



Project Address: 5606 Russett Road

Application Type: Public Building for MMSD Toki Elementary and Orchard Ridge Middle Schools
UDC is an Approving Body

Legistar File ID #: [93015](#)

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Scott Chehak, Madison Metropolitan School District | Susan Bowersox, OPN Architects

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the construction of a new 215,000 square foot, three-story combination elementary and middle school on the unused (northwest) portion of the property while the existing school remains open. Upon completion of the new construction the existing building will be demolished and replaced with parking and green space.

Project Schedule:

- The UDC received an Informational Presentation on May 20, 2026.
- Plan Commission is scheduled to review this application at their August 31, 2026, meeting.

Approval Standards: The UDC is an **approving body** on this request. Pursuant to MGO Section 33.24(4)(d), "*The UDC shall approve plans for all buildings proposed to be built or expanded in the City by the State of Wisconsin, the University of Wisconsin, the City of Madison, Dane County, the Federal Government or any other local governmental entity which has the power to levy taxes on property located within the City.*"

Staff note that the UDC's approving authority is limited to the buildings themselves; any comments related to landscaping would only be advisory in nature.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff request the UDC provide feedback and make findings as required for public buildings. Potential design considerations for the Commission's review and comment are identified below:

- **Building Design and Materials**, including as it relates to using durable, high-quality materials, as well as architectural design and detailing to maintain a pedestrian scale, clearly defining building entrances and maintaining a positive building orientation to the street, minimizing/mitigating blank wall expanses, and maintaining the same level of design and detailing across all elevations.

Staff continue to note that the west elevation along S Whitney Way appears to have some extensive blank wall expanses on what will be a prominent street-facing facade. Staff note that the applicant has added windows along the ground floor. However, for the middle section of the façade, staff question whether a different organization/pattern of window openings or opening sizes could provide more of a visual prominence of the windows and further break up the blank wall.

As noted by the Commission in their Informational Presentation comments, the Commission commented that this elevation is a long blank wall and that consideration should be given to incorporating windows and landscape or both to reduce the blank wall.

Staff request that Commission's feedback and findings on the overall building design and materials, especially as it relates to providing adequate street orientation and creating a cohesive architectural expression.

- **Signage.** Staff note and the applicant is advised that while signage is shown on the perspective renderings, signage is not part of this review. A separate review and approval are required for all signage. Staff encourage the applicant team to work with Zoning Staff early in the process to confirm that any proposed signage complies with the [Sign Code](#).

Summary of Informational Presentation Questions and Comments

As a reference, the Commission's questions and comments from the May 20, 2026, Informational Presentation are provided below.

The Commission commented on the drop-off loops, which seem very common with a school. The site plan elements are organized well. This looks like a school I would want my children to attend. It really does look like a learning environment from the site plan organization to the use of colors to the massing, excellent job. Excited to see it refined.

The Commission asked if they are able to retain all of the school forest on the site. The applicant responded yes, for the most part. The district is managing a clean-up of the forest, separate from this project. The curvilinear form along the forest, the fence will be replaced but done in a way that creates natural outdoor learning environments.

The Commission noted the middle school entrance is a very strong corner for a student to approach and enter, however, the elementary portion has lost some of that. It's not as dynamic as the middle school, seems like a loss. The entrance needs something to mark it as the primary spot on this façade. Look at incorporating additional glazing, or a different material, a canopy or overhang.

The Commission commented on the two entry points to the elementary drop-off. There being a high potential for vehicular/pedestrian conflicts. Would it be better if there was just one entry point? The Commission noted that they would like to see an iteration on the vehicular loop, the drop-off, with an option for a single driveway access point.

The Commission commented that there is much less room in front of the elementary school than the middle school. Having more spill out space for kids running out after school.

The Commission questioned the need for that much off-street parking on the elementary side, if it is really needed. The applicant noted that after-school activities in the building need that parking.

The Commission noted that the building base facing Whitney Way is a long façade and pretty blank, and maybe that could be handled with landscaping, but this corner is the most visible corner. Consideration should be given to incorporating windows and landscape or both to reduce the blank wall.