

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

PRESENTED: August 12, 2015

TITLE: 2107-2249 Sherman Avenue – Advisory Presentation at Planning Staff’s Request for a New Mixed-Use Development Containing 60 Market-Rate Apartments and Approximately 6,700 Square Feet of Commercial/Retail Space, in addition to a 6,667 Square Foot Commercial/Retail Pad Site to be Developed in the Future. 12th Ald. Dist. (39566)

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

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ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: August 12, 2015

ID NUMBER:

Members present were: Richard Wagner, Chair; Dawn O’Kroley, Tom DeChant, John Harrington, Cliff Goodhart, Richard Slayton and Lois Braun-Oddo.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of August 12, 2015, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** on a new mixed-use development containing 60 apartments and approximately 6,700 square feet of commercial/retail space, in addition to a 6,667 square foot commercial/retail pad site to be developed in the future located at 2107-2249 Sherman Avenue. Appearing on behalf of the project Kirk Keller, Jeff Lee and Suzanne Vincent, all representing McKenzie Place, LLC.

There are three principal buildings currently on the site to be demolished. There are no zoning changes being requested. They have met with the neighborhood association and received very positive feedback. What is driving this project is fitting a rectangle into a triangular shape for a neighborhood area; they listened and responded to what the neighborhood wants. You enter through underground parking (62 stalls) for 60 apartments. They are cognizant of the groundwater because of the property’s previous use as a gas station. They will be 100% covered bicycle parking. A third floor community room is proposed for the apartment units, as well as two roof gardens. Being across from Burr Oaks Park they are proposing “parking” and storage for canoes and kayaks. They have been in conversation with the owners of Banzo next door, who wish to utilize some of the greenspace between the properties for growing produce to use in their restaurant. There are no walpaks or mechanical grills in the building, no stucco and no vinyl products proposed; there is a high percentage of brick and high efficiency glass. The outpad portion of the property is proposed for a 2-story bank building in the future.

Keller discussed Planning Division concerns of the project, which include:

- The 1-story element (the owner is strongly in favor of stepping the building back);

- The idea of the building taking on more of a flat iron design (that's the vertical piece they do not want to do; they do not want stacking 4-5 stories in that area, the neighborhood would rather see 3-stories);
- The palette is overly complex (the forms have been smoothed out with less articulation in the depth, they have made a strong effort to address that);
- How might the massing be changed to either eliminate or better integrate the vehicular pass through under the building while still maintaining access to both streets. Staff suggests that perhaps by shortening the building, vehicle access can be provided from Sherman Avenue on the southern portion of the site. The goal is to eliminate excess curb cuts and to give a very concise statement to the property.

Comments and questions from the Commission were as follows:

- Nice job. Take a look at how that park works and see if it you can get what you're looking for by having more of a grid of Honey Locust in this area (at the corner), which would become perhaps more serving because of the shade.
 - I had thought that too.
- You talked about this gracious walkway but it's still a garage kind of setting. Is there any way to indent it to bring light to the ends of the sidewalk adjacent to the covered parking.
 - We do have some angles we can work with to make it more inviting as an entry point.
- You're probably lucky that we're burned out on flat irons. This would make a great site for a flat iron building.
- Unless the road is changed to a "T" interchange.
 - It's a unique site that brings a unique product to this area. The apartments at the third floor step back quite a bit with nice views.
- The flat iron building has a one-story volume at the prowl that is essentially transparent. What I'm looking at here is something that you're kind of looking to do, if it's a single volume of a restaurant or retail, if that piece were very lightweight, almost transparent, you still have an elevation behind which should be treated as a primary façade. Whether you follow the true form of the property line or not, this façade needs to be treated as a primary composition that happens to have a very light transparent piece below it.
 - Point taken. I think we should look at it and I struggled specifically at this inside corner. I can see your point of bringing this façade across through here, how do I work with signage then? Do I have to look at a variance to go with a little more glazing, is it metal to try to lighten it up, to change the material from the brick to something lighter there, do I still look at a...
- If it's a beautiful building, you'll find a spot for signage. Don't think of this as an inside corner, think of this as an elevation that you've now clipped a light piece in front of. I'm talking big gesture. The mass of the building is broken up into so many colors and materials, it does lose the sense of what you initially talked about, is a volume with ins and outs, maybe it's more of a recess on the Sherman side to create the sense of a really big outdoor room on this upper level that people would celebrate, and thinking about on Sherman, not thinking so much about the outdoor rooms towards the prowl, but really celebrate that view to the park. And if you make that façade so beautiful, people would wonder why aren't we closing Sherman. Make them close it. Make it such a good space and consider putting your outdoor room on the first floor.
 - I agree because some of the discussion, if Sherman is closed, yes we would expand the retail right through here.
- What's the plan for the outlot pad site?
 - The long-term plan is we're looking at fulfilling the second part of the neighborhood plan with our future development.

- (Wendt) One thing that's very important about that plan is that it's not approved. Right now it's in process and it will come back to this body for review. But to refer to it as the neighborhood plan is a misnomer at this point, it is merely in process.
- What is the potential for a commercial node out here with this space and what's existing, and what may exist. How can we see this in that broader context, not just your own parcel. That would be a piece we'd need to see when you come back.
 - Currently there is already commercial there.
- But talking about this with pedestrian connections and how this is a node, we need to see how this node works.
- I would agree with the staff report about the use of materials and the request to simplify the material palette. When you talked about this creative expression of volumes going in and out, it's almost lost with the mix of modern details and some more traditional ones that we see on a lot of projects. When I look at how the project you brought to us on John Nolen Drive is turning out, it has a nice expression of how the retail is. It does have ups and downs but it's really cohesive, a little bit more cohesion of the composition would improve your concept. But as an overall volume I can see how you could do something really interesting without changing the footprint, but really taking it in one strong direction.
 - The owner has requested "truth in advertising" to the modernist statement here. He wants to come in with more of the metal look, the red which appears both on the Sherman and Fordem entrances. Looking for even less of a traditional statement, more of a modern statement but even with the modern statement you can have traditional forms that function for the residential.
- Do you really need a vehicular entrance off of Sherman Avenue?
 - Yes we feel we need it because of the traffic volume, the neighborhood very much wants to keep the traffic on the Fordem side. But we may lose, depending on what becomes with the long-term of the neighborhood, with the EEPY Plan, we would lose this entry right here. So I need to keep this through here, but there is also street parking available here.
- You have the other street (McGuire) where a resident coming down Sherman Avenue could very easily take a right on McGuire and drive in on the Fordem side.
 - I think you would get strong resistance from the neighbors.
 - The folks that live up Sherman Avenue, one of the concerns about shutting down Sherman is that McGuire intersection is not an easy left given that there's a large building and with their landscaping and the way they're pushed up to the road, you cannot see down Fordem if you're looking to take a left there.
- So the neighbors prefer the Sherman Avenue? But they're also pushing to abandon Sherman Avenue?
 - No.
- The fact that you have parking on both sides makes it seem rather pedestrian unfriendly. Maybe there's only parking on one side that makes that less of a garage type setting.
- Maybe look at other buildings that feature that, like the Randy Bruce one on University Avenue.
 - I've heard well the concern of treating the entry and getting more of a design element there, Dawn's good comments there, and what I look for is in the notes that that advisory list could be put together in a way that can be worked at and we can come back in a successful manner.
- You might look at is there a way to use plants to separate the parking from the pedestrian area.
 - With this being up to about 15-feet through here, I can do lots of different things with texture and color.
- Mesh panels that could be tinted. More clarity would help.
- I think this is going to be challenging to do the one-story portion; need elevations along with clear detailing.
- From a flat iron perspective, the corner treatment is not sufficient, needs massing and height.

(Wendt) One of the reasons this is here tonight is for the conditional use standards. Staff was concerned about the evolution of where the building was at and moving forward straight to Plan Commission, so we made a recommendation to have you guys look at it. I don't think the design team quite captured what we're getting at. The flat iron, Dawn you started to get to what our concern was. When one considers the urban form, right now we have an existing condition, we have a flat iron corner. There is a proposal that potentially Sherman might go away. The chances of that we don't know; most likely it's not going to happen any time soon given Engineering outlooks and things like that, based on budget. Maybe it'll happen in the future but very possibly it might not. So from an urban standpoint, how is this building addressing the corner? At the applicant, how they're looking at the clear glassy corner, or whatever it might be, staff has concern about what that end piece might be and how it relates to that corner from an urban form perspective. I don't think the building has quite gotten it yet. We aren't recommending a five-story elevation here by any means, but we don't feel it successfully addressed that corner they way that we always ask things. The façade rhythm, how the breaks are, this is something we see again and again. Are there too many breaks in this façade, is it too busy, can we simplify this? That relates directly to the material palette as well. The vehicular access, basically we haven't seen an elevation that ties those two together to see what that really looks like. I think it could work and be an interesting element, but as it is right now we basically have about a 60-foot parking bay and an additional pedestrian space that adds, so it's 65 or 75-feet, broken into three bays with columns coming down. How does that work on the façade, is there a better way to treat that, is it some sort of portal that goes through, getting to Cliff's point, does it even need to be there? That's another question that we're asking of you. That ties back to the pedestrian access, can we call attention to those access points, how does that work. What we're asking of you, from an advisory standpoint, what is your recommendation based on two conditional use standards on the bottom of this page: "When applying the above standards to any new construction of a building, the project creates an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with the existing and intended character of the area." So what is the urban intended character of what you guys see this going forward? The NMX district statement of purpose ideas, from this body's perspective, what would your recommendation be on some of these concerns that we have?

There are a lot of issues that are not resolved and we would expect, as with any other informational matter, that it would come back trying to address some of those concerns that we have raised.

The applicant could request referral from their schedule from the 24th to go to the Plan Commission, and the next one would be the 21st. Maybe what could happen then is come back to this body so you can move forward with an affirmative advisory recommendation.

ACTION:

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

The Commission noted the need for the project to come back to address issues that are not resolved and concerns raised.

After the Commission acts on an application, individual Commissioners rate the overall design on a scale of 1 to 10, including any changes required by the Commission. The ratings are for information only. They are not used to decide whether the project should be approved. The scale is 1 = complete failure; 2 = critically bad; 3 = very poor; 4 = poor; 5 = fair; 6 = good; 7 = very good; 8 = excellent; 9 = superior; and 10 = outstanding. The overall rating for this project is 6.

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION PROJECT RATING FOR: 2107-2249 Sherman Avenue

	Site Plan	Architecture	Landscape Plan	Site Amenities, Lighting, Etc.	Signs	Circulation (Pedestrian, Vehicular)	Urban Context	Overall Rating
Member Ratings	6	6	5	-	-	5	6	6

General Comments:

- Use bold landscape treatments/concepts to enhance (challenge) the architecture.