



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 229 West Towne Mall
Application Type: Exterior Renovations to an Existing Building in a Planned Multi-Use Site
UDC is an Advisory Body
Legistar File ID #: [79616](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Killian McKenzie, Black Duck Partners | Laura Lewallen, pb2 Architecture + engineering

Project Description: The applicant is proposing to renovate the existing tenant space at West Towne Mall for a new indoor recreation use (Planet Fitness). Exterior building modifications include a new exterior entrance, increasing the height of the existing parapet wall and decorative pilasters framing the storefront, as well as amending the materials palette to include fiber cement board on the extended pilasters, incorporating additional stucco on the parapet wall, and recladding the existing pilasters in new masonry. The proposal also includes various site improvements, including landscape and bike parking.

Project Schedule:

- The UDC granted Initial Approval with conditions on September 20, 2023.

Approval Standards: The UDC is an **advisory body** on this request. [Section 28.137\(2\)\(e\)](#) of the Zoning Code requires that a planned multi-use site containing more than forty thousand (40,000) square feet of floor area and where twenty-five thousand (25,000) square feet of floor area is designed or intended for retail use or for hotel or motel use, shall require conditional use approval following a recommendation on the design of any specific proposal by the Urban Design Commission. The conditional use is currently under consideration as a possible administrative minor alteration. As such, the UDC is advisory to the Director of Planning (28.183(8), MGO).

In addition, pursuant to MGO [Section 33.24\(4\)\(f\)](#), *“Proposals for additions, exterior building alterations, or site alterations to existing structures currently used for, or originally designed to accommodate, a retail development that has a floor area of forty thousand (40,000) square feet or more shall be approved pursuant to the applicable ordinances relating to the alteration of approved projects and shall comply with these requirements to the extent possible, given the constraints of the existing sites and structures.”* As part of their review, the UDC should refer to Section 33.24(4)(f), which includes design related requirements for customer entries, site design, parking design, pedestrian circulation, and central features and community spaces (attached for reference).

At the September 20, 2023, UDC meeting, the Commission granted Initial Approval of this item with conditions that generally spoke to modifying the proportions and height of the proposed parapet wall, materials and detailing, as well as landscape plan modifications. The Commission’s subsequent review and continued evaluation of this item should focus on whether those conditions have been addressed.

Summary of Design Considerations

As noted in the applicant’s submittal materials, the development plans have been modified to address the Commission’s Initial Approval conditions as enumerated below. It is the role of the UDC to review the revised drawings for consistency with the conditions of approval as outlined below. Please note that as conditions of

approval, they are required to be met. The UDC's role is to ensure these previously established conditions are met, however they cannot waive or change these requirements. Staff requests the UDC's final action to reflect the following:

1. Address the comments related to mass/proportions of EIFS area, including minimizing the EIFS expanse to be more in portion of the base of the building, including bringing down the parapet height or incorporating the Nichiha panel to create a frame.
2. Finessing the signable areas to be proportional to EIFS area.
3. Enhancing the entrance into something more dynamic and less plain than is currently pictured.
4. Making adjustments to the landscape plan as noted in comments, including utilizing a different path surface than crushed gravel, removing the remaining Callery pear and replacing it with another tree species, and updating the landscape plant schedule to reflect only the plantings on the plan.

In addition, staff notes the following with regard to lighting and signage.

- **Lighting.** Outdoor lighting is not included in the submittal materials. The applicant is advised the if exterior lighting is proposed, including the removal and reuse of existing fixtures, a photometric plan and fixture cutsheets will be required. Staff recommends that a condition of approval be included regarding lighting, in particular whether it could be reviewed administratively as part of the Site Plan Review process.
- **Signage.** The applicant is advised that while signage is shown on the building elevations, it is not a part of this review and/or approval. A separate review and approval is required for signage.

Summary of UDC Initial Approval Comments and Action

As a reference, the Commission's comments and action from the September 20, 2023, Initial Approval are provided below.

The Commission had the following questions for staff and the development team:

- I understand why there is no glazing at the top where you have the hydro massages on the floor plan, but the other elevation with the vestibule entry, check-in and lobby, why doesn't that have more glazing and daylighting coming in there?
 - In a lot of our clubs we do have windows at the entry desk.
- This is a facelift to make it look like you are modern and nice, competitive gym, but your entry doesn't say that. There's no canopy or anything, it's just flat. It's really flat and doesn't read like an entry. Some type of projection, like Dick's with the massive entry feature, it gives it some dimension. It needs a little bit more design to do what you're trying to do. An entry canopy, something that brings you in, as opposed to just a flat wall, a little gesture.
 - I agree, more windows is something that we can look at. Good comments.
- Are you raising the roof on that portion where you are putting in the new wall?
 - No. Just the parapet, the roof behind that is staying the same.
- It appears there's a lot of EIFS on a little bit of brick, it really compresses that. I can imagine the motivation to do that is to provide a big signable area, but maybe I'm just being cynical about that. I see the signable are on the drawings and that would be way above the roof level, I don't think that's going to fly anyway, unless you raise the roof. Architecturally, in addition to the entry not being emphasized, those enormous EIFS panels are out of proportion with the base of the building. Adding masonry will never match, it may be a matter of adding the Nichiha as a band in the EIFS area, more like a frame;

then it is in proportion with the base of the building. To frame that EIFS panel. We're not here just to provide a canvas for a bigger sign at West Towne Mall.

- Continue the pilasters, more consistent and more elegant.
- Would both of those be signable areas?
- (Secretary) Correct. Signage is not being considered this evening, but we would be looking at signage in excess of size allowed, as well as more than four-feet above the roofline. But of those requests would be required to come back to the UDC for review and approval. It may be good for the Commission to weigh in on the signage as it is shown on the plans currently.
- It would look pretty awful to have this big huge parapet with a small sign on the bottom of it.
- Why is the parapet so high?
 - That's what we do in our clubs. We have over 120 stores and some of our more aesthetically pleasing gyms have pretty big parapets. I don't know about the sign approval and how big that can be, but the signs usually take up the majority of that space.
- Working with staff to put the cart before the horse. Realizing how big your sign could be so your mass is in proportion. Put the canvas around that. Adding something to your entry, some type of canopy, will make all that feel a little bit better.
 - We do have a couple different options to our signage, whether it's stacked or linear, as well as the gear logo.
- Regardless, even with no signage, that EIFS cap is way out of proportion with the brick base of the building. We're letting you know the actual sign can't go more than four-feet above the roof that's behind it. Nobody would be happy with a big roof portion and tiny little signage at the bottom of it.

The Commission discussed the following:

- There are a few problems on the landscape plan. There is stuff on the plant schedule that isn't on the plan, and the labels aren't all corresponding correctly, for example there is a juniper listed in the plant schedule, but it doesn't show up on the plan. The plan schedule should be cleaned up. You decided to keep Callery Pear on there that is not a tree we would approve anymore. That plant is being banned in a lot of Midwest states and we discourage the planting of that. If you're taking out all the existing plantings and leaving that with the idea of planting around those, don't, get rid of those Callery Pear trees and plant some other small tree in its spot. You have the crushed gravel path that is specked as crushed gravel; trying to remove snow from a gravel path is a fool's errand. Either make it concrete or just use a one sided bike rack on that side and let people access it from the sidewalk.

Action

On a motion by Harper, seconded by Von Below, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL** with the following conditions:

5. Address the comments related to mass/proportions of EIFS area, including minimizing the EIFS expanse to be more in portion of the base of the building, including bringing down the parapet height or incorporating the Nichiha panel to create a frame,
6. Finessing the signable areas to be proportional to EIFS area,
7. Enhancing the entrance into something more dynamic and less plain than is currently pictured,
8. Making adjustments to the landscape plan as noted in comments, including utilizing a different path surface than crushed gravel, removing the remaining Callery pear and replacing it with another tree species, and updating the landscape plant schedule to reflect only the plantings on the plan.

The motion was passed on a unanimous vote of (4-0).