



**Agenda Item #:** 13

**Project Title:** 3401 E. Washington Avenue - Residential Building Complex Located in Urban Design District (UDD) No. 5. 12th Ald. Dist.

**Legistar File ID #:** 71151

**Members Present:** Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Tom DeChant, Shane Bernau, Rafeeq Asad, Christian Harper, Christian Albouras, Jessica Klehr and Russell Knudson.

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

## Summary

### SUMMARY:

At its meeting of May 11, 2022, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** for the development of a Residential Building Complex located at 3401 E. Washington Avenue in UDD No. 5. Registered and speaking in support was Kevin Burow, representing Knothe & Bruce Architects, LLC. Registered in support and available to answer questions was Mike Slavish, representing Wisconsin Housing Preservation Corp.

The proposal aims to repurpose the former Gardner Bakery building that has been vacant for approximately 3 years into a new mixed-use development on what is now an almost 100% paved site. The initial concept shows a mix of apartments, townhomes and commercial space with five-story buildings along E. Washington Avenue, transitioning down to two-story buildings, with a three-story building in background. There is a pedestrian tunnel underneath E. Washington Avenue that will be utilized, and underground parking will be accessed off of Fair Oaks Avenue. They are considering different colors to the buildings for variation. Slavish noted they are considering the possibility of dropping the surface parking count to pull the buildings closer while still maintaining ample greenspace in the interior fronting the parking layout. With the proposed BRT so close and this being an affordable housing project, there will be a lot of families living here that will use that BRT.

The Commission discussed the following:

- The two-story next to the five-story, the different building types is a bit odd. You bring interest to the corner but then just drop down, they could be more cohesive. Some of the materials on the far left building should probably be revisited, the location, amount and how they relate to each other. The forms are fine, but look at how they relate to each other, they don't all need separate materials, you can tie them together a different way.
- Quite happy to see some people living in what we might call a transit-oriented development. This is the closest project UDC has had that is this close to a proposed BRT station. Curious if that's come into your conversations and design thinking, to what extent you acknowledge that with site design.
  - Yes, the BRT will be located kitty-korner from us, we wanted strong pedestrian connections out leading to E. Washington and Fair Oaks Avenues for access to that.
- Glad to see the way you've maintained the underpass, that's a very useful amenity there.
- Appreciate you stepping down to two stories for the small houses just to the right, and happy to see three-bedroom apartments for families. To that end, it's really nice that it ties into the playground area for Hawthorne School, I'd be curious as you develop further to see how kids will be crossing drives to get to the park from all units.

- Seems like a lot of private sidewalks going up to doors, I'm not quite sure I understand why. Could some be combined for more greenspace?
  - Yes, these are individual entries, but we do need to have direct entry as a WHEDA project. There is not a common corridor connecting those townhomes together.
- The transition from five to two stories, particularly on that high visibility façade, is too abrupt and I'd prefer to see at least three. Make it more compatible with the corner building as opposed to such a contrast. I find the light/dark contrast on the western most building better color-wise than the light to tan contrast of the eastern building, reexamine those materials on the eastern building. I like the composition, the acre of parkland facing the school, those elements are excellent. It's only a couple of steps to get this where you want it.
- Commend you for the park area, that's a huge community-building amenity and a strong point of the project. I like the site plan, the way it's holding the urban edge, tucking the parking inside. Think about where kids will be crossing, the islands and connections, and continue to follow that path from any of the units to the park area.
- It looks like you might have a couple of rooftop terraces; make sure there's some plant life and other things happening up there other than just pedestal pavers.
- The one facing the auto parts store is tricky, how you might handle that through design to give it some separation and screening, but also make it a lovely usable space. There was another terrace in the rendering of the 110-unit that looked out over the park, that one is probably a much nicer view than the other side.
- The staff report noted concerns with the size of a couple of the buildings and the continuous parking underneath them. To have a space in between some of the bigger buildings would really help. There are no mega apartment buildings in this neighborhood, you have the land to allow for more space between residential units.
- The center island between the two main parking bays seems pretty minimal. I'd be willing to give up some of that one acre park, bringing the buildings closer to the school and having an enhanced greenway between those two parking lots that somehow connects to the park that is there.
- Agree about the parking space. There's an awful lot of surface parking considering there is under building parking. If it is necessary, your suggestion of moving things around is a nice idea. Seems like way too much surface parking lot.
- I'd vote in favor of the two-story townhouses. It is a major drop-off but one thing we've heard again and again from citizens, people are not comfortable with having tall buildings that butt right up to residential areas. It looks quite a bit different, but so what? The average person going by isn't looking at it as one holistic project that has to tie together. Pushing those up to three-stories, considering they're individual units, most people don't want to go up two flights of stairs to get inside. I'm fine with those stepping down to two-stories, I really love the large front yards there. I hope the final product resembles the renderings here of some intensive landscaping around all the buildings and entrances, it has the potential to be really attractive. This will be a huge improvement, overall a really nice project.
- A 1:1 parking ratio feels more appropriate. I think cohesive greenspace is more functional and should be prioritized, that green strip in the parking could be wide enough to support bioretention or stormwater management by giving it five more feet.
- It's how you treat the five-story coming down to the two-story. It doesn't step down, it's situated appropriately based on surrounding context, the five-story is the issue as it meets the two-story.
- I applaud the blue color on the building.
- Appreciate some of the restraint I see the designer making. Having some quality detailing vs. lots of different colors and materials lends a level of sophistication that any housing development should have.

## Action

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