

## PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

November 10, 2025

PREPARED FOR THE LANDMARKS COMMISSION



**Project Name & Address:** 425 N Frances Street & 450 W Gilman Street

**Application Type(s):** Advisory Recommendation for Development Adjacent to a Landmark Site

**Legistar File ID #** [90011](#)

**Prepared By:** Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner, Planning Division

**Date Prepared:** November 5, 2025

### Summary

**Project Applicant/Contact:** Brad Aycock, Villas Student Housing, LLC

**Requested Action:** The Applicant is requesting that the Landmarks Commission provide an advisory recommendation for development adjacent to a landmark that will be reviewed by the Urban Design Commission and Plan Commission.

### Background Information

**Parcel Location/Information:** The subject property is located adjacent to the Grimm Book Bindery (454 W Gilman Street) designated landmark site

#### Relevant Ordinance Sections:

##### **28.144 - DEVELOPMENT ADJACENT TO A LANDMARK OR LANDMARK SITE.**

Any development on a zoning lot adjoining a landmark or landmark site for which Plan Commission or Urban Design Commission review is required shall be reviewed by the Landmark Commission to determine whether the proposed development is so large or visually intrusive as to adversely affect the historic character and integrity of the adjoining landmark or landmark site. Landmark Commission review shall be advisory to the Plan Commission and the Urban Design Commission.

### Analysis and Conclusion

The proposed project is to redevelop the properties at 425 N Frances St and 450 W Gilman St by demolishing the existing buildings and constructing a new multi-unit 16-story building on the property. This redevelopment site shares a property line with the historic Grimm Book Bindery, which is a designated landmark. The City designated the Grimm Book Bindery as a landmark in 1989 for its distinctive architecture. The building is a rare remaining example of a small Neo-Classical commercial building as designed by Madison architect, Alvan Small, and constructed in 1926.

The Landmarks Commission reviewed a massing model as part of an informational presentation at its September 15, 2025, meeting. There was some concern about the cantilevered pool on the top of the building, but otherwise the commission relayed that they appreciated that the mass of the new building was pulled back from the historic resource with a combination of setbacks and stepbacks. This proposal now has the architectural details, which allows the Landmarks Commission to better speak to how the two buildings will relate to one another.

While the height datum of the single-story projection aligns with the adjacent landmark, the closed nature of that volume and the industrial character of the materials for the garage door and metal paneling above it are an

architectural disconnect. Staff would recommend a less industrial character to the area above the garage door and the door itself, so that it looks more in keeping with the architectural character of a commercial storefront. At the moment, it reads more like a back side to a building. A glass-panel garage door would continue the boxy theme of the new building, while also providing more of a sense of street activation. Such doors could look like this:



This project will also need approvals from the Plan Commission and Urban Design Commission. The Landmarks Commission is not an approving entity but is tasked with providing advisory recommendations on if the proposed work will have adverse impacts on the adjacent landmark.

A discussion of relevant standards follows:

**28.144 - DEVELOPMENT ADJACENT TO A LANDMARK OR LANDMARK SITE.**

Staff believes that the proposed work will not have an adverse impact on the adjacent landmark. This redevelopment is happening at the border of a dense urban commercial corridor and the edge of a historic residential neighborhood, which serves as the context for the designated landmark site. The redevelopment is configured so that it mitigates the visual impacts that would be visible from the pedestrian experience of the landmark from the front of the historic property. The proposed new structure is not so overly large or visually intrusive as to adversely affect the character of the adjacent landmark.

## Recommendation

Staff recommends the Landmarks Commission advise the Plan Commission and Urban Design Commission that due to the side setback and substantial step back from the single-story wing of the building, the proposed work will not be so large as to adversely affect the historic character and integrity of the adjoining landmark. However, the Landmarks Commission recommends a less industrial and closed character of the exterior materials of the single-story wing to increase the street-level activation so that it is not so visually intrusive as to adversely affect the historic character and integrity of the adjacent landmark.