees are to be replaced with younger ones. A future project could potentially seek to replace more mature streetscape trees to allow the construction staging area. The city may want to consider policies related to projects being built under the Downtown Density Bonus Program where the Great Streets streetscape exists and mature trees are in place.

We conclude that the project, as presented, is in substantial compliance with the Urban Design Guidelines. However, we do have concerns that center on the potential historic significance of the existing building. Research has indicated that the building is considerably older than indicated by the applicant. The Historic Preservation Office has concluded that the building is approximately 92 years old and has a rich history. Given this, and the DAP priority, it should be made clear that our conclusion of substantial compliance with the Urban Design Guidelines does not advocate that we support the demolition of the existing building. We would defer this decision to the recommendation of the Historic Landmark Commission.

The Design Commission appreciates the opportunity to comment on this project. We look forward to continued discussion on ideas about the potential historic value of the existing building.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Design Commission,



David Carroll, AIA
Chair, Design Commission

cc: Katie Mulholland, Executive Liaison to the Design Commission