

August 20, 2009 – DRC Summary

2600 SHATTUCK AVENUE [at Parker] (DR#08-3000090): Preview of a mixed-use development comprised of 2 5-story buildings and one 3-story building, totaling 157 dwelling units, 31 affordable units, 22,484 sq. ft. of net ground floor commercial space, and 158 parking spaces; one building to incorporate existing one-story retail building at 2600 Shattuck; second building to be built on parking lot at 2598 Shattuck.

Advisory comments follow:

BUILDING FORM & MASSING, SITE PLAN & PARKING

Sunlight & Views:

- *Streetscape design, as well as retail and restaurant storefront design should take advantage of the sunny spots on the site.*
- *Second floor units facing the streets will be looking into a 4' high wall. These residents will only have a view of the sky when seated.*

Building Massing:

- *Shattuck is a large, wide street and this building height appears to be in scale with it.*
- *Transition to the neighborhood is commendable.*
- *The large cubes sitting on a platform do not provide an adequate sense of scale, nor do they enhance the street or skyline.*
- *Proportions of the upper facades to the base are too similar. There is a base, and a shrunken main body, but no top.*
- *The open strip between the base and the upper building is not successful and weakens the facade.*
- *Massing step down at the neighbor's edge is good, but it still doesn't add any amenities for those still with a blank wall.*

Relationship to Surroundings / Neighborhood Pattern:

- *There was some question as to the value in keeping the existing building, but others thought it made sense to keep the existing Plachek building.*
- *Landmark Analysis needs a more critical review. LPC should look at this project.*
- *Project should do a better job of relating to the existing building.*
- *One drawback with the existing building remaining is that the existing wall on the west property line remains instead of a decent landscaped transition.*
- *Design is jarring. Project should fit better into its context.*
- *Look at reducing the height to the west wall as much as possible, and adding plants which hang down to soften it and relate better to the adjacent backyards.*
- *This site is close enough to the Downtown to look at the Downtown Design Guidelines.*

Public Open Spaces / Landscape Concept:

- *Consider big landscape gestures wherever possible. Increase scale and value of vegetation proposed to create a Gateway/Boulevard statement.*

- *Alley between the two buildings on the north side of Parker is a nice gesture, but should be more thought out for safety issues. It also needs a visual terminus.*
- *Wrap open space around the corners as much as possible.*
- *Look at a pocket park or at least space for benches as a transition to the neighborhood.*
- *Behind public open spaces, provide views into private open spaces as much as possible for more transparency.*
- *Consider adding plant material at the podium level on the street elevations to extend the landscape further up and give a gift back to the City.*
- *Consider working with Public Works to remove several parking spaces on Shattuck and increase the public realm in front of the project.*

Parking & Driveways:

- *Look carefully at where van-accessible vehicles will drop residents off at the north building.*

Pedestrian Circulation:

- *There are safety concerns with disabled residents going from one building to the other for parking.*

Schematic Building Design:

- *Design should be softer and more inviting – not so jarring.*
- *Need a dignified way to address the street.*
- *Design needs to be refined. Look carefully at the materials, colors, scale, textures, and how the project meets the street and the existing Plachek building.*
- *Model has a softer visual impact. The color perspectives are more jarring with their dark and light contrasts, and don't show as much relief of horizontal planes as the model does.*
- *Look at any design changes that can encourage street activity.*

BUILDING DESIGN**Articulation :**

- *This location requires a facade with rhythm, depth and handsome detailing.*

Window & Door Treatment:

- *Fenestration on 'rear cottages' should be carefully reviewed for privacy of neighbors.*

Building Entrances:

- *Steps as a part of the street are good. Monumental stairs on Shattuck could be even more monumental.*
- *Develop ground floor lobbies so they are more inviting.*

Building Materials and Colors:

- *Colors should be more subdued, at least on the public faces. Brighter colors inside are fine. Retail signage will add some color and interest on the street frontages.*
- *Brown wall color proposed is too dark.*

Building Design / Details:

- *Hardiboard battens do not provide a handsomely detailed street front.*

LANDSCAPE, OPEN SPACE, & CIRCULATION**Public/Common Open Space Areas / Materials / Plantings:**

- *Big trees are important for residents in the building as well as creating a Boulevard.*
- *Water retention recharge areas in the landscape plan are a good direction.*

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LAND USE PLANNING

1600 Shattuck Avenue

Shattuck Avenue between Dwight Way and Adeline presents a rare opportunity for the City to develop a handsome, mixed use boulevard. As one of the primary entries to downtown Berkeley this part of Shattuck should be treated as an extension of the downtown and we should look for design solutions that will set high standards for quality and visual amenities. We only need to look at the morose new neighborhoods created in Emeryville to understand what this street could become if the we do not demand handsome design solutions.

I find the proposed project at 2600 Shattuck as not showing any potential to set a quality standard that should occur on this site. The large cubes on a platform do not provide any sense of scale and do nothing to enhance the street or the skyline. The floating cubes emphasize the brutality of the concept and the proportions of the upper facades to the base are too similar. There is a base, there is a shrunken main body and there is no top to the building.

There are a variety of successful designs of large buildings in Berkeley, some old and some new. Look at the Fine Arts Building up the street. It provides beautiful articulation of the façade with a wonderful skyline and handsome details. The new buildings at Shattuck and Delaware use bays to create a wonderful rhythm along the street front. Acton Court uses materials similar to those in this proposal but again the bays give depth and establish a vibrant façade. Downtown there are several very large older buildings that have relatively flat facades but the details create handsome results. Even the storage facility at Shattuck and Adeline provides nicely proportioned façades, openings and details. The proposed project provides none of those design features.

I have some question as to if there is value in keeping the existing building. The new design certainly does nothing to compliment the existing building façade and the existing façade, by itself, is not distinguished enough to create an exciting street front. The scale of the street front is hugely important to the success of a block long building. I have no doubt that a handsome building could be built on top of the existing building but not in the genre of this proposal.

Some specific comments:

- The flat facades with the flimsy detailing of battens on Hardy Board are inadequate to the task of providing a handsomely detailed street front. This is not Ashby Avenue or San Pablo where the State does not allow overhangs in the public right of way. This location demands a façade with rhythm, depth and handsome detailing. A box with cutouts and inadequate detail does not do that.
- Colors: A chocolate façade without significant details will disappear from the street front in a fog or at dusk. There are more than enough examples of this in Berkeley and Emeryville.

- More Colors: Do what you want on the inside of the complex but the dabs of yellow and red and orange add no dignity to the street.
- The open strip between the base and upper buildings weakens the façade and emphasizes the brutality of the design.
- The second floor units facing the streets will be looking into a 4 ft + high wall so that residents who are seated will only have a view of the sky.
- It is a shame to keep the existing 20' high concrete wall along the west side. Can't a major new building on a large site provide a decent landscaped transition to the adjacent residential neighborhood?
- The ground floor lobbies are grim. The lack of any comfortable sense of entry may be typical of many recent Berkeley buildings but that doesn't make it right.

Where to go from here:

- We need to know if Landmarks is going to take any action on this building, if they want to see the existing façade retained and if they have any issues with the design of the new buildings.
- We need to hear from ZAB on the requested 15'-8" height increase over the 50' allowed in the district
- Tweaking these facades will not create a design that would be acceptable in Berkeley, on this main boulevard or in this neighborhood. I do not want to see anything closely resembling the proposed street front design come back to Design Review. Berkeley deserves better than this.

Bob Allen