



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 134-150 S Blair Street & 506-518 E Wilson Street
Application Type: New Hotel and Multi-Family Residential Buildings in UMX Zoning
UDC is an Advisory Body
Legistar File ID #: [79707](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Brian Johnson, JCAP Real Estate | Brian Munson, Vandewalle & Associates

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the redevelopment of the parcels flanking the Hotel Ruby Marie on both the Wilson and Blair Street sides of the building. The proposed development consists of an eight-story, 178-unit multi-family residential building on S Blair Street and a six-story, 100-key hotel building on E Wilson Street.

The existing Hotel Ruby Marie will remain intact with limited site changes occurring, and for which separate review and approval will be required.

Staff notes that the project site is currently zoned Urban Mixed Use (UMX) and Planned Development, as part of the development proposal, the applicant team is proposing to rezone the site, in its entirety, to the UMX zoning district.

Project Schedule:

- The Landmark Commission received an Informational Presentation at their September 18, 2023, meeting. Please refer to Legistar ID #[79566](#) for more information.
- The UDC received an Informational Presentation at its September 20, 2023, meeting.
- The Landmarks Commission reviewed this item at their May 20, 2024, meeting, and granted a conditional approval. Additional details related to the Landmarks Commission action is provided below.
- The Plan Commission is scheduled to review this item at their June 10, 2024, meeting.
- The Common Council is scheduled to review the land division and rezoning portion of this development request at its June 18, 2024, meeting.

Approval Standards: 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 Zoning Code outlines design standards that are applicable to all new buildings in both the UMX and DC zoning districts. As a reference, the design related zoning standards outlined in the UMX and DC zone districts are included as an attachment to this report, including, but not limited to those related to building entrance orientation, façade articulation, height, fenestration, and materials. 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 majority of the project site is six stories/88 feet, which is applicable the development on the S Blair and E Wilson Street frontages. There is also a portion of the project site adjacent to the existing Germania Condominiums where three stories/46 feet is the permitted height. This area is located on the northwest portion of the site and is internal to the project site. As noted in the Zoning Code, buildings must meet both the maximum number of stories and the maximum height.

Staff notes that there is a provision in the Zoning Code that allows for the maximum number of stories to be exceeded in cases where applicants voluntarily enter into a contractual agreement to provide affordable housing, and provided the building remains at or below the maximum height (88 feet along Wilson and Blair and 46 feet internal to the site, as noted above). As noted in the Letter of Intent, the applicant is pursuing this option. As proposed, the proposed development **appears to be consistent** with the maximum height limitations.

Adopted Plans: The project site is located within the [Downtown Plan](#) planning area, within the First Settlement neighborhood. As such, development on the project site is subject to the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#). The Downtown Plan (the Plan) recommendations for development in this neighborhood generally speak to encouraging new development on the edges of the historic district, including Blair and Wilson Streets, and ensuring that new development is compatible with the historic context in scale and design.

Landmarks Commission Action: The project site includes properties located in both the First Settlement Historic District and Third Lake Ridge Historic District, which include those properties along S Blair Street associated with the residential building. As such, Landmarks Commission review and approval is required for that portion of the development, as well as an advisory recommendation on the accompanying lot combination and demolition. The Landmark Commission reviewed this proposal at their May 20, 2024, meeting and granted a conditional approval, including the following conditions of approval:

- The architectural canopy at the building’s front entry be redesigned to span the central bay of the building,
- The final door window, railing and fencing specifications be submitted and administratively approved by staff,
- The arched windows need to be in the arched opening on the front façade, and
- Information on mechanicals and utility locations on the building be provided and administratively approved by staff.

Please refer to Legistar ID #[79566](#) for more information, including the Historic Preservation Planner’s staff report.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff recommends that the UDC review the development proposal, provide feedback and make findings based on the aforementioned approval standards as it relates to the design considerations noted below.

- **Overall Building Design and Composition.** Staff requests the UDC’s findings related to the overall building design and composition for the revised design of both buildings. Regarding the hotel, the UDC’s Informational Presentation comments generally focused on the proportions of the building’s components, including a stronger finish at the top of the building and reconfiguration of the building components, including a stronger, more clear base course, and giving careful consideration to the reconstruction of the old façades and how they transition to the new – limiting the appearance of old buildings being glued to the new.

Regarding the residential building, staff references the aforementioned conditions of approval from the Landmarks Commission, who is an approving body for that structure because it is located in a historic

district. As noted above, the Landmarks Commission has reviewed multiple versions of this request for consistency with their applicable standards and has subsequently granted conditional approval as proposed. Staff notes, that while the UDC is an advisory body on this request, because this portion of the development is located in a historic district, the Landmarks Ordinance should take precedence. In addition, staff notes that further design modifications that result from the UDC (and/or Plan Commission) review may require additional review and approval by the Landmarks Commission.

- **Longviews and Blank Walls.** The project site is not only located at a prominent intersection, but also includes several visible internal facades, including those along the “living street” and those facing adjacent development. As part of the Commission’s Informational presentation comments, the treatment of the blank walls was a concern expressed by the Commission, in particular as it relates to the hotel building and the south elevation of the residential building adjacent to the Germania.

Staff specifically requests comments regarding the revised elevations for S Blair Street-facing elevation of the proposed hotel, which will remain highly visible adjacent (and above) the Hotel Ruby Marie. The current plans, which staff believes are improved, include a single column of windows and reveals within the material application, though the façade still includes relatively large solid wall fields in what will be a highly visible façade. Additionally, the elevation facing S Franklin Street understandably does not include windows as it may abut and ultimately be concealed by development of the vacant corner property, however consideration should be given to the interim condition as a highly visible end wall.

While the applicant has incorporated additional architectural detailing, as well as screening to mitigate blank wall expanses, staff requests UDC provide feedback and findings on the treatment of blank wall expanses.

- **HVAC Louvers and Air Exchange Grilles.** As shown on the elevation drawings there are air exchange grilles shown on the east and west elevations of the residential building, and however while commonly associated with hotel uses, HVAC related louvers and external vents/flues are not depicted on the hotel building elevations. Staff requests the UDC review and make findings related to HVAC louver and air exchange grilles, especially as it relates to the design details, and the integration of such with the surrounding architectural design and elements.
- **Building Materials.** The building material palette for the hotel building is comprised of multiple types of masonry (clay brick and cast stone), and metal panels (flat, corrugated, and perforated), whereas the building material palette for the residential building is primarily comprised of masonry, with metal panel accents. Staff requests the UDC’s feedback and findings as related to the proposed exterior materials.

Consideration should be given to the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, which generally speak to utilizing a high quality, durable materials to enrich the pedestrian environment through the use of scale, color, texture and detailing.

- **Architectural Accent Lighting.** As noted in the night renderings of the hotel building, architectural accent lighting is shown high on the building, however no information was provided related to this fixture, mounting details, or light levels. Additional information is needed in order to evaluate its compliance with MGO 29.36, and the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines. Staff recommends the UDC include a condition related to architectural accent lighting and details thereof as part of their formal action, including noting whether the lighting can be reviewed administratively.
- **Landscape Design.** As noted in the Downtown Design Guidelines, landscape designs should be focused on creating an “urban” landscape that not only is context sensitive but that also that softens hard edges. As such, consideration should be given to incorporating site amenities (i.e. planting beds, seat walls, street

furniture, public art, lighting, and landscape materials, etc.) in combination with plant species that are compatible with an urban environment and that provide year-round texture and color.

Of particular interest as part of the Commission's Informational Presentation was the landscape design of the "living street", especially as it related to creating a lush alleyway and providing a better understanding of the grade. The Commission requested more details and renderings.

Staff requests the Commission provide feedback and findings on the proposed landscape plan.

Summary of UDC Informational Presentation Comments

As a reference, the Commission's discussion and comments from the September 20, 2023, Informational Presentation are provided below.

The Commission had the following questions for staff and the development team:

- The hotel needs a cap, you have a strong base, middle and top. You did that with the residential part. It would strengthen the design a bit.
- A previous design did not have parking. You are proposing parking and I think that helps, but I'm confused as to what those two things are above the parking.
 - (Slide 11) One level is buried in the ground. So there are two levels of parking. The two end caps are residential units coming out in that area, to break up the expression and get some articulation there. We do have some space in the back with a 10-foot setback and landscaping, and the garage would be closed with façade treatments. So it is not an open garage façade back there. We would try to keep the façade adjacent to the Germania as detailed as possible.
 - The landscaping will include trees for buffering, and an increased area of green roof on the lower roof area to provide room for screening.
- Currently the hotel is pretty activated along the living street?
 - There are activated hotel spaces on both sides of the hotel. Conference rooms, food and drink, dog walking area, there are activated uses all around those spaces.
- Otherwise it's just an alley.
 - There are multiple uses on both sides of the hotel, as well as the residential building.
- Is this also where the fire trucks will be providing aerial apparatus access?
 - Yes.
- Talk about how both the residential building and the hotel would be served in terms of garbage, deliveries, etc.
 - All that would be interior to the buildings and wheeled out, the idea would be to push those as far plan north away from the neighborhood. We have to look at that in closer detail, but the goal is to push that away from the neighbor. The corner parcel is not part of this project; we agree that the facades are highly visible. We agree with staff's comments on those.
- The hotel façade design, is that blank wall on the end?
 - Yes, we have a situation where there is an end wall where there will be infill in the future. On the Hotel Ruby Marie side, that wall will be highly visible. This would be a permanent condition, further design will include further articulation, detail and interest. WE agree with staff's comments on that are looking at that.
- You have green indicated on the roofs, is that intended to be green roofs and what is the white area on the hotel?
 - It is a combination of approaches. Permeability with some stormwater management functions, those are place holders to indicate we want to try to do that. On the residential we want to do that on the shorter roofs for visibility for neighbors and people above. On the hotel are looking

at the perimeter with mechanicals in the center. We haven't gotten all the details on the mechanicals yet and that space, but anticipate that green roofs are necessary for stormwater.

- I agree with the comment about making sure you have some kind of a top on that hotel building.
- Is this the current streetscape?
 - Yes, that is the current rebuilt streetscape. We're hoping for streetery opportunities there. That is all right-of-way there.
- I think with the Monona waterfront development, this is a good location for a lot to happen. You could have some cool pedestrian things. To the building ends - Are you talking about public art on the ends? It's going to be a very activated space, whether it has articulation or not, it's still a blank wall. Once you start incorporating murals or public art, it could be historic, industrial stamps or something; a cool opportunity.
- The Railroad Street viewshed, across from that could be an intersection, if the building could accommodate another entrance. It could then exit out on to Railroad Street. The concerns are that crazy intersection, neighbors are worried about traffic on Franklin. Could this be a way to alleviate that? It's going to create issues during high traffic times of day.
 - We are looking at that as well as the other comments that you provided for Landmarks Commission. We do anticipate a TDMP will be needed here, we'll be working with Traffic Engineering to find a working solution. The Franklin Street entrance, we're proposing that as a one-way inbound, we didn't want folks to circulate all the way down Franklin and around. As far as the Railroad Street entrance that is something we'll look at. There are significant structural concerns with regard to the buildings on E Wilson, nonetheless we are looking at the feedback from Landmarks and looking to see what can be done. The architectural expression of the hotel will continue to evolve.
- Can you talk about what you heard from Landmarks on the Blair Street façade setbacks and articulation?
 - We were at Landmarks and have talked with Heather Bailey. We did hear comment about this being more of an H style building, pulling away from Blair for more vertical articulation. Staff also brought up a larger stepback above the townhomes, is there an opportunity to do some of that. We'll be looking at what can be done in the design context to address those.
- I've heard from neighbors about the railroad and industrial connections there from the 1870s. This is an area eligible for national register. Maybe some interesting history to spark creativity. Can you preserve, say for example, the Come Back In, or more?
 - That is something we're looking at, especially with the Come Back In, it has more of the architectural integrity left. The Essen Haus has very little integrity left, the 518 lower level has been modified multiple times. The biggest opportunity for integration and preservation is the façade of the Come Back In. That is some feedback that we received from Landmarks staff and Commission. So we will take that back and see what we can do to incorporate some nods to history.
- Take a look at the circulation issues, how that alley works for back of house stuff will be very important. The E Wilson facade, and then how does it work to get in and out of that space.
- This is a new building on a gateway site, and I would hate to see some thin strip of old buildings glued onto this. It's transformational and wouldn't do justice to the façade of Come Back In having that stuck on a new hotel building. Hotel Ruby Marie is intact and by all means that should be integrated as part of this development.
 - It is controlled by the developer, inside of it very little will change.
- It's not like you need a fire wall that cannot have penetrations, right?
 - Because of the COA for lot combinations these will have to remain distinct lots. We cannot attach a lot in a local historic district with a lot that is not. The lot lines for the Hotel Ruby Marie have to stay. There will be lot lines under the living street that need to stay, with easements.
- I am getting at the blank walls. There are no-build easements that can be done, to get some windows and openings above the hotel especially if you know you are not going to have someone that wants to

build there. I understand on the other side you probably want some infill at some point in the future. It would be a better integration of the two buildings if it wasn't a blank wall.

- With regard to comments on the design of the hotel, right now I see a 3-story base and 3-story top. If you're going to have a datum maybe it's a full one-story kind of a datum with a four story base and a three story top, there would be less stratification and would help it be a standalone building.
- Going back to the condos, the 10-foot setback between the condos and apartment building, did they have their own fence or wall?
 - There's a concrete wall along the entire run of the Germania, then the driveway and garages behind them. Our setback is behind the wall.
- Their driveway is on their side of the wall?
 - Correct.
- That will be an interesting green lush alleyway and understanding the grade differences there.
- Please bring plenty of details and pictures in that space.
 - We understand that is an important space to design correctly and appropriately.
- Even a bit more stepback on the townhouses would be very effective in giving them the presence of a real townhouse without just a big huge building with bay windows on the first floor. The more you can do to make it look like a real townhouse, and then something stepped back above, it would really help the pedestrian experience.

**ATTACHMENT:
28.071 (3) DESIGN STANDARDS FROM ZONING CODE**

(3) Design Standards.

The following standards are applicable to all new buildings and additions, within any ten- (10) year period, exceeding fifty percent (50%) of existing building's floor area for non-residential buildings, mixed-use buildings, lodging houses, and residential buildings with 8 or more dwelling units.

(a) Parking.

1. Parking shall be located in parking structures, underground, or in surface parking lots behind principal buildings. Parking structures shall be designed with liner buildings or with ground floor office or retail uses along all street-facing facades.
2. For corner lots or through lots, rear yard surface parking areas abutting any street frontage are limited to fifty percent (50%) of that frontage, and shall be located a minimum of ten (10) feet from the street property line.
3. Parking garage openings visible from the sidewalk shall have a clear maximum height of sixteen (16) feet and a maximum width of twenty-two (22) feet. Garage doors or gates shall be located a minimum of ten (10) feet from the front property line. Doors to freight loading bays are exempt from this requirement.
4. No doors or building openings providing motor vehicle access to structured parking or loading facilities shall face State Street, King Street, or the Capitol Square.

(b) Entrance Orientation.

1. Primary building entrances on all new buildings shall be oriented to the primary abutting public street and have a functional door.
2. Additional secondary entrances may be oriented to a secondary street or parking area.
3. Entries shall be clearly visible and identifiable from the street, and delineated with elements such as roof overhangs, recessed entries, landscaping, or similar design features.
4. Within ten (10) feet of a block corner, the facade may be set back to form a corner entry.

(c) Facade Articulation.

1. The facades of new buildings more than forty (40) feet in width shall be divided into smaller vertical intervals through techniques including but not limited to the following:
 - a. Facade modulation, step backs, or extending forward of a portion of the facade.
 - b. Vertical divisions using different textures, materials, or colors of materials.
 - c. Division into multiple storefronts, with separate display windows and entrances.
 - d. Variation in roof lines to reinforce the modulation or vertical intervals.
 - e. Arcades, awnings, window bays, arched windows, and balconies to reinforce the vertical intervals.

(d) Story Heights and Treatment.

1. For all buildings, the maximum ground story height is eighteen (18) feet, measured from the sidewalk to the second story floor. An atrium that exceeds eighteen (18) feet will be considered more than one (1) story.
2. Upper stories shall not exceed fourteen (14) feet floor to floor.
3. For all buildings, the minimum ground story height is twelve (12) feet, measured from the sidewalk to the second story floor.

4. For non-residential uses, the average ground story floor elevation shall not be lower than the front sidewalk elevation nor higher than eighteen (18) inches above the sidewalk elevation.
5. For ground-story residential uses, landscaping, steps, porches, grade changes, and low ornamental fences or walls or similar treatments shall be located between the sidewalk and the front door to create a private yard area.

(e) Door and Window Openings.

1. For street-facing facades with ground story non-residential uses, the ground story door and window openings shall comprise a minimum of fifty percent (50%) of the facade area.
2. For street-facing facades with ground story residential uses, ground story openings shall comprise a minimum of fifteen percent (15%) of the facade area.
3. For all buildings, upper story openings shall comprise a minimum of fifteen percent (15%) of the facade area per story.
4. Garage doors and opaque service doors shall not count toward the above requirements.
5. Glass on all windows and doors shall be clear or slightly tinted, allowing views into and out of the interior. Spandrel glass may be used on service areas on the building.

(f) Building Materials.

1. Buildings shall be constructed of durable, high-quality materials. Table 28 E-1 below lists allowable building materials.
2. All building facades visible from a public street or public walkway shall use materials and design features similar to or complementary to those of the front facade.