



**Agenda Item #:** 6

**Project Title:** 2230 Pennsylvania Avenue - New Storage Facility in Urban Design District (UDD) 4. (District 12)

**Legistar File ID #:** 80725

**Members Present:** Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Jessica Klehr, Shane Bernau, Christian Harper, Marsha Rummel, Rafeeq Asad, and Wendy von Below

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

## Summary

At its meeting of November 29, 2023, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** for a new storage facility located at 2230 Pennsylvania Avenue in UDD 4. Registered and speaking in support were William Butcher, Eric Welch, Ellie Grimm, and Jeff Davis.

The applicant presented the project overview, noting that as the city has expanded and built, units have become smaller and storage has been eliminated. The team has heard that a convenient, clean, new, safe, secure storage near downtown is what people need and want. The ground floor allows exterior access those units. Small business owners downtown have to store seasonal patio furniture; this provides exterior access to units. The building form presents large façades with the possibility of large format mural(s). It will be the most beneficially impactful design, nothing would be quite as impactful or engaging with the public as art. This is an opportunity to make a first impression upon visitors to the City in this corridor; they see why this is an Urban Design District and why this project is before the Commission tonight. The landscaping elements in the front of the project are meant to encourage pedestrian activation, with a high priority on the aesthetics. They will maintain the long row of hedges, maintain the good trees (6-8), remove bramble and plant more native species in the "front yard" for a more inviting landscape. The three existing billboards on-site will be removed. A leasing office will be located on the corner, adjacent to an area for someone to pull into the building, unload the vehicle and head out plan west. That drop-off has to be adjacent to the office and could only potentially work in a couple of locations (Pennsylvania Avenue side plan south), gives a lower building form and massing that allows them to articulate and give a setback along that long façade. Two ingress/egress points are located at the far north and south ends of the site.

The Commission had the following questions for staff and the development team:

- The Zoning Code requires building articulation every 60-feet. Could you demonstrate how this requirement has been met, or not?
  - The goal with the artwork is that we could pretty simply articulate the building form with parapets every 60-feet, our proposal is that the artwork would articulate every square inch of the building versus every 60-feet. We really want the artwork to be the canvas for the building and not arbitrarily add articulation.
- What opportunities are you taking advantage of in terms of sustainability on this new building?
  - It is an incredibly efficient building in terms of the envelope.
- To clarify, you're obviously putting in a new building, you're surrounding it with asphalt, and you're showing mowed lawn in your renderings. It seems to me there is opportunity in terms of returning to native species, what strategies can you take to minimize that asphalt, which is really in very odd stark contrast to the idyllic mural on the wallpaper of the building.

- This is a first stab rendering. As far as the plantings we wanted to engage the setback itself. Native species will make it more engaging visually and open to the public, we'd like to encourage the use of that buffer. The intention isn't just to do grass here at all, we'll look at different plantings, grasses, and lavender, migratory bird and insects. As far as the footprint use here it's well under the maximum impervious space. We have ample opportunities to do nice thing with plantings. Right now it's just grass and a gravel lot.
- I want to start to comment on the mural and the artwork. Traditionally murals in an urban setting tend to bring very public art on lifeless and unappealing buildings. In this case, this is new construction. A lot of times you spend time looking at precedents, one of the charms or urban mural art is a way to add color in a way that is unexpected. While I am a huge proponent of artwork incorporated into the environment, it's very expected, like your canvas is here to here, very traditional. I would like to see something with more trompe-l'oeil to it, or dips above and below, unexpected and whimsical rather than what you print on vinyl wallpaper and roll it out bookend to bookend.
  - This exact rendering is taken from a different piece altogether, just as an idea of what our artwork looks like and it would be something pastoral-esque. This is not the final piece for the building. We layer textile patterns into our pieces as well which you can't see on this piece exactly. Part of the idea of this piece, since it's such a large piece with no interruptions, it does melt into the sky and brings a restful moment to your eye in such an industrial area. That's where we were coming from.
  - It is less an illustration than a piece of fine art. It is different than other murals around town, we think that would set it apart.
  - Bringing art to this area would be really neat since it's a really creative neighborhood. There's not quite a lot of public facing art in this area, something this large would really make an impact on the area.
- It would be up to the Zoning Administrator to make a finding that the façade articulation requirement is met.
- (Secretary) Yes, when you start moving forward with design, it would be good for the applicant team to reach out to the Zoning Administrator to have that conversation. Based on my conversations with the Zoning Administrator, this does not meet the articulation requirement in the code.
- Can you give us a sense of initial thoughts on where mechanical systems are, the roof, the site somewhere?
  - They'll all be on the roof, relatively central to the building, and screened.
- What is the large door looking thing on the mass that projects from the building?
  - The goal would be to make them recess into the building from a visual standpoint. Those are overhead doors with glass, someone would pull in from the north side, park inside, unload and then leave on the other side. It's purely access to the office and interior elevator.
- I appreciate the transparency about the coloring of the doors so we can see them. If you're really going all in on the mural strategy, why not art on the doors? To me there's quite a contrast between the utilitarian base of the building and the fine art.
  - We'd love to look at that option. We didn't think of it to be honest. That's a great idea, we are planning on masonry here which gives us different opportunities.
  - Tie the doors in, we'd love to look at that.
- I'm not convinced it's the right strategy, more of a question than something to consider. Can you share any precedents or benchmarking you've done with other storage buildings to have a design element more than some of the corporate, U-Haul utilitarian buildings?
  - We can forward examples, not so much from storage but other commercial buildings of similar massing.
- Please don't do that, put art on the doors, this is intensive as it is and I don't think you ought to do any more. I could be the minority here, but don't do that. I'm confused, there's two different concepts, one covers the windows and one does not, is that correct?
  - No, the one with windows showing at the corners is the correct one. We had an option that showed the whole thing wrapped and we failed to remove that one.
- I was going to say don't do that either. I actually like this but I think it's missing exactly what Zoning is requiring, some kind of vertical break every 60-feet. You have an inset palette, its setback and not framed; a vertical element would give it more articulation, break it up. It's still a continuous mural and would make this a stronger

project. To have this massive expanse of flatness, regardless of the image painted on it, it needs more vertical design elements with articulation.

- As you move forward, some consideration to the entrance and relation to the street, its set back far right now, the staff memo mentioned that, something to review in the future. I am a huge fan of those murals in any kind of color, but its most of what you see on this building and an important topic to discuss. This site and the use of the building is urban, there's railroad tracks, multi-lane traffic, and the billboards should be shown on these renderings because it has an impact also to what it feels like to walk down the sidewalk as well as what is going on visually. I would propose that the urban site and use of storage, why do you need storage in the city, because you don't have the space in the city, so you need storage. Everything is spelling urban to me but then to put pastoral images on there, might not fit with the urban setting but might also be fighting and trying to make this building look too much like something other than what it actually is, which is urban storage. Things to consider as you move forward.
- Maybe it's because it's literally landscape imagery on the building, but I love the proposal. There's so much about it that I really love, the fact that it is different, the style of the mural and long expanse of it with a frame to it is something I like, and I'm certainly not one to be able to contradict the Zoning requirements, but I really love it the way you have it. I think you have an incredible opportunity as you're already alluding to with the landscape, if the imagery on the mural is something pastoral you can bring that native Wisconsin landscape, bleed it down from the building to the ground with huge swaths of native grasses in front of the hedge row that is existing. I think that could be incredibly successful, especially that foreground landscape since this is such a gateway corridor. I like the juxtaposition with the industrial urban around it and behind it, I think that's okay. Encourage you as you work through design and planting design that it's not little onesie-twosie of plants here and there, but big bold moves following big strong patterns that you would see in an agricultural field or pastoral landscape that you have. I am very excited about the landscape opportunities.
  - With regard to the billboards are not shown here. WE have the opportunity to terminate the billboards. They are not shown here to not interrupt the site lines. They are showing gone because they will be gone.
- I have to admit when I first saw this my head spun. Shane painted it really well, he likes it, but I didn't like it at first. I don't think I like the mural in an industrial corridor, it seems odd to me. I do believe it needs to have the articulation as mentioned. I'm really excited about getting rid of the billboards, I want to cheer you on with that. I want to honor that Eric does really interesting work with buildings. Thank you for bringing this for informational.
- N these corner elements with the glass, is it spandrel or a mix of both?
  - You're seeing a mixture of it. It is a branding requirement.
- The office on the front corner needs to be adjacent to the drive-thru door sections?
  - Correct, yes.
- With regard to the landscape and murals, my comments align pretty much with Shane's. I knew when I first looked at this, this would be either you like it or you don't. I like it. I like murals in general and I like seeing a variety of them and it seems like the most of the ones we've seen have a real colorful jazzy vibe to them. Lots of semi abstract things. I think there is room for something that is more naturalistic expression and the fact that it is in an area that is sort of light industrial I like that. I mean this whole stretch here is not one of the nicest looking sections of Madison, let's be honest. We just did a façade grant for the building to the south, I was glad that they were doing something, but it was so modest. The chance to take a lot where heavy construction equipment is parked and replacement is with something like this is a huge opportunity. I'm ready to see different in Madison's mural world. The idea of it playing into landscaping on the ground and the sky up above that all works for me. I would concur with Rafeeq's comment about avoiding the idea of continuing that artwork down to the doors. That would be a bridge too far for me. The basic landscape mural on there is really in some way traditions but in some ways bold. There is no one else doing this around town. In this spot and place, the bar for good looking storage places is pretty low. The other ones within a mile or less are all the most ugly utilitarian. The beast looking one is the old Shopko on HWY 30 because it doesn't look like the usual storage complex. This is a big win for this kind of service, which clearly seems to be needed. With regard to the

landscaping out front without knowing more what is existing I cannot comment. But worth having surveyed, and keeping the good stuff. The solid hedge near the sidewalk does not need to be kept. It is blocking the view of the more extensive planting further back. I like the idea of not having a lot out front, but having big drifts of native grasses and wild flowers is the way to go. I hope something can be worked out with the requirement for articulation. I don't think it is a deal breaker for the visual effect of this to have delineated proportions. That seems like you could get to the technical aspects of breaking up the façade just because you have to, I don't think it would destroy the mural but seems like it would be nice to waive that requirements. Nice interesting project, a real asset to this stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue.

- Can you please describe the materials of how the mural is painted, I thought I heard you mention textile, and how it's maintained so the same look is achieved 50 years from now?
  - We are exploring vinyl wrapping panels painted by hand in their art studio and digitalized on vinyl which would get applied to metal panels, installed as siding. There are other ways of applying without hand painting. It will be out of a durable vinyl with a long shelf life and easy maintenance. It'll be durable, good colors, easier to install.
  - It will need to be repaired or replaced in 12-15 years.
  - It will be hand painted in the studio, it's not a digital painting.
- Reading through the staff notes under building orientation, it struck me about the overhead door cube being in front of the front door. Have you considered switching that or what kind of ideas have you had after reading the staff report about having the entrance face the street?
  - It wasn't just the staff report, we considered that before designing this. The front from a logistical and operations standpoint is the best. The office needs to be able to see people coming in, they have to be adjacent. So if that areas if located in the back, the office and entrance has to be back there as well. Having the entrance and drive in the back conflicts with the urban design considerations and logistical use. If we put it on the side of the building, which is a possibility, we have a longer uninterrupted view of the entrance. From the Pennsylvania side, we have articulation and stepping in the wall.
  - The entry can face the street, the door is on the corner. Whether it's facing parking or Pennsylvania Avenue doesn't make a difference on the interior layout.
- I assume the overhead doors are for driving in and bringing in stuff. It's possible to imagine a back-up of customer vehicles, something else to consider when you think about the orientation to the street and the doors.
  - This design accommodates two small moving trucks end to end on two sides. It could have one or two people waiting, it wouldn't back up. Managers who do this weighed in on the design and understand the way the flow works.
  - Or they go to the parking area and wait.
  - The volume of people that visit the place on a daily basis is very low.

The Commission discussed the following:

- As much as we appreciate the artwork, I don't think the primary objective of this project is to bring art to Pennsylvania Avenue. It is to have a storage building with a big blank wall and then think about adding art to it. We've seen this mural solution on a number of projects before. I would respectfully ask the applicant to look at some other successful storage buildings, one in particular in Fitchburg, Discovery Storage, it has expanded glass corners and used subtle differences in materials and articulation on the face to achieve an interesting, clean, modern look in a number of different styles. The drive-thru could work, you could make this work, the garage doors are glass and it's all really light and well lit inside. With some development that could be a nice counterpoint to the big box that's the main building. I also think you can probably find a solution where you don't need the smaller units being accessed from the outside along Pennsylvania Avenue. Even upstairs you're going to have an internal corridor, you could rearrange and do something there, maybe even a screen wall to hide those unit entrances on the Pennsylvania Avenue side. Expanding the glassy corners and looking at ways others have articulated their façade could give this building another level of interest. I'm not precluding a mural

either. The mural on the short side is more effective than the length of the building on Pennsylvania Avenue. Any good art deserves a frame, the one on the right side of the image has a more appropriate frame to it.

- I agree with a lot of those comments. I'm struggling with this project because on one hand it's a gift, much improved to what's in this area now. I do commend the artists' initial work here, but at the same time I did ask the question for comparable facilities; the State preservation facility that's nearby, that is something to consider because it's more honest about what it is, it's a storage building and the architectural does a nice thoughtful design, it still looks like a nice, it's not pretending to be anything else. This proposal lives and dies on the success of the mural, which could be really wonderful or it could be problematic. As an example, I particularly do not like this mural, it's a sad reminder that we live in a day and age that we need buildings like this because we have so much stuff and we've displaced lovely pastoral scenes to make buildings like this, it's off-putting and a reminder that this design is pretending to be something that it's not.
- I agree with both of you. I think this building is relying on the murals, the entire architecture is relying on the murals. When I ask the question of the technical aspects, there's the zoning aspect of every 60-feet, but also durable materials and having something on vinyl that need replacing every 12 to 15 years, looking at a more honest depiction of the building as a storage unit with potential for murals, not the entire architecture is reliant on them, would be much more successful.

## Action

Since this was an **INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** no formal action was taken by the Commission.