



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

**Project Address:** 521 E Washington Avenue  
**Application Type:** Informational Presentation for a New Mixed-Use Building in Urban Design District 4  
**UDC will be an Approving and Advisory Body**  
**Legistar File ID #:** [83068](#)  
**Prepared By:** Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

## Background Information

**Applicant | Contact:** Duane Johnson, Knothe & Bruce Architects, LLC | John Leja, LZ Ventures

**Project Description:** The applicant is proposing an eight-story mixed-use building containing a first-floor office use, and 70 multi-family residential units above the first floor. There will be eight surface parking stalls accessed from Blair Street.

**Approval Standards:** Upon formal submittal, the UDC will be both an **approving and advisory body** on this request. The site is located in Urban Design District 4 (“UDD 4”), which makes the Urban Design Commission an approving body related to the design standards and guidelines for that district in [MGO Section 33.24](#)(11).

In addition, per MGO Section 28.076(4)(c), “All new buildings and additions greater than 20,000 square feet or that have more than four stories in UMX zoning shall obtain conditional use approval from the Plan Commission following review by the Urban Design Commission for conformity to the design standards in Section 28.071(3) of the Zoning Code and the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#) and report its findings to the Plan Commission.”

**Zoning Related Information:** The project site is zoned Urban Mixed Use (UMX). The Zoning Code outlines design standards that are applicable to all new buildings in both the UMX and DC zoning districts ([MGO 28.071](#)), including, but not limited to those related to building entrance orientation, façade articulation, height, fenestration, and materials. With regard these standards, staff notes and the applicant is advised, that the Story Height and Treatment (minimum ground floor story height is twelve feet where 11’-8” is proposed), and Door and Window Openings (street-facing elevations with ground floor non-residential uses, the ground floor door and window openings shall comprise 50% of the façade area) requirements shall be met. As proposed, it is **does not** appear these standards are being met. Staff notes that while the UDC is tasked with evaluating the development proposal for general consistency with the design-related standards in the Zoning Code, ultimately, the Zoning Administrator will determine compliance.

As noted in the Downtown Height Map, the maximum height allowed for the project site is eight stories/116 feet. As noted in the Zoning Code, buildings must meet both the maximum number of stories and the maximum height. As proposed, the development **appears to be consistent** with the maximum height limitations.

**Design-Related Plan Recommendations:** The project site is located within the [Downtown Plan](#) planning area, within the Downtown Core subarea. As such, development on the project site is subject to the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#). The Plan recommendations for development in this area generally speak to encouraging the highest intensity of development in this area and encouraging a mix of uses that will help to retain the area’s vibrancy.

## Summary of Design Considerations

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

- **Building Design and Composition.** The project site is located at a highly visible intersection of S Blair Street and E Washington Avenue. Due to the site's topography, prominence, and scale of the proposed building, it is believed all four facades will be highly visible. Staff notes that the Downtown Plan also identifies East Washington Avenue as a "Premier Corridor" as one of eight major streets that frame views to and from the Capitol.

UDD 4 Building Design guidelines and requirements generally speak to designing with a sensitivity to context, avoiding large unbroken facades, utilizing four-sided architecture, etc. In addition, the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines address utilizing building modulation and articulation to distinguish architectural components (top, middle, base), the appropriateness of setbacks/stepbacks to minimize perceived mass and scale, balancing proportions and horizontal and vertical datums with design details, including windows/window openings, maintaining building entry orientation toward the street and an architectural corner element, minimizing blank wall expanses, especially along street facing elevations, integration of louvers, creating positive termination at the top of the building, utilizing an enhanced level of design and detailing at the pedestrian level, etc.

Staff requests that the UDC provide feedback on the overall building design and composition. Staff have concerns on the current façade design and believe modifications should be considered, noting the desire to have both adequate architectural interest and creating a cohesive expression on all sides. As noted below, staff believe it is also important to consider how the building is perceived from various long views among the Capitol and other prominent structures. Specifically, staff request the UDC's feedback on the appropriateness and number of materials, transitions, colors, and whether a simplification would better align the project with the aforementioned standards and guidelines.

- **Materials.** The exterior material palette is comprised of metal composite panels, both flat and corrugated and masonry veneer. UDD 4 Building Design guidelines and requirements state that exterior materials shall be low maintenance and harmonious with those used on other buildings in the area. In addition, the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines generally speak to utilizing high quality materials and four-sided architecture, as well as using a palette that is simple. Among the most significant concerns is the use of standing seam vertical metal siding at this location.

In concert with the above comments on composition, Staff requests the Commission provide feedback related to the proposed material palette, especially as it relates to the surrounding context, utilizing a consistent level of design detailing across all elevations, incorporating articulation in material transitions, etc.

- **Wall Packs.** As noted on the elevations, wall pack units are proposed on all elevations, including along the prominent S Blair and E Washington fronting façades. While it has been the current practice to not locate wall packs so that louvers are not street-facing or on highly visible facades, they have been approved in some situations when found to be well integrated into the façade's design. Staff requests the Commission's feedback on the integration of the wall packs with the overall building design and materials, especially as it relates to the aforementioned standards.

- **Long Views.** Due to the prominence of this site, careful consideration should be given to the building's overall design impact relative to the surrounding context and viewsheds, especially as it relates to creating a strong corner element, minimizing the blank wall on E Washington façade of the building, and utilizing a richer level of design details at the pedestrian level.
- **Site Amenities.** As noted in the Zoning Code, a minimum of 10 square-feet of open space per bedroom is required (700 square-feet). While an at-grade open space is reflected on the site plan along the south side of the building, limited details were provided related to the programming of this space or how it relates to the adjacent site, which sits higher than the subject property. As noted in the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, *"Project designs should provide attractive, safe, and creatively designed yards, courtyards, plaza, sitting areas, or other open spaces for building residents."* Staff requests the UDC's feedback, particularly as it pertains to the successful planting and programming for this space.