

Design Evolution of Civic Square

Architectural design is an iterative process. Critique and review of proposed designs by peers has a long history in architecture and urban design.

This booklet demonstrates the design review process in Seattle. It shows the evolution of the design of Civic Square as a result of a series of six reviews by the city's Design Review Board and Design Commission.

Project
Civic Square, at 700 4th Ave., is the third and final component of the masterplan for the city's three block campus in downtown Seattle. The first two parts, City Hall and the Justice Center, were completed in 2002 and 2003.

Civic Square, a public-private partnership, features a 593,000 sq. ft. office tower, 31,000 sq. ft. of retail space, 136 residential units, a 30,000 sq. ft. public plaza and connections to an underground transit system. Foster and Partners, GGLO and Atelier Dreiseitl are the designers.

Reviewers
The Seattle Design Commission and the Downtown Design Review Board reviewed Civic Square since it is a public-private partnership. The commission reviews the city's facilities; the board reviews private development. Both groups are comprised of citizen members with design backgrounds. For reasons of efficiency, both groups reviewed the project as a joint panel between June 2007 and November 2008.

The reviewers assessed how well the project met the city's Design Review Guidelines for Downtown Development.

Outcome
As a result of the review, the following project components changed from the initial proposal to the final design:

1. Plaza and Circulation
2. Shape of the Base
3. Access to the Transit Station
4. Cherry Street Facade
5. James Street Facade
6. Tower Form
7. Top

Images from First Review, June 2007



Images from Final Review, November 2008

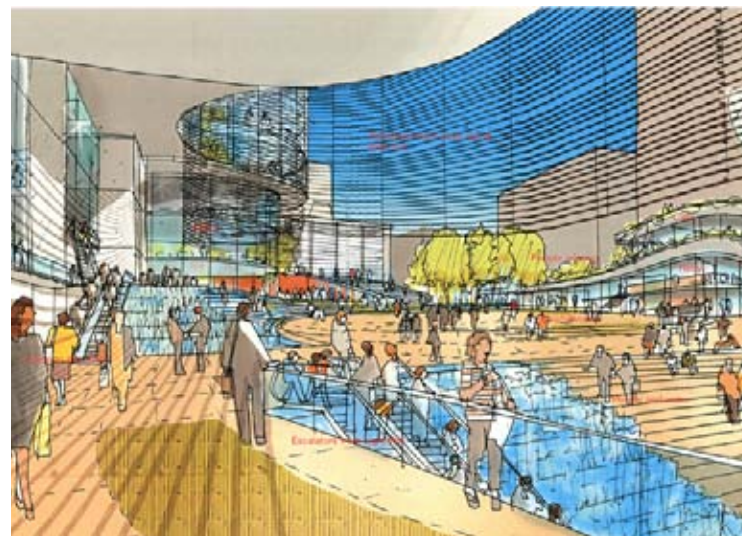
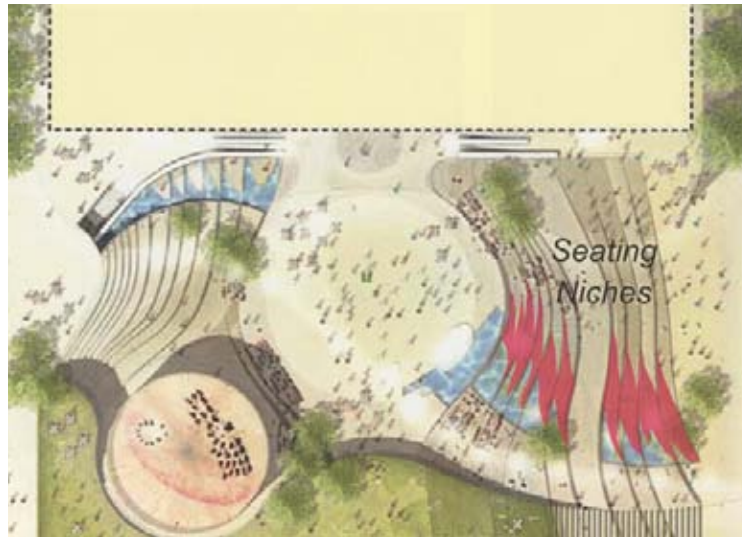


1. Evolution of the Plaza and Circulation

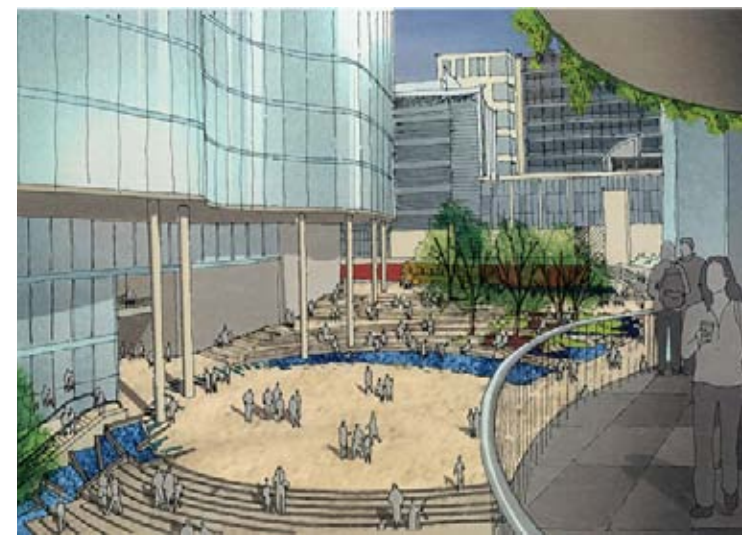
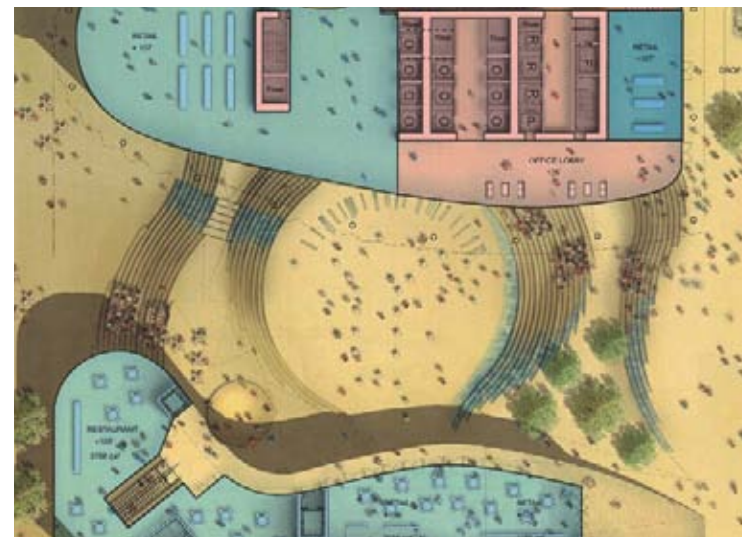
Initial Design

In its initial design, the applicant proposed large, terraced steps and a pavilion designed as an enclosed gathering place. The design intent was to connect with City Hall, its open space and the larger municipal campus.

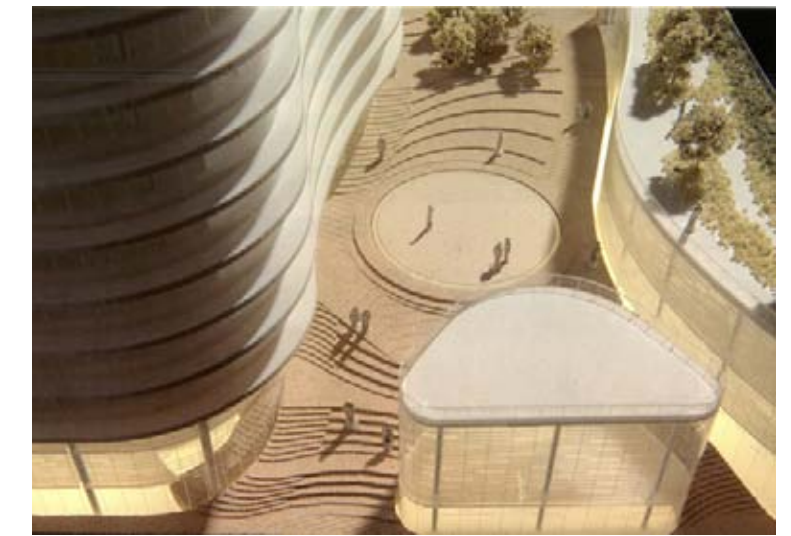
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→ Pavilion is removed.

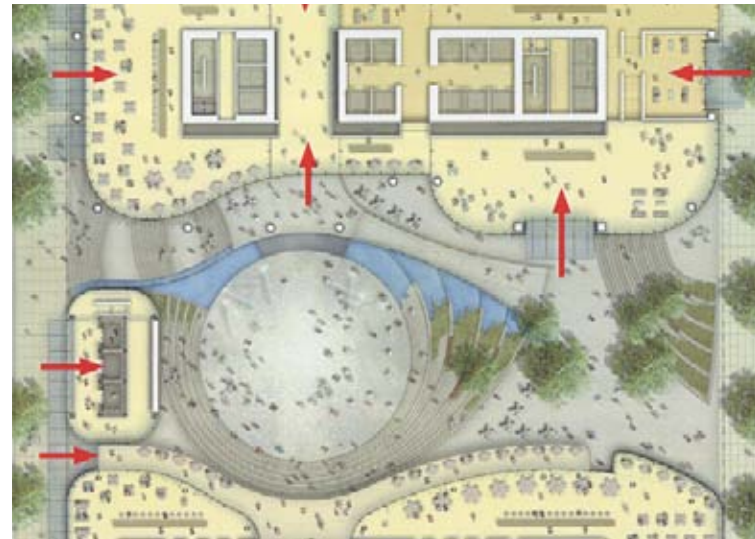
Board Guidance

- » Create a variety of pedestrian paths through the site.
- » Integrate paths with the plaza, the Metro station and the tower.
- » Develop a design which treats the site grade as a positive condition.
- » Prioritize the circulation patterns.
- » Create a design that recognizes that people will use the plaza for multiple reasons.
- » The flat portions of the open space will not be animated when not housing a festival or some large gathering of people.
- » The public space appears too homogenous and needs more variety. It also needs to be accessible
- » The "mountain to city to sound" concept ought to be abstracted in the design; taken too literally, the idea risks becoming a cliché.

- » The framework of the plaza has not changed.
- » Imbue the plaza with more personality and greater diversity of spaces
- » The big idea -- the cascading steps and water -- also needs smaller ideas
- » Create intimate sanctuaries for gathering.
- » Add more clusters of trees and vegetation
- » Find a balance of water features and of rough and sleek materials
- » Reduce the amount of space devoted to steps and develop more spaces for lingering.
- » Redesign the area at the foot of the steps along Third Ave. and make a stronger connection to the City Hall steps at Fourth Ave. and James St.
- » The placement of the escalator at the corner of the retail building, Third Ave. reduces the ability to draw people to the plaza.
- » Add significant landscape elements and/or retail to the plaza along Third Ave. Use these elements to bifurcate the space in front of the stairs.
- » Evaluate the Wells Fargo plaza on Second Ave. as an example of the paradox of a successful plaza that appears unable to support retail.

- » The plaza still needs more small gathering spaces.
- » The portion of the plaza on the south side of the tower would receive the most activity due to the solar exposure.
- » Encourage the location of cafes and restaurants along the plaza. Too much circulation is hugging the south side of the tower.
- » Imbue the plaza and the proposed structures with materials from City Hall and the Justice Center to create a sense of continuity. Select materials and landscaping should assist in creating a unified scheme.
- » Organize the plaza so that Fourth Ave. could be closed off for large events.

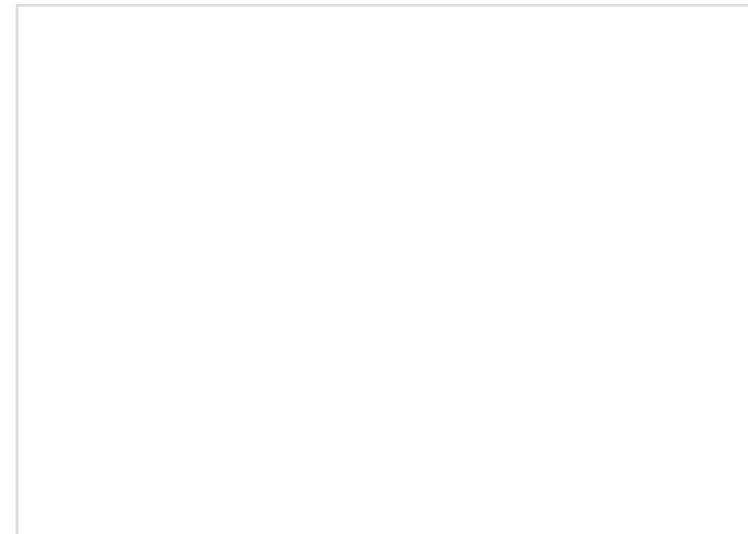
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Final Design

→ The final plaza design offers more activity space and less reliance on the grand gestures of cascading steps and a formal pavilion. The landscape architect added a series of more discrete spaces for lingering connected by a water feature. The revised plan encourages a wider range of activities.

→ Fewer steps are on the plaza.

- » Round the base of the tower more to enhance the sense of enclosure surrounding the plaza.
- » Approves the singularity of the designers' vision of the plaza.
- » The plaza concept has not significantly changed. The plaza still needs more intimate and distinct places within the larger plaza.
- » Learn from the barren City Hall plaza with its copious amounts of concrete and too few trees to shade its users.

→ The plaza has more gathering places and is moved east.

- » None given.

→ None given.

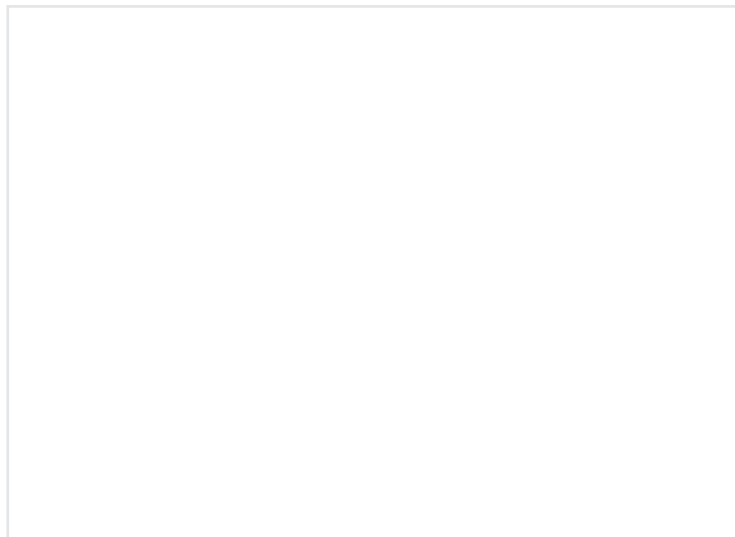
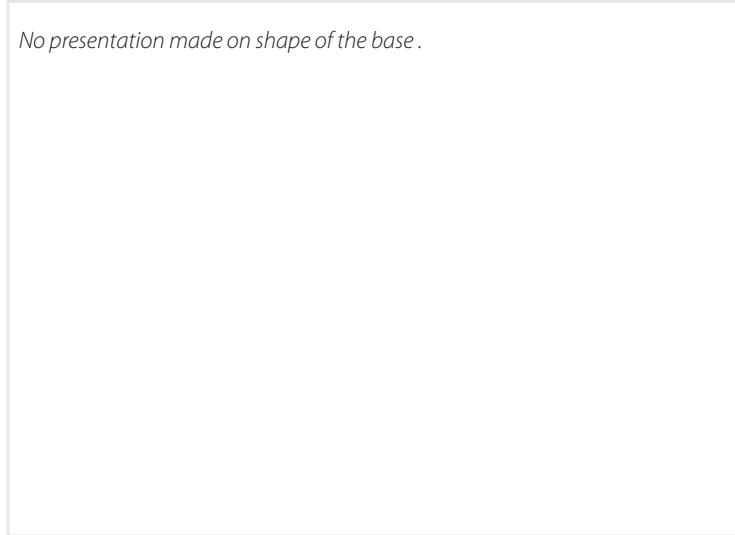
- » None given.

2. Evolution of the Shape of the Base

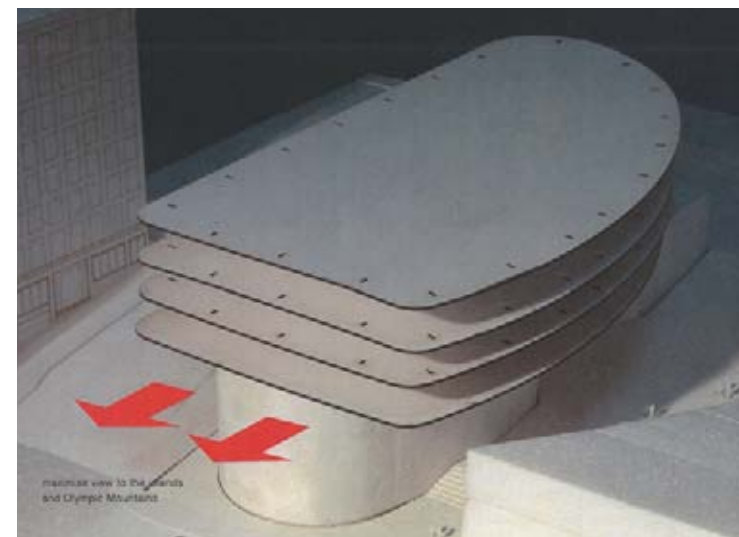
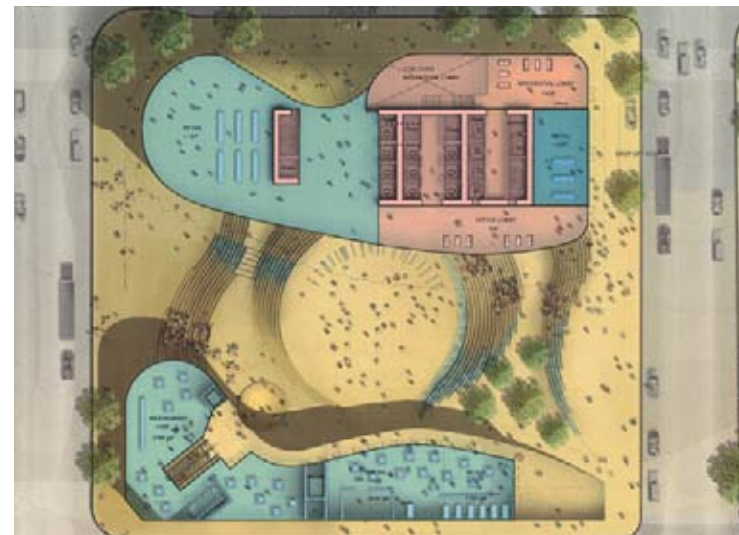
Initial Design

In plan, the initial proposal of a wedge-shaped tower base lacked a convincing relationship to the adjacent public plaza. A large cantilevered overhang diminished the quality of the open space. Early studies would show that the design would increase wind velocity on the plaza.

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Base is a cantilevered wedge.....>

Base is an assymterical dumbbell.>

Board Guidance » None given.

- » The footprints of the tower and the retail building reduce the width of the plaza directly exposed to the sky to about the size of the adjacent rights of way.
- » The basic wing-like form of the office volume is an appropriate form.
- » The extent of the overhang into the mid-plaza area diminishes the plaza's quality as a major public place.
- » Redesign the concave plaza and the convex shaped tower to find a better marriage between the two.

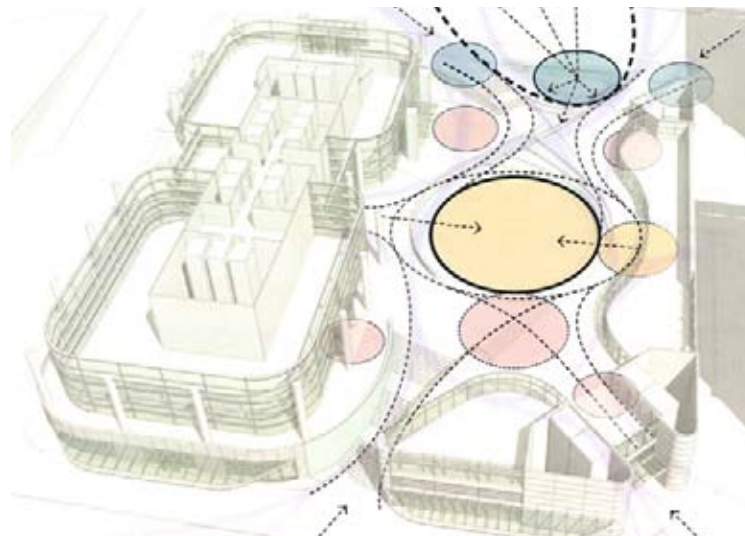
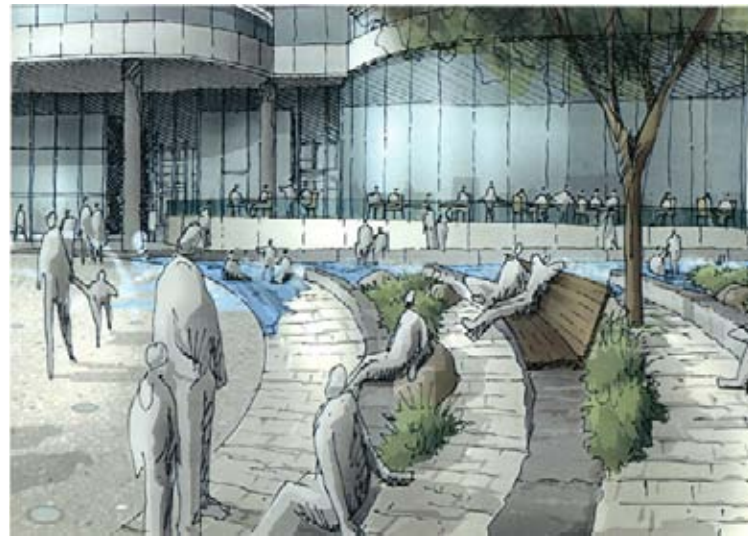
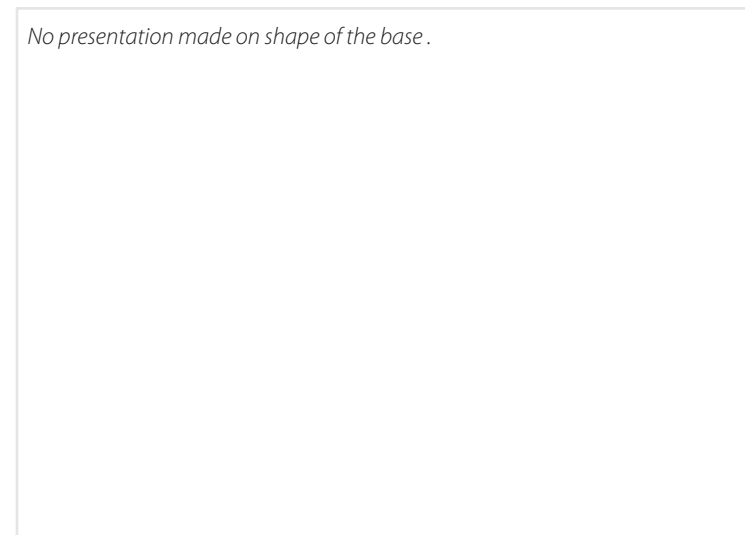
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Final Design

- » In plan, the final design of the base with two co-joined squares with rounded corners solves circulation problems and creates a pleasing backdrop to the plaza. The base has a double height glazed wall facing the south which acknowledges solar conditions and the connection between activities both inside and outside on the plaza.

» Base is two rounded dumbbells.

- » Relate the datum line expressed in the overhang and in the retail and Metro pavilions to adjacent buildings.
- » Design the entrances, fenestration, materials, canopies and structural system to contribute to the streetscape with the same exuberance as the neighboring landmark buildings. Respond to the richness of the surrounding structures.

» None given.

» None given.

3. Evolution of the Access to the Transit Station

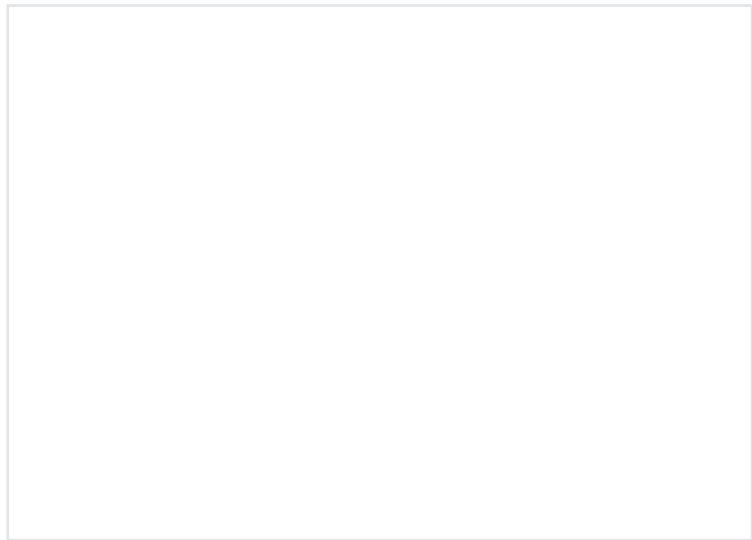
Initial Design

Access to the underground transit station would connect the station to the proposal's significant public spaces and the building to a larger circulation network in the city. The panel scrapped the initial design using escalators because of their circuitous approach to the public plaza.

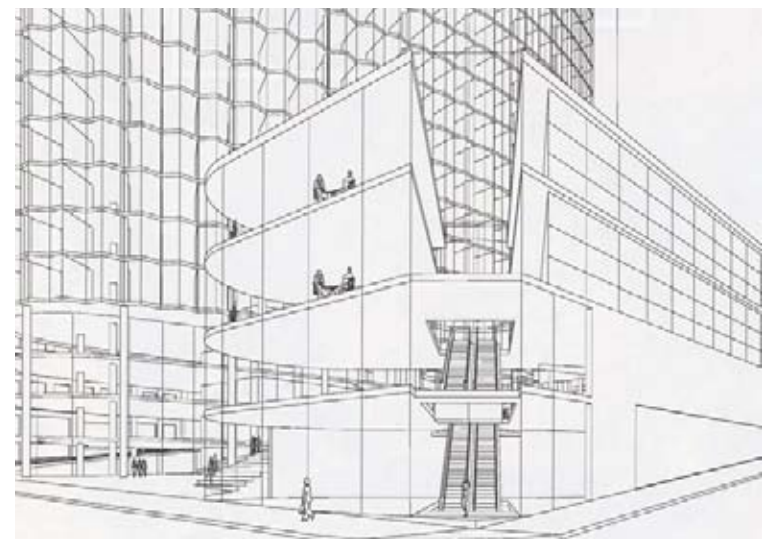
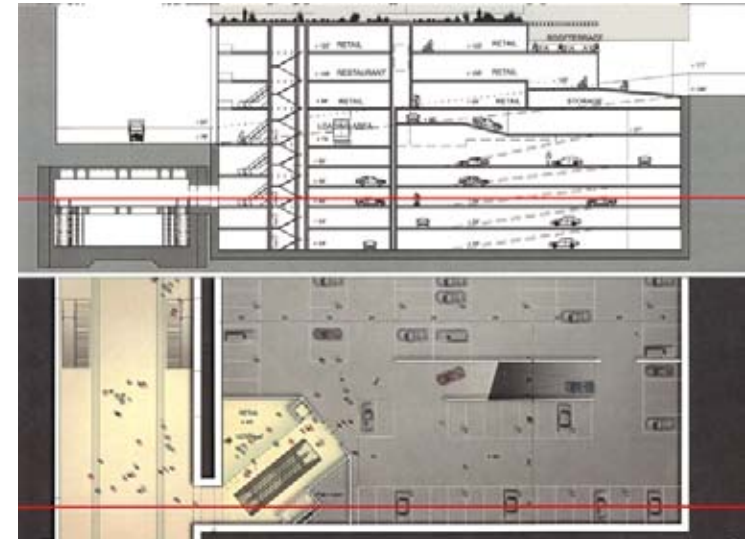
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No presentation made on access to transit station.



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Escalators at Third Ave. and James St. within retail building connects street, plaza and transit station.

- » The shift in the escalator's placement leaves a largely undeveloped open space along Third Ave. at the foot of the steps and places the arriving pedestrians from the station directly behind the People's Pavilion, which would be awkward during performances.

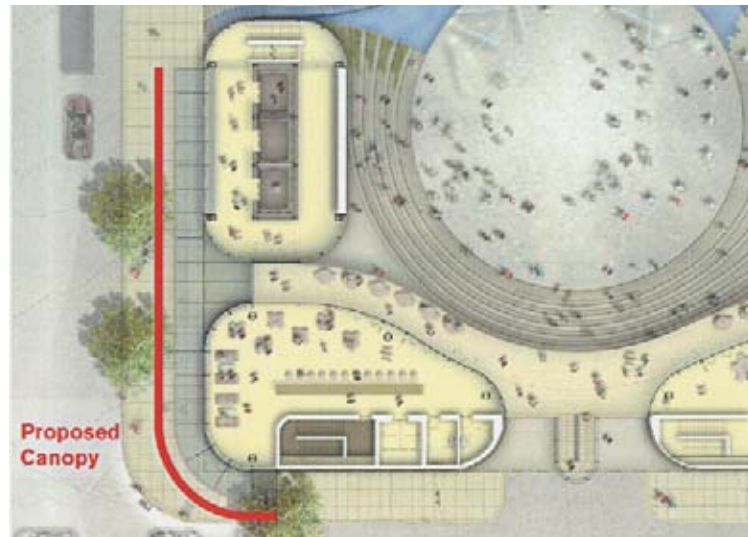
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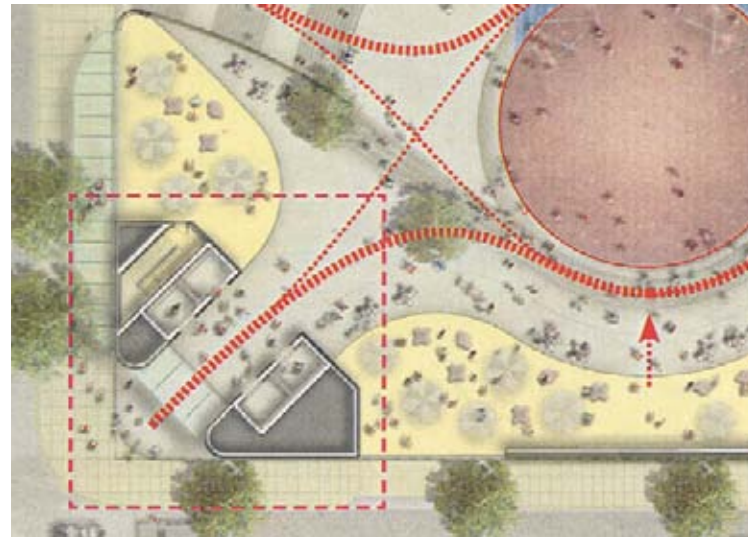
- » Redesign the circulation system from the Metro tunnel to the plaza, as it is awkward for pedestrians to use two sets of escalators in two different buildings to access the plaza. The connection to Metro should be direct and obvious from the plaza.
- » The space along Third Ave. is too small and not gracious enough to accommodate the anticipated number of transit riders.

Board Guidance » None given.

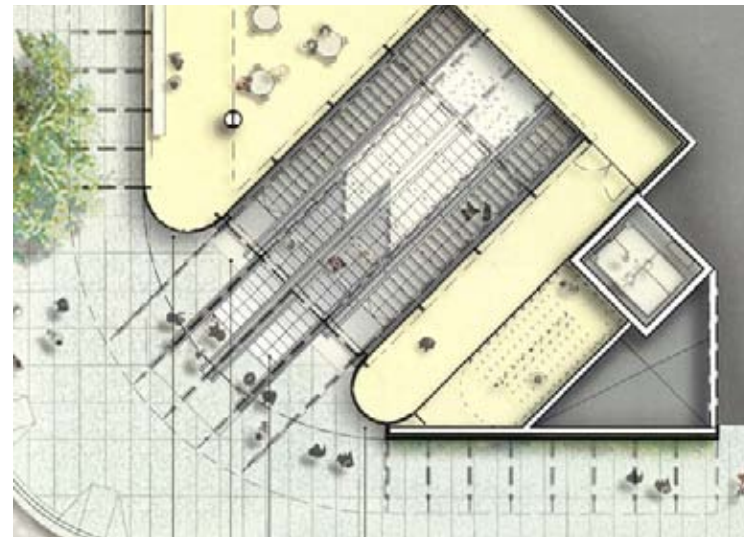
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Final Design

» After exploring many options for transit station access, the architect returned to the use of escalators. The final design possesses the clearest pedestrian access to the different levels within the site, creating a more welcoming gesture to the building's public spaces -- the plaza above, the transit station below and the streetscape itself. The escalators' openness to the street corner was unachievable by elevators.

» Elevators replace escalators and are moved to Third Ave.

- » The elevator's lack of visual clues as a route to the plaza hinders the design. Escalators provide a strong visual connection to the plaza.
- » The massing of the metro pavilion needs a stronger expression of verticality and an identity distinct from the design of the overall complex. The Metro pavilion and the retail pavilion on Third Ave. look large when in reality these structures would be small in contrast to the tower and nearby buildings. Reconsider the design of these structures to reflect their intimate size.
- » The elevator tower could also be quite fun and more a whimsical structure.
- » Passage through the site without the use of an elevator is important. The removal of the escalator at the Metro and retail pavilion requires installation of a direct connection to the plaza from the site's southwest corner
- » The lack of an entry or a gateway to the plaza from Third and James is troubling. The Third and James corner is important for pedestrians in the Pioneer Square neighborhood. The loss of the steps, the lack of a door into the retail space and the blank walls along James St. suggest that the design is turning its back upon this area and its pedestrians.

» Elevators are moved to Third Ave and James St.

- » Gang the retail elevator, exit stairs, and the bike storage area within the Metro elevator pavilion.
- » Approve of the shift of the Metro station from Third Ave. to the corner at Third and Cherry streets.
- » The corners are fortress-like, particularly at both corners of James St. The corners and the James St. façade starkly contrast with "the magical world of the plaza." What should be gateways to the plaza appear more like barricades.

» Elevators are removed. Escalators at Third Ave. and James St. connect plaza, street, transit station and retail pavilion.

- » This design produces a better connection among the relationships of the street, the plaza and the Metro station.

4. Evolution of the Cherry Street Facade

Initial Design

The Cherry Street facade has a tremendous impact on the quality of the streetscape and its ability to attract pedestrian activity. The facade, which has building entrances at both corners as well as mid-block, lies on a steep street, compounding the challenge to design well for the pedestrian. The initial design did not effectively acknowledge the pedestrian or the nearby historic structures.

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Board Guidance » None given.

» None given.

Little detail shown.

- » Provide more detail at the tower's base and about its opaque or solid materials. The stone and other materials used at City Hall and the Justice Center should be introduced on this site to promote the unified approach intended in the Civic Master Plan.
- » Insert more detail at the tower base fronting Cherry St. to promote a greater sense of human scale and place to match that of the Arctic Building.

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Final Design

→ The transparent design of the Cherry Street facade reduced the apparent mass of the building, creating a more welcoming pedestrian experience by enlivening the street and encouraging a visual interaction between building occupants and pedestrians.

→ Base facade is a fortress

- » Provide more architectonic detail at the tower base fronting Cherry St. in order to have the structure acknowledge the building's relationship with the landmark Arctic Building.
- » The onyx in the amount shown at the base would require departures from the Land Use Code due to the extensiveness of blank walls along the street edge.

→ Base facade on Cherry St. is more transparent.

- » The entire base and the choice of materials remains quite problematic.
- » The earlier guidance remains unheeded. Fully redesign the base at Third Ave. and Cherry St. given its limited transparency, basement like quality of the facades, the awkward relationship of the one-story base with the columns above it, and lack of adequate detailing.
- » Create much greater transparency and a building form that clearly indicates the function of the building as a connector to the Metro station and the plaza. The enclosure for the elevators should convey a sense of security for its users and express its function. A base with these qualities can anchor the corner and exude a strong presence.
- » Nowhere along its three street edges does the proposed structure announce itself as a retail pavilion. The structure should simply communicate what's inside the retail pavilion.
- » The circulation above the limestone base lacks a strong raison d'être.

→ Base facade on Cherry St. is more transparent.

- » Approves the transformation of the entire base from a stone plinth to an entirely transparent window wall. The transparency at the corners improves the sense of the complex's approachability for pedestrians. The escalators at the Third Ave. and James St. corner produce a better connection among the relationships of the street, the plaza and the Metro station.

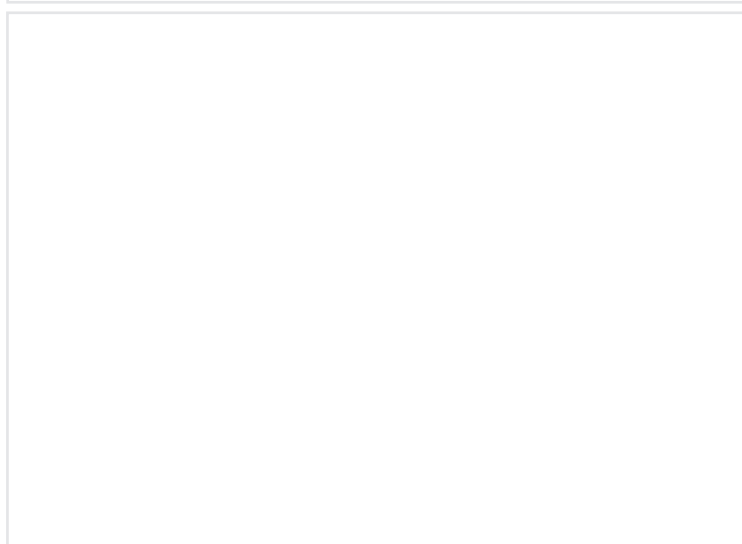
5. Evolution of the James Street Facade

Initial Design

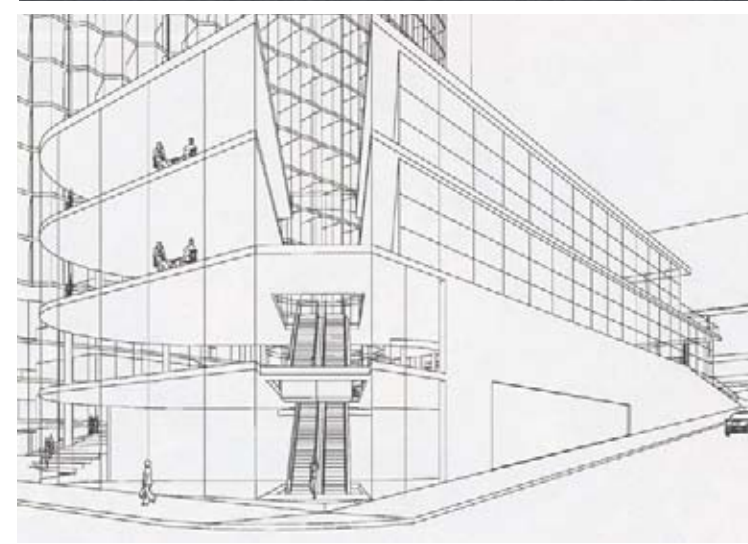
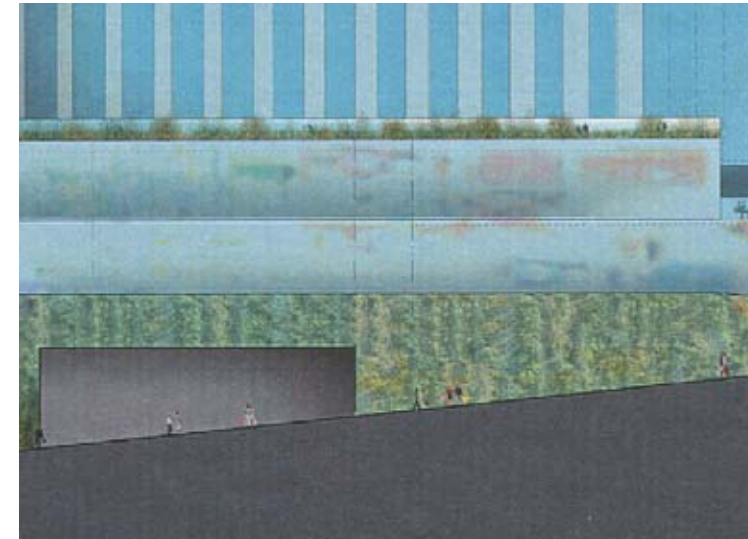
The architect's initial concept relegated the James Street facade to service functions with garage openings and blank walls obscuring the interior. The preliminary design ignored pedestrian comfort by failing to provide overhead weather protection and to acknowledge a busy bus stop.

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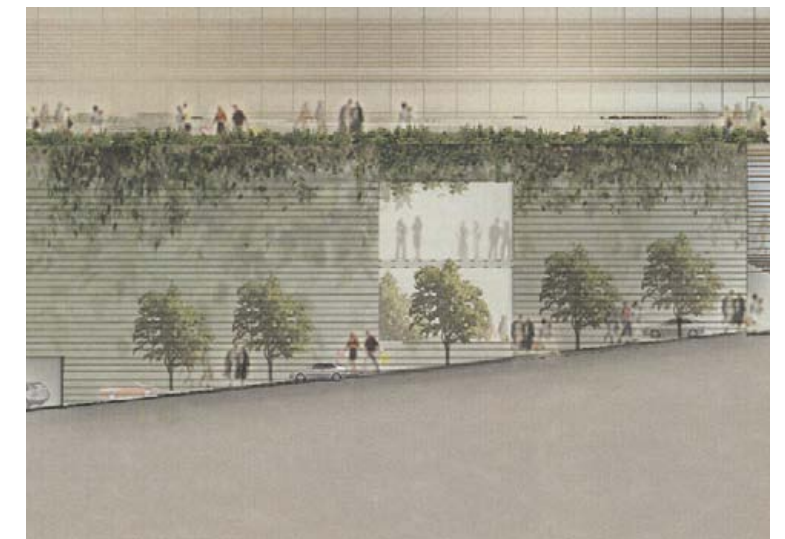
No presentation made on Cherry Street facade.



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» Green wall along lower elevation of facade.

» Little detail shown.

Board Guidance

- » Create an attractive James St. facade. Even with the presence of the vehicular service area on James St., the design of the facade should not entirely turn its back to the street. Blank facades and garage doors should be well designed. The facade and entry points should suggest the civic nature of the space behind it.
- » Showcase environmentally sustainable features along James St. in keeping with the proposed green roof above the retail pavilion.
- » Retain the idea that the lower elevation's appearance along James St. could be a mostly solid or opaque base supporting a delicate, glassy structure without sacrificing a pleasant pedestrian experience on James St.
- » Although James St. will house service and vehicular entrances, the pedestrian realm should not be overlooked. The Board encouraged the architects to incorporate overhead weather protection, the escalator and the green wall into one integrated element comprising the James St. facade.
- » Board members noted the large expanse of the green wall on James St. Greater penetration of the upper levels would provide views to the south from the restaurant.
- » Add more transparency to the James St. facade and choose interesting materials and detail beneath the green wall to ensure a good facade even when the wall lacks foliage.
- » Overhead weather protection should be integrated into the James St. facade in places it won't interfere with service and vehicular entries.

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Final Design

» The final James Street design offers pedestrian oriented features such as store front displays and overhead weather protection. The design also creates a more pleasing rythm of green landscape features that brings a sense of human scale to the blank walls.

» Green wall along entire facade.

» The green wall on James St. is devoid of context.

- » The blank wall along James St. is mostly inhospitable to pedestrian comfort and safety. Redesign the James St. elevation to provide more transparency and literally connect the green screen to the sidewalk level and allow the green roof to cascade over the wall to join the green screen.
- » Revise the green screen and add overhead weather protection along the façade. The green screen on the south elevation of the retail pavilion appears appliqué and is detached from the roof top as well as the sidewalk level. It covers service functions which in themselves could be wonderfully expressed on the exterior. The green screen does not satisfy the zoning code's requirements in portions of the facade. At Third Ave. and James St., the design of the Metro access pavilion lacks any visual clue that it connects to the Metro station or the plaza above the sidewalk grade. The proposed monolithic corner elements framing the entrance should be more welcoming and attract people to the plaza.
- » At Fourth Ave. and James St., an entirely opaque prow containing an exit stairs makes little sense at this important corner.

» Storefront displays and overhead weather protection at street level, green wall above.

- » Approves the changes to the James St. façade with its modulations mimicking the tower and amenities for pedestrians.
- » The lack of continuity in the overhead weather protection does not significantly impact the intent of pedestrian protection during inclement weather.
- » Recommends a departure from the Land Use Code for the series of discontinuous canopies stepping up the slope of James St .
- » Approves the redesign of the James St. elevation, with modifications to the continuity of the canopies, the amount of transparency at the Fourth Ave. and James St. prow, whether or not the vitrines animate the street front, and the connection between the green screen and the green roof.
- » Achieve a stronger relationship between the green wall and the roof top of the retail pavilion. Increase the transparency from James Street through the stair well at the Fourth Ave. end of the retail pavilion to better connect James St. to the plaza.

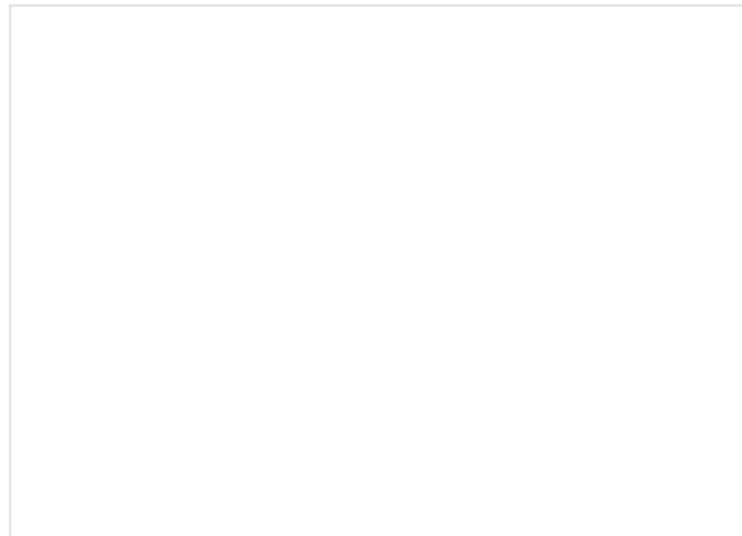
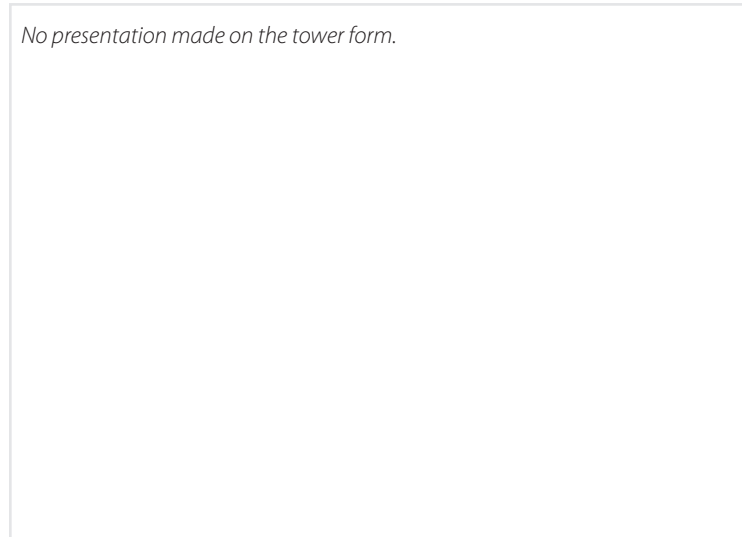
6. Evolution of the Tower Form

Initial Design

The architect initially designed many iterations of the tower form. Beginning with a wedge shape for the office component, the designers attempted to make a clear distinction in form between the upper level residences and the offices. Gradually, as the distinctions became more subtle, the architect focused attention on modulating the mass on the north and south facades.

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No presentation made on the tower form.



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» Residential block is distinct from the offices by floating its mass over the office volume.

Board Guidance » None given.

- » Approves the architect's idea to slide the residential block uphill to the east to emphasize the building's verticality at Fourth Ave. and Cherry St. closest to the Columbia Tower.
- » Recognizes that the architect had not completed the exploration of the building form for the residential block. Prefers to wait until the next meeting when the applicant presents two or three schemes with one identified as its preference.

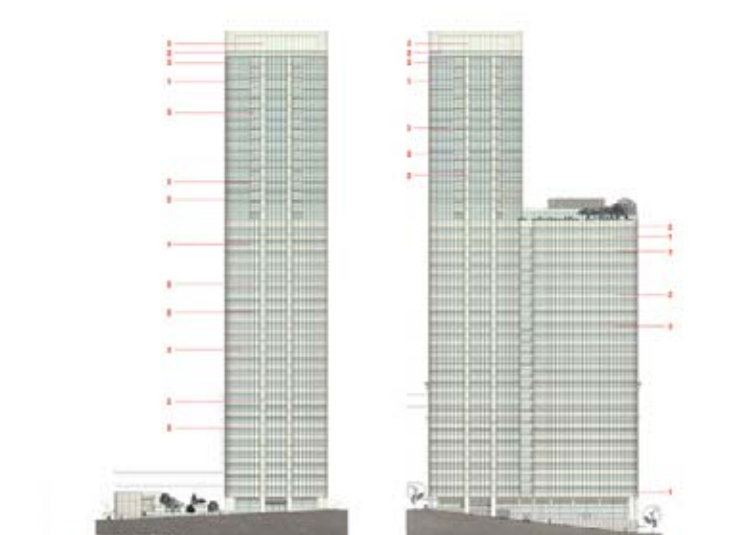
- » Approves the form of the residential mass and its placement along Fourth Ave; however, provide a greater differentiation between the residential and office volumes.
- » The applicant's use of banding on the facades promotes an appearance of homogeneity marrying the masses too closely together. Produce different treatments of all the facades based on sustainable concepts.
- » Because the upper portions of the Cherry St. façade are quite long, they need more interesting things happening. These upper facades should become increasingly more interesting as one approaches a building.

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- » Approves the vertical crease or modulation in the façade to differentiate two vertical shafts within the overall massing.
- » Provide greater differentiation of the building's skin in order to create a livelier and less monotonous façade.

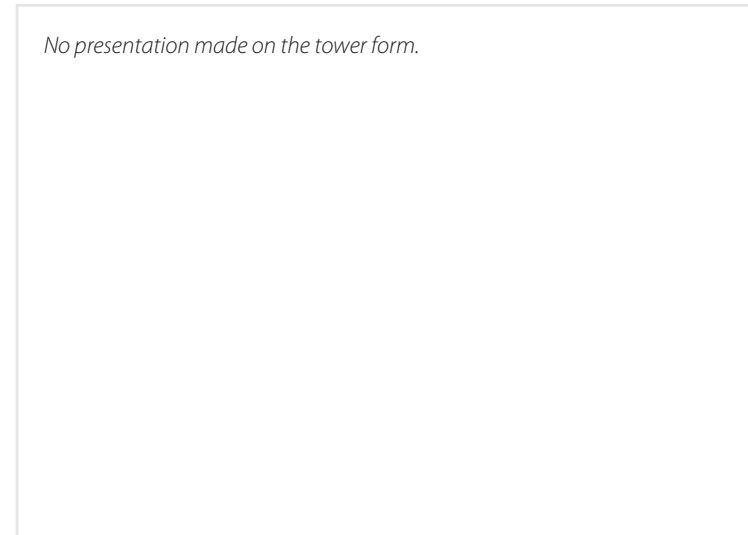
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» Residential block is more integrated into same form as office base.

- » Retain the different exterior expression between the residential portion of the tower and the office block.
- » All or portions of the first several office levels of the tower facing the plaza should respond to the plaza's presence.
- » Add balconies or some modification to the building skin or form to better marry the tower and the plaza. The tower's lower south façade should provide opportunity for the office tenants to interact with the ongoing activities on the plaza.

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- » None given.

Final Design

» The design of the building's final form defines a stepped tower differentiated by a distinct, vertical seam visually separating the two masses. This approach emphasizes the building's height, creates better proportions, addresses site conditions and responds to the buildings nearby.

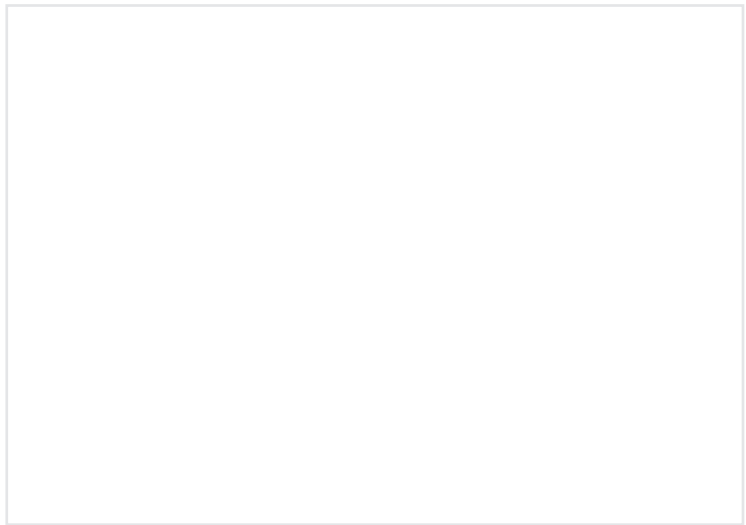
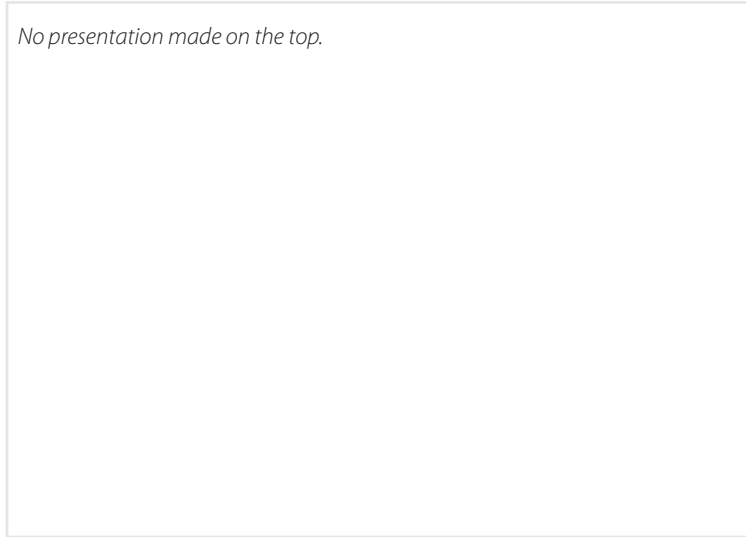
7. Evolution of the Top

Initial Design

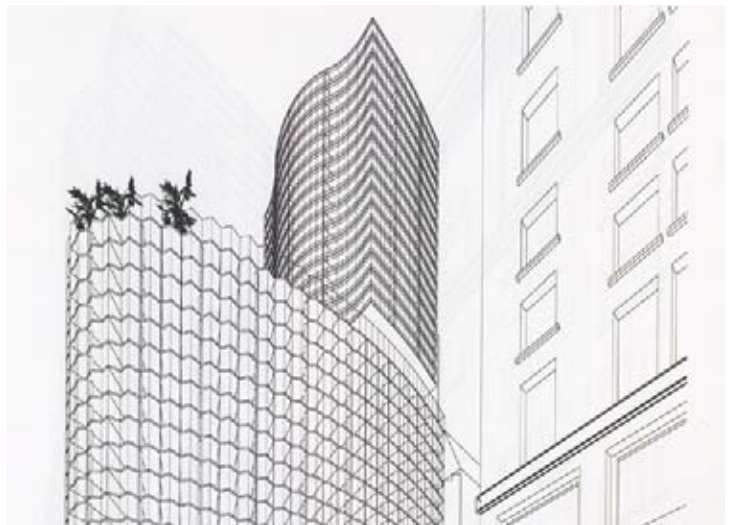
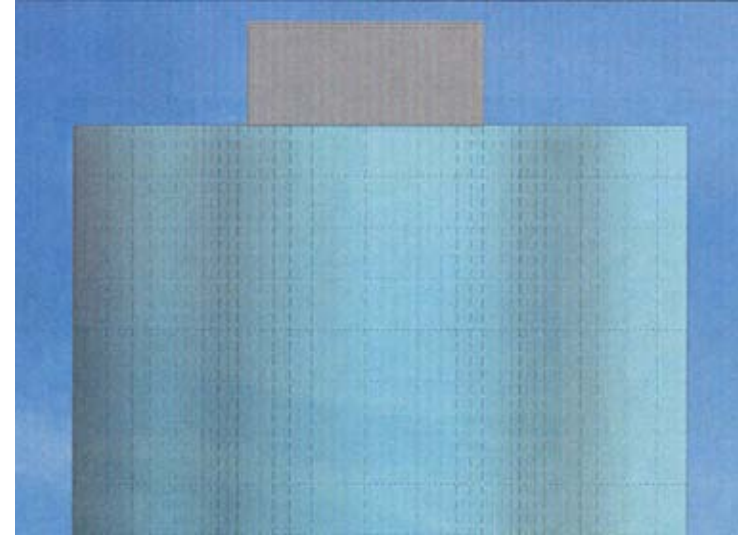
The tower's visibility from the west and south and its proximity between Columbia Center, Seattle's tallest structure and the iconic Smith Tower warranted considerable design attention. With the residential component initially seen as a distinct mass, the evolution of the penthouse and screen took on more significance as the upper level gradually began to resemble the lower tower.

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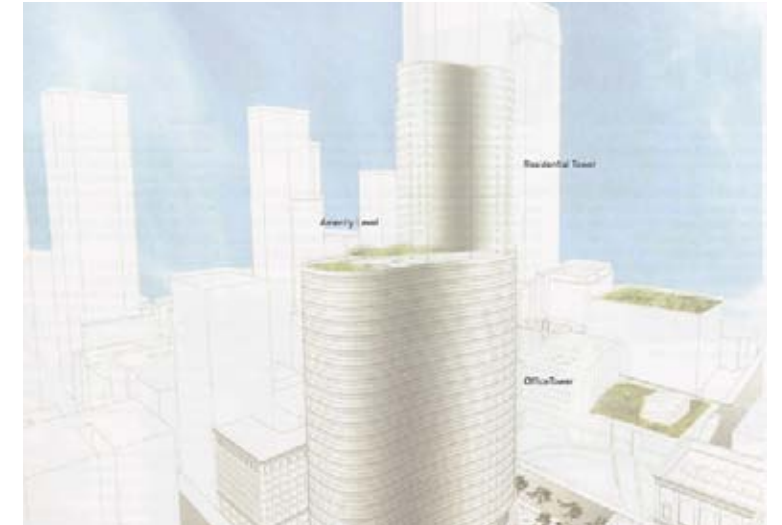
No presentation made on the top.



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Undefined.

Board Guidance

» The proposed tower will be highly visible from the west but particularly from the south where it lies on a diagonal between the Smith and the Columbia Towers, the city's oldest and tallest skyscrapers, respectively. Do not reinterpret or echo the Smith Tower. Although each of these structures will be iconic, they should not compete with one another.

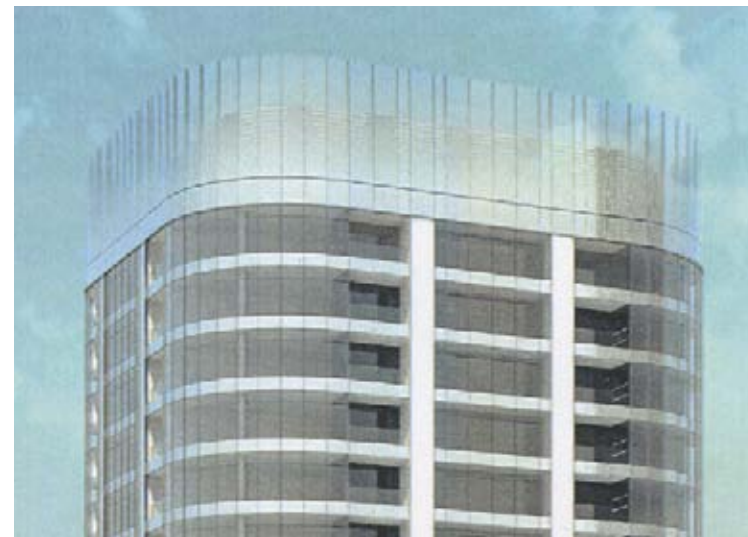
» Approves sliding the residential block uphill to the east which would emphasize the building's verticality at Fourth Ave. and Cherry St. closest to the Columbia Tower.
 » Recognizing that the architect had not completed the exploration of the building form for the residential block, the Board did not comment upon the shape preferring to wait until the next review.

» The tower should possess a sense of conclusion. Both this proposal and the Smith Tower have a narrower tower rising above a base. The Board strongly encourages the architect to explore significant changes to the top.

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November 18, 2008 Recommendation Review



Final Design

» The final design of the top terminates in a fritted glass parapet that screens mechanical equipment. The glass screen's shape mimics the form of the tower beneath it. The fritted glazing gradually becomes more transparent closer to the top. At night, the glass screen will be colorfully lit, creating a distinctive lantern.

» Greenhouse.

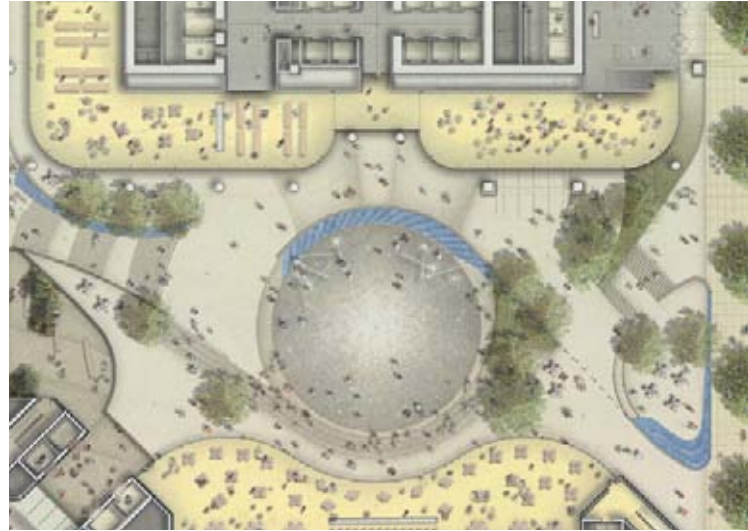
- » Show a greater commitment to expressing the tower's verticality. Shaping the apex of the tower should enhance the sense of the vertical lift.
- » The concept of a box within a box (the mechanical penthouse surrounded by green walls within a glass enclosure) met with little enthusiasm.
- » Better express the technology of sustainability in the roof.
- » Design a more powerful image for the city skyline.

- » Refine the top of the tower with the intent of producing a more elegant presence on the Seattle skyline.

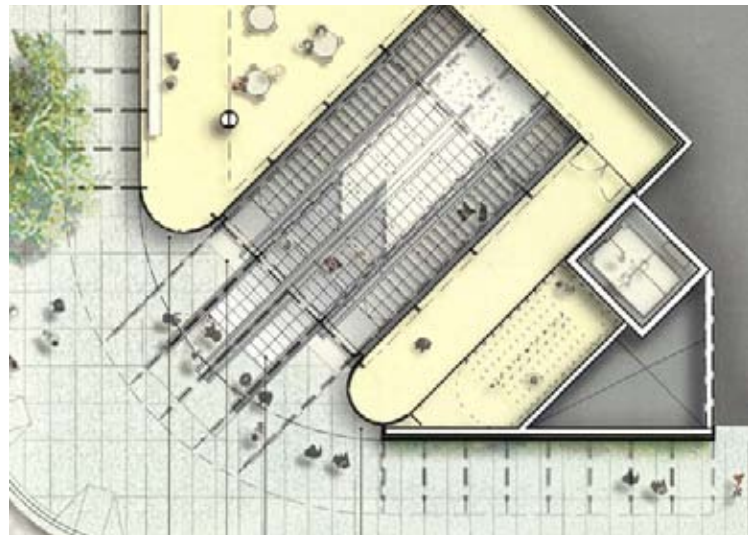
» Glass screen wall whose fritted parapit tapers so it appears to disappear into the sky.

- » Approves the proposed roof design.

Summary of Final Design



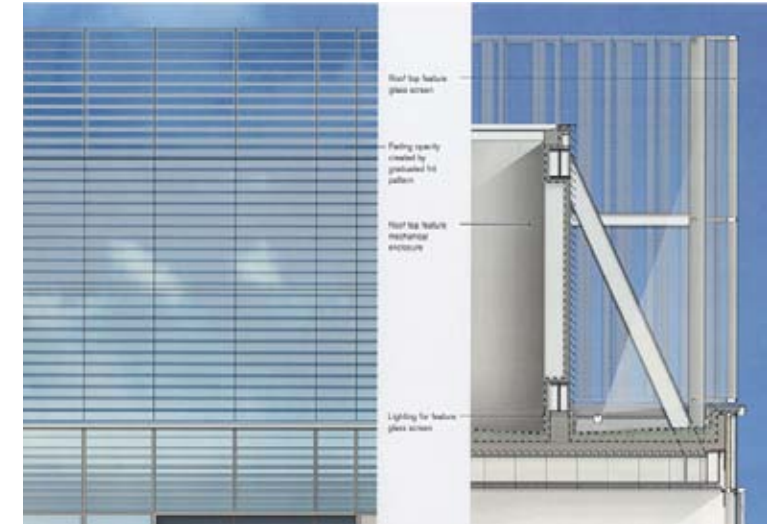
1. Plaza and Circulation
less area devoted to steps
more intimate spaces to
congregate



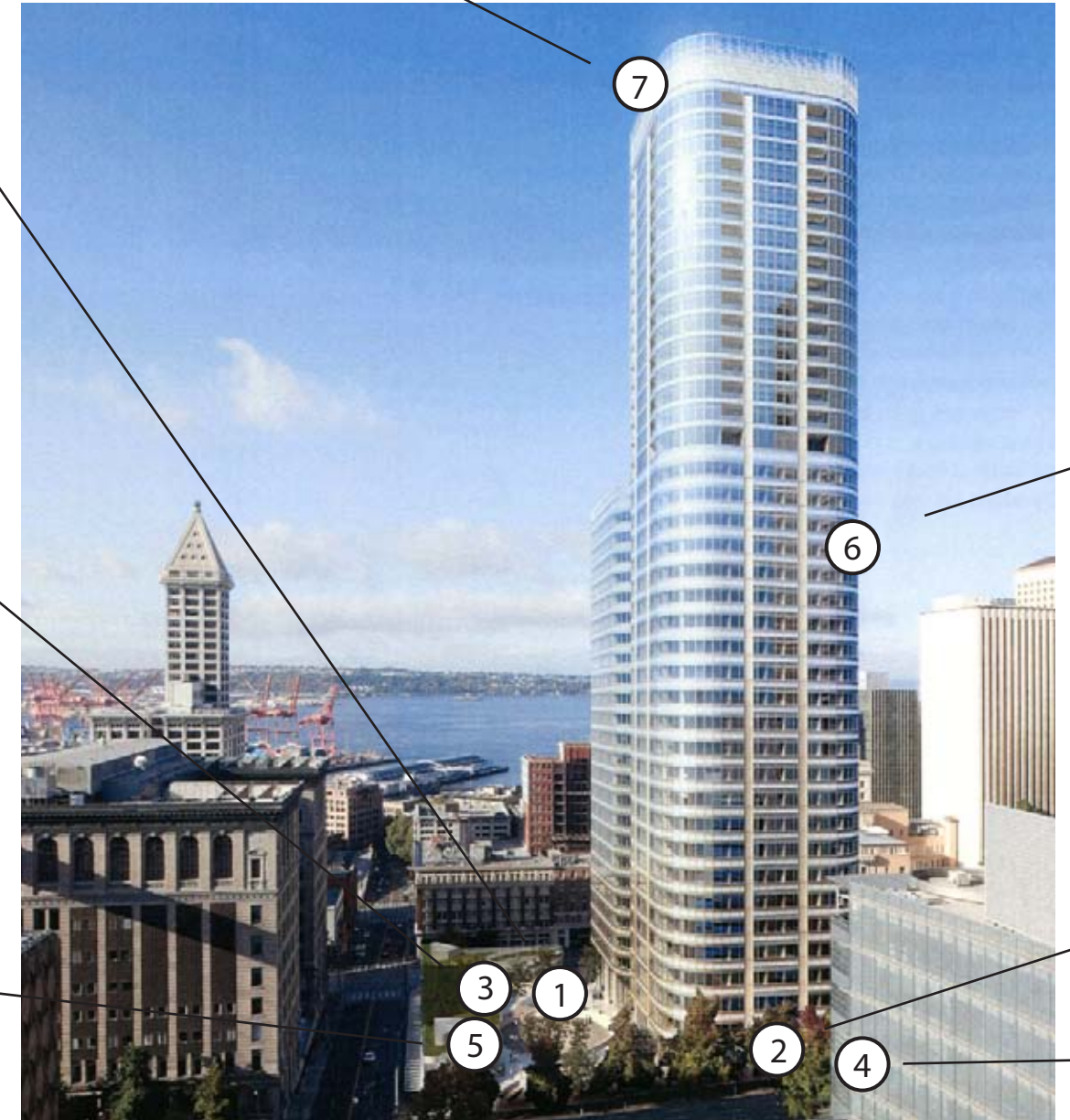
3. Access to Transit Station
escalators connect plaza,
4th Ave., and subterranean
Metro station



5. James Street Facade
more pedestrian features,
such as transparency,
overhead weather
protection, green wall and
display boxes

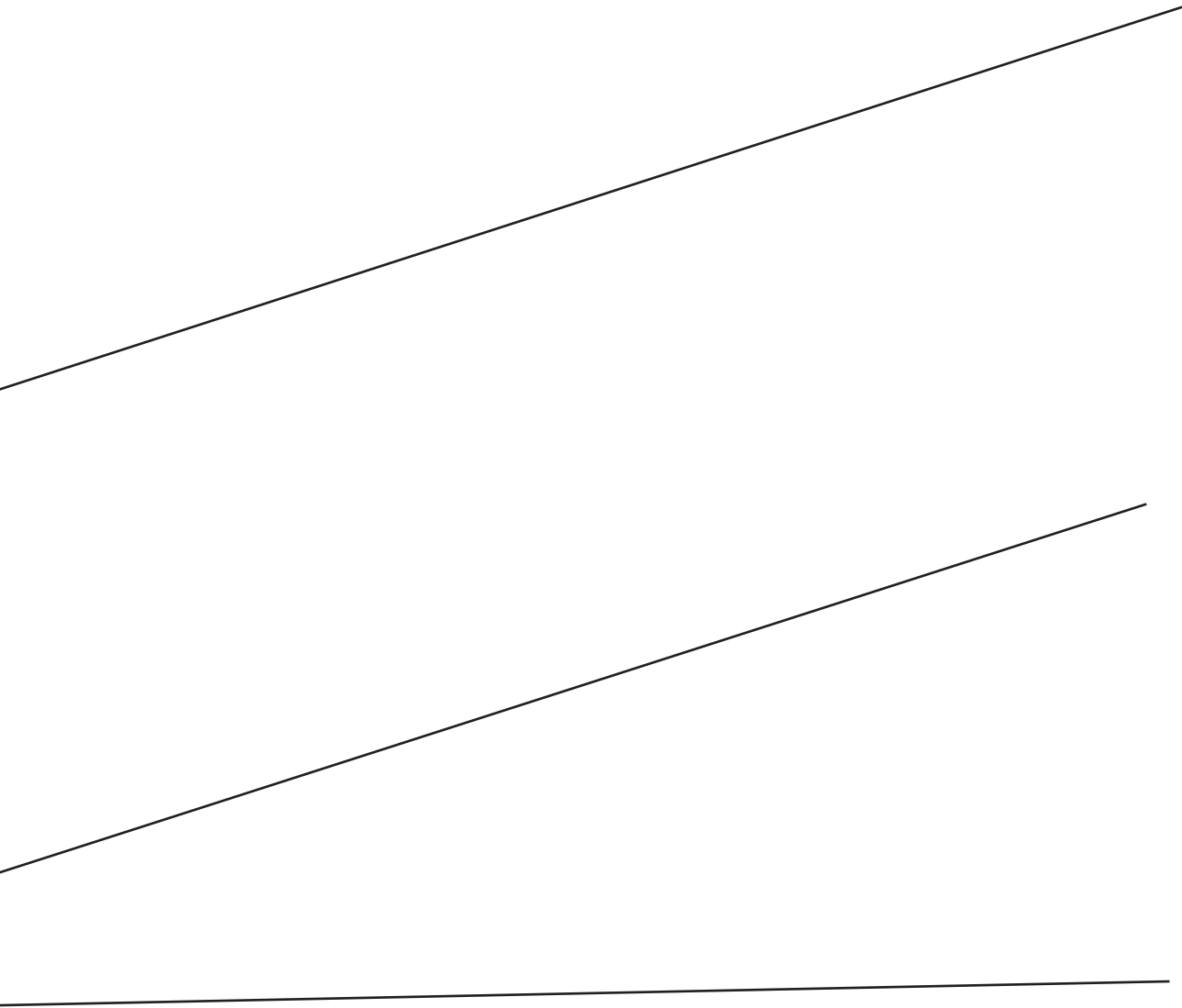
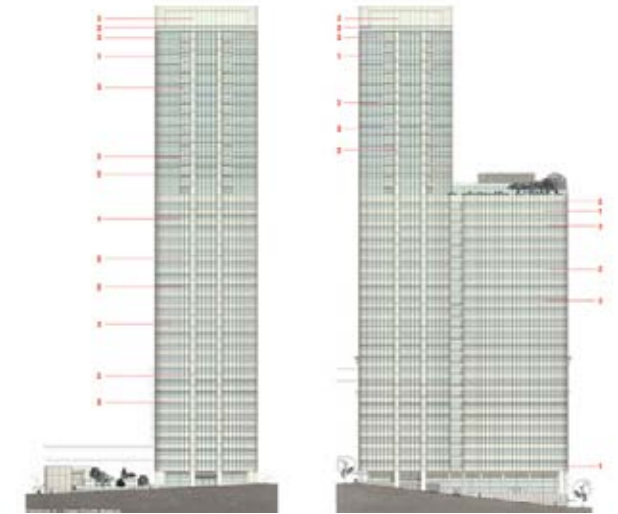


7. Top
fritted glass disappears
into sky at day and casts
distinctive lighting at
nighttime





6. Tower
final form emphasizes the building's height, creates better proportions, and responds to buildings nearby



2. Shape of Base
base is two co-joined squares with rounded corners to better relate to public spaces



4. Cherry Street Facade
much more transparent than original design



Civic Square Design Credits

Reviewers



Downtown Design Review Board

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- » Kelly Mann » Dana Behar
- » Jim Falconer » Karen Kiest

Seattle Design Commission

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- » Dennis Ryan
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- » Tom Rasmussen, Councilmember
- » Jan Drago, Councilmember

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- » Dwight Dively

Department of Fleets and Facilities

- » Brenda Bauer

Foster and Partners

Atelier Dreiseitl

GGLO

Arup

Design Guidelines Cited

The Downtown Design Review Board and the Seattle Design Commission referenced the following guidelines from the City of Seattle's Design Review Guidelines for Downtown Development when it issued the design guidance of the Civic Square project:

Site Planning and Massing

- A-1 Respond to the Physical Environment
- A-2 Enhance the Skyline

Architectural Expression

- B-1 Respond to the Neighborhood Context
- B-2 Create a Transition in Bulk and Scale
- B-3 Reinforce the Positive Urban Form and Architectural Attributes of the Immediate Area
- B-4 Design a Well-Proportioned and Unified Building

The Streetscape

- C-1 Promote Pedestrian Interaction
- C-2 Design Facades of Many Scales
- C-3 Provide Active -- Not Blank -- Facades
- C-4 Reinforce Building Entries
- C-5 Encourage Overhead Weather Protection
- C-6 Develop the Alley Facade (This guideline did not apply because there was no alley on the site.)

Public Amenities

- D-1 Provide Inviting and Usable Open Space
- D-2 Enhance the Building With Landscaping
- D-3 Provide Elements that Define the Place
- D-4 Provide Appropriate Signage
- D-5 Provide Adequate Lighting
- D-6 Design for Personal Safety and Security

Vehicular Access and Parking

- E-1 Minimize Curb Cut Impacts
- E-2 Integrate Parking Facilities
- E-3 Minimize the Presence of Service Areas

For more detail, on these guidelines see:

http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/cms/groups/pan/@pan/@plan/@drp/documents/Web_Informational/cos_005121.pdf

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Department of Planning and Development
Seattle Design Commission
Design Review Board

