



**Agenda Item #:** 5

**Project Title:** 131 W. Wilson Street - New Mixed-Use Building in UMX Zoning. 4th Ald. Dist.

**Legistar File ID #:** 73562

**Members Present:** Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Lois Braun-Oddo, Jessica Klehr, Christian Harper, Russell Knudson, and Rafeeq Asad

**Prepared By:** Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

## Summary

At its meeting of March 29, 2023, the Urban Design Commission **REFERRED** consideration of a new mixed-use building located at 131 W Wilson Street. Registered and speaking in support was Kirk Keller. Registered in support and available to answer questions were Johnathan Lilley, Jake Bunz, Garret Perry, Design Studio, Etc., and Clay Michek.

Keller presented the updated proposal, noting new landscape planter in front of the coffee shop and raised porches along the W Wilson Street side, with the John Nolen Drive side creating a different image with the second floor rooftop pool area. They have incorporated the UDC's previous comments (#7-12) regarding landscape items. There are no significant changes as you go up the building. The street level is improved with veneer as a unified form, carved in with the wood form that opens up to the end of the building. They are maintaining the intent of two different colors of glass with the idea of breaking up the seventy-foot wide mass of the building with almost no perceptible difference from the inside. The louvers are shown as disappearing and blending in with the colors and face of the building and have all been unified with window arrangements and worked into the overall glazing system. There is a portion of condensers that will go above the Capital Preservation Limit by about three-feet. He indicated that no light fixtures will be seen as they are proposing LED strips for a soft glow.

The Commission discussed the following:

- The staff memo notes the items that we need to confirm were handled per our request and at the direction of the Plan Commission:
  - The finish on the underside of the balconies;
  - Removing the random mullions;
  - The metal panel inset at the W Wilson elevation;
  - The darker glass feature;
  - HVAC louvers;
  - A number of landscape updates;
  - The big 'M' logo proportion details; and
  - Green roof tray thicknesses.

With that are there any questions or requests for clarifications from the Commission on any of those on the list of eight?

- Also, included is the staff interpretation of those items for your information as well. And then there are a couple of new things that we did not see before which are the modifications to the base along John Nolen Drive and accent lighting that staff would like us to address as well.
- The eight items; were all these items given to the applicant beforehand?

- Yes.
- So, with the M it is still there.
- Our comments had to do with the design of it and not its existence. The proportion and the detailing of it.
- But it's essentially a logo, that's signage that would have to come back at some point. So it should just go away period and come back as part of a signage package.
  - (Secretary) Essentially yes. It's best to think of these as two separate items: Items 1-6 are yes/no, did they address the Commission's conditions? Ultimately those conditions are also conditions the Plan Commission adopted that cannot be modified or changed. Items 7-8, while part of the Plan Commission's conditions of approval, those were items where the Commission worded their recommendation as "should consider or further study" so they aren't yes or no items. If you want to see further refinements or conditions to get to final approval, you need to incorporate those into a final approval motion.
  - (Secretary) With regard to the M, it is considered a branding logo and would be required to come back for further sign review. Knowing how the Commission feels today would be helpful for the applicant in putting together a signage package.
- The big one is the underside of the balconies. That's a no-go as far as giving a pass for unfinished concrete. They need to be done well, this is a nice looking building, I can appreciate the applicant's comments about the cost, but that's not really our problem. The trade-off of having a finished bottom and having a wood or faux wood finish to match what is on the upper level of the building is really the way to go. I don't think scrapping such a powerful visual that everyone will see driving and walking by, clearly the Plan Commission felt the same way. The neighborhood clearly made it one of the first things they commented on, it's universal we feel that it needs to be finished on the underside of those balconies.
- The elements involving metal parts of the façade and mullions, I'll leave to the architects. The changes that seemed apparent in the drawings seemed okay to me, I'm fine with the different colors of glazing.
- The landscaping issues, I will address. Shane strongly advocated for a deeper green roof system that would support more than sedum trays. While they have declined to do that, I don't think we should not appreciate the fact that there is green roof and solar panels up there. It's not as extensive as some of us would like but still a positive development up there.
- The ground level that I commented on the first go round seemed to have been addressed. I will point out that you should still be a little more definitive about what you're specifying for this, you're still leaving straight species. Russian Sage straight species comes in everything from 18-inch tall dwarf varieties to 3-foot tall larger varieties, you would want the latter for this application; you need to say that on the plan. You switched out the climbing vines on the panels on the west and south side. I like the selection better than the trumpet vines that you had but hope you're aware that Virginia creeper will creep off those support panels and onto the masonry around it, unless you have someone out there reigning that in several times a year, so keep that in mind. It's a nice looking building.
- I hope the lighting issues can be worked out, I have the same concerns about it in its current state and whether it is abiding by the guidelines to not compete with the Capitol. Illuminated buildings, as attractive as they may be, this is an important view of the Madison skyline and it really needs to be paid attention to.
- The reference to those white vertical stripes that run the length of the building, what the lighting of those is, as well as just the physical structure of it, how that plays into the overall look of the building is something that definitely caught my eye; it looks like a racing stripes.
- To clarify a few things from the applicant; is it fair to assume that the elevations are accurate in terms of your plans for the different types of metal panel? There's a rendering of the pool deck area that appears to randomize the metal panel a little bit.
  - The elevations are correct. The way the light hits it in a computer rendering, what you're seeing would be overridden by the accurate information on the elevations.
- Is that what's going to happen in real life?
  - No, I think it's the computer. The subtle changes in color has proved challenging with the computer.

- I remember when this first came for Informational. One of the ideas that was exciting to the design team was to not have a simple rectangular form building. The balconies were a key part of breaking out of this rectangular form building and those extensions were giving a nuanced form of the building. The look of the balconies becomes a key element of this design so cheapening the material appearance of it is a bad idea.
- Looking at the accent glass, what is the real intention; there seems to be some misalignment in the architectural expression of the fully glazed building portion. I would ask the applicant what percentage of energy are those panels providing back compared to the cooling loads of that south facing glass façade? Are the neighbors aware between the intention of solar panels on the roof and a glass south facing façade? The accent glass does not do a whole lot; I'd advocate for something solid or opaque. I like the metal panel and like the random patterning. The darker tone glass to me doesn't do much from a design and performance perspective.
- I do like this building. I do have a question about the balconies; is the concrete framed, does the edge of the balcony have an aluminum expression or is it concrete?
  - Right now I'm showing there is matching metal edging there, that's what we're trying to do to balance between the comments we've received and the desire of the neighborhood. You are seeing more metal edge banding there, the wood is brought back in with the upper top floors, but it is not currently shown under the balconies.
- You're saying the individual balconies do not have the wood, it's just at the top two expressions at the very top?
  - Correct.
- In my opinion the wood underside of the balcony is a huge issue. We just saw a project last week with all concrete underneath, when you finish the underside they add bulk and you get unintended consequences of a more chunky, less refined balcony. I don't know what that will look like in 15 years either. The concrete is a natural material, it goes well with the aluminum, that's my opinion. I do like that you framed it, it adds a level of sophistication or a detail that makes it look nice and helps receive the guardrails better. So, that's my opinion.
- Perhaps a stain or paint, in an earth tone finish, that from a distance could, because of its texture, could still achieve the warmth we were looking for.
  - I agree.
- The vertical light elements, in the daytime view, what is that, a white metal surround? In the daytime it looks really foreign to the building, and it would go better with the other expressions if it was the same color as the horizontal elements at the top of the building, that edge kind of folded down. If it is lit up at night, at least during the day it wouldn't look so foreign to the other expressions of the building.
  - I will speak on behalf of the developer. I have no problem with a recommendation to come back with a different color that is more matching the building. What we are trying to do is to break-up that completely glass mass facing the lake. We have been talking about the different colored glass. If you look at Nolen Shores down the street they did it with green metal panels. We want something that stands the test of time though. Though it looks great and is a good looking project, we are looking for some way to take these and putting the condition in there that matches in with the building. Fine, can do.
- Especially if we don't know if that M is going to get approved. They will look kind of floating. The image on the front doesn't have the M, and in the nighttime vision it kind of pops because of it being lit, but in the daytime they stand alone and don't really seem to have a purpose.
  - Can take that as a condition. We are trying to work on the base of the building so it doesn't appear so much as you set a plinth for the building and you put a glass box on it; we are trying to make a statement of something that runs vertical. You see the grey in this picture. On the John Nolen side, the exact tone of the concrete is warmer than the vertical. If we worked with those two materials, then there starts to be a blend.
- Those light fixtures are in a cabinet. They are a little metal box. There's no detail of which side of the strip they are on, if they reflect back into the glass, there's just no detail. It would help to know how that light fixture is actually going to illuminate without showing the light source.
- I would prefer not to see the light source, as kind of like a neon stretch, it would be more successful if it glowed from within like a channel. Subtle is better.

- We have not touched on the base of the building where there is a slightly different design and some lighting. Staff wanted that addressed in some way that acknowledged whether or not it was successful and acceptable.
- I think what we're looking at now looks exactly like what the applicant said they were trying not to do: a plinth with a glass block on top. There's a disconnect between the two elements. I don't know how to prevent that.
- Because the Plan Commission has approved it, the question is: is this design on the base or plinth acceptable in contrast to what was shown to us before? I know we don't have that image, but it had similar rectangular openings and a less wood panel look.
- I don't think it's the wood that is doing it. The wood helps bring it together.
- I will comment on these balconies, I don't disagree with Lois but I don't think that would do enough to do what we're trying to accomplish. I worry about a paint or stain not shown, what will it look like, what color would it be, how intense will it be? You could go from bad to worse in a heartbeat. Without seeing that this late, I don't know if that's a suggestion we should make. I do agree that you don't want these balconies to be as big as the top two floors, you want to keep a thinner profile. Even the ones we see existing around downtown that are concrete slabs, there's a rough under finish element to it, it's something that I don't mind, but that I think the majority of people don't like. I don't know that covering it in a wood veneer is the answer, but something should happen to the underside that makes it complement what's going on with the building a little bit more. Maybe a true frame that wraps around the bottom?
- I despise the M, it's so foreign from everything happening on the building, whether it's the color or the fact that it looks stretched. Abandon that and come up with something different.
- I don't have a problem with the lighting as was explained. I agree with the comment about the white pieces; that should be something that should be more concealed and that has a more subtle light LED low glow. I think of the project that we just did, a restaurant or a gas station or something that had LED around the top that had the fake roof on it, the way they were doing that was like a subtle glow to add some character or interest in the night time hours. That could be something that is beneficial here. To see a light source would take away from the design. There are some good examples on East Washington Avenue that do some things with color. On something like this you would want it concealed and more of a glow than a light.
- Overall a decent project.
- I think it is fair to request additional information on the treatment of the underside of the balconies.
- We haven't touched on the wall pack notes from the Plan Commission. It seems pretty black and white, their statement is that this will have to go back to the Plan Commission if there are louvers facing the street. This is a major design impact, is it worth discussing if it's so black and white?
  - (Secretary) Yes, you're right. Any wall packs on either the John Nolen Drive or W Wilson side are heading back to the Plan Commission for certain. The UDC does not have the authority to modify Plan Commission conditions. The one thing worth discussing is whether or not we've seen enough in terms of detail to have confidence that these wall packs and louvers are certainly integrated into the architectural design of the building. That is something that the commission should discuss this evening. That was part of the conditions of approval of the Plan Commission and recommendation of the UDC. It is my understanding that all louvers have been located on the north and south elevations, which are not street facing elevations.
- That makes sense, thank you. The integration is there, I'm not sure what more could be done.

A motion was made by Knudson, for referral to see this project again. The motion includes:

- See the balconies become consistent with the top floor overhangs.
- The south (east) façade elevations where the M logo is located that there is some refinement and maybe less depth perhaps on the vertical mullions.
- The project team consider instead of darker tone glass as a way to break-up that glass façade on the lake side to instead look at replicating some of the opaque wall design moves that are used in other parts of the building. We are satisfied with the integration of the wall packs.
- There might have been some landscaping comments.

- I agree that I like the deeper tray roof, but my motion does not require it.
- I welcome friendly amendments on any other landscape comments.
- I agree, that we would like to see it back to understand the detail on the accent lighting.

Discussion on the motion:

- I was going to ask some questions, I do not agree with some of the points and the way they were captured. Please restate the motion. There is a lot going on there.
- (Secretary) The motion is for referral with the following comments needing to be addressed:  
The underside of the balconies shall be finished with a similar treatment or materials as the upper level balconies (faux wood). Would paint or stain be acceptable?  
Refine the M logo and vertical mullions to have less depth. Is that captured correctly?
  - Yes.
- The project team shall consider instead of the darker glass to break-up the façade on the lake side of the building look at replicating the opaque wall design moves that are used on other parts of the building. Can we clarify the “design moves?”
  - The use of metal panel in-lieu of...I wouldn’t prescribe how much or where, I’m suggesting that it could be done with an opaque metal panel.
- That is what they are showing on W Wilson, correct? They have this vertical metal panel versus the different glazing. Is that what you are referring to?
  - I am thinking more of the longer side elevations. I am thinking of the use of...
- You are thinking about the north and south elevations.
  - Yes.
- The Commission is satisfied with the integration of the wall packs.
- As well as the landscape comments being addressed. The plant schedule should be updated to specify specific species on the plant schedule. Should that be included?
  - Yes.
- The applicant shall provide mounting and fixture details of the proposed vertical and horizontal light cabinets that show how the fixtures are integrated into the architecture and how light is emitted. A subtle glow is preferred.
- Yes, I agree.
- Clarification on a couple of those before we go for a second: with regard to the underside of the balconies, there was also concern that it would get too thick with furring with a metal panel that looked like wood. Could it be less prescriptive to say the underside of the balcony be treated with a finish that is compatible with the upper two floors? And let them come back with something and show us what it looks like.
- I used the word consistent, but compatible is more what I was intending, my motion does not require that it matches the exact material. If that’s helpful.
- The last clarification, with regard to the lighting, particularly where fixtures L-3 and L-4 are involved, those are the ones that are illuminating the very upper overhang and the fins on the front and back.
- Any friendly amendment before we look for a second on the motion?
- It might be easier to make a motion for referral and have them address the conditions in a way they think is appropriate without prescribing how the façade is broken up. We don’t want to get into the habit of designing for them. They are more than capable of designing. If we have a concern with the lights; don’t tell them how to do it, give them our concerns and they can address them as they see fit. The motion is to address these comments and come back. I don’t think we need to be specific, unless its yes or no type things like the landscape.
- I was going to say the exact same thing. We don’t want to say they have to have panels if they want views. I’d like the architect to come back with what they think is a good solution.

- Basically the motion is to refer. There are a number of conditions that we want to see coming back so that when they come back, he will say this is where the issues were and here is what we are offering. These will also define those things that we are ok with so the design team does not need to worry about them anymore.
- I would echo those comments, I was afraid we were getting into an area where there's so many numbered items presented to us, did they meet these concerns or not? While I largely agree with most of the motion I definitely have issues with the switching from the two color glazed windows and going back to something completely different, it seems like we're one step beyond that. Issues of solar gain notwithstanding, that seems like we're going backwards to discuss something that should have been an earlier discussion. I don't want to get into a position where I agree with almost all of this but not certain parts. If we are doing a general referral, let them address what we said, but clearly even amongst our group we have differences of opinion on what I just mentioned and what needs to happen with these balconies here. If we could package this into something that is easier for us to digest in going forward, that would be a good thing.
- We're definitely just going to stick with the eight items. We are not going to look at other parts of the building that the Plan Commission hasn't authorized us to.
- (Secretary) To clarify, the comments on the darker tone glass was limited only to the east elevation. Reassessing glass on the whole building is not keeping in line with our review purview as it sits today.
- I thought the motion was for the street facing elevation.
- With regard to the motion, what I'm seeing is basically something they don't have to worry about any more, removing of the random mullions, the metal panel inset at W Wilson Street, the HVAC louvers, the green roof and modifications to the building base at John Nolen.
- What we want to see back is detail on the underside of the balconies, we want to make sure we understand the darker glass feature in the middle is on the street sides of the building, maybe a better photo of those two pieces of glass and what they would look like from both sides, landscape updates, elimination of the M logo and the accent lighting L-3 and L-4. Is that what you have Secretary?
- (Secretary) Yes, but to clarify the motion was specifically related to the glass on the north and south elevations.
- To clarify I am only really focused on the east elevation and the glass there, but I will say that I think we want some consistency applied to the opposite side of the building. If we develop that design of the east further, there may be considerations to be consistent on the west. Other than the comment on the wall packs, I don't think I have any particular comments or motions related to the north and south elevations.
- Just want to address four of the eight things identified.

## Action

On a motion by Knudson, seconded by Asad, the Urban Design Commission **REFERRED** consideration of this item. The motion was passed on a unanimous vote of (5-0). The motion provided for address of the following:

- The underside of the balconies shall be treated with a finish that is compatible with the balconies on the upper two floors.
- Refine the vertical mullions to have less depth and eliminate the M logo.
- The project team shall consider instead of the darker glass to break-up the façade on the lake side of the building, look at replicating the opaque wall design moves that are used on other parts of the building (i.e. use a similar application of metal panel to what is used on the longer side elevations).
- The applicant shall provide mounting and fixture details of the proposed vertical light cabinets that show how the fixture is integrated into the architecture and how light is emitted from the cabinet. A subtle glow is preferred, particularly where fixtures L-3 and L-4 are shown.
- The plant schedule shall be updated to specify specific species.
- The Commission is satisfied with the integration of the wall packs.