



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 134-150 S Blair Street and 506-522 E Wilson Street

Application Type: Redevelopment in UMX Zoning
UDC will be an Advisory Body

Legistar File ID #: [79707](#)

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Alex Padrnos, JCAP Development | 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. The proposed development consists of an eight-story, 160-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. A “Living Street” is proposed through the project site that connects S Franklin Street and S Blair Street, which is intended to provide enhanced street activation for the property, as well as vehicle and fire lane access to the project.

Approval Standards: While the project site is currently zoned PD, it is the understanding of staff that the development will proceed under UMX zoning (Urban Mixed Use District). 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.”

In addition, staff understands that the proposed multi-family building will require a conditional use approval. As such, as part of the Commission’s consideration, Conditional Use Approval Standard No. 9 is provided below:

Which in summary states: “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...”

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.

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 mainly to the Blair and Wilson Street frontages. There is also a portion of the project site where three stories/46 feet is the permitted height, which is located on the northwest portion of the site, an area that is primarily internal to the site. As noted in the Zoning Code, buildings must meet both the maximum number of stories and the maximum height. Staff notes that the proposed deviations to the Downtown Height Map will require a Zoning Text Amendment.

Staff notes that a recently approved modification to the Zoning Code allows, in cases where applicants voluntarily enter into a contractual agreement to provide affordable housing, the maximum number of stories may be exceeded, 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 exploring the possibility for additional stories within the maximum allowed height. Further discussions are in progress related to compliance with the provisions of the ordinance, including those that speak to affordability, floor area, etc.

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.

Historic Preservation Planning Information: The project site includes properties located in both the First Settlement Historic District and Third Lake Ridge Historic District. As such, Landmarks Commission review and approval is required on the new development, as well as an advisory recommendation on the accompanying lot combination and demolition. The Landmark Commission is scheduled to review this proposal at their September 18, 2023, meeting. Please refer to Legistar ID [#79566](#) for more information, including the Historic Preservation Planner's staff report. Any additional comments from the Landmarks Commission will be provided to the UDC prior to this informational presentation.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff recommends that the UDC review the development proposal and provide feedback regarding the aforementioned standards and adopted plan recommendations related to the design considerations noted below.

- **Building Height and Massing.** Staff first wishes to acknowledge its support for a two-building redevelopment concept for this site. Previous redevelopment proposals, none of which were approved, proposed a singular building. The shift towards a two-building solution is viewed as a significant improvement.

As proposed, only the multi-family residential portion of the project is not compliant with the base height limitations, though could be if the applicant pursues the height bonus provisions in the Zoning Code. This portion of the project is comprised of seven stories that transition to eight stories on the northwest portion of the project site, where six stories that transition to three would be permitted. As noted in the Historic Preservation Planner's staff report, staff has concerns regarding the massing of the residential building as it is pushed so strongly towards Blair Street as it relates to applicable findings in the historic district.

As noted on the elevation drawings, while lines are drawn referencing contextual datums, the street facing façade of the residential building reads as a continuous wall plane with a minimal articulation paying homage to historic resources in the area, i.e. width, modulation, roof forms, etc. Staff requests the UDC provide feedback on the proposed building height relative to the objectives noted above in the Downtown Plan, especially those pertaining to context, providing an appropriate transition and sensitivity to design.

- **Site Access and Circulation.** As indicated on the site plan, there is a shared, "Living Street" that is proposed that will provide access through the site connecting Franklin Street to Blair Street. As noted in the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, how people, bikes, and vehicles access and move through a site can be a determinant of how it relates to context. Consideration should be given to enhancing and maintaining uninterrupted pedestrian access, building orientation towards the street, providing separation and buffers between user groups, utilizing alternative pavement surfaces, landscape, lighting, etc. Staff requests the Commission provide feedback on the design of the proposed "Living Street."

- **Building Design and Composition.** Staff requests the Commission provide feedback on the overall building design and composition as it relates to the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, including those related to the overall massing and proportions of architectural components (top, middle, base), the appropriateness of the use of stepback/setbacks, balancing vertical/horizontal lines and datum, size and rhythm of windows and doors, simplifying roof forms/transitions, creating positive termination at the top of the building, etc.
- **Building Materials.** As noted on the hotel elevation drawings the preliminary material palette is comprised of masonry, glass, and metal materials. Information regarding the residential building material palette was not provided. As noted in the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, *“An integrated palette of high quality, durable building materials can enrich the pedestrian environment through the use of scale, color, texture, and architectural details.”* Staff requests that the Commission provides feedback on the proposed material palette and composition, especially as it relates to creating an enhanced design at the pedestrian level along both street frontages, utilizing high quality materials and four-sided architecture, as well as using a palette that is simple and complementary/compatible to the surrounding historic context.
- **Long Views.** Given the project site location at the corner of Blair and Wilson Streets, and the proposed building height, the development will be highly visible, including likely also having visibility from both Lake Monona and John Nolen Drive. As such, consideration should be given to the composition of upper floors of both the hotel and residential portions of the development, as well as those elevations visible from the intersection of Wilson and Blair, particularly the upper level hotel elevation of then hotel beyond the “Hotel Ruby Marie” which is seemingly blank, but will a very prominent elevation. Staff strongly believe additional articulation, including the incorporation of fenestration is important for that elevation.

The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines speak to providing a higher degree of architectural strength and design in areas of prominent viewsheds. Staff requests the UDC provide feedback and findings related to the design of these highly visible facades.

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.