

## PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

June 11, 2025

PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION



**Project Address:** 305 N Frances Street + 533 Conklin Place

**Application Type:** Informational Presentation - New Multi-Family Residential Building in UMX Zoning  
**UDC will be an Advisory Body**

**Legistar File ID #:** [88527](#)

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

### Background Information

**Applicant | Contact:** Brian Munson, Vandewalle & Associates | Doug Tichenor, CS Acquisitions Vehicle, LLC

**Project Description:** The applicant is proposing the construction of a 16-story multi-family residential building. The proposal includes ground floor retail, and resident amenities.

**Approval Standards:** The Urban Design Commission (UDC) will be an **advisory** body on this request when a formal application is submitted. Section [28.076\(b\)](#) includes the related design review requirements which state that: *"All new buildings that are greater than twenty-thousand (20,000) square feet or that have more than four stories shall obtain Conditional Use approval. In addition, the UDC shall review such projects for conformity to the design standards in [Sec. 28.071\(3\)](#) and the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#) and shall report its findings to the Plan Commission."*

**Related Zoning Information:** The project site is zoned Urban Mixed Use (UMX). The Zoning Code outlines design standards that are applicable to all new buildings in both the UMX and DC zoning districts ([MGO 28.071](#)), including, but not limited to those related to building entrance orientation, façade articulation, height, fenestration, and materials. Staff notes that while the UDC is tasked with evaluating the development proposal for general consistency with the design-related standards in the Zoning Code, ultimately, the Zoning Administrator will determine compliance.

As noted in the Downtown Height Map, the maximum height allowed for the project site is 12 stories (172 feet). The Zoning Code also notes that buildings must meet both the maximum number of stories and the maximum height. A recently approved modification to the Zoning Code allows, in cases where applicants voluntarily enter into a contractual agreement to provide affordable housing, the maximum number of stories may be exceeded, provided the building remains at or below the maximum height (172 feet, as noted above). The applicant is exploring the possibility for additional stories (maximum 12 stories, where 16 are proposed) within the maximum allowed height (172 feet). Further discussions are in progress related to compliance with the provisions of the ordinance, including those that speak to affordability, floor area, etc. Ultimately, the Zoning Administrator will determine compliance.

**Design-Related Plan Recommendations:** The project site is located within the [Downtown Plan](#) planning area, within the Johnson Bend Neighborhood subarea. As such, development on the project site is subject to the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#). The Plan recommendations for development in this area, this district should continue as a primarily higher density student housing area with some new neighborhood service retail uses. Development on the project site is also subject to the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines as noted above.

## Summary of Design Considerations

Staff recommends that the UDC provide feedback on the development proposal regarding the aforementioned standards as it relates to the design considerations noted below.

- **Building Scale and Massing.** The applicant is proposing a large, singular building to occupy much of the subject property. Staff requests the Commission's feedback on the overall mass and scale, and the appropriateness of how the building mass is broken down and transitions to surrounding properties, giving consideration to the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, including those that speak to:
  - Building orientation, including the location and orientation of common building entryways, defining public and private spaces along the street, maintaining an appropriately scaled, enhanced pedestrian environment,
  - Building mass and scale, including potentially incorporating setbacks and stepbacks to reduce mass/scale, providing adequate transitions between differing levels of intensity and the surrounding built environment, and
  - Building components, including the levels of design details at the street, incorporating positive termination at the top of the building, integrating the rooftop equipment into the overall building design.

In addition, if bonus height is indeed sought, staff requests consideration be given to the overall shape and design of upper-level components in order to provide visual relief and interest at the top of the building.

- **Longviews and Sensitivity to Context.** As noted in the Downtown Plan and Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, consideration should be given to how buildings and their architectural designs anchor street corners and frame intersections, contribute to the overall composition of the cityscape, and incorporate a higher degree of architectural design. Due to location of this site within the W Johnson Street view corridor, as well as mass/scale of the development, it will undoubtedly be experienced from multiple perspectives and vantage points. As such, consideration should be given to the overall composition of the building design and materials as part of the overall cityscape.

For reference and current context information, staff refers the Commission to the recently completed multi-family residential development within the same block-face (Legistar File ID [67242](#)).

- **Building Design and Composition.** The proposed large building, while incorporating some modulation and setbacks, utilizes a very consistent and dark material palette on all sides. Other than a distinct base, the upper levels appear to have little differentiation.

Staff requests the Commission's feedback on the overall building design and composition as it relates to the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, including those that generally speak to building mass and scale, proportions and articulation (vertical/horizontal), defining building components (top, middle, base) and positive termination at the top of the building, etc.

- **Street Level Activation.** The project site is situated on a busy street corner, with frontage on three streets including W Johnson Street, N Frances Street, and W Conklin Place; each with a different level of intensity and activity. As such, careful consideration should be given to the context along each of the three street frontages and maintaining positive building orientation to the street and creating an enhanced pedestrian

environment with a richer level of design and detailing. Of particular concern is the W Johnson Street elevation (south elevation), which does not appear to have any active entries, except for the corner entry at Johnson and Frances, as well as the pedestrian pathway that runs along the east elevation, which is primarily a blank masonry wall.

As indicated on the site plan, the proposed development will surround three existing properties along W Conklin Place on three sides. As indicated on the elevation drawings, this side of the building (north elevation) is primarily lined blank walls on the exterior (hallway corridor and garage on the interior). As an amenity space and public street consideration should be given to design alternatives to minimize the blank walls and increase permeability along the north elevation, i.e., incorporate glazing, garage door design, masonry detailing, landscape, etc.).

- **Building Materials.** The building material palette is primarily comprised of slate blue flat metal panel with tan metal accents and a masonry base. Given the scale of the proposed building, staff believes that the design details will ultimately be a very important consideration. Staff requests UDC provide feedback on the proposed material palette, giving consideration to the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, including those that generally speak to utilizing high quality, durable building materials and appropriate scale, color, texture, architectural detailing to create an enhanced pedestrian environment, as well as providing continuity in the finish and detailing across all elevations.
- **Landscape and Screening.** As indicated on the site plan, there are two areas where larger-scale utilities are anticipated, one at the corner of N Frances and W Conklin Place and one along W Johnson Street frontage. If possible, consideration should be given to exploring alternative locations for these utilities that are less prominent, located behind the building edge, underground or internal to the building. Staff encourages the applicant to collaborate with MG&E early and often to confirm the required utility services, as well as explore potential alternative locations.

Staff requests the UDC's feedback related to the landscape and screening of these areas, as well as the landscape along the street frontages, pedestrian pathways, and at grade open spaces giving consideration to the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, which generally speak to creating context appropriate landscapes and site amenities, including softening hard edges, providing color, texture and interest, including linear planting beds, seat walls, street furniture, public art, lighting, etc.