



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 3401 E Washington Avenue
Application Type: Planned Multi-Use Site in Urban Design District (UDD) No. 5
Initial/Final Approval is Requested
Legistar File ID #: [71151](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Kevin Burow, Knothe & Bruce Architects, LLC | Mike Slavish, Wisconsin Housing Preservation Corp.

Project Description: The applicant is seeking Initial/Final Approval for the development of a Planned Multi-Use Site consisting of approximately 245 residential units in four buildings with underground parking and a large greenspace amenity. The site is currently zoned IL (Industrial Limited District) and will be rezoned to CC-T (Commercial Corridor - Transitional) District for the proposed redevelopment.

Approval Standards: The project site is located in 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\(12\)](#). As such, UDC is an **approving body** on this development request.

Adopted Plans: The project site is also within the Carpenter-Ridgeway-Hawthorne-Truax Neighborhood Plan (the “Plan”) planning area. The Plan identifies goals and objectives with regard to development in the planning area including those related to enhancing the visual and physical prominence of the Hawthorne Elementary School within the neighborhood, encouraging the development of neighborhood-oriented shopping nodes that host pedestrian-friendly businesses and mixed-use development along East Washington Avenue, enhancing aesthetics along East Washington Avenue, and improving pedestrian and bicycle connectivity.

While the project site is within the planning area, the Plan does not specifically identify the project site as a “redevelopment site” for which specific design goals were developed.

Summary of Design Considerations

Planning Division staff requests that the UDC make their decision and base their findings on the requirements and guidelines of UDD 5. Staff’s specific design considerations are noted below.

- **Building Design.** UDD 5 “*Building Design*” guidelines generally speak to encouraging four-sided architecture, compatibility in design and materials with adjacent structures, and minimizing large unbroken facades. As indicated on the building elevations, there are areas of blank wall expanses, especially on Building 2 along Fair Oaks and at various building end locations within the development. In addition, there are tower elements and “cornice-like” or coping features incorporated into the general building design of each building. Consideration should be given to maintaining a consistent design of these elements, especially where they signify common building entries, and as they relate to creating a positive termination at the top of the buildings. Staff requests UDC’s findings as it relates to the overall building design, including the reduction of blank walls, the design of the tower elements, as well as creating a positive termination at the top of the buildings.

- **Building Transitions.** Along the E Washington Avenue frontage, the proposed building height is five stories, however as the building turns the corner to N Fair Oaks Avenue, the building mass abruptly drops to two stories. Staff refers the Commission to their Informational Presentation comments, which included potential design considerations to more adequately address the transition between the two and five story buildings, including providing a more cohesive design between the two buildings, reducing the mass on the five-story building, and increasing the height of the two-story building. Staff requests UDC's findings regarding the appropriateness of the transition area or separation between buildings to accommodate the shift in mass and scale, as well as the overall building designs being complementary to and compatible with each other, especially as it relates to the aforementioned UDD 5 "*Building Design*" guidelines and requirements. One potential design consideration would be to increase the plaza space between the Buildings 1 and 2 by reducing the side yard along the access drive adjacent to Building 2.
- **Landscape.** As noted in UDD 5 "Landscaping" requirements and guidelines, landscaping shall be used for functional as well as decorative purposes, including framing views, screening unattractive features and views along roadways and uses, and complementing architectural features. As noted in the Commission's Informational Presentation comments, the design and landscape of the proposed above-garage patios and plaza spaces will play a key role in the success of those spaces. Consideration should be given to enhanced landscape plantings in these areas to soften the hardscape, and to provide interest and screening for the residential units located in these spaces. Although renderings of the rooftop areas were provided, limited information was provided with regard to the landscape and programming details of these spaces.

Staff requests the Commission's findings related to the proposed landscape plans as it relates to:

- The design and treatment of outdoor spaces, especially the rooftop plaza spaces,
 - Screening blank wall expanses, including those associated with Building 2,
 - Providing adequate buffer to the non-residential development adjacent to the site on the north, and
 - Providing adequate screening for the individual unit entries adjacent to the parking lot, as well as the units along the plaza space located between Building 1 and 2.
- **Lighting.** UDD 5 guidelines and requirements note that the functions of exterior lighting shall be to illuminate building facades, pedestrian walks and spaces and parking and services areas and that design and equipment should relate to those functions. While a photometric plan and light fixture cutsheets were provided for the internal site driveways, parking areas and building garage entryways, lighting information was not provide along the street, including the pedestrian plaza space along E Washington Avenue. Staff requests the Commission's findings related to exterior lighting.
 - **Signage.** As noted on the elevations, potential sign locations and types are shown. Staff requests UDC review and comment on the proposed sign locations and types.

Summary of UDC Informational Presentation Comments

Staff refers the Commission to their comments from the May 11, 2022, Informational Presentation:

- The two-story next to the five-story, the different building types is a bit odd. You bring interest to the corner but then just drop down, they could be more cohesive. Some of the materials on the far left building should probably be revisited, the location, amount and how they relate to each other. The forms are fine, but look at how they relate to each other, they don't all need separate materials, you can tie them together a different way.

- Quite happy to see some people living in what we might call a transit-oriented development. This is the closest project UDC has had that is this close to a proposed BRT station. Curious if that's come into your conversations and design thinking, to what extent you acknowledge that with site design.
 - Yes, the BRT will be located kitty-korner from us, we wanted strong pedestrian connections out leading to E. Washington and Fair Oaks Avenues for access to that.
- Glad to see the way you've maintained the underpass, that's a very useful amenity there.
- Appreciate you stepping down to two stories for the small houses just to the right, and happy to see three-bedroom apartments for families. To that end, it's really nice that it ties into the playground area for Hawthorne School, I'd be curious as you develop further to see how kids will be crossing drives to get to the park from all units.
- Seems like a lot of private sidewalks going up to doors, I'm not quite sure I understand why. Could some be combined for more greenspace?
 - Yes, these are individual entries, but we do need to have direct entry as a WHEDA project. There is not a common corridor connecting those townhomes together.
- The transition from five to two stories, particularly on that high visibility façade, is too abrupt and I'd prefer to see at least three. Make it more compatible with the corner building as opposed to such a contrast. I find the light/dark contrast on the western most building better color-wise than the light to tan contrast of the eastern building, reexamine those materials on the eastern building. I like the composition, the acre of parkland facing the school, those elements are excellent. It's only a couple of steps to get this where you want it.
- Commend you for the park area, that's a huge community-building amenity and a strong point of the project. I like the site plan, the way it's holding the urban edge, tucking the parking inside. Think about where kids will be crossing, the islands and connections, and continue to follow that path from any of the units to the park area.
- It looks like you might have a couple of rooftop terraces; make sure there's some plant life and other things happening up there other than just pedestal pavers.
- The one facing the auto parts store is tricky, how you might handle that through design to give it some separation and screening, but also make it a lovely usable space. There was another terrace in the rendering of the 110-unit that looked out over the park, that one is probably a much nicer view than the other side.
- The staff report noted concerns with the size of a couple of the buildings and the continuous parking underneath them. To have a space in between some of the bigger buildings would really help. There are no mega apartment buildings in this neighborhood, you have the land to allow for more space between residential units.
- The center island between the two main parking bays seems pretty minimal. I'd be willing to give up some of that one acre park, bringing the buildings closer to the school and having an enhanced greenway between those two parking lots that somehow connects to the park that is there.
- Agree about the parking space. There's an awful lot of surface parking considering there is under building parking. If it is necessary, your suggestion of moving things around is a nice idea. Seems like way too much surface parking lot.
- I'd vote in favor of the two-story townhouses. It is a major drop-off but one thing we've heard again and again from citizens, people are not comfortable with having tall buildings that butt right up to residential areas. It looks quite a bit different, but so what? The average person going by isn't looking at it as one holistic project that has to tie together. Pushing those up to three-stories, considering they're individual units, most people don't want to go up two flights of stairs to get inside. I'm fine with those stepping down to two-stories, I really love the large front yards there. I hope the final product resembles the renderings here of some intensive landscaping around all the buildings and entrances, it has the potential to be really attractive. This will be a huge improvement, overall a really nice project.

- A 1:1 parking ratio feels more appropriate. I think cohesive greenspace is more functional and should be prioritized, that green strip in the parking could be wide enough to support bioretention or stormwater management by giving it five more feet.
- It's how you treat the five-story coming down to the two-story. It doesn't step down, it's situated appropriately based on surrounding context, the five-story is the issue as it meets the two-story.
- I applaud the blue color on the building.
- Appreciate some of the restraint I see the designer making. Having some quality detailing vs. lots of different colors and materials lends a level of sophistication that any housing development should have.