



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 2230 Pennsylvania Avenue
Application Type: New Indoor Storage Facility in Urban Design District (UDD) 4
UDC is an Approving Body
Legistar File ID #: [80725](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: William Butcher, Madison Square Storage, LLC

Project Description: The applicant is proposing to construct a four-story, self-storage building that includes individual rentable storage space, drive-in unloading, office space, restrooms, and ancillary space.

Project Schedule:

- At their March 13, 2024, meeting, the UDC granted Initial Approval with conditions.
- At their November 29, 2023, meeting, the UDC received an Informational Presentation.

Approval Standards: The UDC is an **approving body** on this request. The site is located in Urban Design District 4 (“UDD 4”), 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(11).

At the March 13, 2024, meeting, the Commission granted Initial Approval of this item with conditions that generally spoke to adjusting the building location on the site to be further setback from the street, continuing a parapet on the two-story mass, and incorporating more plantings into the landscape plan. The Commission’s subsequent review and continued evaluation of this item should focus on whether those conditions have been addressed.

Adopted Plans: The project site is located within the [Oscar Mayer Special Area Plan](#) (the Plan) planning area. As noted in the Plan, the project site is in an area that is recommended for employment related uses, including but not limited to office, low impact manufacturing, specialize employment, research and development and medical uses. This category does not generally include retail and customer service bases uses for the wider community, but may include limited retail and service based uses to support the surrounding employment uses. The Plan also notes that all uses should be compatible with the density and scale of the surrounding development. More broadly, the Oscar Mayer Special Area Plan outlines land use recommendations that generally speak to creating a vibrant, mixed-use, transit oriented development that integrates high density residential, employment and commercial uses.

The site is also within the older [Emerson East - Eken Park – Yahara Neighborhood Plan](#) planning area in Focus Area 7, Pennsylvania Avenue Commercial Corridor. Generally, the focus areas were selected due to the potential for future changes in land use patterns, the existing underutilization of developed and vacant lands, their access to and visibility from major thoroughfares, etc. More specifically, Focus Area 7, was identified as a major gateway to the City from the airport. While it is primarily an industrial corridor with some retail and service related businesses, recent improvements include the reconstruction of Pennsylvania Avenue and streetscape landscape improvements. The Plan notes that additional improvements that further develop a neighborhood identity and a sense of place, including uniformity in design, landscape, way-finding, screening of refuse areas, and public art installations are recommended.

Zoning Related Information: The project site is zoned Industrial Limited (IL). As noted in the Zoning Code ([MGO Sec. 28.088](#)), loading and parking areas are required to be screened from views from the street, parking shall be located at the rear or side of the building to the extent feasible, and a principal building entrance shall be oriented to the primary abutting public street.

In addition, pursuant to [MGO 28.173](#), Mixed Use and Non-Residential Building Forms, industrial buildings are required to have vertical articulation at a minimum interval of 60 feet along facades facing a public street.

While staff believes the proposed building orientation and design are consistent with the zoning requirements, ultimately the Zoning Administrator will determine zoning compliance.

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 as it relates to the following:

- The parapet condition on the two-story mass shall return towards the building as a complete parapet.

As noted in the Letter of Intent, the roof system of the two-story mass is a sloped standing seam metal roof, which needs a gutter system on the low side of the building (west elevation). Instead of a solid parapet wall in this location, in an effort to maintain consistency with the intent of the condition, an aluminum screen wall system is proposed. Staff requests the Commission's continued consideration and findings related to this item, especially as it relates to the introduction of a new design element.

- The landscape plan shall be updated to meet MGO 28.142, to incorporate landscaping to break down blank wall expanses on all four sides of the building, to densify the foundation plantings, to identify the plantings within the beds, and to locate additional trees along the west side of the property and edge of the parking lot.

Staff believes this condition has been met.

- The building be moved to the west, for a setback of 15% of the area currently located between the building and the west property line.

Staff believes this condition has been met.

Summary of UDC Initial Approval Action

As a reference, the Commission's discussion and action from the March 13, 2024, Initial Approval are provided below.

The Commission had the following questions for staff and the development team:

- Regarding the landscaping, there is a memo note 6, stone mulch with no call out. What is happening in that two-foot strip?
 - That was a keynote that was missed at the south property line. It's a stone mulch buffer up against the building.

- I'll take back what I said last time. The mural had me 'oh my gosh,' I miss it, and the dark tone of the basic pillars. It seems so bright and stark, simplified. Can you bring some of that artistry and color back? You did improve it a lot but it's so stark. I appreciate the fundamental improvements.
 - We miss the art. I would like nothing more than to look at doing that, but it would have to work subsequent to this. We're open to it and were going to pursue that later.
 - Do you see it on the south or north side?
 - The south side has the advantage, with two small single-story windows there. The view from the south going northbound would get a pretty large view.
- I share that, we feel like we've been whip sawed, we see so much of the same type of buildings and anytime something totally different comes before us we're jazzed about it. I know the mural subject matter was hit or miss among the Commissioners, it was something so novel and different, it was appealing just on that point alone. How much of this lawn is part of this project?
 - We're roughly five and half feet from the property line, it was a two-foot stone landscape bed there.
- On this type of building, I don't really have a problem with a stone buffer along the edge of the building for maintenance purposes. On the west side you have detention basins, what is your intent for that, especially now that the gravel road is gone?
 - We just found out about this late yesterday afternoon. We don't have a plan other than native grasses and plantings, and pollinators, it won't be sodded lawn. I'm not sure what's in the basin itself, but it's not a sodded basin. I'd like to put a few shade trees in there too.
- My reaction is this building is really, really close to the street given its context and height. With what we know about that gravel drive, is there anything that precludes you from moving that building back about ten feet? There's not a utility easement or something like that?
 - MG&E has a vertical power line over the rear portion of the parcel. Moving our retention further back shouldn't bother that. I would need to talk to our civil engineer about that.
- I just wanted to double check before I suggest that to my fellow Commissioners for their consideration. A little bit more green in front of the building versus behind facing the railroad tracks would be nice.

The Commission discussed the following:

- Benefit of pushing the building back?
- I agree with that suggestion. The landscape here does soften some of the blank walls. Adding to some of the other ones would help do the same thing, on the other elevations. The staff memo asked us to look at the overall massing, blank walls, and materials, I think they all work fine. The way it's designed now is sufficient and appropriate. I don't think adding a bunch of random murals and art is the answer. I thought it was too much before, strategically placed might be the thing but you don't want to cover your building in art, sometimes less is more and this is a pretty attractive building as it is now.
- I think I agree, the building should be moved back if it can be. Here's an example of where Fire could make design decisions, congratulations on being able to make more improvements on the site.
- I was a fan of the previous proposal; I do miss the really bold use of art on this project. You have some vastly improved site plan moves and I'm happy to see that. I would agree with moving the building back as suggested to do more with landscape where it's perceived by the street. I would also be in favor of art, if you'd go that route, to explore where it would be most effective. My landscape comments, there are a lot of large, tall blank walls that could really benefit from landscape breaking it up, specifically this south side. To be a two-foot gravel strip doesn't seem adequate. You can do stuff in five feet, and I would suggest you add some plantings along the south edge. On that west side, looking at the use of larger trees, specifically along the edge of the pavement where they are out of the way from snow clearing but still help shade the pavement. There might be code requirements for planting, I'm not sure if lawn satisfies that. Now that you have more space on that west side, depending on what you do

with the building, I definitely suggest adding large trees for cooling benefit, ecologically benefit, as well as breaking up the massing of some of the larger blank walls.

- That south side with that narrow strip, dependent on mural options, there are columnar trees out there, work done in developing narrow, upright hardwoods. There are some ginkgoes we see used quite a bit, those Lindens on the two islands are a columnar variety. There are maples oaks, they grow straight up but only ten feet wide. Any number of really tall, narrow arborvitaes and junipers would work. Both the south and west side, as well as regular, full canopy spread ones on the side. The Webcrafters building will go away, we can look at it as future possible views, as well as generally doing the right thing as far as planting trees. Otherwise, the foundation plantings are okay but really sparse. You have this sinuous line along the building with small groupings at the corners and in between, I would really encourage you to fill up those spaces. You have these winding beds with all kinds of plants that could easily filled those gaps to soften that base of the building there. By the front entrance too, it's a decent selection of plants but your architect has been stingy on the numbers. I see a little corner there with four specimens of an allium, where there's room for two or three times that much. Wherever you have ornamental grasses and perennials increase them by at least 50%. There's nothing worse than peppering these huge beds with not enough plants, it's a miniscule amount of a project budget. The bayberry is a nice, under used shrub but it's like winterberries, I hope you're aware you need to plant a male version of that plant here and there to pollinate the other ones so they have the flowers and berries that are the main reason you would grow that, I don't see that indicated on the plant. Yeah, more foundation plantings, more number in those beds and potential columnar trees would do a lot to break up the expanse of blank wall there. Tip my hat to you with the colored doors, the pop of color is a nice touch that goes a long way to making this building pop out a little bit.
- I agree with many of the comments on the improvements, it's a benefit to have reduced all the pavement on the site circulation. I also agree some relief on the street edge is appropriate. Slide 10, the parapet condition there, I find it curious, it looks like the Hollywood sets where it doesn't continue all the way across, that could be improved. Putting murals on top of this seems like wall papering, the articulation and forms you have are appropriate for the building type.

A motion was made by von Below for Initial Approval, with the condition that the parapet condition return back to the building for a complete parapet, and the landscaping to meet the City's landscape requirements pursuant to MGO 28.142, including those related to building foundation plantings, screening ground mounted utilities, 75% bed vegetative cover, development frontage. The building setback should be roughly 10-feet, to be studied plus or minus 15% of that, depending on the utility easement. Second by Asad.

Discussion on the motion:

- This is a metal roof sloping down towards downspouts. Sometimes it's tough to bring that parapet all the way back, but maybe it could return so it didn't look so two-dimensional.
- Return, in the direction toward the building. The line would be consistent.
- (Secretary) Parapet condition, landscape plan (specific comments related to foundation plantings, locating landscape to break down wall expanses), need to be specific, building be moved to the west.
- Amend following MGO 28.142 to include comments of using plant material to break up some of the blank façades.
- Current placement of the building and the lot line.
- Friendly amendment, more detail and summary to the landscape comments. Densifying the foundation plantings, breaking up the building massing, applies to all four sides. There are some areas along the north side we didn't really talk about that really deserve taller landscape treatment as well. Also the parking lot islands, the planting material is a ground cover material under the trees, additional trees specifically along the west side of the property, potentially along the west edge of the parking lot.
- I accept the friendly amendment.

- Do you want feedback with regard to the integration of signage?
- (Secretary) There's been a lot of discussion related to signage located high up on buildings. Typically, we discuss it being at or below the second story. Any comments related to where the signage is shown today?
- Honestly, I don't like to see signage up high when it's not necessary, closer to street level as long as it's visible and serving its purpose. I don't know what specificity we can add today, but this building, given its proximity to the street doesn't need signage at the top to be effective and visible.
- I think it's appropriate where it is. The proportions would be completely off at the second story, you have negative space above it. Signage anchors projects, it's assumed it will be in a certain area and not towards the bottom. Because this is four stories the second story would be considered the bottom. I'm not saying exact location or size, but that general height is somewhat appropriate to the building.
- That 1/3 2/3 with the 2/3 of the weight of the architecture below the sign is usually a handsome proportion. But we don't know the size or type, as long as it works with the datum lines, I would be fine with that.
- If they comply with the sign ordinance, there's nothing in UDD 4 that would stop them from putting a sign up that's compliant.

Action

On a motion by von Below, seconded by Asad, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL**. The motion was passed on a unanimous vote of (6-0).

The motion passed with the following conditions:

- The parapet condition on the two-story mass shall return towards the building as a complete parapet.
- The landscape plan shall be updated to meet MGO 28.142, to incorporate landscaping to break down blank wall expanses on all four sides of the building, to densify the foundation plantings, to identify the plantings within the beds, and to locate additional trees along the west side of the property and edge of the parking lot.
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