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From the Austin Business Journal:

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## Design tweaked for residential high-rise that could have art gallery, plaza at street level

**Commissioners pleased with changes: 'This one kind of knocks it out of the park'**

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A high-rise on the northwest side of downtown has passed a hurdle it couldn't clear two months ago.

Members of the Austin Design Commission gave their blessing Aug. 26 to the proposed condo tower at 17th and Guadalupe streets, which will also have ground-floor retail and art gallery space. Commissioners found that the project substantially complied with the city's urban design guidelines, a necessary step for the developers to receive a density bonus.



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The development team led by West Seneca, New York-based Reger Holdings LLC hopes the 117-unit tower will be a dramatic and highly visible boost to a section of downtown between the State Capitol and the University of Texas campus.

The area as a whole is rapidly changing with Travis County's new courthouse and a new hotel already planned nearby. That raises the stakes for what gets built on the site of 17th and Guadalupe, currently occupied by the low-rise William Gammon Insurance Building and a parking lot.

The Design Commission failed to make a recommendation on the development at its last meeting in June. The development team sought a recommendation to participate in the Downtown Density Bonus Program, which would allow them to build to a higher floor-to-area ratio.

Brockett Davidson, an architect with tower designer Rhode Partners, said at the Aug. 26 meeting that the changes made to the plan since June were made with pedestrians in mind.

"We're very pleased with the design updates and the adjustments that have been made to the project, specifically as it meets the ground," he said.

### **A bit more pedestrian-friendly**

Davidson said the project now stands at 28 stories — starting with about 5,000 square feet of leasable retail and art gallery space on the ground floor, topped by a parking garage and amenity deck and then the 117 residential units.

Davidson said one of the bigger changes made to the design was adding a canopy above the retail space and the residential lobby entry.

"Both those moves will ... reinforce pedestrian activity," Davidson said. "Even though there's still a lot of glass and concrete, the overall effect is one that's quite friendly to the passerby."

He said they wanted to address concerns raised about the uninterrupted glass from floor to ceiling on the retail section of the project.

"Now that this canopy is there, it's broken up," Davidson said.

Davidson also said they reworked the art gallery corner to try to create a sort of art plaza with space for a bench or sculpture.

Previous plans called for a 27-story residential tower. It's not immediately clear what the extra floor will be used for — Davidson did not return a request for comment.

### **'A really cool building'**

Commissioners said they appreciated the updated plans. Commissioner Evan Taniguchi said they made a "very nice pedestrian experience on all sides of the building."

"This one kind of knocks it out of the park," Taniguchi said of the changes. "This is going to be a really cool building."

Commissioner Samuel Franco asked for the development team to look at partnering with local artists for the art gallery. He also wanted the team to "decouple" parking spaces from the tower's condos, meaning that parking spaces could be offered separately instead of being automatically included when someone buys a condo.

"Hopefully, one of these days we won't have so many cars on the streets or y'all can do something different with those parking spots," Franco said.

Development Services Division Manager Jorge Rousselin, a Planning and Zoning official who serves as the commission's executive liaison, said design commissioners can't attach conditions when they weigh in on a project's compliance with the city's urban design guidelines.

"Neither of these can be achieved through the density bonus program and thus they are considered recommendations from the commission ... for the applicant to consider," he wrote in an email.

Planning and Zoning staff are ultimately responsible for approving requests to participate in the Downtown Density Bonus Program, which allows projects to get greater height and density entitlements in exchange for high-quality building or street standards and support for community benefits like affordable housing.

The tower's construction start date is listed as 2019 with a completion date in 2021 in city documents.

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