



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 2860 East Washington Avenue
Application Type: Building Mural in UDD No. 5 – Initial/Final Approval is Requested
Legistar File ID # [68157](#)
Prepared By: Kevin Firchow, Acting UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Anne Morrison, New Year Investments

Project Description: The applicant is seeking initial/final approval for an exterior building mural. Please note that the rest of the development received final approval and is not before the Commission at this time.

Project Schedule:

- The UDC granted initial/final approval of the building (addressed as 2902 E. Washington Avenue/2812 E. Johnson Street/401 North Lawn Avenue) on July 1, 2020 (Legistar #[60546](#)), with the mural as a placeholder to return for Commission approval.
- The Plan Commission approved the related demolition and conditional use approvals on July 27, 2020.

Approval Standards:

The UDC is an **approving body** as the site is also within Urban Design District 5 ([UDD 5](#)), which requires that the Urban Design Commission review the proposed project using the design requirements and guidelines of Section 33.24(12).

Summary of Design Considerations and Recommendations

Staff recommends that the Urban Design Commission review, make findings, and base their decision on the standards for Urban Design District (UDD) 5.

Summary of Design Considerations

Please note that only the mural details are before the Commission at this time. As part of their final approval action on July 1, 2021, the UDC specified that “The project is approved with the mural as placeholder that will come back to the Commission for approval.”

As noted in the application materials, the mural is proposed to be painted directly on white brick, on floors 2-5. Gray brick piers frame the outer edges of the mural. As noted in the previous staff report, the mural is believed to be among the building’s most prominent features and as such, asked the UDC to give careful consideration to this request, given the mural’s size, prominence, and that staff was not aware of a similar precedent in the City.

In regards to the applicable standards, staff reference the following “Building Design” requirements and guidelines in UDD 5 that are believed to most closely relate to this request. Please see the full standards for additional information.

- *Requirement* - Exterior building materials shall be low maintenance and harmonious with those used on other buildings in the area.
- *Guideline* -Structures should be designed to be compatible with the structures that are adjacent to them.

- *Guideline* - Large, unbroken exterior facades should be avoided.
- *Guideline* - All building elevations are of importance and should be carefully designed. When visible from roadways or adjoining properties, roof surfaces should be considered as part of the overall design.
- *Guideline* - The architecture of new infill buildings, additions to existing buildings and major exterior remodelings should be compatible with that of existing adjacent buildings.

Finally, as a reference, staff have included the following summary of member comments related to the mural from their July 1, 2020 review.

- It still looks a little institutional to me, I'm seeing a gray and tan and the contrast to the mural is pretty stark. It seems washed out to me.
- It's very subjective.
- I personally like the mural and look forward to seeing specifics of that come back. Its presence on East Washington Avenue is going to be awesome.
- Ald. Abbas: There is good support for this project, the community likes the mural.
- I do have a concern about the mural, I love murals but I don't know about the placement of this mural as it relates to the overall design. Looking at staff comments it asks UDC to give careful consideration to a five story mural, there's no similar precedent as a primary façade. I think we need to know more, right now it's an abstract piece. The precedents you provided are all one story, not major facades. I don't know that it supports the architecture or takes away from it. I'm not opposed I just don't know if this is hitting the bullseye on this particular project.
- I don't think the mural was adequately addressed. I need you to explain the justification for the location and size of the mural. Why isn't it over the main entrance or the other side?
- It's really not a canvas at all for a mural, it's mostly windows. Somebody's going to be living there, depending on the subject matter, maybe that's part of the artwork, that you'll be living in a mural.
- To the mural, I see what you're trying to achieve and I'm wondering if the small attempt of coming around the corner is really going to do much for you. Would it be more effective to have a more full frame and not try to come around the corner? A frame rather than the trip tick and try to make it look like a framed piece then, it's not coming off as that now. Overwhelmingly you see the punched openings of the windows and I'm wondering if you frame it as a piece of art would be more effective. I'm just not seeing that it's a framed piece right now.
- The image from the other angle might be more realistic as you're coming up and down the street.
- I personally really like that it's not a framed mural piece. I like that there's people almost living in the art. I would agree that eventually it's going to be critical to see what it is for its content. The fact there's not a precedent for it in Madison is fine by me. I like the gesture, that it's different, the scale that is broken by the fenestration in the windows.
- It is possible to approve it contingent on the mural coming back?
- The punched opening mural looks like a 3-story structure. If it's not an abstract mural whatever that concept is would be disturbed by 2 x 6 openings.
- It could make or break the project. Typically they're on a somewhat solid surface so the art speaks for itself. The holes takes away from the piece itself and my concern is that may happen here. You don't really have a solid wall to display the art on. Right now it just looks like paint on the wall because there's so many punched openings.
- This is a major part of this design. How do you approve it or give initial or final without really knowing what the specifics of the major elements of this piece are going to be?
- If we were to take the signage analogy we know where it's intended to be in general, the signage would have to come back. Knowing the brick behind it should it stand on its own, that would allow the project to move forward without the mural through the rest of the development process and refine that mural design.