



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 418-446 W Washington Avenue/413-417 W Mifflin Street

Application Type: Alder Referral for an Advisory Recommendation to the Plan Commission for a Multi-Family Building
Informational Presentation

Legistar File ID #: [84628](#)

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: CRG Acquisition, LLC | Michael Hanley, The Lamar Johnson Collaborative

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the demolition of two existing buildings for the construction of a six-story, 163-unit residential building with a single level of underground parking.

Approval Standards: While the applicant has elected to voluntarily submit an Informational Presentation application to engage the commission early in their planning processes, ultimately, this application will be before the UDC at the request of Alder Verveer who is specifically requesting the UDC's feedback on the overall design, composition, and consistency with those recommendations in the Mifflandia Plan.

The Conditional Use Section of the Zoning Code allows an applicant to seek an advisory recommendation from the UDC prior to Plan Commission upon the direction of the Planning Director or District Alder. Additionally, Section 33.24(4)(a) MGO states that the Urban Design Commission ("UDC") shall make recommendations to the City Plan Commission, Common Council and any other concerned commission on all matters referred or assigned to it under the provision of this ordinance and other City ordinances.

As such, the UDC will be an **advisory body** to the Plan Commission. As a reference, the Plan Commission will consider the following Conditional Use Standard (MGO 28.183(6)a.8) when evaluating this request:

*"When applying the above standards to any new construction of a building or an addition to an existing building the Plan Commission shall find that **the project creates an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with the existing or intended character of the area and the statement of purpose for the zoning district.** In order to find that this standard is met, the Plan Commission may require the applicant to submit plans to the Urban Design Commission for comment and recommendation." (Emphasis Added)*

Adopted Plans: The project site is located in the [Downtown Plan](#) (2012) planning area, in the both the West Washington and Mifflin neighborhood areas. The Downtown Plan includes various recommendations for each neighborhood area, including those that generally and in summary speak to encouraging flexible building designs to foster a mix of uses, including residential and neighborhood serving commercial uses, establishing minimum and maximum building heights, encouraging shared access to limit vehicular/pedestrian conflicts, maintaining and enhancing the unique character of West Washington Avenue as a gateway "grand boulevard," as well as preparing a detailed concept plan and design standards to guide redevelopment. It is this recommendation that was the impetus for the Mifflandia Plan, which outlines more specific design-related recommendations for new development in this area.

The Downtown Plan Height Map recommends building heights of four stories, plus two bonus stories possible along W Washington Avenue if there is a noticeable stepback, and up to six stories along Mifflin Street. As proposed the development **appears to be consistent** with the height limitations.

The project site is also located in the [Mifflandia Plan](#) (2019) planning area. Similar to the Downtown Plan, the Mifflandia Plan recommends the project site for residential or mixed-use development with maximum height of four stories with an allowance for two additional stories provided that development meets the required stepback above the fourth floor (30 feet from the building face on W Washington Avenue and 15 feet from W Mifflin Street). The plan notes that building setbacks shall closely align with the existing and historic setbacks for the neighborhood (20 feet on W Washington Avenue and 15 feet on W Mifflin Street) with the encroachments of stoops, porches, etc. being encouraged.

In addition to recommendations noted above regarding setbacks, stepbacks and height, the Mifflandia Plan also enumerates specific urban design and other recommendations, which are intended to help guide new development in the neighborhood and which were intended to serve as the foundation for the creation of a new Urban Design District. While a new design district has not been formally created, the recommendation contained in the Mifflandia Plan still apply, including those that speak to:

- Stepbacks noting that minimum stepbacks (ten feet) above four stories on non-street facing sides,
- Setbacks, including a minimum side yard setback to maintain building separate and rhythm (five feet), as well as 20 feet from W Washington Avenue and 15 feet from W Mifflin Street,

Staff notes that the proposed development **does not** appear to comply with the W Mifflin Street setback (15 feet recommended, where 10 feet is proposed), nor the recommendation for a 10-foot stepback for masses above four stories on non-street facing sides.

- Building Materials, including prohibiting EIFS, stucco,
- Building Design, including, incorporating relief where materials transition, utilizing complementary simple materials palette, locating active unit entries at the street, designing main building entries to prominent features,
- Building Mass and Scale, including using modulation and articulation to break down mass and scale, as well as
- Guidelines for the transition between public and private spaces, etc.
- Consider the establishment of an alley or “inter-block lane” in the subject block that would parallel W Washington Avenue, running generally through the rear lot lines in this block.

For additional information please refer to pages 15-20 of the Mifflandia Plan.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff recommends that the UDC provide feedback on the development proposal regarding the aforementioned standards and guidelines noted in the Mifflandia Plan and Conditional Use approval standards as it relates to the design considerations noted below.

- **Building Massing.** Among Planning staff’s primary concerns that have been raised with the development team is the establishment of a “through-lot” building that runs through the entirety of the site, with frontages on both W Washington Avenue and W Mifflin Street. Staff has previously communicated that a two-building solution that better reflected the surrounding context and setbacks was preferable as it would be more consistent with the surrounding development pattern and rhythm, as well as other larger

buildings that have recently been approved in the 400 and 500 blocks of W Washington Avenue and along W Mifflin Street. Considering the building's large size, consideration should be given to how the resulting mass/scale fits into the surrounding context and rhythm along the street.

- **Building Design and Composition.** As proposed, the large building frontage along W Washington Avenue is separated into three distinct building masses. However, it is unclear from the drawings if this design could truly create a multiple-building appearance. As such, consideration should be given to the cohesion between these elements if a building of this scale is ultimately pursued. Staff requests UDC's feedback on the overall design composition of this large façade, especially in terms of its composition resulting in the appearance of multiple buildings while also relating to and being complementary to each other.

Consideration should also be given to the design of the upper stories and their integration into the overall building design and composition and maintaining a consistent level of design across all elevations, as well as the number and design of active unit entries, which appear more like storefronts than residential units, and main building entries, which are not clearly identifiable, especially on the W Mifflin Street elevation which appears more like a back door. Staff would encourage that modifications be considered to that composition, especially related to the arrangement of solids and voids on that front façade.

Staff requests the UDC's feedback on the overall building design and composition.

- **Building Materials.** As noted in the Mifflandia Plan recommendations, exterior building materials shall reflect those as allowed by the Zoning Code, except for EIFS and stucco, which are prohibited, and primary building materials, should be limited to three different materials. As proposed, the building material palette is primarily comprised of metal panels, masonry and fiber cement panels. Staff requests the Commission's feedback on the overall building material palette.
- **Wall Packs/HVAC Louvers.** While wall pack units or louvers are not indicated on the elevation drawings, they are commonly associated with residential uses. While it has been the current practice to locate wall packs so that louvers are not on street-facing or highly visible facades, they have been approved in some cases when found to be well integrated into the façade's design, including the use of perforated metal panels to screen louvers or utilizing a louver system that is consistent with the window opening size. Staff requests the UDC's feedback on the use of wall pack systems and potential design-related considerations.
- **Site Planning Considerations – W Washington Avenue.** As shown on the site plan, a curbcut is proposed on W Washington Avenue. Both the Downtown Plan and Mifflandia Plan include recommendations to limit curbcuts and interruptions in the pedestrian environment along W Washington Avenue. As such, consideration should be given to minimizing the curbcut to the greatest extent possible in its current location, as well as exploring the possibility of an alternative location and/or shared access point along W Mifflin Street if the applicant were to continue to pursue a single-building solution. Staff encourages the applicant team to work with Traffic Engineering staff to address these concerns.
- **Landscape and Open Spaces.** The project site presents a unique redevelopment opportunity given its location within the W Washington Avenue corridor, as well as along the neighborhood's W Mifflin Street. Consideration should be given to the design of the proposed street facing courtyard spaces and "front yard" landscape areas not only in terms of enhancing the pedestrian environment, but also in terms of creating a transition between public and private spaces as noted in the Mifflandia Plan. Staff requests the UDC's feedback on potential design considerations related to the proposed courtyard and "front yard" landscape areas, including those related to softening hardscape areas, incorporating elements to clearly define public/private space, complement architectural features, and providing year-round color, texture and screening where needed.