



Project Address: 15-27 N Butler Street & 302-308 E Washington Avenue

Application Type: Major Amendment to an Existing Planned Development for a New Mixed-Use Building in Urban Design District 4
UDC is an Approving and Advisory Body

Legistar File ID #: [87895](#)

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Eric Minton, Butler Plaza, LLC | Duane Johnson, Knothe & Bruce Architects

Project Description: The applicant is proposing an eleven-story mixed-use building containing 76 dwelling units, underground parking, and a ground floor commercial tenant space for Capitol Fitness.

Staff notes that, as part of the Land Use Application request, the applicant is proposing to rezone the portion of the project site that are currently zoned Urban Mixed Use (UMX) to Planned Development, consistent with the remainder of the project site.

Project Schedule:

- The UDC received an Informational Presentation at their May 29, 2025, meeting.
- The Plan Commission is scheduled to review this request at their September 15, 2025, meeting.
- The Common Council is scheduled to review this request at their September 16, 2025, meeting.

Approval Standards: The UDC is both an **approving and advisory body** on this request. The site is located in Urban Design District 4 ("UDD 4"), which makes the Urban Design Commission an approving body related to the design standards and guidelines for that district in [MGO Section 33.24\(11\)](#).

In addition, the project site will be zoned Planned Development. For Planned Developments the Urban Design Commission is required to provide a recommendation to the Plan Commission with specific findings on the design objectives listed in the PD Standards for Approval (attached for reference), but including, more specifically:

PD Standard (e), which generally speaks to coordinating *"...architectural styles and building forms to achieve greater compatibility with surrounding land uses and create an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with the existing or intended character of the area and the statement of purpose of the PD District."*

As noted above, the UDC is both an approving body and advisory body on this item. As such, staff recommends that the Commission's motion should include two parts as noted below:

- The first, as an approving body, i.e., *"Move to grant Initial/Final Approval or refer with the following conditions..."*, and
- The second part, as an advisory body, i.e., *"Move to recommend that the Plan Commission approve/deny/refer the proposed development finding that it is consistent with the PD criteria with the conditions noted herein being addressed..."*

Zoning Related Information: As noted in the Downtown Height Map, pursuant to MGO 28.071, the maximum height for the project site is eight stories/116 feet with the potential for two additional stories, for a total of 10 stories/144 feet.

The proposed building is eleven stories, which exceeds the maximum height allowed in the Downtown Height Map in stories, but is compliant in feet at 144 feet.

Staff notes that while the proposed building is more than the maximum building height in stories, additional stories may be requested either as part of a Planned Development or as part of a voluntary land use restriction agreement to provide income restricted dwelling units provided the overall building height in feet (144 feet) is not exceeded. It is staff's understanding that the applicant is proposing to pursue the land use restriction agreement.

Adopted Plans: The project site is in the [Downtown Plan](#) planning area, in the Downtown Core Neighborhood. Generally, the recommendations included in the Downtown Plan for the Downtown Core Neighborhood speak to encouraging a mix of uses and housing opportunities at higher levels of intensity to retain the area's vibrancy.

As noted above, the maximum building height for the project site is eight stories (116 feet) with the potential for two additional stories, for a total of 10 stories (144 feet). As noted in the Downtown Plan, Additional Height Area H, while tall buildings are appropriate in this area, this area also functions as a transition area both within the corridor, as well as to the surrounding context. The Downtown Plan also noted that when requests for additional height are being evaluated, careful consideration should be given to viewshed/corridor impacts, including long and short views, as well as building mass and scale, context and character.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff recommend that the UDC provide feedback and make findings on the development proposal taking into consideration the Commission's previous comments and the aforementioned standards as it relates to the design considerations noted below.

- **Building Design and Composition.** The project site is located at the intersection of N Butler Street and E Washington Avenue and due to the site's topography, prominence, and surrounding context, it is believed all four facades will be highly visible. Staff notes that the Downtown Plan also identifies East Washington Avenue as a "*Premier Corridor*" as one of eight major streets that frame views to and from the Capitol.

UDD 4 "*Building Design*" guidelines and requirements generally speak to designing with a sensitivity to context, avoiding large unbroken facades, utilizing four-sided architecture, etc. The guidelines also speak to the architecture of new in-fill buildings being compatible with adjacent buildings. Staff refers the Commission to some of the recent projects in near proximity to the project site, including St. John's Lutheran Church (Legistar File ID [74526](#)), The Continental (Legistar File ID [62383](#)), and the recently approved 521 E Washington Avenue redevelopment at the corner of E Washington Avenue and S Blair Street (Legistar File ID [836068](#)).

Staff requests that the UDC provide feedback and make findings on the overall building design and composition, including as it relates to:

- Utilizing four-sided architecture with the same level of detailing across all four elevations and all building components, minimizing blank walls (southwest elevation),
- Incorporating a strong corner element, and

- Utilizing a richer level of design details at the pedestrian level along both E Washington Avenue and N Butler Street.

In general, and in summary, the Commission's Informational Presentation comments noted that consideration should be given to the following:

- Refining the building design to create a stronger corner element, especially given the context,
 - Applying the same level of design and detailing across all four sides of the building,
 - Making refinement to the building base and integrating landscape to create an active streetscape, including taking a look at what has been done in the corridor with regard to planters and materials, and maintaining a similar design aesthetic.
- **Materials.** UDD 4 Building Design guidelines and requirements state that exterior materials shall be low maintenance and harmonious with those used on other buildings in the area. The exterior material palette is anticipated to primarily be comprised of a masonry base, masonry veneer middle, with MCM panel accents in rusted steel and black.

Staff requests the Commission's feedback and findings on the proposed material palette.

- **Wall Packs.** As indicated on the elevations, wall packs and their associated louvers are proposed on the inside walls of balconies (flat metal panels and louvers, chocolate brown). It has been the current practice to locate wall packs and their associated louvers so that they are not located on street-facing or on highly visible facades, although they have been approved in some situations when found to be well integrated into the façade's design. Staff requests the Commission's feedback and findings on the proposed location of the wall packs and louvers, as well as their design and detailing and their overall integration with architecture.
- **Long Views.** Due to the prominence of this site near the Capitol Building, very careful consideration should be given to the building's overall design impact relative to the surrounding context and viewsheds, especially as to how the upper levels are viewed from longer distances. Of particular concern is the view of the upper floors looking towards the Capitol from East Washington Avenue (northeast elevation) and those as viewed from N Butler Street (southwest elevation). Staff requests the Commission's feedback and findings as it relates to breaking up blank wall expanses, as well as adding interest in these upper levels of the building.
- **Landscape.** UDD 4 Landscape guidelines and requirements generally speak to landscape being both functional as well as decorative, including framing views, screening uses and unattractive features, complementing architecture, plantings should provide year-round color and texture, all beds should be edged and mulched, landscape berms should be used to screen the view of parking areas, etc.

Staff requests the Commission's feedback and findings on the proposed planting plan and landscape amenities both in terms of softening blank walls and hardscape areas, as well as in contributing to creating an enhanced pedestrian environment, including scale, color and texture.

Staff notes that with regard to landscape, plantings are shown within the public right-of-way. The design of the public right-of-way and any landscape in the public right-of-way is **not** within UDC's purview. Any improvements shown in the public right-of-way will require review and approval by City Forestry and City Engineering, and will be subject to a developer's agreement and maintenance agreement.

- **Lighting.** As indicated on the elevation drawings, lighting is proposed high on the building. UDD 4 "Lighting" requirements and guidelines speak to the functions of exterior lighting, including to illuminate

facades, especially those bearing signage, pedestrian spaces, and parking/service areas, light levels being adequate, but not excessive, that the fixture should relate to its function (decorative versus utilitarian), and that architectural lighting should be free from glare and of a type that complements the existing development in the district.

Staff have concerns related to the proposed lighting and whether it maintains consistency with the intent of UDD 4 guidelines and requirements, especially those that speak to accentuating architectural features or in terms of utilizing lighting in a more functional manner resulting in a more cohesive design relationship between the lighting and the building design (i.e., wall washing).

Staff requests the Commission's feedback and findings related to the proposed lighting high on the building, including as it relates to:

- The quantity of fixtures (28 fixtures mounted at 55 feet above grade (13 total), 115 feet above grade (13 total) and 125 feet above grade (2 total), especially in conjunction with individual unit balcony lighting (if proposed),
- The overall function of the lighting being necessary to accentuate an architectural feature or detail,
- The lighting being complementary to and integrated with the overall building design,
- In terms of the fixture selection limiting glare when viewed from the ground or distance, as well as
- Producing appropriate light levels.

Summary of UDC Informational Presentation Questions & Discussion

As a reference, a summary of the Commission's comments and questions from the April 30, 2025, Informational Presentation are provided below:

The Commission commented that for a contemporary building something more needs to happen with the design, especially on the Butler/E Washington corner. Maybe it is something different on either side of the red element; a change of plane. There also needs to be a base element, that reads differently, because right now it is coplaner and reads the same all the way up. Integrating a setback at the third floor to create a base.

The Commission commented that all four sides of the building need to be designed equally and that the building corner needs more refinement; the context warrants something more.

The building top gets confusing between the white panel and the eyebrow, refinements should be considered the building top.

The Commission inquired about the mechanical systems. The applicant noted magic packs will be used for every unit and will be located inside the balcony returns.

The Commission noted that this building is unique and while the pop of color is appreciated, maybe a different color other than red would be more unique, differentiating this building from the new building being constructed at the corner of S Blair Street and E Washington Avenue.

The Commission appreciated the connection to the existing underground parking. Consideration should be given to delivery vehicles.

Consideration should be given to the use of landscape and color to activate the streetscape, and how this contributes to the quality of life in the neighborhood. The Commission noted that while they are limited in our

influence of street trees and placement they would advocate for as many street trees as possible with coordination with Forestry.

The Commission noted that in this case, the street activation is really based on interior design of the building. Recognizing that whatever happens inside impacts and activates outside. Looking back down E Washington the use of landscape and color and other tools that have been used to activate the streetscape, the Commission encouraged the applicant team to think about how this development is contributing to the streetscape and neighborhood. The applicant noted that they will be looking at that as part of their next phase of the project.

The Commission inquired about their role in the building height, the addition of bonus stories, and the possibilities of affordable housing. The Secretary responded that as a Planned Development (PD), the Plan Commission and Common Council will be the final approving bodies, but that the UDC would be making an advisory recommendation based on the building design related to the PD standards.

ATTACHMENT
PD Zoning Statement of Purpose and Standards

28.098 (1) Statement of Purpose.

The Planned Development (PD) District is established to provide a voluntary regulatory framework as a means to facilitate the unique development of land in an integrated and innovative fashion, to allow for flexibility in site design, and to encourage development that is sensitive to environmental, cultural, and economic considerations, and that features high-quality architecture and building materials. In addition, the Planned Development District is intended to achieve one or more of the following objectives:

- (a) Promotion of green building technologies, low-impact development techniques for stormwater management, and other innovative measures that encourage sustainable development.
- (b) Promotion of integrated land uses allowing for a mixture of residential, commercial, and public facilities along corridors and in transitional areas, with enhanced pedestrian, bicycle and transit connections and amenities.
- (c) Preservation and enhancement of important environmental features through careful and sensitive placement of buildings and facilities.
- (d) Preservation of historic buildings, structures, or landscape features through adaptive reuse of public or private preservation of land.
- (e) Provision of more adequate, usable, and suitably located open space, recreational amenities, and other public facilities than would otherwise be provided under conventional land development techniques.
- (f) Facilitation of high-quality development that is consistent with the goals, objectives, policies, and recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan and adopted neighborhood, corridor or special area plans.

28.098(2) Approval Standards for Project

The standards for approval of a zoning map amendment to the PD District, or any major alteration to an approved General Development Plan, are as follows:

- (a) The applicant shall demonstrate that no other base zoning district can be used to achieve a substantially similar pattern of development. Planned developments shall not be allowed simply for the purpose of increasing overall density or allowing development that otherwise could not be approved unless the development also meets one or more of the objectives of (1) above. Conditions under which planned development may be appropriate include:
 - 1. Site conditions such as steep topography or other unusual physical features; or
 - 2. Redevelopment of an existing area or use of an infill site that could not be reasonably developed under base zoning district requirements.
- (b) The PD District plan shall facilitate the development or redevelopment goals of the Comprehensive Plan and of adopted neighborhood, corridor or special area plans.
- (c) The PD District plan shall not adversely affect the economic health of the City or the area of the City where the development is proposed. The City shall be able to provide municipal services to the property where the planned development is proposed without a significant increase of the cost of providing those services or economic impact on municipal utilities serving that area.

- (d) The PD District plan shall not create traffic or parking demands disproportionate to the facilities and improvements designed to meet those demands. A traffic demand management plan may be required as a way to resolve traffic and parking concerns. The Plan shall include measurable goals, strategies, and actions to encourage travelers to use alternatives to driving alone, especially at congested times of day. Strategies and actions may include, but are not limited to, carpools and vanpools; public and private transit; promotion of bicycling, walking and other non-motorized travel; flexible work schedules and parking management programs to substantially reduce automobile trips.
- (e) The PD District plan shall coordinate architectural styles and building forms to achieve greater compatibility with surrounding land uses and create an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with the existing or intended character of the area and the statement of purpose of the PD District.
- (f) The PD District plan shall include open space suitable to the type and character of development proposed, including for projects with residential components, a mix of structured and natural spaces for use by residents and visitors. Areas for stormwater management, parking, or in the public right of way shall not be used to satisfy this requirement.
- (g) The PD district shall include suitable assurances that each phase could be completed in a manner that would not result in an adverse effect upon the community as a result of termination at that point.
- (h) When applying the above standards to an application for height in excess of that allowed in Section 28.071(2)(a) Downtown Height Map, except as provided for in Section 28.071(2)(a)1. and Section 28.071(2)(b), the Plan Commission shall consider the recommendations in adopted plans and no application for excess height shall be granted by the Plan Commission unless it finds that all of the following conditions are present:
 - 1. The excess height is compatible with the existing or planned (if the recommendations in the Downtown Plan call for changes) character of the surrounding area, including but not limited to the scale, mass, rhythm, and setbacks of buildings and relationships to street frontages and public spaces.
 - 2. The excess height allows for a demonstrated higher quality building than could be achieved without the additional stories.
 - 3. The scale, massing and design of new buildings complement and positively contribute to the setting of any landmark buildings within or adjacent to the project and create a pleasing visual relationship with them.
 - 4. For projects proposed in priority viewsheds and other views and vistas identified on the Views and Vistas Map in the City of Madison Downtown Plan, there are no negative impacts on the viewshed as demonstrated by viewshed studies prepared by the applicant.
- (i) When applying the above standards to an application to reduce or eliminate setbacks required by Section 28.071(2)(c) Downtown Stepback Map, the Plan Commission shall consider the recommendations in adopted plans, including the downtown plan. No application to reduce or eliminate setbacks may be granted unless it finds that all of the following conditions are present:
 - 1. The lot is a corner parcel.
 - 2. The lot is not part of a larger assemblage of properties.
 - 3. The entire lot is vacant or improved with only a surface parking lot.
 - 4. No principal buildings on the lot have been demolished or removed since the effective date of this ordinance