



Agenda Item #: 6

Project Title: 660 S Whitney Way - New Retail Bank Building Located in Urban Design District 3. 19th Ald. Dist.

Legistar File ID #: 78223

Members Present: Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Wendy Von Below, Rafeeq Asad, Christian Harper, Jessica Klehr, Russell Knudson, and Marsha Rummel

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Summary

At its meeting of August 16, 2023, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL** of a building renovation located at 660 S Whitney Way. Registered and speaking in support was Henry Amegatcher.

The existing vacant restaurant is proposed to be renovated for a retail bank with an ATM drive-up on the west side of the building. The major concerns were on the east side on S Whitney Way where there is a 5-foot drop from the right-of-way. The grading will be maintained using existing neighboring properties to connect the retaining wall. They will use the existing wood material for the retaining wall. Shrubs and trees will be planted to enhance the landscaping along S Whitney Way.

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

- We understand this is an existing building, my concerns are with the new retaining wall and the new disabled ramp connecting to the sidewalk.
- I wish there were more contextual photos. You said you're keeping with ones that precede to the south along Whitney Way?
 - We're going to replace what is there now with something closer to what is at the Walgreen's. The switchback ramp will be screened heavily. We'll be introducing black anodized metal around the windows. The brick and windows will remain the same. We will be washing the brick so that it looks better and nicer.
- Back to the retaining wall, those pictures you showed, were those onsite there or further to the south.
 - Those are the existing adjacent retaining walls. What is there now are like logs, which were used to buttress landscape. We want to take it down, but replace it and tie in to match.
- But a little further down it goes to precast or manufactured blocks like on the Vintage. You don't see a whole lot of railroad tie retaining walls anymore.
- That wall is falling apart, all the parking spaces along that wall are barricaded off so nobody will park there. The Vintage and then all the way around Odana Road is an interlocking concrete wall. My concern is that with the wood wall, the interlocking wall next door, the concrete ramp and three ramp switchback with metal rail, the whole thing is going to have an inharmonious pedestrian experience along Whitney Way. I would like to see if the ramp could the ramp be lengthened to minimize the switchbacks, or bring the ramp in and conceal the railing with some of the retaining wall? Since we haven't seen an elevation drawing of the design, I am cautious in saying that the design is appropriate. I don't have any problem with the building or concerns with the landscape, but this is very visual.

- That is why we are heavily landscaping it. You will see a lot more of the landscape than the ramp, including trees and shrubs. Our goal is to limit the area of disturbance area to not have an issue with stormwater code. The grade change ranges from 4-6" to 5'.
- My concerns are material of the wall and not being consistent with the neighbors to the south and west, the condition of the existing wooden walls that are there now, as well as seeing what you can do to conceal some of that ramp with continuation of the masonry wall.
- It seems like you're replacing curved canopies, are you replacing them in kind and you're introducing something flat? Help me understanding what is being proposed with the canopies.
 - It's just to define the area. Mostly they jut out about three-feet at the front entry and at the drive-up.
- What am I seeing on the elevation?
 - Standing seam roof we are introducing over the existing windows. They are anodized black. There are only two canopies on the building (applicant pointed out the front entry canopy and at the ATM drive-up).
- Why does a ramp have to go to this property?
 - (Secretary) Traffic Engineering is requiring a pedestrian entry to the street. Given the amount of grade change, switchbacks are inevitable. It may be possible to minimize the amount of switchbacks by elongated the ramp run.
- Will adjacent properties have to put in a ramp as well? Should this be thought out with more long-term planning?
 - (Secretary) That is a possibility. We are also looking at the most direct path we can provide to the street.

The Commission discussed the following:

- There is a recommendation for the lighting in the staff memo that should be followed. The lighting plan does show that uniformity is not being met. I would agree with the staff recommendation and that that be followed.
- We need to take a look at this again with some different approaches to the whole issue of both the ramp and the retaining walls. If we know what's already there is not in good condition, if those adjoining properties are forced to replace those timber walls I would be surprised if they replaced them with timber. We should be leaning towards a stone/masonry type wall. A wood wall is going in the wrong direction in making the streetscape attractive.
- I thought the landscaping was pretty exceptional for a project like this.
- I would make a motion for referral. To see some different approaches to the retaining wall, the pedestrian ramp and to bring the lighting into compliance with city ordinances.

A motion was made by Harper, seconded by Knudson, to refer with conditions. Discussion on the motion was as follows:

- Traffic Engineering is making them put the ramp in?
- Yes for accessibility to this parcel.
- Are they going to determine where it needs to be?
- (Secretary) This item will be going to Plan Commission on August 28 with staff conditions related to the pedestrian connection. I wanted to note that the UDC is an approving body, an Initial Approval with conditions would allow them to move forward to Plan Commission.
- I'd be willing to change to an Initial Approval with the same conditions.
- (Secretary) Just to reiterate the conditions the proposed retaining wall material shall be masonry as opposed to wood, revise the ramp design to minimize the number of switchbacks in the ramp as much as possible, and revise the lighting plan to be consistent with MGO 29.36.
- Correct.
- So that is a motion for Initial Approval. It has to be from a public way.

- I didn't know if it needs to be right there, I understand screening things with landscape, but if the wall is not screened elsewhere on the street – I would try to use that real estate where you have the trees to stretch it out a little bit.

Action

On a motion by Harper, seconded by Knudson, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL**. The motion was passed on a unanimous vote of (6-0), with the following conditions:

- The proposed retaining wall materials shall be masonry versus wood;
- The ramp shall be revised to minimize the number of switchbacks in the ramp as much as possible; and
- Revise the lighting plan to be consistent with MGO 29.36, including uniformity ratios.