



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 535 W Johnson Street

Application Type: Approval of a Planned Development (PD) Alteration for Exterior Modifications to the Existing Building - Final Approval is Requested

Legistar File ID #: [74228](#)

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Chris Houden, Jr., Willow Partners | Carole Schaeffer, Freide and Associates

Project Description: The applicant is seeking Final Approval of exterior modifications to an existing building in a Planned Development (PD). The proposed improvements include the expansion of the existing roof top amenity space by adding a pool, pergola, and installation of glass and metal railings.

Approval Standards: The UDC is an **advisory body** on the Planned Development request. For Planned Developments the Urban Design Commission is typically required to provide a recommendation to the Plan Commission with specific findings on the design objectives listed in Zoning Code sections [28.098\(1\)](#), Statement of Purpose, and (2), Standards for Approval (PD Standards Attached). However, in this case, since the proposed alteration was found to be consistent with the intent of the PD, it is considered an administrative amendment, not requiring Plan Commission review. As such, the UDC is advisory to the Director of Planning (28.098(6), MGO).

Adopted Plans: The project site is located within the [Downtown Plan](#) (the "Plan") planning area in the Johnson Street Bend Neighborhood. As noted in the Plan's recommendations, this district should continue as a primarily higher density student housing areas mixed with some new neighborhood serving retail uses. The Plan also recommends building heights of 12-stories.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff requests that the UDC review the proposed development and make findings based on the aforementioned standards, including the previously recommended conditions that were part of the Commission's Initial Approval motion as noted below:

- Future plans show a design that is more cohesive with the existing Art Deco style.
- An appropriate lighting plan should be part of the return as noted in the staff memo.
- A landscape plan shall be submitted.
- Corrected elevations that show what exactly you are asking for.
- The applicant shall provide information related to the repurposing of the pool space when it is not in use.

Staff requests that the UDC look revised drawings which include several modifications and comment as they relate to the above conditions, including whether the size and scale of the revised details can be found to be cohesive with the existing design.

Per the Commission's adopted Policy and Procedures Manual, Initial Approval signals approval for general site plan layout and building massing, noting that architectural or material revisions are still found necessary prior to Final Approval. In this case, the motion for Initial Approval specified that the four considerations noted above

needed to be addressed in order to reach Final Approval. Staff advises that the Commission base this review on those previously-specified elements.

Summary of UDC Initial Approval Comments

As a reference, the Commission's comments from the November 9, 2022, Initial Approval Recommendation are below:

- This building has an Art Deco nod, I'm not seeing that you're enhancing that at all; you're really going away from that.
 - The project team felt that the Art Deco gestures of the existing building were pretty minimal and abstract. We're not completely ignoring it but felt the gestures weren't strong enough to continue to build on that theme.
- The element that comes down over the pool is really heavy and coming down part way through the building, maybe it is supposed to relate to the new entry. It's very heavy and I'm not sure if it has to be that thick, it seems very foreign to the elevation.
 - Unfortunately we don't have an elevation view that would show it from the street level all the way up to the top that reads as one element. Seeing it straight on might ease your concern, it is a rectangular frame that carries down.
- I also felt like that element, the piece centered on the pool was a bit heavy. It struck me as it comes down the face of the building that it doesn't really seem to terminate at anything, it's just spires hanging there. It might be more successful if it intentionally terminated or found some resolution at the side, and it was not quite so heavy.
- I didn't see a landscape plan. My recommendation is to carve out some space, whether it's planters or built in space to support some plant life and not just extensive thin sedums. Something that supports pollinators, color and texture, I would like to see this with some plantings on that roof terrace that would be a benefit to the tenants and the space as well.
 - Right now it's a sea of concrete in front of the building, we eliminated and replaced that with low vegetation, grass, and trees. I like the suggestion of plants that are portable at the penthouse level.
 - The white frame coming down is intentional. We wanted it to be more beefy than the surrounding framework, because it is that central element, its high up on the façade, we thought the scale was appropriate.
 - The further out you get, it makes sense.
- I still feel like my comments are valid. As that element comes down, it's terminating at a datum but that there would be something there instead of it just hanging there. It could still come down slightly and have hierarchy.
 - We can see what we can do to reduce that.
- What a wonderful excuse to see these mint green arched projections with the slender columns, a really nice design element we don't see very often anymore. Seems like an opportunity to replicate some of that, bringing something that's a little more cohesive with what we find on the building today. What's preventing us from having more of that mint green arched projection? Looks like an exciting rooftop, nice design and activation of that rooftop. I disagree with some of the comments about the heaviness with the rest of the building in context.
- To look at the existing elevation it has an elegance because of those corner windows, the way they're framed with the head plate that extends beyond the window into the brick, it makes this building elegant proportions and lines. I would debate with whether or not that white frame fits with that. This building has really nice details, I would debate that the frame is so heavy it negates the nice detail that is already there. The balconies are delicate with their railings, and how thick that slab is, it might be worth reviewing that top again more in proportion with the details that are already on the building.

- The water extends beyond the edge of the building and you could sit with your back against a glass railing?
 - Correct.
- I understand the beauty of that, but I also can imagine somebody accidentally stumbling backwards. Bad behavior choices, just a thought. The shape on top of this building and the details that are already there are lovely and to maybe revisit those a little bit more.
- If this was a brand new building we would think things don't match. There is an opportunity to take the Art Deco to a whimsical expression on this. It's student housing, it's a new thing, maybe lighted finials at the ends of the structures, or trying to do a soft curve somewhere in there, but I do feel it's worth a little more effort to make a nod to the Art Deco style that the rest of the building is trying to mimic. Take it to almost an expression rather than trying to follow it exactly, through lighting or finials that are more of a folly.
- Just a little additional level of detail, then? Those barrel vaults don't say Art Deco to me.
- If you are trying for an expression there, you could take it a little further than these rectilinear things.
- The red reminds me of red solo cups and bad behavior. I can see where you're coming from and how this will make the rooftop more lively. But back to the point, that pool is going to be closed most of the year, I'm really curious to understand why your client thinks it's necessary to have a pool.
 - We keep it open from May to October, we also own The Waterfront on Henry Street which has a pool. We see it as a dramatic element to an amenity stack to maintain competitiveness in this ever changing market. While your point is absolutely valid that the usability of pools in the Wisconsin climate doesn't reach its peak, we do see the utility and the value of being able to present this option to potential tenants.
- I've heard from tenants that having a safe livable place to live is more important than having a place that has a pool. Some previous comments noted that there isn't much green space on the roof. The pool is a huge square bed that could be used for greenspace.
- The railing comes up all the way, do you have any safety measures? Is that a glass railing containing the pool? What if that glass shatters?
 - The railing has to be designed and installed to meet certain forces and safety considerations. I believe that's six-feet around the pool, which is taller than it has to be.
- Even within our UDC guidelines for downtown districts, we understand there are more amenity spaces available in the downtown area. There doesn't need to be excessive amenity spaces and I think this is excessive and unnecessary. We are not in a pool shortage in the City of Madison.
 - Multi-family and student housing, especially those built 20 years ago have to evolve and accommodate changes to keep up with the market and the amenity stack is a big consideration in that.
- I've always admired this building, it's so refreshingly different than the other high rises in this area. The mix of rectangular and circular balconies, and interesting things like the angled balconies on the corners on the top floors, and down on the ground level there are some posts and lights on the corners; it's really a nice looking building. I'm afraid this detracts from all that. My initial thought was to also maintain the parabolic arches that are present on the building, keep that and raise it up higher. I echo the comments that the white blockiness and the gauge and scale of this just looks really bolted on and does not meld with the architecture of the building. I'm not a big fan of the stark whiteness of it and it is way too large. We ran into a similar discussion with the project by the Interstate, with concerns with the timber supports looked a little too medieval, and they needed to be scaled down to size. The same design considerations fall into place here. Somehow shrinking those and possibly the accompanying ones that wrap around the side of the building would be well advised. Agree, that the way they stop on the second from the top balcony looks awkward. Not sure what the solution is there, maybe disappearing into the brick or not terminate in a squared off fashion or maybe rounding it would play off some of the Art Deco influences. Changing the corners of the building where you took out the diagonal

balconies and squared them off, which resulted in additional space for two more chaise lounges, a small tradeoff for what was an interesting design element that existed before.

- I echo those comments, it is the owner's prerogative to improve your properties, but people are not going to fill your building because you don't have a pool. It's a little of our prerogative too, and I laugh at this as a minor alteration because it's pretty visually significant; it needs some tweaking.
- I'm curious about how the transition works on the side, how the railing ends, why it stops in the middle over the window.
 - The railing stops where there's solid wall and counter space with higher chairs. Solid makes more sense functionally there.
- Shouldn't the railing come all the way to the end of that side façade?
 - That was intentional, the glass turns the corner into something else. That bay of the frame is a different dimension and we wanted to treat it differently.
- I would enjoy the design more if it went all the way to the end of the side façade, it looks abrupt.
- The entrance too, it doesn't meld as well with some of the lovely details this building already has. Color does a lot and the green could be debated as a good feature. The same comments that apply to the roof are applicable to here as far as style and cohesiveness with the building.
- The brick fence and posts are going to be removed?
 - That's slab concrete on the planter box, the fence is in really rough shape and the lights have been ripped out and the planters are deteriorating. Our idea was to create a fluid streetscape and provide more greenery to the pedestrians.
- It would have been good to see more plans with those changes, I thought this was just the rooftop.
 - To your point with the plantings, we would as a condition of this process submit a landscape plan amenable to the UDC in order to satisfy that concern. As far as the portable planters on the roof, we can absolutely add that element. I'm trying to do everything I can within the realm of financial feasibility. Permanent planters with irrigation systems is really expensive, but we look into portable planters on the rooftop and can supplement with a landscape plan on the streetscape
- What about the changes shown to the windows on the first and second floors on the northeast and northwest corner?
 - Those are not proposed at this time, those window components would be part of a future phase.
- (Secretary) The UDC is advisory, staff felt the changes and design were significant enough for the UDC to review. The Plan Commission will not see this, so technically UDC is advisory to the Planning Division Director.

The motion included the following conditions:

- Future plans show a design that is more cohesive with the existing Art Deco style.
- An appropriate lighting plan should be part of the return as noted in the staff memo.
- A landscape plan shall be submitted.
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ATTACHMENT
PD Zoning Statement of Purpose and Standards

28.098 (1) Statement of Purpose.

The Planned Development (PD) District is established to provide a voluntary regulatory framework as a means to facilitate the unique development of land in an integrated and innovative fashion, to allow for flexibility in site design, and to encourage development that is sensitive to environmental, cultural, and economic considerations, and that features high-quality architecture and building materials. In addition, the Planned Development District is intended to achieve one or more of the following objectives:

- (a) Promotion of green building technologies, low-impact development techniques for stormwater management, and other innovative measures that encourage sustainable development.
- (b) Promotion of integrated land uses allowing for a mixture of residential, commercial, and public facilities along corridors and in transitional areas, with enhanced pedestrian, bicycle and transit connections and amenities.
- (c) Preservation and enhancement of important environmental features through careful and sensitive placement of buildings and facilities.
- (d) Preservation of historic buildings, structures, or landscape features through adaptive reuse of public or private preservation of land.
- (e) Provision of more adequate, usable, and suitably located open space, recreational amenities, and other public facilities than would otherwise be provided under conventional land development techniques.
- (f) Facilitation of high-quality development that is consistent with the goals, objectives, policies, and recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan and adopted neighborhood, corridor or special area plans.

28.098(2) Approval Standards for Project

The standards for approval of a zoning map amendment to the PD District, or any major alteration to an approved General Development Plan, are as follows:

- (a) The applicant shall demonstrate that no other base zoning district can be used to achieve a substantially similar pattern of development. Planned developments shall not be allowed simply for the purpose of increasing overall density or allowing development that otherwise could not be approved unless the development also meets one or more of the objectives of (1) above. Conditions under which planned development may be appropriate include:
 - 1. Site conditions such as steep topography or other unusual physical features; or
 - 2. Redevelopment of an existing area or use of an infill site that could not be reasonably developed under base zoning district requirements.
- (b) The PD District plan shall facilitate the development or redevelopment goals of the Comprehensive Plan and of adopted neighborhood, corridor or special area plans.
- (c) The PD District plan shall not adversely affect the economic health of the City or the area of the City where the development is proposed. The City shall be able to provide municipal services to the property where the planned development is proposed without a significant increase of the cost of providing those services or economic impact on municipal utilities serving that area.

- (d) The PD District plan shall not create traffic or parking demands disproportionate to the facilities and improvements designed to meet those demands. A traffic demand management plan may be required as a way to resolve traffic and parking concerns. The Plan shall include measurable goals, strategies, and actions to encourage travelers to use alternatives to driving alone, especially at congested times of day. Strategies and actions may include, but are not limited to, carpools and vanpools; public and private transit; promotion of bicycling, walking and other non-motorized travel; flexible work schedules and parking management programs to substantially reduce automobile trips.
- (e) The PD District plan shall coordinate architectural styles and building forms to achieve greater compatibility with surrounding land uses and create an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with the existing or intended character of the area and the statement of purpose of the PD District.
- (f) The PD District plan shall include open space suitable to the type and character of development proposed, including for projects with residential components, a mix of structured and natural spaces for use by residents and visitors. Areas for stormwater management, parking, or in the public right of way shall not be used to satisfy this requirement.
- (g) The PD district shall include suitable assurances that each phase could be completed in a manner that would not result in an adverse effect upon the community as a result of termination at that point.
- (h) When applying the above standards to an application for height in excess of that allowed in Section 28.071(2)(a) Downtown Height Map, except as provided for in Section 28.071(2)(a)1. and Section 28.071(2)(b), the Plan Commission shall consider the recommendations in adopted plans and no application for excess height shall be granted by the Plan Commission unless it finds that all of the following conditions are present:
 - 1. The excess height is compatible with the existing or planned (if the recommendations in the Downtown Plan call for changes) character of the surrounding area, including but not limited to the scale, mass, rhythm, and setbacks of buildings and relationships to street frontages and public spaces.
 - 2. The excess height allows for a demonstrated higher quality building than could be achieved without the additional stories.
 - 3. The scale, massing and design of new buildings complement and positively contribute to the setting of any landmark buildings within or adjacent to the project and create a pleasing visual relationship with them.
 - 4. For projects proposed in priority viewsheds and other views and vistas identified on the Views and Vistas Map in the City of Madison Downtown Plan, there are no negative impacts on the viewshed as demonstrated by viewshed studies prepared by the applicant.
- (i) When applying the above standards to an application to reduce or eliminate stepbacks required by Section 28.071(2)(c) Downtown Stepback Map, the Plan Commission shall consider the recommendations in adopted plans, including the downtown plan. No application to reduce or eliminate stepbacks may be granted unless it finds that all of the following conditions are present:
 - 1. The lot is a corner parcel.
 - 2. The lot is not part of a larger assemblage of properties.
 - 3. The entire lot is vacant or improved with only a surface parking lot.
 - 4. No principal buildings on the lot have been demolished or removed since the effective date of this ordinance.