



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 1128 and 1138 East Washington Avenue
Application Type: New Development in Urban Design Commission (UDD) No. 8
Initial/Final Approval is Requested
Legistar File ID # [67172](#)
Prepared By: Kevin Firchow, Acting UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Melissa Huggins, Urban Assets Consulting | Bridget Fraser, Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestra (WYSO) | Tim Crum, Strang, Inc.

Project Description: The applicant is seeking initial/final approval for a new 40,000 square foot rehearsal facility for the Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestra (WYSO) to include two rehearsal spaces, a percussion room, rehearsal studios, a music library, instrument repair shop, administrative offices, and community gathering space. The development site includes two lots that are separated by an existing rental car facility property that is not part of this application. The new building is proposed on the existing “Avenue Bar” site at 1128 East Washington Avenue, while parking is proposed to remain at the smaller 1138 East Washington Avenue site. No design modifications are currently proposed for the existing parking lot to serve this applicant, though Plan Commission conditional use approval will be required for that parking lot.

Project Schedule:

- The UDC received an informational presentation on September 22, 2021.
- The Plan Commission is scheduled to review this demolition request on January 10, 2022.

Approval Standards: The UDC is an **approving body** on the development request. The development site is within Urban Design District 8 (UDD 8) Block 5b, which requires that the Urban Design Commission review the proposed project using the design requirements and guidelines of Section 33.24(15).

In applying the standards, the code states that the Urban Design Commission shall apply the [UDD 8](#) district requirements and guidelines as may be appropriate in order to implement the Core Development Principles of the [East Washington Avenue Capitol Gateway Corridor Plan](#). In order to approve, ordinance requires that the development is found to meet the requirements and conform as much as possible to the guidelines.

Summary of Design Considerations and Recommendations

Planning Division staff requests that the UDC provide findings and base their decision based on the aforementioned standards and guidelines for UDD 8.

Summary of Design Considerations

The Planning Division notes the following considerations:

- **Height.** In regards to height, UDD 8 includes a minimum building height of two stories (20 feet) and maximum height of three-stories (39 feet) along the street setback. While staff believes that the building achieves the East Washington Gateway Plan’s intent of having up to a three story building mass along this frontage, some elements of the second and third floors are stepped behind the first floor. As such, for

the height to be approved as proposed, UDC will need to make the following finding as outlined in Building Height Guideline b1 which reads:

The Urban Design Commission may, on a case-by-case basis, reduce the minimum building height requirement provided the buildings incorporate elements such as extended parapet or tower features to convey the appearance of a taller building. Such elements shall be substantially integrated into the design of the building so they do not read as false facades.

Staff does not object to this finding being made by the Commission. In regards to maximum height, staff notes that the building is 39 feet tall, complying with the underlying standards. When measured up to the parapet wall in certain locations, the height is 40 feet. The code specifies that “any non-habitable space from architectural features shall not be included in the height calculation” and as such, staff believes this complies with the ordinance.

- **Setbacks.** In regards to setbacks, both East Washington Avenue and Curtis Court have 15-foot setbacks. The primary setback along East Washington Avenue is just under 17 feet, with a small portion of the building is set back about 24 feet. Similarly, the setback along Curtis Court is generally just over 17 feet. However, staff believes both setbacks are permissible provided UDC can make the following finding as allowed by UDD 8:

The Urban Design Commission, however, may allow greater setbacks to allow for the articulation of long building facades or for the development of additional usable public open spaces, such as pedestrian plazas, as long as design elements are included to maintain a uniform character in the District

Finally, as a reference, staff refers the Commission to their comments from the 9/22 informational presentation:

- I like unique architecture and this is definitely unique. The precedence from the instruments and curves, I like the way it transformed into the building. Struggle with the material, more durable by the thickness of the roof but the heartiest of the stone, don't know if this much is needed. Want to see the back more without the trees covering so much of that, what it looks like. Like the way it's coming together but look at the materials, lot of dark naturalness, might be too similar and close in color and texture.
- Big shout out to the curves, nice to see a different shape, the fact that the curves continue inside and not just on the roof. Curtis Court is such a tiny little street, with the loading dock coming off there, bless the people who live on Curtis Court. That's a tough sell for those residents.
- Exciting project. Agree with the materials comment, your inspirations of instruments and tension forms, this building is super heavy while the inspirations have a lightness and a fineness to them. The drive aisle feels claustrophobic. Not sure where the driftless comes in because we're not in a driftless area, the stone could use some finessing. Like the green area for Curtis Court, the project should be really respectful of the scale of that housing and how narrow that street is. Because there's this gap between the parking and this building I want to see some nice pedestrian access, even on the Curtis Court side.
- When you look at the WYSO logo it's light and airy like musical notes. The heaviness also takes away from the youth aspect. The new performing arts building is colorful and playful, youth buildings are always more colorful and playful and light. This is heavy and sophisticated. Don't be afraid to put some color in there.
- I love the expressive architecture, when you see this you immediately recognize it as something dedicated to the arts, that's really successful. Shout out to curves, that's really refreshing. My eye keeps going to the height of the limestone base, the way it follows a curve at the top and ends in a level datum that wraps around the building, I strikes me as odd. It's less pleasing than the rest of the form. To me

the language on the left doesn't really fit with the rest of the building. Take that lower sweep and pull that horizontally more across that façade. Part of it is probably the rendering too. We'll want to see details on where the limestone meets the ground and what kind of limestone it is.

- Love it specifically because it is in contrast to almost everything new on E. Washington Avenue. Also agree with the lightness, keep the curves, lighten it up and make it more playful.
- The performance areas, the traffic noise may impact that and cause echoes, it's up to you to be sure the design responds to that in some ways vs. making this spandrel glass.