

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION MEETING REPORT

May 8, 2024



Agenda Item #: 7

Project Title: 3535 & 3553 University Avenue - New Mixed-Use Building in Urban Design District (UDD) 6. (District 5)

Legistar File ID #: 83067

Members Present: Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Shane Bernau, Wendy von Below, Christian Harper, Marsha Rummel, Rafeeq Asad*, and Russell Knudson

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

*Asad was recused on this item.

Summary

At its meeting of May 8, 2024, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** for a new mixed-use building in UDD 6 located at 3535 & 3553 University Avenue. Registered and speaking in support were Patrick Terry, Peter Harmatuck, Randy Christianson, and Bruce Bosben. Registered in support and available to answer questions was Andrew Geffert.

Summary of Commission Discussion and Questions:

The Commission requested confirmation of the setbacks and the contextual setbacks, expressing concerns related to the building being too close to the street.

The Commission inquired about the number of street trees proposed to be removed and what is driving the tree removal. They are nice looking mature honey locust trees. Generally, the trees should be treated as a public utility and benefit. The removal of such should not be taken lightly.

The UDC noted that there are misgivings about this project. This is a commercial corridor and there is such a minimal commercial ground floor presence. The residential units on the first floor with the ramps and stoops are undesirable being so close to the sidewalk. Maybe reprogram that with amenity space or commercial. This building should be on a plinth to create separation from the street. There is a big gaping hole for the garage entrance in the middle of the ground floor and the pedestrian lobby entrance is minimized. The ground floor closest to the west corner of the building is not well activated or presented at the street. There is a lot of back-of-house stuff and parking behind the spandrel glass.

The Commission acknowledged how difficult this site is to put a building like this on. The Commission noted that the hanging balconies were problematic along this huge commercial corridor; the building needs to be moved back and some of the features need to be recessed versus protruding.

The proportion of solid wall to windows, there is something off about it. It seems like the punched openings and hanging balconies are fighting the building's inherent horizontality.

The University Avenue elevation is not aesthetically pleasing; it seems like a heavy masonry mass that is way too close to the sidewalk. Broad expanses of not enough or too small of windows. The ground floor seems disjointed.

The Commission noted that there is no pedestrian experience here - the car has been celebrated with centering the garage door and aligning it with the street grid. The main building entry is tucked around the corner and looks like a cave making it non-visible. It doesn't seem very welcoming; it is not being celebrated enough.

The Commission noted that there are a lot of good things about this site and project, it is on a BRT line, a major corridor, it is needed housing – but in exchange for that, a building that comes across as more aesthetically pleasing is necessary.

Overall, the Commission noted that the whole ground floor needed to be rethought and reworked. Consideration should be given to removing the ground floor apartments or recessing them back; using a plinth, something to soften the edge right along the sidewalk. It is not too tall, but it seems too tall because of how close it is to the sidewalk. It really needs some ground floor relief. Given the context, a more modern, less dour, long and sweeping and streamlined design would be appropriate, not brown and beige and grey.

Action

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