



Agenda Item #: 7

Project Title: 430-432-444 State Street - New Mixed-Use Building in the Downtown Core (DC) District. 2nd Ald. Dist.

Legistar File ID #: 69486

Members Present: Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Lois Braun-Oddo, Shane Bernau, Jessica Klehr, Christian Harper, Rafeeq Asad and Russell Knudson.

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Summary

At its meeting of June 29, 2022, the Urban Design Commission **RECOMMENDED REFERRAL** of a new mixed-use building in the Downtown Core located at 430-432-444 State Street. Registered and speaking in support was Kevin Burow, representing Knothe & Bruce Architects. Registered in support and available to answer questions were Colin Smith and Joe McCormick. Registered and speaking in opposition were Kurt Stege, Frederic Mohs and Bob Klebba.

The project layout is similar to what was shown at the Informational Presentation, providing additional housing on State Street in proximity to Lisa Link Peace Park, with a revised building design based on the Commission's feedback. Plans show accessing a shared plaza at the park, two levels of commercial space, with the main building entry on the eastern side with access to an elevator and stairs. The building steps back thirty-feet as required, they have introduced additional plantings at terrace level, revised the landscape plantings along the park, and provided additional trays on the accessible roof deck. The building is designed to fit in with State Street as you cannot see the fifth floor to sixth floor loft with the stepback. They have maintained the white brick, created a more cohesive corner element to anchor that corner while providing differentiation in the façade, and added more windows and fenestration on the upper stories for more articulation.

Kurt Stege, as a representative of Madison Trust for Historic Preservation and co-chair of Trust Advocacy Committee spoke in opposition. The Madison Trust submitted a letter stating they oppose both the demolition of buildings and the design of the proposed project. The Landmarks Commission issued their report finding historic value, specifically the buildings at 428-430 and 432-436 based on their status as contributing structures in a potential national register historic district. Together they represent three different eras of construction on the same street, and that cluster is a valuable story in and of itself, speaking to the importance of scale and rhythm along the street. The Downtown Plan supports limited development but only if the buildings are carefully designed to maintain the small scale rhythm of frontage.

Bob Klebba spoke in opposition to the project, noting the concordance with the rhythm and flow of the existing architecture on State Street. It is very obvious this building sticks out like a sore thumb. He asked the team to consider a three-story façade to blend better, such as the Oliv project did. This proposal is too tall, lacks sufficient articulation to avoid the sense of massing that does not currently exist here or elsewhere on the 400 or 500 Blocks of State Street. The proposed building would have a huge impact on shading of Lisa Link Peace Park, which would decrease its usability and make snow removal more difficult. The City and others have worked tirelessly to revamp this park. State Street defines Madison, it is important to preserve the diversity of streetscapes we have on State Street in order to continue to draw in these students, tourists and residents to our iconic street.

The Commission discussed the following:

- The staff report asks that we comment on building mass, scale and design elements.
- The overall façade composition reads wider than the smaller, narrower storefronts seen on surrounding blocks. The 100 Block of State Street (opposite side of street) has newer buildings that aren't the mega student apartment buildings, but a nice example of modulating a façade so it does not appear wider than it is taller. It can be done and it has been done successfully.
- There aren't a lot of balconies facing State Street. The corner element with the cap we see a lot of, you might think that's the building entrance but that's an entrance for the commercial. The apartment entrance is not expressed, there's an opportunity there to modulate the façade so you have distinct expressed entrances.
- Overall the building is a difficult problem, this is a very prominent site. You have this real conservative five-bay element, a freeform six-story part around the corner that conforms to where the stepback needs to be. Why isn't the building a bit more of a modern expression that takes advantage of the unique geometry it's faced with?
- The challenge of this project is somewhat precedent setting. We heard great commentary from the public that I very much appreciate. Everybody wants to protect our beloved State Street. I remember my first experience of this pocket park, it's a vivid memory. As much as that experience resonates with me, the Downtown Plan is such that we do envision increasing heights of buildings in this area. I have not heard that this is necessarily a direct solution to affordable housing, but it is more housing nonetheless. As much as the shading analysis is valuable, I don't know there's much we can do related to the growth of our city and the need to densify and build upward. I do agree with the earlier comments, we've made them before and I don't know they are yet resolved. This design is so disruptive to what is there currently and the context around it. I would potentially be supportive of this building height-wise, but I don't know that this particular design can help me support this project.
- There's not a lot of finesse. We just saw a good example of when you have a good brick material, how you can articulate openings and elements with little finesses to break down the scale and mass. If brick is your choice of materials, more articulation could be used. The big openings at the corner may be working against you, it has a heaviness to it and are not in keeping with the rhythm at the pedestrian level. Then you have this typical articulation of the cornice, there's a lot of opportunity here to break down the mass of this with lighter materials. In keeping with what they're doing at the Hub and much larger buildings, you want to start articulating the pedestrian level in quaintness. I am concerned with the precedent of the four-story flat up against the property line. You start that rhythm down State Street and pretty soon you're in a canyon. This precedent setting for a replacement building, it has to have a lot more sensibility to breaking down at the pedestrian scale. The contradictory elements with the more modern style, the Juliet balconies with fussy grading, maybe one or the other has to go. All in all, it just has a mass that is off putting for continuing the rhythm of State Street.
- We have a responsibility to make some recommendations the best we can so the designers have the best opportunity to give us something approvable.
- I'm in agreement with the detailing comments, the human scale of being around this building. It is hard to see things change, but people might very well respond to those balconies in a favorable way. Understanding that aesthetic here on State Street, there is a sense of playfulness; turning that corner gray gives it a much more somber tone. It's right next to a park, an ideal place to be more playful with architecture and color.
- The architecture is rather attractive and a nice combination of materials, in a different context. It definitely changes the character of the streetscape and sets a precedent. The design of Lisa Link has this amphitheater grade change bowl-like experience. Right now those existing buildings are retaining four-feet of grade against that one wall and it really contributes to that topography that you're nestled in. You're losing all of that with this project, until you get further back in the park. It changes pretty dramatically and I think what is there now is very successful, not to mention it has a big mural on the wall for the color that Jessica was referencing. I don't have an issue with the corner tower element or the Juliet balconies. The proposed mural brings color and creativity if you're on that side to see it, but in order to be an approvable project, it needs to have that break down of more division along State Street, less width of the appearance of a single building and more of that rhythm we know

and love about State Street itself. One story less in height would certainly help the approval process. This is not moving in the right direction for State Street.

Action

On a motion by Braun-Oddo, seconded by Knudson, the Urban Design Commission **RECOMMENDED TO REFER BACK TO URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION**. The motion was passed on a unanimous vote of (6-0).

The Urban Design Commission found that this proposal sets a precedent and recommends that the building as proposed not be approved based on the following:

- The proposal needs to relate better to the pedestrian scale.
- The proposal needs articulation of materials that is not matching, but that is not foreign to the other architectural elements on State Street.
- The corner tower element is too heavy for the scale of the building and needs articulation and more of a unification of the front, back and side façades.
- The project would benefit from, if not a complete removal of a floor, perhaps a portion going from four to three-stories at the street.
- More articulation along the State Street façade with a slight stepback to appear less sheer along the sidewalk.
- Look at the rhythm of the bays so that they are more vertical and the building reads as a series of vertical elements vs. a more egg crate design.
- The Commission recognizes that having units facing Lisa Link Peace Park on the other side is a good thing. However, it is unfortunate the building goes the full six-story height along there, whereas it's much lower along that side now.
- It is a blank wall right now and could be pretty neat to have lit apartments there at night vs. a blank brick wall.
- There are many successful infill projects that use more variety of modern materials in a creative way without mimicking the exact period of architecture next door, while still having very pedestrian scale elements.