



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 134-150 S Blair Street & 506-518 E Wilson Street
Application Type: New Hotel and Multi-Family Residential Buildings in UMX Zoning
UDC is an Advisory Body
Legistar File ID #: [79707](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Brian Johnson, JCAP Real Estate | Brian Munson, Vandewalle & Associates

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the redevelopment of the parcels flanking the Hotel Ruby Marie on both the Wilson and Blair Street sides of the building. The proposed development consists of an eight-story, 178-unit multi-family residential building on S Blair Street and a six-story, 100-key hotel building on E Wilson Street.

The existing Hotel Ruby Marie will remain intact with limited site changes occurring, and for which separate review and approval will be required.

Staff notes that the project site is currently zoned Urban Mixed Use (UMX) and Planned Development, as part of the development proposal, the applicant team is proposing to rezone the site, in its entirety, to the UMX zoning district.

Project Schedule:

- The Landmark Commission received an Informational Presentation at their September 18, 2023, meeting. Please refer to Legistar ID #[79566](#) for more information.
- The UDC received an Informational Presentation at its September 20, 2023, meeting.
- The Landmarks Commission reviewed this item at their May 20, 2024, meeting, and granted a conditional approval. Additional details related to the Landmarks Commission action is provided below.
- The Plan Commission reviewed this item at their June 10, 2024, meeting and granted a conditional approval, which included the UDC's recommendation.
- The Common Council reviewed the land division and rezoning portion of this development request at its June 18, 2024, meeting and granted conditional approval.

Approval Standards: Per MGO Section 28.076(4)(c), *"All new buildings and additions greater than 20,000 square feet or that have more than four stories in UMX zoning shall obtain conditional use approval from the Plan Commission following review by the Urban Design Commission for conformity to the design standards in Section 28.071(3) of the Zoning Code and the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#) and report its findings to the Plan Commission."*

At the May 29, 2024, meeting, the Commission granted Initial Approval of this item with conditions that generally spoke to revising the historic façade reconstruction to more accurately reflect the building's period of significance, providing more details related to the design of the building end walls and architectural lighting, as well as updates to the landscape plan. The Commission's subsequent review and continued evaluation of this item should focus on whether those conditions have been addressed.

Zoning Related Information: The Zoning Code outlines design standards that are applicable to all new buildings in both the UMX and DC zoning districts. In summary and generally, the design related zoning standards outlined in the UMX and DC zone districts, include, but not limited to those related to building entrance orientation, façade articulation, height, fenestration, and materials. Staff notes that the Zoning Administrator will determine compliance with the design-related standards enumerated in the Zoning Code.

As noted in the Downtown Height Map, the maximum height allowed for the majority of the project site is six stories/88 feet, which is applicable the development on the S Blair and E Wilson Street frontages. There is also a portion of the project site adjacent to the existing Germania Condominiums where three stories/46 feet is the permitted height. This area is located on the northwest portion of the site and is internal to the project site. As noted in the Zoning Code, buildings must meet both the maximum number of stories and the maximum height.

Staff notes that there is a provision in the Zoning Code that allows for the maximum number of stories to be exceeded in cases where applicants voluntarily enter into a contractual agreement to provide affordable housing, and provided the building remains at or below the maximum height (88 feet along Wilson and Blair and 46 feet internal to the site, as noted above). As noted in the Letter of Intent, the applicant is pursuing this option. As proposed, the proposed development **appears to be consistent** with the maximum height limitations.

Adopted Plans: The project site is located within the [Downtown Plan](#) planning area, within the First Settlement neighborhood. As such, development on the project site is subject to the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#). The Downtown Plan (the Plan) recommendations for development in this neighborhood generally speak to encouraging new development on the edges of the historic district, including Blair and Wilson Streets, and ensuring that new development is compatible with the historic context in scale and design.

Landmarks Commission Action: The Landmark Commission reviewed this proposal at their May 20, 2024, meeting and granted a conditional approval, including the following conditions of approval:

- The architectural canopy at the building’s front entry be redesigned to span the central bay of the building,
- The final door window, railing and fencing specifications be submitted and administratively approved by staff,
- The arched windows need to be in the arched opening on the front façade, and
- Information on mechanicals and utility locations on the building be provided and administratively approved by staff.

Please refer to Legistar ID [#79566](#) for more information, including the Historic Preservation Planner’s staff report.

Staff notes that these conditions of approval **are not** reflected in the submittal materials.

Summary of Design Considerations

As noted above, 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 continued evaluation and findings related to the following:

- Revise the landscape plan to reflect two different varieties of uprights trees on the living street.

Staff believes this condition has been met. The landscape plan has been revised to include three Armstrong Gold Maple trees in addition to five Prairie Sentinel Hackberry trees where eight hackberry trees were originally proposed.

- Additional detailing and articulation shall be incorporated into the metal panel areas on the blank building end walls of the hotel building, including but not limited to horizontal articulation, more articulated panels, or artwork.

*The renderings and letter of intent appear to indicate that additional detailing has been incorporated into the hotel building endwalls, including the addition of vertical reveals in the metal panel, the introduction of a flat metal panel, and addition of a more exaggerated horizontal reveal or band, as well as a mural location on the south elevation. With that however, details with regard to the material changes and articulation in the metal panels on the upper levels or in the masonry on the ground floor framing the potential mural, wall sections, or material transitions **were not** provided or identified on the elevations.*

Staff requests the UDC's feedback and specific findings on the hotel building's endwall design and detailing.

- Provide additional details related to the recreation of the existing historic facades to allow for flexibility in the reinterpretation/reapplication of certain architectural details of those facades versus recreating exactly what is existing today (i.e., the diamond window pane pattern or six-over-six windows vs. the brick detailing).

Staff requests UDC's continued review for compliance with this condition.

- Consideration should be given to the angle of the masonry wall on the west elevation, including as it wraps the corner and relates to the blank wall expanse.

*Staff notes that the masonry on the west elevation has been refined to carry a consistent datum line across the entire façade versus an angled line. In addition, it appears the other details are proposed to wrap the corner from the east elevation (Wilson Street) along the south elevation and around the corner to the west elevation (living street). These materials, details and colors **are not** specified in the application materials.*

- Provide additional details related to the proposed architectural lighting.

*Staff **does not** believe this condition has been met. As noted in the previous staff comments, additional information was requested related to Fixture F, the architectural accent lighting, including mounting details, or light levels (initial lumen rating) as noted in the staff report. The additional information is needed in order to evaluate its compliance with MGO 29.36, as well as the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, including those that speak to fixture cutoff, limiting glare and integration with the façade.*

Staff recommends the UDC include a condition related to architectural accent lighting and details thereof as part of their formal action, including noting whether the lighting can be reviewed administratively.

- With regard to the S Blair Street elevation and landscape shown along the base elevation, the landscape plan shall be revised to more accurately reflect the renderings.

Staff believes this condition has been met. The landscape plan has been revised to show 48 Gem Box Inkberry Holdy evergreen shrubs, consistent with the renderings.

Summary of UDC Initial Approval Discussion and Action

As a reference, the Commission's discussion and comments from the May 29, 2024, Initial Approval are provided below.

The Commission inquired about the existing buildings that are to be rebuilt, noting this is not preservation, the buildings will be demolished and rebuilt. The applicant noted the intent is to match the brick colors without painting them, and to match the window patterns. The Commission noted that the intent should be to give a nod to the historic facades, without giving it back exactly as it is – we don't need all of the bad elements that are currently on it. That aside, this is a great design.

Several Commissioners expressed a preference for allowing more freedom to reinterpret the historic blocks while still having the outlines and frames, and same sized punched openings, without distracting from the new development. When you zoom in on the details of the historic façades, you can see what has been changed over time and some of the patchwork that has been done.

The Commission discussed the internal street, the use of decorative concrete unit pavers, and the small swath of lawn, noting it does not contribute much to the landscape or street design. It was noted that the living street could have more in terms of design and programming. There are a lot of nice details and materials are nice, the precedent imagery is great, but the plans seem to reflect something else. The hackberry noted on the landscape plan (#6 and #7) is an overuse of one species; there are other upright taller trees that could be used.

It was noted that the southwest and Blair Street elevations could utilize more windows and fenestration. The southwest façade was suggested as a place for artistic expression.

The Commission discussed the verticality of the ribs in the metal panel, suggesting that it could go horizontal versus vertical for more articulation, as well as light and shadow play. If fire walls do not allow for fenestration, more ins and outs are needed; the detail paid to the street level/pedestrian experience should go all the way to the top, and carry over to the blank façades. The air gap between the Hotel Ruby Marie and the new hotel needs to remain, but some attention should be paid at the street level to make it less creepy.

Overall, the Commission felt this iteration is a better design now, and appreciated the integration of the two contributing buildings into the hotel. The Commission commended the team on working with so many competing interests, and their efforts to incorporate all that feedback.

Action

On a motion by Knudson, seconded by Rummel, the Urban Design Commission made an advisory recommendation to the Plan Commission to **GRANT INITIAL APPROVAL**. The motion was passed on a unanimous vote of (7-0).

The motion was made with the following findings, conditions and comments:

- The application shall return to UDC for Final Approval.
- The UDC finds that the overall building design and composition, mass, scale and placement is appropriate, the treatment and design of HVAC louvers as proposed on the hotel building is adequate.
- Revise the landscape plan to reflect two different varieties of uprights trees on the living street.

- Additional detailing and articulation shall be incorporated into the metal panel areas on the blank building end walls of the hotel building, including but not limited to horizontal articulation, more articulated panels, or artwork.
- Provide additional details related to the recreation of the existing historic facades to allow for flexibility in the reinterpretation/reapplication of certain architectural details of those facades versus recreating exactly what is existing today (i.e., the diamond window pane pattern or six-over-six windows vs. the brick detailing).
- Consideration should be given to the angle of the masonry wall on the west elevation, including as it wraps the corner and relates to the blank wall expanse.
- Provide additional details related to the proposed architectural lighting.
- With regard to the S Blair Street elevation and landscape shown along the base elevation, the landscape plan shall be revised to more accurately reflect the renderings.