



Department of Planning & Community & Economic Development

Planning Division

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TO: Urban Design Commission
FROM: Timothy M. Parks, Planner
DATE: December 15, 2017
SUBJECT: ID [48451](#) (UDC); [49535](#) (Plan Commission) – Approval of a demolition permit and conditional use to demolish four residential buildings and construct a five-story, 45-room hotel with a 1,000 square-foot first floor commercial tenant space at 502-506 E. Washington Avenue and 7-11 N. Franklin Street; Urban Design Dist. 4; 2nd Ald. Dist.

The applicant, McGrath Property Group, is seeking approval to demolish four residential buildings containing a total of fourteen dwelling units to construct a five-story building that will include a 45-room hotel and a 1,000 square-foot first floor commercial tenant space. The proposed building will occupy most of the 0.23-acre site at the northeasterly corner of E. Washington Avenue and N. Franklin Street, which includes 67 feet of frontage along E. Washington and approximately 122 feet of frontage along N. Franklin.

Approval Standards

The site is located in Urban Design District 4 (“UDD 4”), which requires that the Urban Design Commission approve the proposed hotel project using the design standards and guidelines for that district.

Additionally, the subject site is zoned UMX (Urban Mixed-Use District). Hotels and dwelling units in mixed-use buildings are permitted uses in UMX zoning. However, 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, if applicable, and the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines. The Urban Design Commission shall report its findings to the Plan Commission. The Plan Commission is scheduled to consider the demolition and conditional use requests for this project at its January 8, 2018 meeting.

Project Description

The lobby and common spaces for the hotel will occupy most of the southerly half of the first floor of the proposed building, with entrances to the hotel and separate commercial tenant space proposed from the E. Washington Avenue sidewalk. The remainder of the first floor will include five hotel rooms, including three rooms that will have direct entries from steps leading up from the N. Franklin Street sidewalk, as well as a housekeeping room. Plans for the proposed building call for the first floor façade to be set back five feet from the both street property lines, as well as along the easterly side property line adjacent to two residential structures converted into offices used by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections.

The building will include a variety of studio, one- and two-bedroom hotel suites on floors 2-5. The southerly and westerly walls of those floors will be cantilevered over the first floor setbacks along E.

Washington Avenue and N. Franklin Street, respectively, with no setbacks proposed for the upper stories from those streets. The cantilevering of the upper stories is best depicted on Sheet A008 of the plan set.

Parking for the proposed building will be provided in twenty automobile stalls to be located on one level below the building; eight bike parking stalls are proposed outside the building, and the applicant is in discussions with B-Cycle to locate a bike sharing facility adjacent to the project. Access to the underground auto parking will be provided along the northerly, rear wall of the building from a driveway from N. Franklin Street. Rooms for trash, utilities and a generator, and an off-street loading zone will also be located at the rear of the building below the grade of the N. Franklin Street sidewalk.

The building will be clad with a smooth white metal panel on floors 2-5, while a composite wood cladding is proposed along the first floor. An eight-foot tall gray metal mechanical screen is proposed on the roof, which will be set back on all four sides from the parapet walls above the fifth floor. A metal screen wall is proposed along the northerly property line above the under-building parking and service area for the hotel.

Analysis of Standards for Approval

The UMX zoning of the subject site requires that the proposed building be located between 0 and 10 feet from the front property line adjacent to E. Washington Avenue, with a 10-foot rear yard setback required, and no required side yards. Per the Downtown Height Map in Section 28.071(2)(a), new buildings on the four parcels may be up to eight stories in height, with the potential for two additional stories to be granted by conditional use approval, for up to a ten-story building on the subject site. No stepbacks are required by zoning. The Zoning Administrator has determined that the proposed development will comply with these bulk requirements, although confirmation that the project will not exceed the 90% maximum lot coverage requirement in the UMX district will be required prior to final approval.

The proposed building appears to meet most of the design standards for new buildings in the downtown pursuant to Section 28.071(3) of the Zoning Code.

Parking for the proposed building will be located entirely underground, with the access to the parking located at the rear via N. Franklin Street, which satisfies the parking location and design requirements of the Zoning Code. However, vehicular access to the site from a one-way street that extends into the neighborhood from E. Washington Avenue, the amount of automobile parking proposed to serve the project, and the grade of the driveway serving the parking and service area at the rear of the building will likely be considered as part of the Plan Commission's review of the project. The proposed building also appears to meet the standards for entrance orientation, story heights and treatment, door and window openings, and screening.

However, the Urban Design Commission should make a recommendation to the Plan Commission whether the proposed building is sufficiently articulated, and whether the material palette is consistent with the materials guidelines in the Zoning Code.

Regarding the former, the Zoning Code requires that the facades of new buildings more than 40 feet in width shall be divided into smaller vertical intervals through techniques including but not limited to: facade modulation, step backs, or extending forward of a portion of the façade; vertical divisions using different textures, materials, or colors of materials; the division into multiple storefronts, with separate

display windows and entrances; variation in roof lines to reinforce the modulation or vertical intervals, and; the use of arcades, awnings, window bays, arched windows, and balconies to reinforce the vertical intervals. In the case of the proposed building, both the E. Washington and N. Franklin facades will exceed 40 feet in width, which requires that the articulation standards be met. While both facades include a high percentage of door and window openings and a horizontal material change between the first and upper floors, the face of the upper four floors will be a flat plane across both facades comprised of white metal panel and windows, with no variation in roofline, and no vertical modulation.

The Urban Design Commission shall also affirm that the proposed material palette complies with the material palette in Table 28E-1 of the Zoning Code for the Downtown and Urban Districts. In those zoning districts, metal panels are allowed as a base, middle, top, and trim material only if a heavy gauge, non-reflective metal and used in conjunction with a “palette of materials,” which implies that a plurality of materials is used (including by type of material and color). Additionally, wood and fiber cement panels shall not be used on the ground story except between the sidewalk and the bottom of storefront windows or as an accent material; the plans before the Urban Design Commission appear to show composite wood siding on the full height of the first/ground floor, which may require consideration of an alternative material prior to final approval of the project.

The material palette for the proposed building, particularly the use of metal, is also a key consideration for the Urban Design Commission as it considers approval of the project against the standards and guidelines in Urban Design District (UDD) 4. While staff believes that the Commission may find that the building is consistent with the site planning and landscaping requirements for new development in UDD 4, the Commission shall find that the exterior building materials are low maintenance and harmonious with those used on other buildings in the area, and that the building represents a “design of exceptional merit” in order for metal to be used as an exterior building material along E. Washington Avenue west of First Street per Section 33.24(11)(d)3 of the Urban Design Commission ordinance.

The Urban Design Commission shall also review the proposed five-story building against the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, which were adopted to provide additional guidance on the desired design qualities of buildings within the Downtown Core and Urban Mixed-Use zoning districts beyond the design standards included in the Zoning Code. The Planning Division believes that the Commission may find that the proposed is consistent with the building placement and site design recommendations in the Guidelines. However, the Commission should consider whether the building adequately addresses the massing guidelines, in particular the relationship between the proposed building and the lower-scaled, wood-framed two-story residential buildings to its north and east.

On the first block of N. Franklin Street and western portion of the 500-block of E. Washington Avenue, there is some dissonance between the recommendations in the Downtown Plan, bulk allowances for new development in the Zoning Code, and the existing context. The Downtown Plan includes the E. Washington frontage as part of the “Downtown Core” mixed-use sub-district, which generally recommends a relatively high-density mix of office, civic and institutional, housing, and retail development. While most of the Downtown Core sub-district is comprised of properties surrounding and south of the Capitol Square, the sub-district also includes the E. Washington gateway approaching the Capitol from the east, which is also a primary street and viewshed as outlined in the plan. The plan recommends that the north side of E. Washington be developed with up to eight-story buildings, with the opportunity for two bonus stories to be considered, as subsequently reflected on the Downtown Height Map in the Zoning Code.

Immediately north of the subject site in the Downtown Core sub-district, the remainder of the first block of N. Franklin Street is included in the “James Madison Park” residential sub-district. The James Madison Park sub-district is recognized for its mostly intact blocks of two- and three-story houses, which the plan encourages be preserved, with opportunities for selective redevelopment in up to six-story buildings on the rest of the first block north of the E. Washington frontage. Along N. Franklin and N. Hancock Streets, the plan recommends that any infill and redevelopment be compatible in scale with the “house-like” character along those streets, although that recommendation may apply more to the 100- and 200-blocks of N. Franklin and N. Hancock, where a four-story maximum height is recommended.

The applicant notes that the proposed five-story, approximately 59-foot tall building represents a less intensive use of the site compared to the recommendations in the Downtown Plan and bulk allowances in the Zoning Code, the latter of which would allow the building to be closer to the rear property line than proposed (10 feet required; 16.8 feet proposed) in addition to three to five stories taller in height. However, staff is also aware of concerns by nearby residents and property owners of the James Madison Park neighborhood and environs regarding the proposed mass of the building and its relationship to the adjacent lower-scaled, wood-framed two-story residential buildings, particularly to the north along N. Franklin Street.

Per the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, the proportions and relationships of the various architectural components of the building should consider the scale of other buildings in the vicinity. In areas where the Downtown Plan recommends significantly taller or larger buildings than currently exist, the massing guideline should consider the evolving context. Articulation of buildings in both plan and profile may help break up the mass of large buildings, and stepping back the upper floors from lower floors may be appropriate to minimize overall scale and minimize shadow effects. The Urban Design Commission should affirm whether the mass and placement of the proposed building is appropriate given the existing context, particularly in relationship to the buildings to the north.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The proposed five-story building that will include a 45-room hotel and a 1,000 square-foot first floor commercial tenant space requires Urban Design Commission approval for new development in Urban Design District 4. Additionally, the Commission shall report findings to the Plan Commission on the project’s conformity to the design standards in Section 28.071(3) of the Zoning Code and the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines as part of the review of the conditional use approval required.

In summary as the Urban Design Commission reviews the project, the Planning Division recommends that the following actions be specifically considered:

- The Urban Design Commission should make a recommendation to the Plan Commission whether the proposed building is sufficiently articulated per the zoning design standards;
- The Urban Design Commission shall determine whether the building represents a “design of exceptional merit” in order for metal to be used as an exterior building material in Urban Design District 4, and whether the proposed palette of materials supports the use of metal as shown per the zoning design standards;

- In the event that the composite wood siding on the full height of the first/ground floor cannot be used due to zoning restrictions, the Commission should indicate which building material would be an appropriate alternative; and
- The Urban Design Commission should affirm whether the mass and placement of the proposed five-story building is appropriate given the existing context, particularly in relationship to the wood-framed two-story residential buildings to the north.
- As a condition of approval, staff recommends that a detail of the fencing or walls proposed to enclose the rear yard parking and service area be submitted for Planning Division approval prior to issuance of permits; any such fences and walls shall be architecturally compatible with the principal structure.
- Further, any proposed HVAC or utility penetrations on the building shall not face E. Washington Avenue or N. Franklin Street, and that any such penetrations elsewhere on the exterior of the building be designed to be perpendicular to the facades to limit their visibility to the greatest extent possible. No utility or HVAC pedestals or penetrations, including HVAC wall packs for units, and gas meters or electric meters for buildings/units shall be permitted without specific approval by the Urban Design Commission and Plan Commission.