



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 1904 Bartillon Drive
Application Type: Public Building, Dane County Men’s Homeless Shelter
UDC is an Approving Body
Legistar File ID #: [78514](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Jon Evans, City of Madison Engineering Division | Carl Miller, Dimension IV Madison Design Group

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the construction of a new two-story building (approx. 51,000 square feet) for the City of Madison and Dane County Men’s Homeless Shelter.

Project Schedule:

- UDC Referred consideration of this item on January 10, 2024.
- UDC granted Initial Approval with conditions on November 8, 2023.
- UDC received an Informational Presentation on June 28, 2023.

Approval Standards: The UDC is an **approving body** on the proposed building. 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.”*

At the January 10, 2024, meeting, the UDC Referred consideration of this item. The Commission’s referral action included two conditions related to the cohesiveness of the overall building design. The Commission’s review and continued evaluation of this item should focus on whether those conditions have been addressed.

Summary of Design Considerations

Overall, staff believes that the revised plans are improved and that the revisions address many of the Commission’s comments. As noted above, it is the role of the UDC to review the revised drawings for consistency with the conditions as noted by the Commission in their referral action as noted below:

- Revise the building design to provide a more cohesive overall building design, including but not limited to incorporating similar design elements and level of design across all elevations, maintaining datum lines, looking at the wall heights on the patios, materials, including materials transitions and details, canopies, fence details etc.

As noted in the Letter of Intent, the design team has noted a number of design modifications that have been incorporated into the overall building design to address the UDC’s comments, including, in summary:

- Reconfiguration of the window design details and openings to be more consistent across all elevations,

- Refining the design of “top” of the building to create a consistent datum line and to better relate to the proposed fence both in color and orientation,
- Introduction of vision glass, spandrel panels, laminated colored glass, and ACM panels to breakdown the blank walls on the east elevation.

Regarding this item, staff requests the UDC review the updated plans and make findings related to the resulting overall design and detailing of this particular elevation giving consideration minimizing the variation and number of design details and materials and creating a cohesive elevation.

- Incorporating changes in plane where materials transition,
- Refining the light fixture selection to match the exterior material color, and
- Incorporating a public art installation on the south façade in place of the living wall.

Regarding this item, staff notes that a public art installation is shown on the south elevation. Staff recommends the UDC address the proposed public art installation in their formal action, especially as it relates to the integration of the art installation into the overall building design, as well as the resulting design and details in the event the art installation does not come to fruition, and whether further review/approval is required by the UDC or administratively by staff.

- Remove the living/green walls.

As noted in the revised materials, the living wall has been removed.

Summary of UDC Discussion and Referral

As a reference, the Commission’s discussion and comments from the January 10, 2024, Referral are provided below:

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

- We are just looking at the conditions of approval from Initial Approval, there are 11 of them in the staff report.
- There’s a lot going on here and I’m trying to make it make sense. Not sure why the color was changed and if it’s appropriate, or if it was better before. There seems to be a lot of things are competing with each other. I do not see men’s shelter, I see something playful. I don’t see the cohesiveness when I look at the site furnishings, I don’t know if they were representative of the fixtures themselves or what are they representative of? The finishes don’t complement each other. You have black poles and bollards, the finishes don’t complement each other. There is so much going on with the low part of the railing, but that’s a different material. There’s a lack of consistency that could help strengthen the project, even if it is all the wood on the project going the same way - have something that’s consistent. Because of that’s why there are questions about not meeting some of these other conditions. There needs to be a way to simplify some of these things.
- That goes to the condition that speaks to the cohesiveness of the overall design.
- Right, the materiality is one element of it. Before it was dark, monochromatic darkness. Now you introduced this wood, which I don’t know if it fits with all the different colored glazing, and this metal ACM corner, which does nothing for the project – it doesn’t highlight that element or anything; just another something else that is distracting.
- Yes, a lot of ups and downs with the colors and different head height of the windows is a little chaotic.

- Some consistent datums would help to start bringing some organization to it. You can have different windows, some vision, some spandrel, but creating consistent datums across might start to bring some continuity to this.
- When I was looking through the presentation, it's really busy and the other part of me thinks it's kind of cool. Maybe simplifying is something that we may want to direct them to do. As an Alder who is really supportive of this project, does some of this busyness add more cost to the project? Everything is higher in cost, if we were to value engineer it, would that benefit the project? I don't know that answer. The walls of the patio, what is the balance between privacy and not being able to see anything.
 - At the first level there is a 6-foot wall. We wanted security but freedom. Same with the second floor allows for more views out so we reduced the height in some locations.
- Color can be subjective. If we look at all four elevations at the same time, overall, to me there isn't much color. There's an awful lot of dark masonry, I would argue I love the color, this is hopefully a temporary place for people and it looks active, it looks energetic, and a little unusual which I'm ready for that in architecture period, much less a shelter like this. I am A-OK with that small front façade being kind of chaotic because the others are long and non-chaotic and maybe that is OK.
- I think you can have the color and it was just that you've got different colors, different head heights, different window shapes, different materials; it's the cohesiveness of all those different elements, not the fact that we wouldn't want to see color. It's all of those things competing against each other that takes away from the cohesiveness. That was one of the conditions we were looking for some improvement on.
- I can agree it's not just about color. I'll put in the argument that a bit of non-cohesion might be interesting for a change.
- Maybe if there was the same color of glass but they're all varied in their shape and head height. But when you get all these variables happening in different materials, and proportions and colors, I think it gets overly complicated.
- That's what I'm saying; I like it.
- That is good, we're not here to build a consensus, we are here to state our opinions and ultimately there will be a motion and we'll vote.
- I'm pro-color, I'm fine with it on every elevation but I will admit to finding the main entrance, the south elevation the only one I find a bit too jazzy. Three sides good, one side I could see toned back just a little bit but generally thumbs up on the color elements.
- These living walls, man you know, I love the idea of living walls but the reality of planting them, maintaining them, keeping them alive, having them look like these nice renderings is a process and I'm going to say that I have really strong doubts as to whether those conditions and long-term maintenance are ever going to happen here. Virginia creeper or Boston ivy do not want to be grown in a container. They both are extremely aggressive; they won't stay on these trellises without constant trimming. Containers will cause its own set of problems with roots that will need to be watered. The roots will rapidly fill up those containers. You'll also have the issue of roots freezing and thawing quickly, that destroys root structure, trying to keep these plants alive long term in there is going to be tough. It is possible but it's really a stretch and I've known people that have dealt with living walls and it is constant maintenance, you would have to trim these multiple times a year, somebody would have to be up there on a ladder; I just don't see it happening and I hate to see you going forward with something doomed for failure. If there's other things, you think will give you an aesthetic feel for those south facing walls I would encourage you to explore other avenues. I love the green roofs over the decks on the side but again, it's nice to see something other than just sedum roofs but as far as maintenance goes, a sedum roof will withstand just about any drought, but this is more extensive with stuff other than sedum perennials that will not go a long time without natural rain or irrigation so again I want the team to think about who is going to be monitoring these plants and giving them extra love when they need it. Kudos to your efforts but I really have to advise against those living walls and I'm really sad to say it but giving you a hard dose of reality on those.

- Could I invite the design team to just say again, what's driving the color and the playfulness?
 - We wanted to ensure that this is not an institutional looking building. To offer a lightness for people coming here. Our thought was to include pops of color that relates to the interior wayfinding. We wanted to bring the color in for the experience of it.
- I wanted to hear one more time before I offered comments. I think we should be celebrating as a city that we have invested in this type of amenity. I don't think we should celebrate this through the architecture though. I think the architecture should lean more toward a warmth and a dignity mentality as opposed to a celebratory playfulness. So, I don't know if that helps; that is my reaction.
- The east elevation, let me be clear, I am not against color. I welcome color to projects, this city needs color. If you look at the east elevation, you have a flexible pattern of windows to the far left. Then you have these three clear punches that do not relate to that in the middle, above something ribboned with colors in it, then to the right you have another stack of colors and rhythm. That whole elevation should have one concept of windows; they're all random. The three different types is what adds to the confusion, not the color. It's the datums, the head heights above the ceiling where they become spandrel; it's the ribbons where there's alternating spandrels at the heads and sills. Apply a concept to the entire side and you'll start to get the organization we're looking for; it's not the colors, it's definitely not the colors. Is there a way that that playfulness can happen more throughout the building, if that is the look you are going for; and what's driving it in some areas versus the ribbon windows?
 - Those punched windows are the toilets and shower rooms so we didn't want a lot of glass, those are the translucent panels for letting daylight in. Below are into dorms and daytime space, it relates to what is behind it. But I hear what you're saying, a more consistent pattern on that wall would clean it up.
- If you want privacy in terms of vision but allow light you can do clerestories, but that's going to be dated very fast. If you continue that pattern with clearstories, it will break up the expanses of blank wall while tying things together your color and your pattern and different rhythms along that façade (east elevation).

The Commission discussed the following:

- To return to the 11 bullet points from our last meeting, I'll acknowledge what I feel they have completed: updating the landscape plan to incorporate native plantings, they did update the landscape plan to use bark mulch and not stone, and they did provide the photometric plan and fixture cut sheets in terms of lighting. I, like others, find the design very bipolar. We have an elevation that is using biophilic design, which is traditionally used on an interior to connect people with nature. I struggle with applying an interior concept to an exterior façade, when the moment they are outside they are connected to nature. I would strongly recommend removing it all, not just because of Christian's knowledge, but just conceptually, I don't think applying biophilia to a façade is a good practice. That will help you with some of the design consistency you are looking for. I don't mind the pops of color at all, but I feel you're using it to overcompensate for a very dark and stark design over all of your elevations. You're also struggling to find any kind of datum line that would simplify that. I would encourage you to pull back, look for datum lines, look for consistency and reevaluate. I'm not ready to move on beyond this Initial, I don't find those other conditions have been met yet.
- There was some language in there with regard to the wall heights and the patios, but other things have been provided like fence details, design of the canopies. But I think the cohesiveness of the overall building design and the green wall are the two that seem to have the strongest reaction with the Commission.
- From a discussion standpoint I feel that the canopies are resolved. I didn't catch that in Wendy's comments, I think they explained those and worked those out.
- I think there might have been a question on the appropriateness of the green roof plant selection. As we look at the bottom elevation, those guardrails up there (patio wall heights), some of that could be

regularized, perhaps to bring in some additional cohesiveness, not saying it has to but it's pretty prominent and might be an area you can get some more continuity.

A motion was made by von Below, seconded by Knudson, for Referral with conditions.

Discussion on the motion:

- I would like to see, because we need much more consistency, I still think looking at wall heights on the patio, looking at materials, looking at the cohesiveness is still appropriate. They did revisit the design of the canopies but perhaps that might help them too in their cohesiveness. I don't want them to not ever look at those again. The fence details, the composition of materials, we have very flat facades. I'd like to see the green walls on the facades removed.
- To paraphrase, there are a lot of things to bring more cohesiveness to the design, we don't want to rule out any of those with maybe exception of the green wall. Because it just doesn't seem viable, taxpayers are paying for it and the reality is it might not last more than a year or two. Maybe bring it inside if that is really the appropriate place for it.
- (Secretary) To confirm, if there were any other comments related to lighting or landscaping? Otherwise, I have a motion for referral with making improvements to design and removing the living wall.
- Yes.
- I remember getting excited about geothermal, I want to say something positive. That's a really exciting thing for a public building and want to acknowledge that.
- I think this project has a lot going for it. In a lot of ways what we're talking about is kind of superficial, it's not a complete redesign. I hate to use the word superficial, these are important things, regardless of the clientele, we want this project to be the best it can be but we're hoping one more pass will get it past the finish line.

Action

On a motion by von Below, seconded by Knudson, the Urban Design Commission **REFERRED** consideration of this item to a future meeting. The motion for referral included the following conditions:

- Revise the building design to provide a more cohesive overall building design, including but not limited to incorporating similar design elements and level of design across all elevations, maintaining datum lines, looking at the wall heights on the patios, materials, including materials transitions and details, canopies, fence details etc.
- Remove the living/green walls.

The motion was passed on a unanimous vote of (7-0).