



Agenda Item #: 4

Project Title: 529 University Avenue - New Apartment Building in UMX Zoning. 2nd Ald. Dist.

Legistar File ID #: 78638

Members Present: Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Lois Braun-Oddo, Amanda Arnold, Shane Bernau, Christian Harper, and Marsha Rummel

Prepared By: Kevin Firchow, AICP, Acting UDC Secretary

Summary

At its meeting of July 12, 2023, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** for a new apartment building in UMX zoning located at 529 University Avenue. Registered and speaking in support were Jeremy Frommelt, Kevin Carey, and Ethan Mohoney. Registered in support and available to answer questions was Michael Goeden. Registered and speaking in opposition were Kyra Coubal, Francesca Anderson, Liam Geoghegan Smith, Damien Short, and William Clay.

In terms of existing condition, this corner of University Avenue and Frances Street currently includes an existing restaurant-tavern – a 4,700 square foot site with a building footprint of about 3,600 square feet. Proposed is a new mixed use building with 33 units including 10 units per floor. The development team noted this is in contrast to other developments with more students per floor. The development team stated the intent is to furnish these units with higher end finishes and furniture to improve the experience for students. The lower basement level will contain storage, fitness and mechanicals. The proposed street level shows commercial tenant space of about 1,400 square feet entered off of University Avenue. The residential entry is located off of Frances Street, and trash would be handled through the alley to the southeast. The floor plan repeats on floors 2-12 with 10 units per floor. The roof level shows a mechanical penthouse and patio accessed from the elevator/stair corridor. The applicant team stated that the exterior building materials are intended to take inspiration from nearby buildings and use wood like material, corrugated metal panel, and board formed concrete-like material. Windows are not located on the south wall that is on the property line.

Questions for the development team/staff:

- Are these furnished? Any accommodations for bicycle parking?
 - Yes, they are furnished. There is a 10-foot setback in the alley we intend to use for bike parking, we are still working on it. We also have lower level basement for indoor bike parking. We don't have the total number of stalls yet.
- The building by Dotty Dumpling's is relatively new and I didn't think it had a 10-foot setback.
- (Firchow) I'd have to verify the setbacks, I think that was developed under PD (Planned Development) zoning.
- There is requirement in the alley for the setback.
- Yes, in conventional zoning a rear yard setback would apply.
- Aside from bike parking, what is the vision for this site plan along here? Right now it's got the old Vintage building built right up to the property line. What opportunities to you see to open up this alley and bring light and other design features to the setback area?
 - With the setback it is pretty tight. Right now there's a two-story building on there, keeping with that ten-foot is going to increase the light and visibility coming out of that alley. We don't have any

structures planned to be built there, it is a student market, so we're not providing any underground vehicle parking.

- Along the corner of the alley and University do you see any greenspace opportunities? There is an opportunity to do a 10 x 10 or 10 x 15 green buffer there, have you had any discussions on how you might take advantage of that?
 - We've worked with the City on the streetscape requirements and will be following all Madison requirements on that. With the tightness of the site, taking ten feet out of the corner, I'm not sure how much value you'd get out of that, but we can explore it.
- Is there any historic value to the adjacent liquor store or adjacent buildings?
 - (Firchow) None of the buildings in this block are listed as formal landmarks. As part of this process the Landmarks Commission will provide a recommendation on the historic value of the building proposed for demolition.
- The exterior building materials described as corrugated and listed as precast, it is a masonry system that is then formed and either stained or painted?
 - Yes, we're looking to mimic a corrugated metal panel as close as possible, likely a black stain over that so it wouldn't appear to be concrete.

Discussion by the Commission was as follows:

- My concerns are echoing a lot of what was in the staff report that referenced the importance of the ground level on such a major intersection, and the need for a strong corner element. Looking at these plans and elevations I just see a very run of the mill corner there, I see nothing from an architectural or design standpoint that stands out in any significant way. It seems very pedestrian and mundane and just really boring. That to me, the whole ground level there, realizing it's based partly on what is envisioned in that tenant space, but clearly from what we're seeing here there's nothing exciting about the ground level and in particular that corner element. I was confused about the comment about the lack of windows on the south elevation, they said because they were building to the lot line?
- It's the State building code, when you build up to the property line like you're able to do in this zoning district, you are prohibited of having any openings in your wall for fear of fire, life safety issues.
- If it's a regulatory thing I guess there's no out, but it sure presents a very blank, monolithic expanse that I'm not sure is mitigated by the materials we're seeing here. I can appreciate the renditions they did of how it would look at different times of day but that leaves a lot to be desired. I'm not finding those small pictures of what the concrete would look like particularly inspiring.
- We're charged with looking at this one building but I can't help but step back and see the canyon effects we're getting at this major road here, there's a domino effect of 12, 10 stories and pretty soon there's no greenspace, nothing but tall buildings that detract the feeling as we enter the campus area where there is more variety of setbacks and things. That said I also think that perhaps it's a little ambitious trying to cram 10 pounds of potatoes in a five pound bag that is the site. I don't see any reasonable area for vehicles to pull off for packages, deliveries or drop-off people, or even to move in. Even though they're furnished, we've all seen the dorm move-ins and how much you can fit into those tiny rooms that are already furnished. The program might be a little ambitious for such a small site, and the result is that big blank wall that faces campus, that starts to beg for more development on the other site, to go up to that height and fill it in. I'm struggling with this, not only the site but access to sun and fresh air, this seems to be cutting off and adding to that canyon like feel of this particular part of the downtown area. I'm not inspired by the materials, it's a lot of precast, as much as you're trying to vary the execution of what that panel will look like, it will always look like concrete, it will look wet when it rains, we don't know the reflectivity, it's going to end up looking like a dull building.
- I want to mention the essence of the design, there are some very attractive elevation views of the building, but I think the essence of the design is very serious and not necessarily unique to the site. In a lot of ways it's very much the opposite of what we have there today, and I think that's a big loss for the community to replace this colorful open corner that really is a gateway. When you drive into town I've always thought this site is very much

a gateway because it's active so many days and times of the year, there's the colorful quality and life on the street level that is always present as you come into town and this feels much more closed off. Again, it's 10 pounds of potatoes in a five pound bag. I'm very much struggling to piece together what that might mean for the applicant, tangibly. I was inspired by something Cliff was alluding to as an idea for that alley, if there was any way to capture some of that colorful, vibrant essence and use that 10-feet to your benefit, to benefit the tenant of that first floor space and the rest of the City as a gateway element. I'm thinking of spaces like Bakers Place with that mews-like narrow corridor with lighting. Coordinating and working with the City to utilize that 10 feet for something other than heavily shaded dead greenspace and bikes. Maybe there's an opportunity to bring fun and life back to the corner. Otherwise most of my observations have been commented on.

- I want to express that I concur with the other Commissioners about this seeming like a heavy building. It is really unfortunate to lose such a vibrant space and I think the design could do more to honor that. I want to acknowledge the speakers and let them know we do feel this rub between property rights and the ability to develop, and our scope to comment on the design. But out of that comes a wonderful opportunity to make this building speak to what is there with color and vibrancy, to pay homage to what will have been there in the past.
- I would agree with the playfulness comment, although I don't think you need to go completely random. I'm intrigued by the corrugated concrete and how that could work. The grid makes sense but maybe there still is a little bit of patterning you could do in the color, and certainly on the south side. You could have solid fenestration that you normally wouldn't otherwise do because of unit layouts or window locations. That is something we'll likely be looking at coming down Frances Street for a number of years so pay attention to that side. With regard to the comments about the ground floor elevations, one thing you can really do to help improve that is distinguish the residential entrance from the commercial entrances. I would take that and use it to your advantage to bring some interest and variety to the ground level. I appreciate that it has handsome elements to it, some real thought in terms of the balance, maybe a little lightening up might also be in order.

Action

Since this was an **INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** no formal action was taken by the Commission.