



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 2150 Commercial Avenue
Application Type: New Mixed-Use Building in Urban Design District 4
UDC is an Approving Body
Legistar File ID #: [88916](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Rachel Kriech, The Annex Group | Jennifer Camp, JLA Architects

Project Description: The applicant is proposing a five-story, 241-unit multi-family residential building with 6,000 square feet of commercial space, wrapping a five-story parking structure.

Staff note that a Subdivision Application will be part of a future submittal to create the project site and dedicate right-of-way.

Project Schedule:

- UDC received an Informational Presentation on August 13, 2025.
- UDC referred action on this item on December 3, 2025, requesting more detailed information from the development team.

Approval Standards: The UDC is an **approving body** on this request. The site is located in Urban Design District 4 ("UDD 4"), which requires that the Urban Design Commission review the proposed project using the design standards and guidelines for that district in [MGO Section 33.24\(11\)](#).

As noted above, at the December 3, 2025, meeting, the UDC referred action on this item requesting additional information. Generally, and in summary the additional information included:

- Revising the landscape plans to increase plantings and provide additional details related to amenity space programming,
- Revising the building design to further distinguish the residential from the commercial spaces and provide additional design details of certain materials, including the metal panel and fiber cement panels,
- Continued exploration and discussion of an at-grade pedestrian connection, and
- Providing additional information related to site lighting and the finish details of HVAC louvers.

As noted in the Plan, the project site is recommended for Community Mixed Use land uses with activated first floors at the corner of Commercial Avenue and Oscar Avenue, as well as along Coolidge Street. Generally, Community Mixed Use development is a *"...high-intensity Activity Center that integrates residential, retail, office, institutional and civic uses to serve the larger community."* Development in this area should create a walkable node or corridor and be located near transit.

In addition, the Plan goals also speak to creating mixed-use, transit-oriented development, including high-density residential and employment uses; create walkable, urban streets, including along Commercial Avenue; and carefully select and design uses at the intersection of Coolidge Street and Packers Avenue to serve as a highly visible entry to the mixed-use center.

Zoning Related Information: The project site is zoned Regional Mixed Use (RMX). The Zoning Code outlines design standards that are applicable to all new buildings the mixed-use and commercial zoning districts ([MGO 28.060](#)), including, but not limited to those related to building entrance orientation, façade articulation, design of street-facing facades, door and window openings, and materials.

In addition, the project site is in the Transit Oriented Development Overlay (TOD) zone. New development within the TOD Overlay is subject to the requirements as outlined in [MGO 28.104](#), including those that speak to:

- Maximum principal building setbacks – At least 30% of the primary street facing façade (Packers Avenue) shall be setback no more than 20 feet,
- Entrance orientation – Principal building entrances shall be orientated towards the primary abutting street (Packers Avenue) and be located within the maximum setback (20 feet),
- Minimum number of stories – A minimum of two stories is required for a minimum of 75% of the building footprint, and
- Site standards for automobile infrastructure.

Staff note that ultimately, the Zoning Administrator will determine compliance with Zoning Code requirements, which, as a permitted use project, will occur as part of the Site Plan Review process.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff request the UDC's continued review and evaluation of this proposal for consistency with the aforementioned standards, as it relates to the additional information submitted and design considerations noted in the Commission's motion for referral, including those related to:

- **Massing, Building Design and Composition, Materials.** UDD 4 Building Design guidelines and requirements generally speak to designing buildings with a sensitivity to context, avoiding large unbroken facades, utilizing four-sided architecture and a similar design aesthetic across all elevations, etc. and that exterior materials shall be low maintenance and harmonious with those used on other buildings in the area.

Generally, and in summary, the Commission's comments focused on exploring ways to break down the perceived mass and scale in the absence of multiple buildings, including incorporating a higher level of articulation/modulation in the building design and form. Specifically related to this item, the Commission requested:

- The Commission encouraged the application to continue exploring an at-grade pedestrian connection or ways to provide further separation/distinction between the building and to break down the overall perceived mass and scale,
- That the building design be revised to incorporate further design and detailing to distinguish the commercial from the residential at the building ends,
- Additional details related to how the fiber cement panel materials are applied to the building, including whether they are large sheets or smaller panels, their texture, articulation, joints, transitions to other materials, etc.
- Additional details related to the proposed perforated vertical metal panel on the garage structure, including but not limited to the material itself, how it is attached to the building, and integrated in the design,
- Revise the parking garage design to minimize blank wall expanses, and
- Additional information related to the proposed mechanical HVAC louvers and related design details.

Additionally, as noted in the December 3, 2025, staff report, staff had identified the following design-related considerations:

- Giving consideration to incorporating design strategies to create the appearance of multiple buildings versus one large building, including stepbacks, setbacks, concentrating mass in areas of higher intensity, creating some sort of separation in the building either at grade or above, etc.
 - Encouraging a higher level of visual interest in the overall building design and composition, and
 - In the design of the parking structure along Oscar Avenue, maintaining a similar level of design and detailing as the rest of the building, including minimizing blank walls, successful screening of parking, and maintaining an enhanced level of design at the pedestrian level.
- **Murals.** As noted in the applicant's Letter of Intent, murals being used to help break up the large blank walls on the parking garage façade along Oscar Avenue. While the mural artwork is unknown, the applicant indicates that the murals will be painted directly on the concrete walls and finished with an applied sealant to prolong the life and look of the mural. Given the size of the murals, they could be an integral part of the building design and materials, providing articulation, color, texture, etc.

Staff requests the Commission's feedback and findings on the potential design parameters/details for a large format art installation that could add interest and articulation (i.e. framing, lighting, medium (panels, vinyl), etc.

- **Site Amenities and Landscape.** As noted in UDD 4 guidelines and requirements, "*Landscaping shall be used for functional as well as decorative purposes, including...screening unattractive features and views along roadways...and complementing the architecture of the building.*"

Generally, and in summary, the Commission's comments focused on exploring ways to break down the perceived mass and scale of the proposed building through the use of landscape, as well as creating an enhanced design aesthetic at the pedestrian level. Specifically related to this item, the Commission requested:

- Revisions to the landscape plan to reflect an increase in perennial plantings and shrubs throughout the development. Consideration should especially be given to incorporating additional plantings in the southwest corner of the building where the commercial spaces are located to further activate that space.
- Additional design details related to the landscape, amenities and programming in the open spaces/courtyards.

Additionally, as noted in the December 3, 2025, staff report, staff had identified the following design-related considerations related to landscape:

- Providing year-round color, texture, and screening,
- Breaking down building mass and scale, and
- Adding interest at the pedestrian level along all street frontages.

Of note in the revised landscape plan is significant reduction in the number of overstory (from 32 to 16) and ornamental (from 44 to 19) trees.

- **Signage.** Staff note and the applicant is advised that while signage is shown on the elevation drawings, signage is not a part of this review nor subsequent approvals. A separate review is required. The applicant

is encouraged to work with Zoning staff to confirm whether the proposed signage complies with the [Sign Code](#).

- **Lighting.** While staff believe that the proposed lighting is consistent with the UDD 4 guidelines and requirements that speak to lighting, the applicant is advised that further review of lighting will occur as part of the Site Plan Review process for compliance with [MGO 29.36](#). The applicant is encouraged to work with Building Inspection Division staff to confirm submittal requirements.

Summary of UDC Referral Comments and Discussion

As a reference, a summary of the Commission's discussion and questions from the December 3, 2025, meeting are provided below.

The Commission acknowledged the changes from the previous design. Can see the shape in the elevation and it is articulating the spaces. The entries are defined much better.

The Commission noted the change at the center of the building, that a rendering would be nice, and is it possible to repeat the L shape elsewhere. The elevation that was in the packet was better.

The Commission commented that the message from the public speaker is well received; it's a very long building without any breaks. The Commission inquired about whether thought had been given to the possibility of separating the building in the middle, maybe even making a narrow garden to walk through and separate the building there? The applicant pointed out a small, recessed courtyard. The northeast rendering shows trees in front of the building to serve as a soft buffer.

The Commission inquired about the lengthy and detailed written public comment regarding soil toxicity, and where the UDC stands on that. The applicant noted they will have a remediation plan in place prior to construction, and will work with the WDNR. The Commission noted that if the conditions are difficult, the design might need to change.

The Commission inquired about how the building design addresses the Oscar Mayer Special Area Plan, aesthetic of the plan, history of the site, and comments from the neighboring land owner. The applicant responded that there is about 20% landscaped area, they tried to provide a larger paved area and active streetscape along the south end of the building, there are also live/work units on the south end.

The Commission questioned the need for one building and how this ties in to the Oscar Mayer Special Area Plan as a whole. How would this interact as an integral street in this development, how is the façade encouraging or addressing activity on Commercial Avenue with such a long façade, with 1/3 of it being parking?

The Commission commented that it is telling that the design is trying to hide this being one building, it needs to be broken up. The applicant responded that the site is tight, they tried hard to provide pedestrian activities, this is one building with parking in the middle. They intentionally created this to look like three buildings, with different colors and compositions to create this look to reduce the scale. The site was identified as a mixed-use site, it complies with the plan with commercial on the ends, and internal activities to the front. Coolidge Street will also come through.

The Commission discussed the large gray blank wall expanse of the parking garage near the walk-up units on Oscar Avenue. The applicant noted that underneath that blank wall is the garage entrance. There are perforated metal panel fins; the blank wall can be used for another purpose, including signage or a mural.

The Chair acknowledged that several commissioners have recognized that the length of the building and the lack of separation is a concern. Compare it to a historic downtown city block where there would be permeability. Wondering what the concern is from the public comments. The Commission asked the public speaker about their building permeability concerns, and whether they are visual, or physical. Mr. Seibel responded it is both visual and physical, it is a block long five story wall, painting it different colors and textures doesn't solve the issue, it is a complete and utter blocking of the other 49 acres. The parking garage will face our entire development. The applicant noted that they have been in touch with the speaker and they do hear the concern. They feel they did work hard to work within what is allowed on the site and what the plan is looking for.

The Commission noted that the land use was intended to be pretty dense, it is zoned for 8 stories. They do sympathize with the parking garage facing what is planned for that site. It's a big, long building, and successful in articulation to break it up somewhat. It was also noted that there are larger buildings in the area, the Bodgery is 2/3 the length of this, and the Oscar Mayer building is huge.

The Commission asked about creating voids to get permeability at grade where they are showing different points of connection; an ideal place would be the parking ramp and the retail spaces. The applicant responded it could be looked at, noting additional connectivity will be provided with the Coolidge Street extension. The Commission noted that the building is not only for the tenants, it is also for the public as well.

The Commission questioned the masonry base and why the stone stops at the sills; why not at the elevation of the second floor? The applicant replied that the intent was to highlight where the leasing office and retail areas are by taking the stone up a higher floor. Stopping at a place that maintains datum lines and same elevation as the balcony.

The Commission asked for more information on the parking ramp metal panels, how they are attached, and how they relate to the other façades. The applicant stated there are aluminum elements, a vertical sun shade, in between perforated metal panels to cover openings.

The Commission discussed the landscape plan, noting there are no perennials across the entire project, just shrubs trees, and turf lawn. It is striking for a site this large to have zero diversity in the ground plane. There are areas with large expanses of brown bark mulch with quite a gap between shrubs. There should be more grasses and perennials, better spacing of plants, and overlapping of texture. The Commercial Avenue commercial space could be further activated with landscaping.

The Commission noted that at this scale, what is hard to see, at the south end along Commercial Avenue, there is not a lot of transitional site space between the ground level activation and street, with nothing addressing the fact that the opposite corner might be a very active space as well according to the Oscar Mayer Special Area Plan.

The Commission commented that the large blank concrete wall on parking garage, without a guarantee of a mural or signage, is a very large area and needs more articulation in the architecture and materiality.

The Commission was still torn on the permeability of this project, that it is too long and continuous without any sort of visual and physical access through the middle of this space. However, there are many areas throughout our city where that is naturally how a block develops. The applicant has done a good job through pushing and pulling, and materiality in addressing that. But it's a struggle that across the street there aren't any natural crossings between Commercial and Coolidge.

The Commission noted this is a challenging and unique site. The developer tried to maximize the space as much as they could, some of these things may just be unresolved. It is difficult to make a continual façade look not so contiguous.

The Commission commented that if this comes back, they would need to see more detail about the parking garage metal panels, how they work, and what they look like. The size and orientation are a struggle. Oscar Avenue is going to be the more pedestrian street over Packers, we don't understand the greenspace, who would use it, or how they would get there, when Oscar Avenue seems to be an important future pedestrian zone. The existing building is easily recognizable because of its history, use and connection to Madison. There could be opportunity on this site, the language we're seeing on this architecture doesn't speak to that. Why couldn't this project have a historic understanding to it? It is also concerning how this answers to the rest of the site, this new hub, new neighborhood. Oscar Avenue is important, having a parking ramp on it is important, having a park on Packers Avenue is a big deal.

The Commission noted the need for more detail in how the developer plans to activate and program the greenspaces, in additional detail on the actual planting design. The Commission did discuss it being inhospitable to have a garden space on Packers Avenue.

The Commission noted that all of their comments are crying for the developer to break this building up and relocate those greenspaces.

Commissioner Mayer inquired about the possibility of a pedestrian bridge or other type of connection over Packers Avenue, and invited Alder Matthews, as the district Alder, to comment. She was unaware of a pedestrian bridge, and noted the challenge in how to connect that area. She further noted that the Oscar Mayer Special Area Plan calls for a lot of community space, and public and pedestrian new opportunities. With this being the first project of the main Oscar Mayer site, there is pressure to make sure the plan can still carry out some of those goals.

The Commission asked about the fiber cement panels, how big they are, what the joints look like, etc., noting there is not much articulation there at the walkup units. This is an opportunity to look at how this is detailed and what style it is (looking at the west elevation and sheet A956). This was a very industrial site that could be incorporated into this fiber cement.

Commission Action

On a motion by McLean, seconded by Mayer, the Urban Design Commission **REFERRED** consideration of this item, with the following additional design details being needed for the Commission to make findings related to the UDD 4 guidelines and requirements:

- The applicant shall revise the landscape plan to reflect an increase in perennial plantings and shrubs throughout the development. Consideration should especially be given to incorporating additional plantings at the southwest corner of the building where the commercial spaces are located to further activate that space.
- The building design should be revised to provide further design and detailing to distinguish the commercial from the residential at the building ends.
- The applicant shall provide additional design details related to the landscape, amenities and programming in the open spaces/courtyards.
- The parking garage design shall be revised to minimize blank wall expanses.

- The applicant shall provide additional details related to the proposed vertical metal panel on the garage structure, including but not limited to the material, how it is attached to the building, and integrated in the design.
- The applicant shall provide additional details related to how the fiber cement panel materials are applied to the building, including whether they are large sheets or smaller panels, texture, articulation, joints, transitions to other materials, etc.
- The Commission encourages the applicant to continue to explore an at-grade pedestrian connection or other ways to provide further separation/distinction between the buildings and to break down the overall perceived mass and scale.
- The applicant shall provide additional information related to the proposed mechanical HVAC louvers and related design details.
- The applicant shall provide additional information related to site lighting.