



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 529 University Avenue
Application Type: New Development in UMX Zoning
UDC is an Advisory Body
Legistar File ID #: [78638](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary and Kevin Firchow, AICP, Principal Planner

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Jeremy Frommelt, Iconica | Kevin Carey, The Carey Group

Project Description: The applicant is proposing a twelve-story, mixed-use building containing ground floor commercial space and 33 residential units.

Approval Standards: The subject site is zoned UMX (Urban Mixed Use District). Per MGO Section 28.076(4)(c), “All new buildings and additions greater than 20,000 square feet or that have more than four stories in UMX zoning shall obtain conditional use approval from the Plan Commission following review by the Urban Design Commission for conformity to the design standards in Section 28.071(3) of the Zoning Code and the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#) and report its findings to the Plan Commission.”

Zoning Related Information: The project site is zoned UMX. The Zoning Code outlines design standards that are applicable to all new buildings in both the UMX and DC zoning districts. As a reference, the design related zoning standards outlined in the UMX and DC zone districts are included as an attachment to this report, including, but not limited to those related to building entrance orientation, façade articulation, height, glazing requirements, and materials.

As noted in the Downtown Height Map, the maximum height allowed for the project site is 12 stories/172 feet. As noted in the Zoning Code, buildings must meet both the maximum number of stories and the maximum height.

While the proposed project appears to be generally consistent with these requirements, ultimately, the Zoning Administrator will evaluate the project for compliance with the Zoning Code requirements.

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 up to 12-stories.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff recommends that the UDC provide feedback and include findings on the development proposal regarding the aforementioned standards related to the design-related considerations noted below.

Staff notes that, as an advisory body, the UDC will make a recommendation to the Plan Commission. As such the Commission’s motion should be one singular motion (i.e., “motion to recommend that the Plan Commission approval/deny” with or without conditions and findings related to the review standards). Staff recommends that conditions should be as specific as possible, and include whether the item is recommended to UDC for final review.

- **Building Massing:** The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines note that massing is an important element in creating a quality urban environment and in how “welcoming” a street is perceived. Consideration should be given to massing and articulation of building components, their proportion and scale, as well as their relationship to the surrounding built environment and intended future character of the area.

Staff note that during the Informational Presentation, some Commissioners noted massing concerns related to possible impacts should this entire area develop with taller buildings, though, staff note that the proposed building height appears to conform to the established zoning and the recommended maximum heights in the area.

Staff requests the UDC review and make findings related to the building massing and modulation.

- **Building Design, Composition, and Articulation:** The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines generally speak to designing buildings at intersections to have strong corner elements, maintaining visual interest across all facades, design with a sensitivity to context, incorporating both horizontal and vertical articulation, as well as incorporating a higher level of visual interest and richer architectural detailing on the lower levels, etc. In summary, the UDC’s previous building design-related Informational Presentation comments included:

- Creating a strong corner element,
- Incorporating more detailing on the ground floor,
- Addressing the blank, monolithic expanse on the south elevation, and
- Promoting color and vibrancy, in part to pay homage to the past and prominent location.

Staff requests the UDC review and make findings related to the building design and composition, especially as it relates to each of the following:

- Building Corner. Considering its prominent location and past UDC comments, staff request that the Commission provide feedback on the design of entry and corner features, and their integration into the balance of the facade.
- Building Base. Staff also request feedback on the design, activation, and articulation of the building base as it abuts a highly pedestrian-oriented area. Staff notes that while a landscape bed is shown adjacent to the base of the building, Traffic Engineering conditions may result in the removal of this element to accommodate a wider terrace and sidewalk. As a result, staff requests the UDC review and provide findings related to the design and detailing of the base of the building, especially in the event the landscape planter is removed.
- South Elevation/Blank Walls. Due to the minimum setbacks and building organization, the south elevation includes few windows as this wall feature includes several “back of house” elements such as stair towers and elevator core. This portion of the building is articulated with some changes in material and a mural feature, though staff believes that there remains significant blank wall expanses. While future potential development could potentially limit the visibility of this elevation, staff request feedback be provided on the treatment of this wall as it will remain highly visible until a redevelopment occurs. Staff request recommendations related to the adequacy of detailing, especially as it relates to incorporating additional materials, transitions, changes in plane, or other forms of architectural detailing to provide more vertical/horizontal articulation or modulation.

- Mural. Limited details were provided related to the mural such as installation, materials, and application. Given the scale of the proposed artwork, staff recommends the UDC provide findings on the proposed mural, especially as it relates to the integration of the art installation into the overall building design.
- Building Top. Staff requests the UDC’s feedback on the top of the building, its integration with such into the overall architectural form, design, and long views.
- VTAC Units. As noted on the elevations, VTAC units are proposed on the east and west elevations, which are located behind a vertical perforated aluminum screen. Staff recommends the Commission make findings related to the integration of the wall packs with the overall building design and materials.
- **Building Materials:** The material palette has been modified from the Informational Presentation, which at that time was primarily comprised of precast concrete panel system, for which the UDC expressed concern. The current material palette is now primarily comprised of a composite panel system in a variety of colors, finishes, patterns and installations (concealed and exposed fasteners), as well as metal panels. In addition, a faux living wall is proposed as an exterior building material that runs the length of the building on the north elevation.

The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines generally speak to utilizing a palette of complementary materials that are high quality and durable, maintaining the same level of design aesthetic across all elevations, incorporating delineated transitional details, etc. Staff requests UDC review and make findings on the proposed material selection and details.

- **Lighting:** Regarding lighting, the applicant is advised that additional information will be required as part of the Site Plan Review process to confirm compliance with MGO 29.36, especially as it relates to light trespass, maximum averages in pedestrian areas, and uniformity ratios. As a code requirement, no further action is required by the UDC on this item.

Summary of Informational Presentation Discussion and Comments

As a reference, the Commission’s discussion and comments from the July 12, 2023, Informational Presentation are provided below.

Questions for the development team/staff:

- Are these furnished? Any accommodations for bicycle parking?
 - Yes, they are furnished. There is a 10-foot setback in the alley we intend to use for bike parking, we are still working on it. We also have lower level basement for indoor bike parking. We don’t have the total number of stalls yet.
- The building by Dotty Dumpling’s is relatively new and I didn’t think it had a 10-foot setback.
- (Firchow) I’d have to verify the setbacks, I think that was developed under PD (Planned Development) zoning.
- There is requirement in the alley for the setback.
- Yes, in conventional zoning a rear yard setback would apply.
- Aside from bike parking, what is the vision for this site plan along here? Right now it’s got the old Vintage building built right up to the property line. What opportunities to you see to open up this alley and bring light and other design features to the setback area?

- With the setback it is pretty tight. Right now there's a two-story building on there, keeping with that ten-foot is going to increase the light and visibility coming out of that alley. We don't have any structures planned to be built there, it is a student market, so we're not providing any underground vehicle parking.
- Along the corner of the alley and University do you see any greenspace opportunities? There is an opportunity to do a 10 x 10 or 10 x 15 green buffer there, have you had any discussions on how you might take advantage of that?
 - We've worked with the City on the streetscape requirements and will be following all Madison requirements on that. With the tightness of the site, taking ten feet out of the corner, I'm not sure how much value you'd get out of that, but we can explore it.
- Is there any historic value to the adjacent liquor store or adjacent buildings?
 - (Firchow) None of the buildings in this block are listed as formal landmarks. As part of this process the Landmarks Commission will provide a recommendation on the historic value of the building proposed for demolition.
- The exterior building materials described as corrugated and listed as precast, it is a masonry system that is then formed and either stained or painted?
 - Yes, we're looking to mimic a corrugated metal panel as close as possible, likely a black stain over that so it wouldn't appear to be concrete.

Discussion by the Commission was as follows:

- My concerns are echoing a lot of what was in the staff report that referenced the importance of the ground level on such a major intersection, and the need for a strong corner element. Looking at these plans and elevations I just see a very run of the mill corner there, I see nothing from an architectural or design standpoint that stands out in any significant way. It seems very pedestrian and mundane and just really boring. That to me, the whole ground level there, realizing it's based partly on what is envisioned in that tenant space, but clearly from what we're seeing here there's nothing exciting about the ground level and in particular that corner element. I was confused about the comment about the lack of windows on the south elevation, they said because they were building to the lot line?
- It's the State building code, when you build up to the property line like you're able to do in this zoning district, you are prohibited of having any openings in your wall for fear of fire, life safety issues.
- If it's a regulatory thing I guess there's no out, but it sure presents a very blank, monolithic expanse that I'm not sure is mitigated by the materials we're seeing here. I can appreciate the renditions they did of how it would look at different times of day but that leaves a lot to be desired. I'm not finding those small pictures of what the concrete would look like particularly inspiring.
- We're charged with looking at this one building but I can't help but step back and see the canyon effects we're getting at this major road here, there's a domino effect of 12, 10 stories and pretty soon there's no greenspace, nothing but tall buildings that detract the feeling as we enter the campus area where there is more variety of setbacks and things. That said I also think that perhaps it's a little ambitious trying to cram 10 pounds of potatoes in a five pound bag that is the site. I don't see any reasonable area for vehicles to pull off for packages, deliveries or drop-off people, or even to move in. Even though they're furnished, we've all seen the dorm move-ins and how much you can fit into those tiny rooms that are already furnished. The program might be a little ambitious for such a small site, and the result is that big blank wall that faces campus, that starts to beg for more development on the other site, to go up to that height and fill it in. I'm struggling with this, not only the site but access to sun and fresh air, this seems to be cutting off and adding to that canyon like feel of this particular part of the downtown area. I'm not inspired by the materials, it's a lot of precast, as much as you're trying to vary the execution of what that panel will look like, it will always look like concrete, it will look wet when it rains, we don't know the reflectivity, it's going to end up looking like a dull building.
- I want to mention the essence of the design, there are some very attractive elevation views of the building, but I think the essence of the design is very serious and not necessarily unique to the site. In a

lot of ways it's very much the opposite of what we have there today, and I think that's a big loss for the community to replace this colorful open corner that really is a gateway. When you drive into town I've always thought this site is very much a gateway because it's active so many days and times of the year, there's the colorful quality and life on the street level that is always present as you come into town and this feels much more closed off. Again, it's 10 pounds of potatoes in a five pound bag. I'm very much struggling to piece together what that might mean for the applicant, tangibly. I was inspired by something Cliff was alluding to as an idea for that alley, if there was any way to capture some of that colorful, vibrant essence and use that 10-feet to your benefit, to benefit the tenant of that first floor space and the rest of the City as a gateway element. I'm thinking of spaces like Bakers Place with that mews-like narrow corridor with lighting. Coordinating and working with the City to utilize that 10 feet for something other than heavily shaded dead greenspace and bikes. Maybe there's an opportunity to bring fun and life back to the corner. Otherwise most of my observations have been commented on.

- I want to express that I concur with the other Commissioners about this seeming like a heavy building. It is really unfortunate to lose such a vibrant space and I think the design could do more to honor that. I want to acknowledge the speakers and let them know we do feel this rub between property rights and the ability to develop, and our scope to comment on the design. But out of that comes a wonderful opportunity to make this building speak to what is there with color and vibrancy, to pay homage to what will have been there in the past.
- I would agree with the playfulness comment, although I don't think you need to go completely random. I'm intrigued by the corrugated concrete and how that could work. The grid makes sense but maybe there still is a little bit of patterning you could do in the color, and certainly on the south side. You could have solid fenestration that you normally wouldn't otherwise do because of unit layouts or window locations. That is something we'll likely be looking at coming down Frances Street for a number of years so pay attention to that side. With regard to the comments about the ground floor elevations, one thing you can really do to help improve that is distinguish the residential entrance from the commercial entrances. I would take that and use it to your advantage to bring some interest and variety to the ground level. I appreciate that it has handsome elements to it, some real thought in terms of the balance, maybe a little lightening up might also be in order.

**ATTACHMENT:
28.071 (3) DESIGN STANDARDS FROM ZONING CODE**

(3) Design Standards.

The following standards are applicable to all new buildings and additions, within any ten- (10) year period, exceeding fifty percent (50%) of existing building's floor area for non-residential buildings, mixed-use buildings, lodging houses, and residential buildings with 8 or more dwelling units.

(a) Parking.

1. Parking shall be located in parking structures, underground, or in surface parking lots behind principal buildings. Parking structures shall be designed with liner buildings or with ground floor office or retail uses along all street-facing facades.
2. For corner lots or through lots, rear yard surface parking areas abutting any street frontage are limited to fifty percent (50%) of that frontage, and shall be located a minimum of ten (10) feet from the street property line.
3. Parking garage openings visible from the sidewalk shall have a clear maximum height of sixteen (16) feet and a maximum width of twenty-two (22) feet. Garage doors or gates shall be located a minimum of ten (10) feet from the front property line. Doors to freight loading bays are exempt from this requirement.
4. No doors or building openings providing motor vehicle access to structured parking or loading facilities shall face State Street, King Street, or the Capitol Square.

(b) Entrance Orientation.

1. Primary building entrances on all new buildings shall be oriented to the primary abutting public street and have a functional door.
2. Additional secondary entrances may be oriented to a secondary street or parking area.
3. Entries shall be clearly visible and identifiable from the street, and delineated with elements such as roof overhangs, recessed entries, landscaping, or similar design features.
4. Within ten (10) feet of a block corner, the facade may be set back to form a corner entry.

(c) Facade Articulation.

1. The facades of new buildings more than forty (40) feet in width shall be divided into smaller vertical intervals through techniques including but not limited to the following:
 - a. Facade modulation, step backs, or extending forward of a portion of the facade.
 - b. Vertical divisions using different textures, materials, or colors of materials.
 - c. Division into multiple storefronts, with separate display windows and entrances.
 - d. Variation in roof lines to reinforce the modulation or vertical intervals.
 - e. Arcades, awnings, window bays, arched windows, and balconies to reinforce the vertical intervals.

(d) Story Heights and Treatment.

1. For all buildings, the maximum ground story height is eighteen (18) feet, measured from the sidewalk to the second story floor. An atrium that exceeds eighteen (18) feet will be considered more than one (1) story.
2. Upper stories shall not exceed fourteen (14) feet floor to floor.
3. For all buildings, the minimum ground story height is twelve (12) feet, measured from the sidewalk to the second story floor.

4. For non-residential uses, the average ground story floor elevation shall not be lower than the front sidewalk elevation nor higher than eighteen (18) inches above the sidewalk elevation.
5. For ground-story residential uses, landscaping, steps, porches, grade changes, and low ornamental fences or walls or similar treatments shall be located between the sidewalk and the front door to create a private yard area.

(e) Door and Window Openings.

1. For street-facing facades with ground story non-residential uses, the ground story door and window openings shall comprise a minimum of fifty percent (50%) of the facade area.
2. For street-facing facades with ground story residential uses, ground story openings shall comprise a minimum of fifteen percent (15%) of the facade area.
3. For all buildings, upper story openings shall comprise a minimum of fifteen percent (15%) of the facade area per story.
4. Garage doors and opaque service doors shall not count toward the above requirements.
5. Glass on all windows and doors shall be clear or slightly tinted, allowing views into and out of the interior. Spandrel glass may be used on service areas on the building.

(f) Building Materials.

1. Buildings shall be constructed of durable, high-quality materials. Table 28 E-1 below lists allowable building materials.
2. All building facades visible from a public street or public walkway shall use materials and design features similar to or complementary to those of the front facade.