



Project Address: 502 Pflaum Road
Application Type: Public Building for MMSD Sennett Middle School
UDC is an Approving Body
Legistar File ID #: [92523](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Scott Chehak, Madison Metropolitan School District | Susan Bowersox, OPN Architects

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the construction of a new 150,000 square foot, two-story school on the unused (western) portion of the property while the existing school remains open. Upon completion of the new construction the existing building will be demolished and replaced with parking and green space.

Project Schedule:

- UDC received an Informational Presentation on April 15, 2026.
- The Plan Commission is scheduled to review this proposal at their July 27, 2026, meeting.

Approval Standards: The UDC is an **approving body** on this request. Pursuant to MGO Section 33.24(4)(d), "*The UDC shall approve plans for all buildings proposed to be built or expanded in the City by the State of Wisconsin, the University of Wisconsin, the City of Madison, Dane County, the Federal Government or any other local governmental entity which has the power to levy taxes on property located within the City.*"

Staff note that the UDC's approving authority is limited to the buildings themselves; any comments related to landscaping would only be advisory in nature.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff request the UDC provide feedback and make findings as required for public buildings. Potential design considerations for the Commission's review and comment are identified below:

- **Building Design and Materials**, including as it relates to using durable, high-quality materials, as well as architectural design and detailing to maintain a pedestrian scale, clearly defined building entrances and creating building orientation and visual interest towards the street, minimize/mitigate blank wall expanses (south and west elevations, which are the street facing and main entrance elevations, respectively), and maintaining the same level of design and detailing across all elevations.

Generally, and in summary, as noted by the Commission in their Informational Presentation comments, there appeared to be a good balance of building massing, articulation, and elements of color, but that consideration should be given to minimizing blank walls, especially those visible from the street and student drop-off area/main entrance.

As reflected on the elevation drawings and landscape plan, both the south and west elevations include utility and roll-up doors, vision and translucent glazing, and based on the landscape plan, appear to have limited amounts of landscape adjacent to them. In addition, a wall sign is shown on the south elevation that occupies what would otherwise be a blank wall space on the second floor.

Staff also note that while a materials board was provided and material labels are included on the elevation drawings and depicted on the renderings, specific details related to some of the materials have not been outlined, including color and texture, manufacturer, etc. Staff recommend the UDC address final materials/details as part of their action.

Staff request the Commission's feedback and findings on the overall building design and materials.

- **Signage.** Staff note and the applicant is advised that while signage is shown on the elevation drawings, signage is not part of this review. As shown, the proposed signs **do not** appear to comply with the Sign Code and would require special approval. A separate review and approval are required for all signage. Staff encourage the applicant team to work with Zoning Staff early in the process to confirm that any proposed signage complies with the [Sign Code](#).

Summary of Informational Presentation Discussion & Questions

As a reference, a summary of the Commission's comments and discussion from the April 15, 2026, Informational Presentation are provided below:

The Commission asked about the building heights and why they are not taller. The applicant noted that the sites are zoned with a 35-foot height limit.

The Commission inquired about how the architectural language was chosen. The applicant noted that cues were taken off the high school, including the orange brick, not to make them completely foreign, but a more modern flare. The site itself also drives the design with the relationship of the building and green space between the two buildings and how the buildings tie into that. It's a balance of applications while not doing a lot of ornate work that would drive up the costs.

The Commission inquired about why the long wrapping vehicular circulation was included as it seems like a lot of space dedicated to cars; could they connect more directly off of Pflaum? The applicant noted the strong relationship between the schools, with this creating a symbolic gesture of separating the two.

The Commission commented on the importance of having memorable school buildings for the students who attend them, taking cues from the high school, tying those together and the site itself.

The Commission talked about the greenspace and possible educational programming. That is up to the school district. The site will be set up with flexibility to do those things as they feel necessary and appropriate for their students. It gives students a safe place to be.

The Commission appreciated the building's relationship to the high school through the architecture and landscaping.

The Commission noted preserving as many of the mature trees as possible would be nice. The Commission noted that tree protection of the trees in the parking lot is shown, it looks like there are some existing trees there that are being protected, but that new contours are being introduced. Check that you actually want to re-grade that space under those trees as it will put them at risk.

The Commission asked for clarification on bike circulation and parking. The applicant noted bike parking at both the northeast and southwest, and that they will be looking at bike circulation in more depth as the design is refined.

The Commission noted a good balance of building massing, articulation, and elements of color, solar panels, works together and reads as a creative and welcoming space. Like how they're coming together and look forward to future presentations.

The Commission noted that on Slide 13 in the presentation, this view is the first view driving into the site and there is a blank wall. In addition, there are dark protrusions from that wall. The applicant noted that they are in the process of doing daylighting studies and those may end up as shade screens, but that additional details would be forthcoming in future presentations. The applicant indicated that they would look at the blank walls areas and refinements.

The Commission appreciated that the renderings and elevation included plant material, noting there are areas of blank walls; plant material can do a lot to break down mass and get a more holistic picture.

The Commission asked about the protrusions on the second floor. The applicant is in the process of doing daylight analysis, knowing sun screening will be necessary for some building faces. The elevations don't exactly match because you're seeing our design testing.

The Commission commented on making sure something in the design is memorable for the students who will attend this school.