

PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

February 16, 2026



PREPARED FOR THE PLAN COMMISSION

Project Address: 121 North Butler Street (District 2, Alder Ochowicz)
Legistar File ID #: [91866](#)
Prepared By: Lisa Ernest, AICP, Planning Division
Report Includes Comments from other City Agencies, as noted
Reviewed By: Kevin Firchow, AICP, Principal Planner

Summary

Applicant & Owner: Cliff Fischer; Bella on Butler, LLC; 380 West Washington Avenue, Madison, WI 53703

Contact: Ray White; Dimension IV Madison Design Group; 6515 Grant Teton Plaza, Madison, WI 5719

Requested Action: Consideration of an alteration to an approved conditional use in the Downtown Residential 2 (DR2) District for a multi-family dwelling with greater than eight (8) units to allow an alternative material palette for an approved five-story, 73-unit apartment building.

Proposal Summary: The Plan Commission previously approved a conditional use to allow a five-story, 73-unit building at 121 North Butler Street (Legistar ID [88956](#)). When the conditional use was approved, the approval was subject to a condition that would require the applicant to use brick on all sides of the ground story. If approved, this alteration would remove that condition and allow a metal panel to be used on the side and rear elevations of the ground story. The alteration would also approve minor changes to the building design, including the location of the building entrance which has been moved to the southern end of the building. And the number of units has been reduced from 73 units to 72 units.

Applicable Regulations & Standards: MGO Section 28.183(6) lists the standards of approval for conditional uses.

Review Required By: Plan Commission

Summary Recommendation: The Planning Division recommends that the Plan Commission find the approval standards for conditional uses are met and **approve** the alteration to an approved conditional use to allow an alternative material palette for a five-story, 73-unit apartment building at 121 North Butler Street, and remove the following condition of approval, "The primary building material on the ground story of the side and rear elevations shall be the same material that is applied to the ground story of the front elevation." All recommendations are subject to input at the public hearing and the conditions recommended by the reviewing agencies.

Background Information

Parcel Location: The property is 15,246 square feet (0.35-acres). It is located along North Butler Street between East Johnson Street and East Mifflin Street. The site is within Alder District 2 (Alder Ochowicz) and the Madison Metropolitan School District.

Existing Conditions and Land Use: The site is zoned DR-2 (Downtown Residential 2) District. It is vacant.

Surrounding Land Use and Zoning:

North: Two-story, two to four-unit residential buildings, zoned DR-1 (Downtown Residential 1) District;

East: Two and three-story single family, two-unit and four-unit residential buildings, zoned DR-1 District; a three-story, 22-unit residential building, zoned DR-1 District;

South: Two-story, two to four-unit residential buildings, zoned DR-1 District; and

West: Across North Butler Street; two and three-story four-unit and three-unit residential buildings, zoned DR-1 District; City of Madison parking garage, zoned UMX (Urban Mixed-Use) District.

Adopted Land Use Plan: The [Comprehensive Plan](#) (2024) recommends MR (Medium Residential) for the site. The [Downtown Plan](#) (2012) recommends Predominant Residential for the site. The [Report of the Lamp House Ad Hoc Plan Committee](#) (Amended 2025), which was adopted as a supplement to the Downtown Plan, recommends four stories for the site.

Zoning Summary: The property is zoned DR-2 (Downtown Residential 2) District.

Environmental Corridor Status: The site is not within a mapped environmental corridor.

Public Utilities and Services: This property is served by a full range of urban services.

Project Description, Analysis, and Conclusion

The Plan Commission previously approved a conditional use to allow a five-story, 73-unit building at 121 North Butler Street (Legistar ID [88956](#)). The building plans showed a brick material on the ground story of the front elevation of the building and an engineered wood lap siding on the ground story of the side and rear elevations of the building. Per the Zoning Code wood and fiber cement panels shall not be used on the ground story except between the sidewalk and the bottom of storefront windows or as an accent material. To ensure the project complies with the Zoning Code, the original approval was subject to the following condition of approval:

- Eliminate the engineered wood lap siding from the ground floor side and rear elevations. Wood and fiber cement panels shall not be used on the ground story except between the sidewalk and the bottom of storefront windows or as an accent material.

As a result, the applicant replaced the engineered wood lap siding on the ground story of the side and rear elevations with a horizontal, preformed metal siding with a faux wood finish. This meets the requirements of the Zoning Code.

However, that approval was also subject to the following condition recommended by the Planning Division:

- The primary building material on the ground story of the side and rear elevations shall be the same material that is applied to the ground story of the front elevation.

The primary building material on the ground story of the front elevation is brick. The above condition would require the brick to be used on all sides of the ground story. The applicant has indicated that this would increase construction costs and impact the affordability of the units. The intent of the condition was to limit the number of materials used on the building, and to create a visual base to the building. Although the metal panel introduces an additional building material, the application of materials does differentiate the base of the building from the upper stories.

The updated plans include some relatively minor changes to the building design. The building entrance has been moved to the southern end of the building. And the number of units has been reduced from 73 units to 72 units.

To allow the metal panel material on the side and rear elevations as currently proposed, staff recommend removing the following condition of approval, “The primary building material on the ground story of the side and rear elevations shall be the same material that is applied to the ground story of the front elevation.”

The conditional use approval standards state that the Plan Commission shall not approve a conditional use without due consideration of the City’s adopted plan recommendations, design guidelines, supplemental regulations, and finding that all of the conditional use standards of MGO Section 28.183(6) are met. Please note, state law requires that conditional use findings must be based on “substantial evidence” that directly pertains to each standard and not based on personal preference or speculation. State law also states that if an applicant for a conditional use meets or agrees to meet all of the requirements and conditions specified in the city ordinance or those imposed by the Plan Commission, the city shall grant the conditional use permit.

MGO Section 28.183(6) lists sixteen approval standards, of which not all are applicable to every conditional use. For this request, Standards 7 and 9-16 do not apply, while standards 1-6 and 8 are applicable. Staff believe that the Plan Commission can find standards 1-6 and 8 to be met.

Given due consideration of adopted plans, staff believe the conditional use approval standards can be found met, subject to the recommended conditions of approval.

Recommendation

Planning Division Recommendation (Contact Lisa McNabola, 243-0554)

The Planning Division recommends that the Plan Commission find the approval standards for conditional uses are met and **approve** the alteration to an approved conditional use to allow an alternative material palette for a five-story, 73-unit apartment building at 121 North Butler Street, and remove the following condition of approval, “The primary building material on the ground story of the side and rear elevations shall be the same material that is applied to the ground story of the front elevation.” All recommendations are subject to input at the public hearing and the conditions recommended by the reviewing agencies.

Recommended Conditions of Approval Major/Non-Standard Conditions are Shaded

There are no recommended conditions of approval for this request.