



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 404-412 West Washington Avenue and 8 North Broom Street
Application Type: Informational Presentation
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Reviewed By: Jay Wendt, Principal Planner

The following project is before the Urban Design Commission (UDC) for an informational presentation. **As proposed, the Zoning Code does not include requirements that this proposal obtain a formal advisory recommendation from UDC, though it could be referred there. Due to the importance of design on this request, the Planning Division recommends that the UDC makes specific findings for future Plan Commission consideration.**

Based on the information provided, a formal approval request would require approval of six demolition permits, a zoning map amendment, and multiple conditional uses. This includes a conditional use to exceed the Downtown Height Limit.

The Conditional Use approval standards state that the City Plan Commission shall not approve a conditional use without due consideration of the recommendations in the City of Madison Comprehensive Plan and any applicable, neighborhood, neighborhood development, or special area plan... Additionally, Conditional Use Standard 9 states, in part:

When applying the above standards to any new construction of a building or an addition to an existing building the Plan Commission shall find that the project creates an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with the existing or intended character of the area and the statement of purpose for the zoning district. In order to find that this standard is met, the Plan Commission may require the applicant to submit plans to the Urban Design Commission for comment and recommendation.

As currently presented, the applicant would be requesting to exceed the maximum four story height limit. Section 28.0712(b) identifies the subject site within an area where two additional stories above the maximum building height can be approved with conditional use approval. The conditional use standards for additional height state:

When applying the above standards to an application for height in excess of that allowed by Section 28.071(2)(a) Downtown Height Map for a development located within the Additional Height Areas identified in Section 28.071(2)(b), the Plan Commission shall consider the recommendations in adopted plans, and no application for excess height shall be granted by the Plan Commission unless it finds that all of the following conditions are present:

- a. The excess height is compatible with the existing or planned (if the recommendations in the Downtown Plan call for changes) character of the surrounding area, including but not limited to the scale, mass, rhythm, and setbacks of buildings and relationships to street frontages and public spaces.
- b. The excess height allows for a demonstrated higher quality building than could be achieved without the additional stories.

- c. The scale, massing and design of new buildings complement and positively contribute to the setting of any landmark buildings within or adjacent to the projects and create a pleasing visual relationship with them.
- d. For projects proposed in priority viewsheds and other views and vistas identified on the Views and Vistas Map in the City of Madison Downtown Plan, there are no negative impacts on the viewshed as demonstrated by viewshed studies prepared by the applicant.

The Downtown Plan has several recommendations for the 400 and 500 blocks of West Washington Avenue. A copy of the defined objectives and recommendations for West Washington Avenue is attached. The Plan notes that these blocks have large terraces and consistent front yard setbacks that provide a sense of “civic open space.” The design of new developments are recommended to engage the street and help maintain an active, pedestrian-scale environment through façade articulation and provision of multiple front entrances to larger buildings with porches and balconies, and other street-oriented features. The full plan is available online at: http://www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/planning/documents/Downtown_Plan.pdf

The Downtown Plan also recommends buildings up to four stories along both sides of West Washington Avenue, with the potential for two additional stories if there is a noticeable stepback. Appendix C of that plan provides further recommendations on the plan’s criteria for additional height. The plan specifically recommends:

Where additional stories are available, it is not intended that they be earned merely by complying with standards and criteria that would be required and expected in any case, such as underlying zoning regulations, good design, or sensitivity to an adjacent historic landmark. The intent is not simply to allow a taller building and additional stories should not be considered “by right” heights. Rather additional stories are to be used as a tool to encourage and reward buildings of truly exceptional design that respond to the specific context of their location and accomplish specific objectives defined for the area.

The Planning Division requests the UDC provides specific feedback on the following design-related issues:

- **Exposed Lower Level.** The Planning Division has concerns about lower parking levels that extend above grade and how that impacts any building’s relationship to the sidewalk. Staff requests the applicant clarify the relationship between the building, any exposed parking levels, and grade. Plans show the lower parking level extends closer to the sidewalk than the balance of the building (a five foot setback) on both West Washington Avenue and North Broom Street. Clarification is sought as to whether this will be completely below grade, as preferred, or if that the planting walls, steps, or other features are planned within the front setbacks to hide a larger exposure. From a precedent standpoint, the five-story building approved at 425 West Washington Avenue (“Washington Plaza”) with additional stories did not include an exposed lower parking level. While that building had a commercial ground floor, staff believes not having an exposed lower parking level significantly improved that building’s relationship to the street.
- **Setbacks.** The Downtown Plan notes the importance of consistent setbacks as part of maintaining the “grand appearance” along the 400 and 500 blocks of West Washington Avenue. The building is now set back between 12 and 15 from the depicted property line. The Planning Division’s primary concern is steps, walls, and other features that encroach into the setback that could visually minimize its appearance.

- **Lack of Upper Story Fenestration.** The Planning Division requests the UDC comment on the building's fenestration, especially on the upper level of the West Washington Avenue-facing façade. The Planning Division is concerned that the combination of window size coupled with the irregular patterning results in a façade that appears very solid, lacking in upper story windows. This does not appear to be on North Broom Street, where a more regular pattern of openings exists.
- **Composition and Materiality.** The building includes a contemporary design. Adopted plans do not recommend a specific style, and staff notes that the surrounding context is varied in terms of contemporary and more traditional forms. The Downtown Plan's recommendation for additional height references responding to the building's specific context. The Planning Division first requests the UDC comment on the building's exterior materials. The building has a brick first floor, but is otherwise clad in large fiber cement panels. The Planning Division would encourage a building of this size and scale to generally have a predominance of masonry and that other materials, such as fiber cement panels, used as an accent. The Planning Division believes this would address additional height standard "b" regarding the "excess height allows for a demonstrated higher quality building than could be achieved without the additional stories."

The Planning Division seeks the opinion of the UDC on the color of materials. With the dark materials and irregular window patterning, the Planning Division believes the façade reads as "heavy," especially compared to the first floor which reads as much "lighter." The Planning Division also requests the UDC provide feedback on the articulation of the building's top, which is limited, and the relationship between the stepped back area and lower levels.

- **Ground Level Activation.** The building only has street access from West Washington Avenue. The ground-level units that front on North Broom Street have no individual entrances and are separated by a raised terrace feature. The Planning Division requests UDC's feedback on this relationship, considering the Downtown Plan's recommendation for multiple building entrances for longer buildings.
- **HVAC Penetrations.** No information is provided regarding possible HVAC penetrations on this building. This should be clarified by the applicant and the Planning Division strongly discourages the introduction of any street-facing louvers or similar features.