

PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

May 8, 2024



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 3535 & 3553 University Avenue
Application Type: Informational Presentation for a New Mixed-Use Building in Urban Design District 6
UDC will be an Approving Body
Legistar File ID #: [83067](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Randy Christianson, Walter Wayne Development | Patrick Terry, JLA Architects + Planners

Project Description: The applicant is proposing a five-story building containing 985 square-feet of first floor commercial space, 84 residential units and two levels of underground parking.

Staff notes that the project site is currently zoned Planned Development. A request to rezone the project site to Commercial Corridor-Transitional (CC-T) will be submitted as part of a future Land Use Application. A Conditional Use would be required for more than 60 units in a mixed-use building.

Approval Standards: Upon formal submittal, the UDC will be an **approving body** on this request. The site is located in Urban Design District 6 ("UDD 6"), 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\(13\)](#).

Zoning Related Requirements: Staff understands that the applicant will be seeking to rezone the property to the Commercial Corridor-Transitional (CC-T) zoning district. Within the mixed-use and commercial zoning districts there are general provisions related to building and site design that are intended to foster high-quality building and site design. Such standards are in [Section 28.060](#), and include requirements that speak to building and entrance orientation, façade articulation, door and window openings, and building materials, etc. Ultimately, the Zoning Administrator will determine compliance with all applicable Zoning requirements.

Staff notes that if rezoned to the CC-T zoning district, five stories in height would be allowed. A height transition is also required where the CC-T district abuts a residential zoning district, which in this case is on both the south and west sides of the project site. As noted in the Zoning Code, building height at the rear or side yard setback line shall not exceed two stories/25 feet. From this point, building height may increase at a ratio of one foot rise to one-foot horizontal distance away from the property line (a 45 degree angle) up to the maximum allowed height. As proposed, the development **does not** appear to meet this transition requirement. Relief from this requirement can only be allowed by a separate Conditional Use, which is the jurisdiction of the Plan Commission. At this time, Planning Division staff has concerns on that aspect of the request.

Design-Related Adopted Plan Recommendations: The City's [Comprehensive Plan](#) recommends "Community Mixed Use" uses for the subject property, which generally include two to six story building forms, with more residential units and commercial space compared with development in Neighborhood Mixed Use (70-130 dwelling units per acre). Generally, the recommendation specifies that development and design within CMU areas should enhance walkability, maintain positive building orientation to the street, be transit-oriented, and well connected to adjacent development.

The project site is also located in the [Hoyt Park Area Joint Neighborhood Plan](#) study area. As noted in this plan, the project site is designated as Focus Area E, University Avenue Commercial. Development in this area is recommended to maintain the commercial focus along the University Avenue frontage with a variety of neighborhood commercial, retail, professional services, and offices. Building heights are recommended to be one to four stories.

The plan also outlines additional recommendations that speak to enhancing and expanding the buffers between mixed use and single-family development and encouraging pedestrian access from Bruce Street.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff recommends that the UDC provides feedback on the development proposal regarding the aforementioned standards related to the items noted below.

- **Site Planning Considerations – Service Area.** At the time of report writing, UDC staff is aware that Traffic Engineering is reviewing the latest concept plans and will likely be recommending some modifications. This includes revising plans to allow for a wider sidewalk along University Avenue, consistent with other recent development approvals on University Avenue, as well as modifications to the service area located on the west end of the building. Additionally, Traffic Engineering staff has noted concerns related to the center driveway that aligns with Highbury Road across University Avenue, given the anticipated vehicular conflicts that full turning movements into and out of the site would create. The applicant team is encouraged to continue to work with Traffic Engineering staff regarding these issues and to discuss on or off-site resolutions prior to submitting a formal application.

With regard to the UDC's purview, staff requests UDC's feedback on proposed service area, especially as it relates to providing adequate screening, its relationship to the building, including accessibility, as well as form and function related to the UDD 6 guidelines and requirements.

- **Building Design and Composition.** UDD 6 Building Design requirements and guidelines generally speak to designing with a sensitivity to context, avoiding large unbroken wall expanses, and designing with a consistent level of design across all elevations. Unlike other more contemporary design districts, UDD 6 does not delineate more prescriptive standards related to setback, height, or bulk requirements. Though as a guideline, UDD 6 does recommend that *"The architecture of new infill buildings, additions to existing buildings and major exterior remodelings should be compatible with but not necessarily similar to that of existing adjacent buildings."* Staff requests the UDC's initial feedback on the following design considerations as it relates to the UDD 6 guidelines and requirements.
 - General building design and articulation, especially as it relates to the existing context. While larger-scale buildings do exist and are permitted in the corridor, they are designed with architectural detailing, including individual entrances, vertical articulation, corner elements, canopies, awnings, etc. that assist in breaking down the overall mass and scale, as well as create a more human-scale at the street level. Staff requests the UDC study the general building mass and scale, and design of building components (base, middle, top), and provide feedback on how to best break-down, articulate or modulate the long facades (approx. 280 feet as proposed), especially as it relates to the University Avenue frontage;
 - Minimizing blank walls and providing a better balance between the size of openings and remaining blank wall space, especially on the building end walls, and
 - As noted in the Letter of Intent, the overall building design intent is a "traditional aesthetic." Provide feedback on the appropriateness on these design and details, including recessed balconies or Juliette

balconies versus hanging, larger windows, and the use of residential design details, including sills, lentils, frames, etc.

- **Building Orientation and Ground Floor Activation.** Staff has concerns related to the overall building orientation and ground floor activation along University Avenue. While there are common building entries, including a commercial entrance, as well as individual unit entries along this frontage, the orientation towards the street appears limited. In addition, consideration should also be given to the design and detailing at the ground floor, including utilizing human-scale materials, utilizing a richer level of architectural detailing, differentiating the commercial space to “read” more like a storefront with glazing and architectural detailing, as well as the overall design and integration of the proposed garage door.

Staff also notes the project site is located in a flood zone, which is potentially a complicating factor here. As such, building entrances are required to be placed above a minimum elevation as determined by the City Engineering Division that is approximately two feet above the existing sidewalk grades. This is reflected in each entrance being accessible via stairs or ramp.

Staff recognizes that while the flood zone creates development constraints, it also creates opportunities. One potential opportunity would be to provide a shared, raised plaza space similar to those reflected in recent developments within the East Washington Avenue corridor. Doing so could result in a more positive orientation to the street as active uses spill out onto the plaza, as well as an enhanced, more protected pedestrian environment. If this design solution is pursued, separation of the raised entry plaza from the public sidewalk with at-grade or raised landscaping should be considered.

Staff requests the UDC’s initial feedback on the overall building orientation and ground floor activation.

- **Building Materials.** As reflected in the materials board, the exterior material schedule includes a composition of composite siding, masonry, both brick and stone veneer, and metal accent panels. UDD 6 Building Design requirements, *“Exterior building materials shall be low maintenance and harmonious with those used on other buildings in the area.”* Staff requests UDC’s feedback on the overall material palette, as well as ornamentation and detailing.
- **Landscape and Open Space.** UDD 6 Landscaping guidelines and requirements generally speak to designing landscaping that is both *“...functional and decorative, including framing views, screening unattractive features and views along the roadway, screening different uses from each other, and complementing the architecture of the building.”*

As indicated by the site and utility plans, landscape and at grade open space amenity areas are primarily limited to the south side of the project site. While the project site is located in an intense urban environment the adjacent properties just to the south remain relatively lower level of intensity. As such, consideration should be given to incorporating appropriate transitions and landscape buffers between these two differing levels of intensity, as well as the design and programming of this yard scape to provide an at grade open space for residents. While a conceptual landscape plan was not provided, staff requests the UDC’s initial feedback related to landscape as it pertains the UDD 6 guidelines and requirements. When considering the feedback to the landscape along University Avenue, the UDC should note that the applicant proposes to remove all four mature street trees.