



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 2101-2115 E. Springs Drive
Application Type: Residential Building Complex Consisting of Four, 4-Story Multi-Family Apartment Buildings – Initial/Final Approval is Requested
Legistar File ID # [69543](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Dan Schmidt, Signature Pointe Apartments, LLC | Ulian Kissiov, Architect | Brian Munson, Vandewalle & Associates

Project Schedule:

- The UDC received an Informational Presentation on March 9, 2022.
- The Plan Commission is scheduled to review this proposal on June 27, 2022.

Project Description: The applicant is seeking Initial/Final Approval for the development of four, 4-story multi-family apartment buildings with a total of 500+/- dwelling units (~34.5 du/acre) located northeast of East Towne Mall, on the east side of East Springs Drive. Onsite parking will be comprised of both surface and underground parking. All first floor units will have active unit entrances and pedestrian connections to the surrounding street and/or the surface parking areas. Exterior building materials are comprised of fiber cement siding and metal panels.

Approval Standards: The UDC is an **advisory body** on this request. [Section 33.24\(4\)\(c\)](#), MGO states that: *“The Urban Design Commission shall review the exterior design and appearance of all principal buildings or structures and the landscape plans of all proposed residential building complexes. It shall report its findings and recommendations to the Plan Commission.”*

Summary of Design Related Plan Recommendations: The project site is also located within the [Greater East Towne Area Plan](#) (the Plan) planning area. The Plan recommends Medium Density Residential land uses for the project site while adjacent properties are recommend to remain in either open space or general commercial uses. No public streets are recommended through the subject site. The goal and intent of the Plan recommendations is to encourage development of “complete neighborhoods” where residents have convenient access to goods and services needed for daily life. The Plan goes on to define “complete neighborhoods” as providing a mix of housing types, costs, a network of well-connected parks, streets, blocks, paths, etc. The site abuts the Starkweather Creek corridor, for which the Plan recommends a 200-foot buffer from the edge of the creek.

Also as noted in the Plan, there is planned infrastructure and natural features that will impact development of the project, including a planned off-street bike path that runs from East Springs Drive through the project site to the interstate, as well as the Starkweather Creek corridor, associated wetlands and buffers that are located adjacent to the project site on the south.

Summary of Design Considerations

The UDC last saw this item as an Informational Presentation on March 9, 2022, and provided feedback on a variety of design-related considerations. While the Commission recognized some site development constraints as part of their review, opportunities were also noted, including those related to limiting the number of residential units

oriented towards the parking lot, adjusting building orientation, providing a centrally located “street” within the development, and concentrating parking nearest the interstate.

While making some adjustments, the development team has indicated to staff that they intended to pursue refining the current concept versus looking at a more extensive redesign. As such, many of staff’s previously raised comments are still applicable for Urban Design Commission and upcoming Plan Commission consideration. While staff acknowledges that there have been some adjustments including the addition of a new fire lane and ring road, many of the original design-related concerns remain, including the number of units oriented towards the long, perimeter parking fields resulting from the current development concept that features longer buildings.

As noted above, the UDC is an advisory body on this request. Staff recommends the Commission’s findings and recommendations to the Plan Commission be framed as a motion based on the “...*exterior design and appearance of all principal buildings or structures and the landscape plans...*” as specified in the applicable ordinances. Additionally, while the UDC utilizes the Initial/Final Approval framework in certain situations, as an advisory recommendation, staff believes it would be procedurally preferable to provide a singular motion with the Commission’s findings and recommendations. It is important to note that, as with all conditional uses, the Plan Commission is the approving body and that the Plan Commission would have to adopt a condition to allow further review by the UDC.

For the Commission’s reference and consideration, staff has identified the following design considerations:

- **Building Mass and Scale.** The proposal includes four large buildings, all of which are dimensioned to be well in excess of 300 feet in length, including Building A, fronting on East Springs Drive. The building’s material palette primarily consists of a Nichiha panel system, with variation in panel width and color. In regard to the exterior design and appearance, staff requests that the UDC provides recommendations regarding façade detailing, mass and scale, and associated articulation.
- **Wall Packs.** Also related to the building’s exterior design, it appears some wall pack/HVAC louvers are proposed on street-facing elevations. It has been a common recommendation of the UDC to not locate such louvers on street facing facades, though they have been approved in some situations when found to be well-integrated into a façade’s design, or otherwise having their appearance minimized.
- **Buffer and Screening.** Given the site’s proximity to the railroad and I-90/94, consideration should be given to providing adequate buffer and screening along the site’s south and east sides, nearest the interstate and railroad. Staff requests the Commission’s findings and recommendations on the proposed landscape plan, especially related to providing an adequate buffer/screen, including the proposed planting selections, quantity, and ability to provide year-round screening. In addition, consideration should also be given to the interior site landscape as it relates to adding texture, color, and scale to the buildings and open spaces.
- **Starkweather Creek Setback.** As a reference, staff notes that the recently adopted plan recommends a 200-foot development buffer from the edge of the Creek. It appears that Building D may be set closer to the creek than generally recommended. This is a design-related consideration that staff will also be noted for the Plan Commission.
- **Site Layout and Design.** During the Informational Presentation, several comments were raised regarding the overall development concept and site layout and, with many units within the larger-footprint buildings oriented towards the perimeter parking. While such considerations relate to exterior design and

landscaping considerations, they also are related to other approval standards that will ultimately be before the Plan Commission. As a reference, this includes Conditional Use standard 9 that states:

“When applying the above standards to any new construction of a building or an addition to an existing building the Plan Commission shall find that the project creates an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with the existing or intended character of the area and the statement of purpose for the zoning district. In order to find that this standard is met, the Plan Commission may require the applicant to submit plans to the Urban Design Commission for comment and recommendation.”

Staff requests that the UDC’s advisory recommendation provides comment and recommendations on how the proposed exterior building designs and landscaping relate to the overall site and proposed layout.

Summary of UDC Informational Presentation Comments

Staff refers the Commission to their comments from the March 9, 2022, Informational Presentation:

- I understand the design intent of the yin yang, but I don’t know that every face of a particular element needs to be a different color, it gets a bit chaotic. It can all be the same color and meet that design intent, but simplified.
- The solids and voids are working nicely and add interest to these pretty long façades. I do wonder about only one entry in and out. The parking around the edges is kind of brutal. The units that face the greenspace are much nicer than facing all that parking. I wonder about access for emergency vehicles.
 - The concept used for the colors changing is a well-known pull-push approach to architecture. To explore the push-pull approach, it’s like an apple that is one color on the surface, you cut through and see a different color. This is on purpose and the owner and client liked it very much.
- Look at how the buildings are placed on the site. The drive that goes all the way back to the underground parking is quite long and now you have double loaded parking spaces. I could see people whipping around that uninterrupted and it being a hazard backing out. We have a large majority of the building facing the parking and the highway, facing the Bowl-A-Vard, even East Springs is not a very pedestrian scale face of the site. Look at reorientation of buildings so the ends are at the parking rather than facing the parking, with the building layout more like fins so there’s more courtyards in between and less units facing a parking lot. That would be more successful.
 - Wetlands and the future bike trail required by the City is protruding quite deeply into the lot, not giving us many options to reorient. This was optimal because the park and open space is right next door, this is a very strong design concept to merge the two. As to how much of the units are facing the parking vs. interior courtyards, you can see Buildings B and D have only ¼ of the units facing the parking lots. Building C we have less than 50 percent because the end units are not facing the parking lot. Building A didn’t have much of an option, initial layout was the parking lot on the other side, however zoning issues and staff forced me to push the parking for Building A behind the building. This is the least desirable building because one side faces the street and the other faces the apartment. But complexes all have these issues, I rarely see them treat the courtyards free of cars, they are full of parking. We have a very strong feature in the courtyards I would like to preserve.
- I wonder if more of the buildings were spoked off of the parking lot with more greenspace between. I know this is an efficient layout to maximize units, I just feel like there could be a better solution to this thoroughfare coming around, you will definitely have vehicular issues. Building A is probably the least desirable.

- If you start breaking down greenspaces they are less successful.
- I like the concept of giving the residents some respite from the Interstate in these courtyards. Confirming the elevations of the grade in those courtyards in relation to the Interstate. Is there any line of sight to the Interstate from the courtyards?
- I'm interested in any kind of efficiencies, it would benefit this project a lot. Exterior outboard landscaping, thinking about future mature trees could really go a long way in further protecting this site in similar ways you're trying to achieve now. Wonder if there's any efficiencies to bring those buildings in further for more real estate on the perimeter, and maybe a way to get some relief in those parking lots. I hardly second the earlier comments about navigating that drive.
- You indicated 500 units, what's the total parking count?
 - Surface is about 315 including the 70 stalls at Building A. 270 or 80 on that long parking around the rest of the buildings. Our intent is to have about 400 underground stalls, 100 of them dedicated to Building A, including the clubhouse, pretty much 100 per building. The entire length of that drive at building D to the driveway approach is 1,300 feet. We'll do some traffic studies.
- 350 surface, 400 underground, 1.5 ratio per unit. Does seem like an immense amount of surface parking.
- Does seem appropriate given the context.
- Appreciate protecting that large swath of open space in the middle, but I wonder about connecting to another road at the end of that parking lot, that dead end length seems really long. Instead of a double sided single drive lane on the Interstate site, have a double drive with parking and congregate more of that parking towards the Interstate. It would dramatically change your site plan, not sure if it's the right answer. This isthmus of greenspace through the site is really nice.
- The clubhouse entrance is pretty close to the main drive entrance to the building. Seems like there could be a lot more openings in the wall somewhere between the two apartment buildings. As I'm driving in, I'm thinking it could be more open and transparent, maybe some punched openings or some other detail to give that a bit less of an institutional feel there.
- Going back to the colors, I really perceive the push and pull on those middle bays, but I don't get the sense of the push and pull on the corners, it's almost more like a Rubik's Cube. I do really appreciate that the corners of the balconies are column-free. This does an excellent job of resolving those corners. The colors are the easy part to resolve.