



Project Address: 425-435 West Johnson Street

Application Type: Demolition Permit and Conditional Use

Legistar File ID #: [33467](#) and [33254](#)

Prepared By: Kevin Firchow, AICP, Planning Division
Report Includes Comments from other City Agencies, as noted

Reviewed By: Jay Wendt, Principal Planner

In the October 27, 2014 staff report, the Planning Division did not believe Conditional Use Standards 5 and 9 were met. Specific concerns included:

- Efficiency of automated parking / vehicle queuing onto West Johnson St. (CU Standard 5)
- Auto-dominated design of the plaza area (CU Standard 9)
- Concerns on the building’s lack of street orientation (CU Standard 9)
- Desirability of units with deep balconies facing curve – concerns on lack of sunlight (CU Standard 9)

Since the issuance of that report, some additional information has been provided and additional comments are summarized below.

Standard 5: Parking / Vehicle Queuing Concerns. The applicant has provided supplemental information to the Traffic Engineering (TE) Division regarding their concerns on the proposed automated parking system. TE’s original comment included:

Traffic Engineering does not support approval of this project at this time. Issues with the vehicular queuing resulting from insufficient capacity of the mechanical parking and insufficient onsite loading will create a situation detrimental to public safety and general welfare.

Based on their review of this supplemental information, the Traffic Engineering Division has revised their comments and has removed the above comment. In summary, the applicant provided additional supporting information from their consulting engineer showing that the City’s trip-generation estimate was higher than actual counts for nearby developments. Based on this lower expected trip generation, TE has revised their condition. The agency continues to recommend a second loading zone. The applicant’s supplemental data and the revised conditions of approval from TE are attached.

With TE’s revised recommendation, the Planning Division believes that Conditional Use Standard 5 can be met. TE staff will be present at the November 10 meeting.

Standard 9: Design Related Concerns. The Urban Design Commission’s (UDC) findings on this proposal differ from the Planning Division recommendation in the original staff report. Staff notes that at their October 15, 2014 meeting, the UDC unanimously recommended initial approval of this request, finding that the Downtown Design Standards and Downtown Design Guidelines were met. As part of their action, the UDC requested details regarding the plaza area return to the UDC. They also recommended that balcony details return, noting durability concerns regarding the application of EIFS on porches. Finally, their motion to approve this item included the “wall pack” locations shown on the supplemental graphics.

In response to the original staff report, the applicant has proposed an alternative plaza layout, moving the loading zones away from the street frontage while adding a second loading zone as recommended by the Traffic Engineering Division. The attached alternative site plan shows a rectangular-shaped plaza area measuring approximately 18 by 26 feet. A series of supplemental perspective illustrations have been provided depicting the alternative layout. Staff notes that these illustrative graphics depict terrace street trees that are not consistent with those shown in the landscape plan.

Staff has the following summary comments related to Conditional Use Standard 9:

- **Plaza Area.** The Planning Division believes that the relocation of the plaza towards the street frontage can provide better street orientation for this development. The success of this space largely lies with how the space is utilized, which could be significantly enhanced by the future commercial user for the adjoining tenant space.

From a design standpoint, further refinements should be considered. The Planning Division believes that the design needs to strike the appropriate balance between providing physical and visual access to the building from Johnson Street in concert with providing some buffering from busy West Johnson Street to make this a comfortable space. The Planning Division recommends that direct access to the elevated area be provided from the adjoining sidewalk. Taller elements, including trees in planters, should be used to define edges of the plaza, but not obscure elements such as the main entrance or otherwise block anticipated pedestrian routes towards the building. Other smaller plantings should be utilized to provide some buffering and separation towards West Johnson Street. From a materials standpoint, details will need to be provided. Higher quality materials are recommended to differentiate this area from the surrounding auto-oriented elements of the frontage. Staff would recommend the use of concrete pavers.

- **Arcade.** One of the building's signature elements is the proposed two-story arcade which forms the base of the curved building wall. While visually unique, the Planning Division raised concerns on this element dating back to the initial discussions on this project in March. The project architects have and continues to strongly defend this element. The original staff report incorrectly sites an arcade width of 7.5 feet. The internal width between the building and arcade walls, is approximately 6 feet. This is confirmed on the recently provided supplemental site plan. From a visibility standpoint, staff believes that this element weakens the building's orientation towards the street by creating a dark and narrow pathway obscuring the front of the building. In addition to widening or reconfiguring the space, the Planning Division believes a solution to consider would be converting the arcade area into expanded building space, filling in wall openings with doors and glass. In discussions with the project architects, they disagree with staff's concerns and believe the proposed design to be a superior solution. Staff advises that this item be discussed as part of the public hearing.
- **Dwelling Units at the Center of the "Curve."** As noted in the original staff report, staff has questions regarding the desirability and amount of light that will reach the units at the deepest part of the "curve." This accounts for 33 units that have no other exterior windows. The applicant has indicated to staff that the configuration of these units will be revised to minimize the patio depth, but this is not reflected in the submitted plans before the Commission.

Staff believes Conditional Use Standard 9 could be found to be met should these above issues be resolved.

Other Comments

Please note, the Plan Commission packets include revised comments from the Zoning Administrator and from the Director of Building Inspection.

Conclusion and Revised Recommendation

With TE's parking concerns addressed, staff believes that Conditional Use Standard 5 can be met. The remaining design issues relate to Conditional Use Standard 9. Staff believes that the revised plaza area, depicted on the recently provided alternative site plan, begins to enhance the site's orientation towards the street, though staff believes these design details should be further refined. The Planning Division believes that further refinements to the physical design, including that of the arcade, would better align the project with the standards.

Subject to input at the public hearing, the Planning Division recommends that the Plan Commission finds that the conditional use and demolition standards are met and approve the applicant's request to demolish three buildings for the purpose of constructing the proposed 160-unit mixed-use building at 425-435 West Johnson Street. This recommendation is subject to the recommended comments from reviewing agencies and the below additional conditions from the Planning Division

Recommended / Revised Conditions of Approval

Major/Non-Standard Conditions are Shaded

Planning Division (Contact Kevin Firchow, 267-1150)

1. That the bicycle parking in the patio be relocated and the plaza space be expanded to the extent feasible. Final details shall be approved by the Planning Division.
2. Wall-pack penetrations shall be as shown on the submitted plans.
3. Agency comments provided to the Plan Commission based on the original submittal and the revised plans were not provided to staff received in time to be reviewed by other City Agencies. If approved, the alternative site plan that relocates the plaza towards the street frontage is subject to additional agency comments related to the proposed changes.
4. That in addition to receiving final approval by the Urban Design Commission, the final details of the plaza including layout, materials, and planting plans shall be approved by the Planning Division.
5. That the residential units along the deepest portion of the "curve" on floors two and above be reconfigured to allow for additional natural light to reach the windows.