

PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

May 28, 2025

PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION



Project Address: 3535-3553 University Avenue and 733-737 N Meadow Lane

Application Type: New Mixed-Use Building in Urban Design District 6
UDC is an Approving Body

Legistar File ID #: [86816](#)

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Randy Christianson, Walter Wayne Development | Patrick Terry, JLA Architects + Planners

Project Description: The applicant is proposing a six-story building containing approximately 4,200 square-feet of first floor commercial space, 146 residential units and two levels of underground parking.

Project Schedule:

- The UDC received an Informational Presentation on February 5, 2025.
- The Plan Commission is scheduled to review this application (rezoning, conditional use) at their June 9, 2025, meeting.
- The Common Council is scheduled to review this application (rezoning) at their June 17, 2025, meeting.

Project History: In July 2024, the UDC reviewed and subsequently approved a development proposal for a smaller five-story mixed-use building on the project site (Legistar File ID [83067](#)). At that time the project site only consisted of the parcels along University Avenue. The UDC's Final Approval included the following conditions and finding:

- The landscape plan, including the fencing and retaining wall shall continue to be reviewed and approved administratively. The landscape plan shall be updated to address the Commission's comments, including those that spoke to accurately showing the proposed plantings, reflecting the use of hardwood bark mulch, as well as adding plantings that are more substantial and vertical and that provide multi-seasonal interest, especially along the south side of the building. Consideration could be given to shifting the fence to the north to provide plantings on the neighborhood side of the fence.
- The stone base course material shall be changed to be less rustic, more smooth stone material, which can be reviewed administratively.
- The UDC finds that the building is generally consistent with the UDD 6 guidelines and requirements, including those that speak to compatibility with surroundings and the basic materials being harmonious with surroundings, with the exception of the rustic stone.

Approval Standards: The UDC is an **approving body** on this request. The site is located in Urban Design District 6 ("UDD 6"), which requires that the Urban Design Commission review the proposed project using the design standards and guidelines for that district in [MGO Section 33.24](#)(13).

Zoning Related Requirements: While the project site is currently under two zoning districts, including Commercial Corridor – Transitional (CC-T) along University Avenue and Traditional Residential – Consistent 1 (TR-C1), along N Meadow Lane, the applicant will be seeking to rezone the project site to CC-T in its entirety. Within the mixed-

use and commercial zoning districts there are general provisions related to building and site design that are intended to foster high-quality building and site design. Such standards are in [Section 28.060](#), and include requirements that speak to building and entrance orientation, façade articulation, door and window openings, and building materials, etc. Ultimately, the Zoning Administrator will determine compliance with all applicable Zoning requirements.

Staff notes that in the CC-T zoning district, five stories in height is allowed. Where the CC-T district abuts a residential zoning district, along the side and rear yards, height transitions are required. The intent of the height transition is to encourage a more gradual transition between developments with differing levels of intensity. As it relates to the project site, a height transition is required along the southern property lines, that are adjacent to residential development along N Meadow Lane and Bruce court. As indicated in the application materials, the required transition cannot be met. As such a waiver may be sought through conditional use approval. The review and approval of such requests is the purview of the Plan Commission.

Design-Related Adopted Plan Recommendations: The City's [Comprehensive Plan](#) (amended 2023) recommends "Community Mixed Use" development for the subject property, which generally recommends two to six story buildings and a density up to 130 dwelling units per acre. Generally, the recommendation specifies that development and design within CMU areas should enhance walkability, maintain positive building orientation to the street, be transit-oriented, and well connected to adjacent development.

The project site is also located in older the [Hoyt Park Area Joint Neighborhood Plan](#) (2014) study area. As noted in this plan, the project site is designated as Focus Area E.1 and E.2, University Avenue Commercial. Development in this area is recommended to maintain the commercial focus along the University Avenue frontage, as well as at the corner of N Meadow Lane with a variety of neighborhood commercial, retail, professional services, and offices. Building heights are recommended to be one to four stories.

The plan also outlines additional recommendations that speak to enhancing and expanding the buffers between mixed use and single-family development and encouraging pedestrian access from Bruce Street.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff recommends that the UDC provide feedback and make findings on the development proposal based on the aforementioned standards, including as it relates to the design-related items noted below.

- **Building Design and Composition.** The project is located within the University Avenue corridor in an area that is comprised of a mix of residential and commercial uses, and that is also transitioning to a higher level of intensity, which is reflected in the more recent development in proximity to the project site. In addition, the project is also a corner location which quickly transitions to lower intensity residential development.

UDD 6 Building Design requirements and guidelines generally speak to designing with a sensitivity to context, avoiding large unbroken wall expanses, and designing with a consistent level of design across all elevations. Staff notes that while UDD 6 does not provide more prescriptive standards related to setback, height, or bulk requirements, as a guideline, UDD 6 does recommend that *"The architecture of new infill buildings, additions to existing buildings and major exterior remodelings should be compatible with but not necessarily similar to that of existing adjacent buildings."*

Staff requests the UDC's feedback and findings on the following design considerations as it relates to the UDD 6 guidelines and requirements:

- Building orientation, especially as it relates to creating a strong corner presence (i.e., placement of mass and bulk, and positive orientation to the street/corner),
- Building design, creating one cohesive architectural expression, including as it relates to the overall integration and design of the upper stories and roof terrace area that present different design characteristics and detailing than those present elsewhere on the building (i.e., creating positive termination at the top of the building, fenestration patterns, general ornamentation and detailing, including use of eyebrows, etc.),
- Building mass and scale, breaking down the long north/south elevations with vertical/horizontal articulation,
- Minimizing blank walls, especially along the south elevation, as well as void spaces along the street at garage door locations (i.e., maintaining high level of transparency),
- Incorporating the same level of design and detailing across all elevations, including as it relates the east elevation which is the only elevation lacking the faux wood composite vertical siding material, and the balcony design/type (hanging vs. recessed), and
- Providing a higher level of detail at the pedestrian level, including active uses, architectural detailing and articulation in materials, minimizing void spaces (i.e., transparency in the garage doors), etc.

For reference, and in summary, the Commission's Informational Presentation comments generally centered around the building length along University Avenue and the street level design. The Commission encouraged the applicant to explore ways to break-up street-level façade to create the appearance of multiple buildings, including incorporating a more dramatic changes at the first-floor level, creating more unique detailing of the storefronts, utilizing different materials, incorporating recesses, plantings, etc.

- **Building Materials.** As reflected in the materials board, the exterior material schedule is primarily comprised of composite siding and masonry, both thin-set brick and manufactured stone materials with metal and stone accents. UDD 6 Building Design requirements, *"Exterior building materials shall be low maintenance and harmonious with those used on other buildings in the area."*

As noted by the UDC in their previous Final Approval conditions, the stone base course material shall be changed to be less rustic, more smooth stone material.

Staff requests UDC's feedback and findings on the overall material palette, including as it relates to the UDC's previous condition of approval.

- **Landscape.** UDD 6 Landscaping guidelines and requirements generally speak to designing landscaping that is both *"...functional and decorative, including framing views, screening unattractive features and views along the roadway, screening different uses from each other, and complementing the architecture of the building."*

Staff notes that there are two fence types noted on the Annotated Site Plan; a four-foot vinyl coated chain-link fence which encloses the dog run area, and a six-foot fence that runs along most of the southern property line, stopping just short of the retaining wall ends on both the eastern- and western-most sides of the site. A detail was not provided for the six-foot fence, nor the retaining walls. In addition, it is unclear where the fence sits relative to the retaining wall (i.e., on top or behind). UDD 6 guidelines do speak to

fences insofar as discouraging metallic fences when visible from roadways and noting that chain-link should be vinyl-coated in a color harmonious with the building exterior.

For reference, and in summary, the Commission's Informational Presentation comments noted that consideration should be given to the programming and design of the open space, as well as the landscape and design at the street level along University Avenue.

Staff requests the UDC's feedback and findings related to landscape plan and plant schedule, including as it relates to providing year-round screening and buffers to adjacent properties, providing an enhanced pedestrian environment along University Avenue, including the proposed benches and raised planters, and as it relates to the proposed fence and wall details.

- **Lighting.** Staff note that a lighting plan and fixture cutsheets were submitted for light levels along the ground floor street frontages. As shown, these light levels appear to be consistent with UDD 6 guidelines and requirements related to lighting, including those that generally speak to maintaining adequate, but not excessive light levels and fixtures relating to function.

Staff note that lighting information **was not** provided for the rooftop amenity space, which will likely be required to meet building code safety requirements for pools, individual balconies, along the back of the building or in the dog run area, nor architectural lighting or lighting high on the building. Staff requests the UDC address lighting in their formal action, noting whether the future review of such can be completed administratively.

Staff also note that while the site lighting appears to be compliant with UDD 6 guidelines and requirements, the Building Inspection Division will review the proposed lighting for compliance with MGO 29.36, "Outdoor Lighting", will occur as part of the Site Plan Review process.

Summary of UDC Informational Presentation Comments and Discussion

As a reference, a summary of the Commission's discussion and comments from the February 5, 2025, Informational Presentation are provided below:

The Commission inquired about the fenestration along University Avenue, and what sort of glazing will be used. The applicant noted there is parking behind some of that area, that it could be opaque or window graphics, and is still being explored. The Commission inquired about whether that is ventilated and conditioned or open. The applicant noted that it would be ventilated and conditioned and that there would be a speed door. The applicant did note there is now another entrance off Meadow Lane for vehicles.

The Commission noted concern for how long the building is along University Avenue and inquired about ways to break it up at the street level. The applicant noted that they have been looking at recessing portions of the building to create articulation without impacting the units. The Commission noted that maybe it is more of a dramatic change at the first-floor level – consideration should be given to creating unique detailing of the different storefronts or utilizing different materials.

The Commission inquired about utilizing similar rooftop rhythms on the west end of the building. The applicant responded it is not possible given exiting distances and height restrictions.

The Commission inquired about concerns with the garage door being centered at the median, and how those discussions have played out with Traffic Engineering. The applicant has had many conversations with Traffic, and noted plans for a timed left turn lane into the building off University Avenue.

The Commission inquired about the south yard being a no man's land, and the potential for nefarious things happening back there. The applicant noted they are working on developing that yard space more.

The Commission inquired about bringing in some of those indents towards the street along University Avenue, and to make storefronts appear different than they currently do through the material palette. The Commission further noted the quality of the University Avenue streetscape with such a narrow planting space and a lot of building close to the sidewalk. A few more feet of breathing room would benefit the experience of the building. The applicant noted that the utilities preclude the building moving further back.

The Commission commented that the architecture and materials are nice, but that the proximity and scale of the building for such a long stretch creates a harsh pedestrian experience. Maybe it's the heightened space between the three-building concept, maybe there is a way to accommodate that down at the street.

The Commission commented that bike parking should also be located on the west end, because the building is so long. The building stepbacks toward the south create an interesting massing of the building; the additional height helps break down the long mass of it as well. The Commission appreciated the applicant respecting the neighborhood to the south, but noted opportunities for vegetation, cascading draped over the edges could be a beautiful and interesting amenity.