



Project Address: 702 E Washington Avenue

Application Type: Alterations to a Previously Approved Mixed-Use Building in Urban Design District (UDD) 8
UDC is an Approving Body

Legistar File ID #: [87954](#)

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Chris Houden, Jr., Willow Partners | Joseph Lee, JLA Architects

Project Description: The applicant is proposing exterior alterations to a previously approved development in Urban Design District 8. The proposed exterior alterations, as noted in the Letter of Intent, generally and in summary include modifications to the proposed metal panel building material, window and doors openings (style, quantity, and sizes), removal of balconies, adjustments to exterior lighting, as well as modifications to the mural on the Blount Street elevation.

Project Schedule:

- The Urban Design Commission granted Final Approval this project on January 10, 2024 (Legistar File ID [79239](#)). As part of the Commission's Final Approval, specific conditions of approval were included pertaining to the design of the mural wall on the Blount Street elevations, which stated that *"Subsequent review and approval of the final art installation and detail as shown on the Blount Street elevation shall be completed administratively as part of Site Plan Review. Any deviations from the proposed design may required further review/approval by the UDC."*
- The Plan Commission approved with proposal on January 22, 2024 (Legistar File ID [81081](#)).

Approval Standards: The UDC is 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). In applying the standards, the code states that:

"...the Urban Design Commission shall apply the [UDD 8 district] requirements and guidelines as may be appropriate in order to implement the Core Development Principles of the [East Washington Avenue Capitol Gateway Corridor Plan](#). The development shall meet the requirements and conform as much as possible to the guidelines. Both the requirements and guidelines apply to new buildings or structures, additions to existing buildings or structures, major exterior alterations of existing buildings or structures, street graphics, and new parking facilities or alterations to existing parking facilities unless stated otherwise for a specific item. The overall design of each development shall be of high quality."

In this case, while the UDC is an approving body, the Commission's review purview is limited to the proposed exterior alterations as noted in the applicant's Letter of Intent.

Following the UDC's review and final action, an administrative alteration application for a Minor Alteration to the Approved Conditional Use will be required to be submitted.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff requests that the UDC review the proposed alterations and make findings based on the aforementioned standards, consistency with the design intent of the original approval, and as it relates to the impact the proposed alterations may have on the overall building design and detailing, streetscape and pedestrian environment, especially with regard to the items as noted below.

- **Exterior Building Materials.** As noted in the applicant's Letter of Intent, changes to the primary exterior building materials are proposed. The original approval included a series of flat, concealed fastener, metal panels in three color variations of gray (Metal Panel 3) above the third floor. The applicant is requesting to change this material to a concealed fastener, corrugated metal panel system, in two more contrasting color variations of gray.

Staff believe that this change impacts the character and general design aesthetic of the building, and such an alteration should be carefully reviewed by the Commission. Of significant concern is the use of corrugated metal panels as a primary material given the scale and visual prominence of the building. Staff note that while corrugated metal panel systems are present in the corridor, typically they have been used as an accent material versus a primary material. In addition, larger expanses of metal panel within district have typically been flat panel systems versus corrugated panels. Staff refers the Commission to the recent approvals in UDD 8, including Baker's Place (Legistar File ID [76215](#)) and 949 E Washington Avenue Hotel Development (Legistar File ID [80425](#)), as well as several existing buildings in the corridor, including but not limited to the Galaxie, Constellation, and Spark/Am Fam buildings (Legistar File IDs [32089](#), [24584](#), and [43555](#), respectively), as well as the Salvation Army Redevelopment (Legistar File ID [56474](#)).

Consideration should be given to whether alternative materials could address the applicant's cost concerns and result in a design that is more consistent with the current approval, including a composite metal panel material or fiber cement product. Staff also have concerns related to the gauge of the panel and its durability (24 gauge panel is proposed) and whether this application would lend itself to "oil canning" or other undesirable impacts.

In addition, the application is also proposing to change the masonry base material (Brick 1) from the calcium silicate brick linear series, which had a thin, horizontal appearance and rusticated texture to a utility brick, which is of a larger format with a smooth finish.

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.

Staff requests the UDC review the proposed color and material change and make findings related to the UDD 8 guidelines and requirements.

- **Overall Building Design and Composition.** As indicated in the applicant's Letter of Intent, a number of design modifications are proposed that impact the overall building design, articulation and composition, including changes to windows and doors (reduction in size and quantity, as well as style), removing portions of the white frame element and balconies, etc. Staff requests the UDC's feedback and findings related to resulting building design and composition, not only as it relates to maintaining a similar level of design aesthetic to what was originally approved, but also as it pertains to the UDD 8 guidelines and requirements.

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 (top, middle, and base), incorporating distinctive architectural features at corners, framing intersections, etc.

- **Blount Street Elevation – Mural Wall Design and Street Level Activation.** As noted above, the UDC's Final Approval included a condition specifically related to the design and detailing of Blount Street elevation. Originally, this wall served as a screen wall devoted to screening parking, but now it provides screening and access to a mechanical vault room. As such, the design of the art installation has been modified to accommodate the required ventilation and access doors required by the utility company.

Staff requests the Commission's review and findings of the proposed changes to the Blount Street elevation. Consideration should be given to the integration of the art installation into the overall building design, especially as it relates to maintaining the original design intent of creating street level activation. Consideration should also be given to the resulting design and details of this elevation in the event the art installation does not come to fruition.

Staff notes that UDD 8 guidelines and requirements 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.

- **Lighting.** As indicated in the applicant's Letter of Intent lighting is proposed high on the building. While UDC's original approval included lighting at the ground and third floor pool level, lighting high on the building or roof were not included.

UDD 8 includes guidelines and requirements related to Site Lighting and Furnishing, which state that full cut-off fixtures shall be used to illuminate the site, that pedestrian areas shall be adequately, but not excessively lit, and that fixture should be designed to complement the character of the building.

As noted in the application materials, light levels on the Sky Deck are in excess of 5.0 footcandles. As a point of reference, the IESNA (Illumination Engineering Society of North America) recommended light levels for active building entries and pedestrian pathways is no more than 5.0 footcandles. Consideration should be given to decreasing these light levels by minimizing these light levels by reducing the fixture length, or number, or choosing an alternative fixture.

In addition, based on the information provided, it is unclear if the proposed fixtures located in the Sky Deck area meet cutoff requirements. Additional information is needed to determine compliance with this requirement, including mounting details and fixture section lengths.

Staff requests the UDC review the proposed lighting high on the building and provide feedback and findings.