



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

**Project Address:** 702 - 734 E Washington Avenue

**Application Type:** Informational Presentation for a New Mixed-Use Building in Urban Design District (UDD) 8

**UDC Will be an Approving Body**

**Legistar File ID #:** [79239](#)

**Prepared By:** Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

## Background Information

**Applicant | Contact:** Joseph Lee, JLA Architects + Planners | Chris Houden, Willow Partners, LLC | DCH Properties, LLC

**Project Description:** The applicant is proposing the construction of a new 14-story, podium-style, mixed-use, multi-family/commercial development at the corner of E Washington Avenue and North Blount Street. The project will be comprised of approximately 233 residential units and roughly 13,000 square-feet of ground-floor commercial space. The development proposal includes structured parking, community meeting room, and various resident amenities.

**Approval Standards:** Upon submittal of a formal application, the UDC would be an **approving body** on this request. The site is located in Urban Design District 8 ("UDD 8"), which requires that the Urban Design Commission review the proposed project using the design standards and guidelines for that district in MGO Section [33.24](#)(15).

As noted in UDD 8, the maximum number of stories currently permitted on the subject site (Block 2b) is eight stories, with the potential for up to two bonus stories for a total of 10 stories. As outlined in MGO 33.24(15)(e)(12), *Upper Level Development Standards*, development's seeking bonus stories shall incorporate a combination of design elements as enumerated therein, providing sufficient public benefit to warrant the additional height. As part of the UDC's review purview and ultimately approval authority, the Commission will evaluate the proposed development for consistency with MGO 33.24(15)(e)(12) and ultimately make findings as to whether the requested height is warranted.

The proposed development is comprised of 14 stories, which is in excess of what would be allowed under the current UDD 8 height limitations. As such, the proposed development would require a text amendment to the UDD 8 standards related to height. Staff notes that multiple amendments to the UDD 8 height standards have previously been approved to accommodate different development proposals. At the time of report writing, the Alder has been working with staff and considering a possible code amendment, though no formal amendment has been introduced at this time. Any code amendment would require a separate review by the UDC, in addition to a separate review on the development itself. The intent is that any such amendment would be adopted prior to the UDC being asked to make a decision on the development itself.

**Adopted Plans:** The project is located in the [East Washington BUILD Capitol Gateway Corridor Plan \(2008\)](#) planning area. The Corridor Plan notes that the key implementation mechanism for the recommendations incorporated therein was the formation of UDD 8. Key design considerations outlined in the Corridor Plan include protecting capital views, creating a grand gateway and sense of place, increasing density and employment base within the corridor, ensure compatibility between corridor and surrounding neighborhood, protect and enhance pedestrian environment, safety, and access, etc.

The project site is also located in the [Tenney-Lapham-Old Market Neighborhood Plan \(2008\)](#) planning area. Considering the geographic overlap, prior to plan adoption, height maps in the document were approved to make the development recommendations in this document consistent with the more detailed formed based standards in the aforementioned East Washington BUILD Capital Gateway Corridor Plan.

Finally, staff notes that [Comprehensive Plan \(2018\)](#) recommends Regional Mixed-Use development for the subject site, which is the most intensive mixed-use district outside of Downtown. It includes buildings ranging in height from two to 12 stories and with densities governed by building height.

## Summary of Design Considerations

Staff requests that the UDC review the proposed development and provide feedback regarding the aforementioned standards related to the items noted below.

- **Building Height and Bonus Stories.** As discussed above, the proposed building height is currently in excess of the allowed heights in UDD 8 and a separate text amendment would be required to Ch. 33.24 in order to approve a building at this height. From a contextual standpoint, the proposed building is similar in overall height to the “Constellation” development, which is located in Block 2c and which abuts the subject property.

Staff requests the Commission’s initial feedback/evaluation of the proposed building height, mass, and scale related to the bonus story provisions. Additionally, staff requests feedback on the adequacy of the height transitions including those to the surrounding neighborhood to the north.

- **Street Level Activation.** In multiple pre-application discussions, staff has noted concerns regarding the lack of activation on Blount Street, where a majority of the street level is devoted to parking. Staff has requested that the applicant look at ways that the ground-level commercial spaces on the building’s interior eastern side be relocated to the Blount frontage or explore other ways to better activate that facade. Staff requests the commission’s feedback on the overall building design and composition as it relates to the design of the building base and parking screen, as well as the UDD 8 guidelines and requirements that generally speak to providing an enhanced pedestrian character at the ground floor, clearly defining common building entryways, minimizing blank and/sheer walls, utilizing four-sided architecture both in design and detail, as well as articulation on visible elevations, etc.
- **Building Articulation and Composition.** Consideration should also be given to the UDD 8, *Building Massing and Articulation* requirements and guidelines, which generally speak to creating four-sided architecture, providing consistent details on all elevations, creating visual distinction between building components, incorporating distinctive architectural features at corners, framing intersections, etc.

As proposed, the building is a podium-style building with two floors of parking. While commercial and non-residential uses screen the structured parking on the East Washington-facing elevation, the same does not appear to be true for the side and rear (alley) elevations, nor the second floor of parking deck. Consideration should be given to the design and articulation of the building base, minimizing blank walls, and considering simplification of materials/transitions, including the appropriateness of the parking lot venting grates prominently located along the top of the building’s base.

In regards to the rear of the building, staff notes that limited information was provided with regard to side and rear (alley) elevations in this submittal though Staff have previously seen other information in pre-application discussions. Considering the anticipated visibility of that elevation, careful consideration

should be given to that composition. Staff had noted that earlier drawings included a flatter façade and somewhat different design aesthetic from what was presented on the other three sides.

- **Building Materials.** As noted in the UDD 8 Building Materials requirements and guidelines, exterior materials shall be durable and high-quality, complementary to the style and surrounding context; brick, stone and terra cotta are preferred. As proposed, the material palette is primarily comprised of masonry, metal panels, and glass. Staff requests the UDC provide feedback on the proposed material palette.