

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION MEETING REPORT

July 12, 2023



Agenda Item #: 5

Project Title: 33 W Johnson Street - New Mixed-Use Development in UMX Zoning. 4th Ald. Dist.

Legistar File ID #: 78639

Members Present: Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Lois Braun-Oddo, Amanda Arnold, Shane Bernau, Christian Harper, and Marsha Rummel

Prepared By: Kevin Firchow, AICP, Acting UDC Secretary

Summary

At its meeting of July 12, 2023, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** for a new mixed-use development in UMX zoning located at 33 W Johnson Street. Registered and speaking in support were Andy Inman, Andrea Schaub, and Rob Uhrin. Registered in support but not wishing to speak was Jon Cakert. Registered in opposition but not wishing to speak was Nathan Olson.

The development team noted that this is a hotel and multi-family development, with the goal of putting this vacant city block back into use. The mix of uses includes an extended stay hotel, upscale boutique hotel, a 130-unit multi-family building, commercial uses, courtyard, and winter garden area. The hotel is accessed off of Wisconsin Avenue, with the receiving area off of Johnson Street. The underground parking will be accessed from Dayton Street, with the main residential entrance accessed off of Carroll Street. All below grade parking is under the hotel portion of the site. The lower level includes amenities for the residential building, walk-out terrace units, and commercial spaces. A restaurant is located on the corner of Wisconsin Avenue and Dayton Street. The residential building is a C-shape that creates a courtyard that can be used year-round for events to residents and the public. Additional meeting space is located on the second floor. The top floor is another food and beverage venue and includes additional amenity spaces for the hotels. The development team stated that they are about 12-feet below the Capitol Preservation Height Limit. The historic building will be renovated to what it was with new windows and architecture that maximizes views. The development team further stated that the Wisconsin Avenue elevation is intended to create a stately and elegant entry sequence that opens views to the winter garden and that the window patterning is attempting to address bird friendly design.

Questions by the Commission for the development team or staff:

- They are under the Capitol View Preservation Height limit, there is a ten-story limit in this area and they are looking for 11? They would be asking for additional height based on architectural merit?
 - Yes, there are two considerations with height. The bonus story consideration, but when height is measured from a zoning point of view it is not meeting the number of floors that is a zoning compliance issue to be worked through.
- I was confused about the height, with the disconnect of the lesser amount of stories having a higher height limit, but that also seemed to conflict with the Capitol Height Limit.
- (Firchow) As far as the height, if the bonus stories were approved the maximum height is 10 stories and 144 feet. My understanding is zoning would consider this an 11 story at 125 feet building. The height limit would comply but the number of stories would not.
- The conflict that the drop-off area is severely at odds with the City's prescriptions for drop-off/driveway areas on Wisconsin Avenue, is that something that's negotiable, or waivers could be granted?

- (Firchow) It was certainly different than the previously proposed project. As far as the UDC's role, ultimately changes in the right-of-way are the purview of the Board of Public Works. Obviously that could impact the private property design which is the primary focus of this Commission. The Downtown Design Guidelines do have specific recommendations about driveway types, which is noted in the staff report. That document notes that portico shared type elements or circular driveway should not be parallel to the street or in the public right-of-way. Those are guidelines cover considerations that are under the purview of the Board of Public Works.

The Commission discussed the following:

- There's a lot going on that feels like multiple buildings all grouped together and I don't see the design pieces that are holding it together, it feels disjointed.
- I agree, there is almost a startling change from one piece to another of this building. It lacks a cohesiveness. I love the playfulness of that corner, but then it just stops and becomes rectilinear, it needs a larger format material to help make those elements where you have the residential a little more grand. Brick entirely maybe adds to the startling scale difference of the large glass panels and this brick detailing. I think that the area facing Johnson Street needs a lot of work, it has kind of a back door quality to it. If you're from Madison you know that's probably the higher traffic area of all the sides of this building. As much as this big corner element faces the Capitol, it's probably one of the least visible traffic-wise for folks that will view it. Having that back door, back alley utility of Johnson Street bothers me a lot, it needs more activity facing that side of the street. You have a tight program and you always need back of house, but that could be more creatively incorporated. Maybe some of those things face internally rather than Johnson Street. Overall it's an exciting project and I'm so glad somebody is going to fill in that hole. But that corner needs a lot of work, it's very underwhelming and doesn't address or complement either side of it. Take more of the old high school massing or more of the playful hotel massing, somewhere in between would be much appreciated.
- I concur with Lois. I love the expressive architecture on that corner, that's unique, exciting, it's a strong element that people will want to take photos of, very cool. I also like how you have sort of a strong base that as a pedestrian I'd be both intrigued by the architecture, but also comfortable walking along and peering into that first floor space with a little relief above it, I think that's really strong and will be successful. I am intrigued by the winter garden idea, that's another really strong idea that could be a really excellent and unique thing we don't have in the community. I'm intrigued by some of the sunken patios along the old Madison College building along Johnson. But that Johnson Street elevation and the Johnson and Wisconsin corner is missing the mark right now. Specifically right in the foreground of this view, that glazing rises up so high, you lose the pedestrian scale and with traffic whizzing by, there's no parking on Johnson along that side so it's uncomfortable on the street side, and now even more so given the building massing. You could certainly improve that with canopies or balconies, whatever is acceptable in the guidelines, but something that is more articulated for the pedestrians. The drop offs and driveways are surprising to me based on my knowledge of the project site. I will be interested to see how that develops in coordination with City staff. The neighborhood and community have previously expressed the importance of preserving the Wisconsin Avenue corridor up to the Capitol, something that goes all the way back to John Nolen's plans. The vitality of the tree canopy on Wisconsin Avenue was something the neighborhood was very concerned with. If we're interrupting that with more driveways, are we losing trees, stressing trees? It's a big design idea that's been around for hundreds of years. Are we able to improve the street trees and canopies with this project? Right now Johnson is woefully lacking tree canopy and it would be great to see that improved. Looking forward to seeing the next iteration.
- I absolutely love the glass portion, I just think that's really dynamic and something we don't see enough of in all the new buildings going up around town. Everybody seems to be afraid of incorporating curves and arcs into building designs, this is really a great jazzy rhythm to it and is impressive and stand out in the downtown area. To me the other portions of the building have nice things going on with the proposed surfaces and masonry, but I'll have to agree that it doesn't see, to meld or flow into the Autograph portion. Maybe part of it is reflective of the fact we have two different hotels in the same building, this helps delineate them but it's a little awkward. While I think the masonry sections look attractive, they don't look like they're part of the same project and pale

in comparison to the corner. The drop-off areas are problematic. Johnson Street is a bottleneck and it can have horrible traffic jams. The very meager drop-off seems problematic. I hope something can be worked out for the grand entrance on Wisconsin, but the tradeoff is you're obligated to do something nice with that remaining area out in front of it. The reference of the allay of trees and the long view going up to the Capitol demands that the design be planted well, which can be done while still preserving the nice view of the entrance to the hotel. I'm curious about the courtyard area and the access to it from the residential area. If you are in the residential area can you just walk right through here and cross over into the hotel, it appears that way. I'm curious about access to the public while still providing security to the residents and hotel guests. I'm not sure the entrance to the parking ramp and loading shouldn't be reversed. Very interesting looking project, looking forward to seeing it further, kudos for the dynamic design on the corner.

- I shared some concerns with regard to the juxtaposition of the brick and the dynamic corner on Wisconsin Avenue. The context photos show these guys have done this before and look really successful. Don't throw it all away but just help us with some of these images and refinement on your design development and how you bring those two brands together with the old Wisconsin High School. I think it can be done. I see these images and I'm encouraged by that. I agree with the comments about Johnson Street, it really is a main arterial that should be paid a lot of attention to, but my biggest concern is the drop-off at Wisconsin Avenue. That is something that is identified in a number of documents as a premier street and it's really important to keep that premier street and those urban design guidelines intact. Just one curb cut, no large porte cochere. Bonus stories are awarded when we get truly exceptional design that responds to a specific location. This premier street is a specific location with a specific vision, it can work, there was another hotel design here that made it work. Otherwise this whole drop-off thing is a non-starter. I'm really grateful we're not debating whether or not to save the arch from the old high school.

Action

Since this was an **INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** no formal action was taken by the Commission.