



PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

December 15, 2021

PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 504-524 W. Johnson Street, 312 N. Bassett Street, & 505-527 Conklin Place
Application Type: New Development in UMX District – Initial/Final Approval is Requested
Legistar File ID # [67242](#)
Prepared By: Kevin Firchow, Acting UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Neal Reardon, ESG Architecture and Design | Mitch Korte, Subtext Development

Project Description: The applicant is seeking initial/final approval for the proposed development of a residential building containing approximately 140-150 units with 110-120 garage parking stalls and 281 bicycle stalls.

Project Schedule:

- The UDC received an informational presentation on October 6, 2021.
- The Plan Commission is scheduled to review this proposal on January 10, 2022.
- The Common Council is scheduled to review the proposed Certified Survey Map on January 18, 2022.

Approval Standards:

The UDC is an **advisory** body on this request. Section 28.076(c) states that “All new buildings and additions greater than twenty thousand (20,000) square feet or that have more than four (4) stories shall obtain conditional use approval. In addition, the Urban Design Commission 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.

Design-Related Plan Recommendations:

The [Downtown Plan](#) identifies the subject properties as a potential redevelopment area. The site is recommended for “Downtown Core Mixed-Uses” which is generally the most intensive development recommendation in Downtown. The development is within the “Johnson Street Bend” sub area which is characterized by larger-scale, high-density apartment buildings with the plan noting that this area should continue to be developed with higher-density student residential uses. The Plan recommends and the Zoning Code allows heights up to 12 stories in this location.

Summary of Design Considerations and Recommendations

Staff recommends that the UDC report its findings to the Plan Commission based on the aforementioned standards.

Design Related Considerations

Staff notes the following design related considerations.

- **Ground Level Massing and Composition.** Staff previously identified the massing and composition as a discussion point, including the one-story element’s relationship to the street and its cohesion with the building’s upper levels. Some UDC members also commented (see below) that the applicant team studies how the building addresses the curve along Johnson Street. That element has been revised and the new

one-story element has a more curved shape, replacing the previous “saw-tooth” walk-up design previously contemplated.

- **Long Views.** Considering the anticipated prominence of the proposed structure, staff previously requested that the UDC provides comments related to long views of the buildings. Members of the UDC had several comments related to the composition of the upper levels and the applicant has made some changes, including a less-aligned window pattern compared to the more uniform pattern previously presented.
- **Building Height.** The previous staff report noted questions regarding height and advised the development team to continue to discuss height with Zoning staff. Prior to finalization of this report, Zoning staff provided comments stating that the code requires the removal of some roof level amenities including the storage room, equipment room, restroom, shade structure, and club room stairs for this building to comply with the 12-story height limit. Staff notes that there is not a UDC waiver or exception that can be granted as part of this process.

Finally, as a reference, staff refers the Commission to their comments from the October 6, 2021 informational presentation:

- The building form itself needs a little bit of excitement. It’s not bad it’s just very flat. The materials are fine.
- Seems like a great opportunity to improve the bike path through there, it’s a critical juncture.
- It appears you’re proposing nice high quality materials. All the buildings around this site are warm tone masonry, this building would stand out and seems much darker. Like the roof deck and appreciate that, appreciate the ambitions with the green roof, like the window treatments as well but do agree on the notions of taking some interest in the façade.
- It is nice to see that green roof type of amenity included not just for stormwater management but also as outdoor relief and people spaces, plants and birds. I would highly recommend that at least the second story roof space be more than just an extensive roof in a 4-inch sedum mat but have some substance and depth to it, a semi-intensive in 6-8 inches of depth for other plant species including native perennials.
- Like the relief as you wrap around on Johnson, that helps the pedestrian experience.
- Not opposed to the vertical-ness of that corner piece, it’s a nice tailored element. I do think it could use flair especially where we have brick, the double soldier course at the base, there’s an opportunity to do something more interesting at that level. Soldier course is too institutional.
- It is kind of dark, the James as it comes around Gorham is really dark too and I don’t know if it’s very successful because there’s no relief. Think about adding something to this that would make it more interesting than a brown rectangle.
- I do like how you stepped it back at the pedestrian level and I really appreciate the drive-thru, this is a really highly trafficked corner, having that was a really good idea.
- There are some more fundamental issues with this design that really should be addressed at this level. I don’t think it adequately acknowledges or celebrates the curve. It’s foreign to the smoothness of the curve. I like and appreciate taking the sidewalk off the curve and bringing it in-board. The walk-up units belong facing Bassett Street and the bike path. The storefront and sign should be on the curve where people are zooming by, not having your walk-up apartment right there. It’s a highway there in the morning.
- I agree on the dark panels, a punch of color, something other than beige or brown would be a nice counterpoint to a lot of other things we see there. Take a look particularly at the ground plane on how that’s programmed and expressed along those two corners.

- Maybe the walk-ups belong on Conklin? It's really tight back there, plus here's a little house there compared to this building. Agree about the dark storefront on the base, maybe at least the storefront framing system could be lighter in color.
- My first reaction was that the curve isn't celebrated. Perhaps the idea of moving those walk-ups is one option that should be explored. Those units feel heavy, a lot of masonry, closed in and not in keeping with the rest of the building. I do appreciate the setback and moving the sidewalk in very much. The westernmost tower appears to be all clad in that same brown material, it needs additional relief.
- We're not seeing how car traffic is going to experience this. We're looking for views of the building from further out and how it's going to be experienced. The dog run seems like you're making the best use of that dead corner, it's an interesting choice for that space.
- Reiterate you don't have to use the colors or materials you see around town, really think outside the box.