



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 619 W Mifflin Street
Application Type: New Multi-Family Residential Building in UMX Zoning
UDC is an Advisory Body
Legistar File ID #: [84855](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Linda Irving, Trinitas | Neil Reardon, ESG Architecture & Design

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the construction of a 10-story multi-family residential building.

Project Schedule:

- The Landmarks Commission received an informational presentation at their July 1, 2024, meeting (Legistar File ID [84154](#) and [84153](#)).
- The UDC received an Informational Presentation on August 28, 2024.
- The Landmarks Commission reviewed this project at their October 7, 2024, meeting, and subsequently conditionally approved the request. Additional details regarding the Landmarks Commission action are provided below.
- The Plan Commission is scheduled to review this project at their November 4, 2024, meeting (Legistar File ID [85186](#), [85187](#), and [85193](#)).

Approval Standards: The subject site is zoned Urban Mixed Use (UMX). Per MGO Section 28.076(4)(c), *“All new buildings and additions greater than 20,000 square feet or that have more than four stories in UMX zoning shall obtain conditional use approval from the Plan Commission following review by the Urban Design Commission for conformity to the design standards in Section 28.071(3) of the Zoning Code and the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#) and report its findings to the Plan Commission.”*

Adopted Plans: The project site is located within the [Downtown Plan](#) planning area, within the West Rail Corridor neighborhood. As such, development on the project site is subject to the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#). The Plan recommendations for development in this area generally speak to encouraging and supporting multi-modal transportation and connectivity, preservation and rehabilitation of landmarks and older building stock, as well as allowing and encouraging mixed-use development. The Plan includes this site within Additional Height Area D, which states that recognizing this large, irregularly shaped block and its proximity to planned taller buildings, heights up to 10 stories may be appropriate where buildings are set back from surrounding through streets. The plan states that heights are to be used as a tool to encourage buildings of exceptional design that respond to the specific context of their location.

Related Zoning Information: The project site is zoned Urban Mixed Use (UMX). The Zoning Code outlines design standards that are applicable to all new buildings in both the UMX and DC zoning districts ([MGO 28.071](#)), including, but not limited to those related to building entrance orientation, façade articulation, height, fenestration, and materials. Staff notes that while the UDC is tasked with evaluating the development proposal for general consistency with the design-related standards in the Zoning Code, ultimately, the Zoning Administrator will determine compliance.

As noted in the Downtown Height Map, the maximum height allowed for the project site is eight stories/116 feet. However, the project site is located within an area where additional height of up to two stories (10 stories/144 feet), may be allowed as part of a conditional use. As noted in the Zoning Code, buildings must meet both the maximum number of stories and the maximum height. As proposed, the development **appears to be consistent** with the maximum height limitations.

Staff notes that the Plan Commission is the approving authority for requests for additional height. In this case, the Plan Commission's evaluation of such a request is based in Conditional Use Standard No. 13, which states:

- The excess height is compatible with the existing or planned (if the recommendations in the Downtown Plan call for changes) character of the surrounding area, including but not limited to the scale, mass, rhythm, and setbacks of buildings and relationships to street frontages and public spaces.
- The excess height allows for a demonstrated higher quality building than could be achieved without the additional stories.
- The scale, massing and design of new buildings complement and positively contribute to the setting of any landmark buildings within or adjacent to the projects and create a pleasing visual relationship with them.
- For projects proposed in priority viewsheds and other views and vistas identified on the Views and Vistas Map in the City of Madison Downtown Plan, there are no negative impacts on the viewshed as demonstrated by viewshed studies prepared by the applicant.

Historic Preservation Related Information: The project site is currently a landmark site that includes the Wiedenbeck-Dobelin Warehouse Building. In addition, the project site is adjacent to Milwaukee Road Depot at 640 W Washington Avenue. The proposed development will trigger compliance with [MGO 28.144](#) for development adjacent to a landmark or landmark site. While the Plan Commission will be the approving agency on this request, the Landmarks Commission will make an advisory recommendation as to *"...whether the proposed development is so large or visually intrusive as to adversely affect the historic character or integrity of the adjoining landmark or landmark site."*

As noted above, the Landmarks Commission reviewed this development proposal at their October 7, 2024, meeting. The Landmarks Commission review consisted of three parts:

1. Development Adjacent to a Designated Landmark, including the Wiedenbeck-Dobelin Warehouse, for which improvements to the units are part of the development proposal and the Milwaukee Road Depot, which is adjacent,
2. Land Combination and Division, Demolition, and New Construction on a Designated Madison Landmark Site to first combine all of the underlying parcels comprising the project site and including the Wiedenbeck-Dobelin Warehouse into one parcel and then to divide them in a manner so as to create individual lots for the new building and for the Wiedenbeck-Dobelin Warehouse, and
3. Amendment of the Landmark Nomination to include new documentation and amend the landmark site boundary to reflect the new lot configuration.

The portions of the Landmarks Commission review and subsequent action relevant to the UDC review are summarized below:

- Development Adjacent to a Designated Landmark. Landmarks Commission recommended introducing 4'-6' setbacks above the podium level on the rear of the building facing towards the historic depot in

order to give better contextual scale, similar to what is included on the front (north) side of that elevation.

The Landmarks Commission noted that the conceptual renderings of the brick detailing on the masonry podium level help the new construction relate to the historic buildings on either side of it. Brick detailing of the bands at the windows and the podium cornice are important, and the rhythm and style of the window openings on the podium level allow this new construction to relate to the adjacent historic resources. Landmarks Commission referred the color choices above the podium level to the Urban Design Commission as being more in their purview than Landmarks Commission as the podium level was more about how the building related to the adjacent historic buildings.

- Land Combination and Division, Demolition, and New Construction on a Designated Madison Landmark Site. The Landmarks Commission's action required that a chamfered corner be reintroduced on the southwest corner of the masonry base level of the building in order to relate the new construction to the adjacent depot; final courtyard fencing, landscaping, and hardscaping specifications to be approved by staff.

As part of the Landmarks Commission discussion the commission noted several considerations for the Urban Design Commission's consideration, including:

- General material colors and selections of the building above the podium level,
- Material detailing and transitions, particularly as it relates to the masonry base, including along W Mifflin Street (i.e., banding and a cornice-like element), and
- Window organization and details at the podium level.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff recommends that the UDC provide feedback on the development proposal regarding the aforementioned standards as it relates to the design considerations noted below.

- **Building Design and Composition.** The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines generally speak to incorporating articulation and modulation (setbacks/stepbacks) in the design of buildings to breakdown mass and scale and add visual interest, as well as delineate proportions of architectural components (top, middle, base); balancing vertical/horizontal lines, as well as maintaining contextual datum lines; maintaining consistency in the size, detailing, and rhythm of windows and doors; simplifying roof forms/transitions and creating positive termination at the top of the building, etc.

Additionally, while not specifically limited to a building's exterior design and composition, the aforementioned standards state that the Plan Commission's review for additional stories includes a finding that the excess height allows for a demonstrated higher quality building than could be achieved without the additional stories. Staff believes that this is an important consideration related to the building design and composition.

Further, the advisory comments from the Landmarks Commission provide additional comments related to the overall building design and composition.

Finally, as noted in the UDC's Informational Presentation comments, generally and in summary, consideration should be given to the following making the following refinements to the overall building design:

- Incorporate more interest, color, texture, and articulation to differentiate towers,
- Provide a definite change in plane to separate the building base from the towers,
- Incorporating more glass at the third floor on the street side of the building,
- Incorporate a higher level of sensitivity to its context into the overall design, including as it related to some of the newer development in the area (the Lark), and particularly as it related to windows, doors, entries, datum lines, etc.,
- Relook at balcony design/treatment, window and door sizes, organization and detailing,
- Provide better connectivity to the depot, and
- Refining the finish/design at the top of the building to incorporate more design details.

Staff requests the Commission provide feedback and make findings on the overall building design and composition.

Staff notes that the applicant has indicated that VTAC/PTAC units will not be used.

- **Building Materials.** As noted in the applicant’s Letter of Intent, the proposed material palette is primarily comprised of masonry, metal panel, and EIFS (to be used on interior courtyard elevations only).

Consideration should be given to the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, which generally speak to utilizing a high quality, durable materials to enrich the pedestrian environment through the use of scale, color, texture and detailing. As part of the UDC’s Informational Presentation comments, the Commission noted that a richer level of material detailing and articulation was necessary. Ultimately, the Commission requested additional information regarding material transitions and detailing, which the applicant has provided (refer to the “UDC Supplemental Information” item in [Legistar](#)).

Staff notes continued concerns regarding the desirability, durability, and quality of EIFS in various applications and note that Zoning Code limits the use of EIFS as an accent material or at the top of the building. Full elevations of the interior courtyard space have not been provided, so it is unclear if the EIFS application is consistent with the Zoning Code limitations or how visible it will ultimately be.

Staff requests the UDC provide feedback and findings related to the proposed building materials.

- **Long Views.** Given the project site location and the proposed building height, the development will be highly visible as it currently sits amongst primarily 1-5 story buildings. The proposed building will be visible from the intersections of W Washington Avenue and Regent/Proudfit Street, as well as W Washington Avenue and Bedford Street, and long the Southwest Commuter Path. As such, consideration should be given to the organization and composition of upper floors and creating an appropriate termination at the top of the building. The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines speak to providing a higher degree of architectural strength and design in areas of prominent viewsheds. Staff again note the aforementioned standards state that the Plan Commission’s standard related to finding demonstrated higher quality building than could be achieved without the additional stories.

Staff requests the UDC provide feedback and findings related to the design of these highly visible facades.

- **Building Orientation.** The project site located at the end of W Mifflin Street, off a cul-de-sac, with limited street frontage (only 33 feet adjacent to the Wiedenbeck-Dobelin building to remain). As noted by the Commission in their Informational Presentation comments, the building orientation is subtle and difficult.

As noted in the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, *“...how a building faces a public way (street and sidewalks) is a primary factor in what it contributes to the urban character of an areas by reinforcing a consistent street wall and enhancing the pedestrian realm.”*

Acknowledging the limited available street frontage, staff requests the UDC's feedback and findings on the building orientation.

- **Landscape and Site Amenities.** As noted on the plans, there are several amenity spaces, including two internal at-grade courtyards, an auto court, several as well as pedestrian pathways, and a rooftop amenity space. The successful design and planting of these spaces will impact their use as amenity spaces.

In addition, there are multiple walls and/or raised beds as shown on the grading and landscape plans, although wall and raised bed details and materials are not clearly specified in the plans. There are also two fence types. A five-foot tall aluminum fence that runs along the southeast and southwest sides of the project site, which will limit access through the project site, as well as to the units located with ground floor entries, and a shorter two-foot fence that appears to be located on top of walls/raised beds.

Staff requests the UDC's feedback and findings on the overall landscape plan and plant schedule, as well as proposed walls/raised beds and fences. Consideration should be given to the Downtown Urban Design Guideines, which generally speak to softening urban edges, providing year-round texture, color, and screening, utilizing context appropriate plantings, etc.

- **Lighting.** Staff notes and the applicant is advised that further revisions to the lighting plan will be necessary to confirm that light levels are consistent with MGO 29.36, including those related to light levels at the property line (max. 0.5 footcandles where averages on the north property line are in excess of 1.0 footcandles).

In addition, to fully evaluate the proposed lighting for consistency with the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, which speak to providing adequate but not excessive lighting, limiting glare and trespass, as well as ensuring that fixtures are full cutoff and architecturally integrated, additional information is necessary, including:

- Making refinements to the Lighting Calculations Table to show light levels in certain areas (i.e., pedestrian areas, which in some areas do not appear to show light levels where fixtures are proposed, and vehicle use areas (auto court)), as well as
- Making adjustments to rooftop light fixture types and locations, especially pole mounted light fixtures located adjacent to the building edge,
- Information/details related to architectural lighting should it be proposed.
- Staff also notes that all proposed light fixtures, including those located at individual balconies, need to be included in the lighting plan.

As noted by the UDC in their Informational Presentation comments, lighting will play a key role in the use and safety related to the pedestrian pathways and amenity spaces.

Staff recommends the UDC address lighting in their formal action.

Summary of UDC Informational Presentation Discussion and Comments

As a reference, the Commission's discussion and comments from the August 28, 2024, Informational Presentation are provided below.

Summary of Commission Discussion and Questions:

The Commission noted the project could do better relating to the surrounding context and asked the team to describe their approach.

The applicant reviewed the efforts that have been made to relate to the landmark buildings and sites, including maintaining the base mass, as well as integrating stepbacks.

The Commission noted that the design needs color and texture. It seems like there are two masses with some hung balconies. There is not a lot of design or architecture being as loud as it could. For instance, the dark tower seems to have horizontal lines that are proud and gives it dimensions, but it doesn't look like they wrap the corners. You can celebrate the context without being background – you want it to hold its own weight. You just want to provide a little more interest. Seeing more about how the masses come together will be helpful.

The Commission inquired about the landscape plan, specifically the site and how it connects to its context. It is an odd back corner, and it is hard to fully connect to its context.

The applicant noted that while the street ends, the intent is to continue the street scape to the auto court with street trees and bike parking.

Overall, the Commission liked the treatment of the façade along the Wiedenbeck Building, but did have concerns related to how the building relates to the depot, especially the stepping in the masonry from three to two stories, as well as the masonry color. Consideration should be given to how is the brick relating on the proposed building, not how it relates to the surrounds.

The applicant noted that the brick color is preliminary and will be refined. Ultimately, the brick color was intentional to not match the depot, but did want to provide a color that is different because the two historic resources are different. The stepdown relates more to the transition to the Wiedenbeck Building. The Commission discussed the pedestrian-oriented auto court, noting issues with buildings that need to serve people who do not have cars, but receive lots of deliveries.

The applicant reviewed the site plan and how vehicular and pedestrian movements will occur through the site.

The Commission confirmed the property line location.

The Commission inquired about the dark colors and the applicant noted that the intent was to break down the mass with color with the idea that they are two buildings.

The Commission inquired about building stepbacks. The applicant clarified that there are varying stepback around the buildings above the three-story podium.

The Commission noted that additional information would be needed that shows the changes in plane and a definite change in plane is necessary between the base and the tower.

The Commission inquired about where EIFS might be proposed. The applicant noted that it would be used on the internal courtyards only so that it is not visible from the public right-of-way.

The Commission inquired about the courtyards and whether a sun study was done to confirm how much sun they get. The applicant noted that the "East Courtyard" will get great sun, but the "Inner Courtyard" would not get as much sun – not a highly greened space, but plantings will be adjusted appropriately. It will be an amenity space, and will have additional lighting added as well.

The Commission inquired about the space between the Wiedenbeck Building and the proposed development noting that additional information should be provided in future submissions that shows that space between the two buildings, especially from the Wiedenbeck Building.

The Commission acknowledged that this is a difficult site. It doesn't have great street presence. There is a struggle with how you identify and connect with context. There needs to be connectivity to the depot. The next pass will need to have better connectivity to this side.

The Commission generally thought that the courtyards looked great and that they were excited about those, the chamfered corner overall was awkward noting that it may make more sense if the building just was notched out, and that lighting and safety will be essential to populating the space between the buildings.

The Commission generally agreed that the contextual relationship should be better maintained, including datum lines. The chamfer is a weak gesture – there are other things to look at – rotating a piece of the building at top. Really seeing the reveals in the building materials would be helpful; it almost looks like a super imposed grid, but it is not clear. It will be important to show those details. There is a glass corner above the base on the street side – explore using more glass.

The Commission requested that the applicant provide more views of the transition between the light and dark towers – what is happening there – encourage you to explore what happens in that notch area.

The Commission talked about the longer view from W Washington Avenue. This is the view that many will likely see more frequently. We need to start looking up at our designs as well. We are seeing less details at the top of buildings. Encourage the applicant to add more interest here. Looking at the chamfered corner – masonry color and contrast to the black balconies and the lighter panels – also the frames around the balcony doors. The truncate here is go bigger or do not do it. The masonry thickness and stepping deserves a second look here.

The Commission noted that context should be looked at as evolving – the context is the Lark and the Trinitas in the background – that is the context. Consider white, is a nice contrast instead of bringing a bunch of saturated colors. The balconies should be treated differently between the towers, which will help with articulation. The street orientation is difficult and subtle, and the building reveals itself as you approach, there should be better connectivity to the depot.

The Commission requested the applicant utilize North arrows on site and floor plans.