



<b>Agenda Item #:</b>	8
<b>Project Title:</b>	121 E. Wilson Street - Alteration to a Previously Approved Mixed-Use Building in UMX Zoning. 4th Ald. Dist.
<b>Legistar File ID #:</b>	71621
<b>Members Present:</b>	Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Lois Braun-Oddo, Christian Harper, Shane Bernau, Amanda Arnold, Russell Knudson, and Rafeeq Asad
<b>Prepared By:</b>	Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

## Summary

At its meeting of March 15, 2023, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL** of an alteration to a previously approved mixed-use building in UMX zoning located at 121 E Wilson Street. Registered and speaking in support were Dan Kennelly, Brian Reed, and Andrew Laufenberg. Registered in support and available to answer questions was Rebecca De Boer.

Modifications to the project are mostly adjustments made over the last few months to enhance the user experience of the building. The frame that surrounds the glass volumes along Wilson Street, used to capture the balconies, has been pulled inward to expand the views from those balconies. The reconfiguration clusters the metal panels in a manner that allows for more use for those residents. The articulation has been reduced to reflect closer to a human scale, and to install visual interest within the panels, they themselves cant in a right or left justification to create dance and shadow throughout the day, reducing in frequency as the panels move up the façade and clustered into three columns creating a random lighting effect up the building façade. To add a secondary level of detail, a reveal has been added to the elements, moving randomly up the façade. They have also implemented this patterning on the glassier portion to highlight the promenade. At the terrace level the notable change is a cable rail system versus the glass railings from the previous iteration. This provides more visibility to the lake and views from balconies, while eliminating the need for bird safe glass. The side elevation and courtyards introduced more brick and decreased the amount of glazing for greater contrast between the solid and glassier elevations of the building. A previous accent brick detail at the spandrel level is expanded on by taking it in a vertical application to create more visual interest within that space. The side and courtyard balconies which were previously recessed have been pulled out roughly 30 inches to create a better interior layout, provide more natural light into the units and provide the opportunity for these users to have better potential views. The initial lighting proposal was found to not be fully dark sky compliant, as well as pose potential maintenance challenges and obstacles for snow and other accumulations. The new current design removes the metal panel accent lighting, keeping the uplights to illuminate the underside of the balcony slabs, the promenade, and the courtyard area.

The Commission discussed the following:

- We're all design related professionals in various capacities, and design is subjective. Our job is to give direction without designing the building for you. The previous designs were much more successful and I loved this project. Now we have cluttered facades where they were so dynamic before, the canted metals and the patterns with the gradation that was clear and now it looks like a bunch of lines on glazing that's a little more cluttered than designed. I understand why, but now I feel like this is just in response to comments you got, you tried to change something that worked really well and much more successfully than we have now. You had a much more successful project before. I do like some of the updates to the interior courtyard, adding the brick was a little bit

better. I like the promenade space now. The change to these major facades, adding the operable windows with a much stronger profile, it just clutters up what was a very nice, contemporary, different design that stood out from other buildings.

- We approved the previous images and this has come back at the request of the development team, not us. I agree with you, these new canted panels are not in keeping with the original concept of the building gradation, especially those pleated bent panels moving back into a recess versus these panels that are kind of sticking out randomly; it is not as successful as it was.
- Sorry to see you back for some of these things. Question on the under-balcony lighting; will the occupant have control of that light fixture, or is that fixture always on, or controlled by the landlord?
  - The intent is that it would be a typical balcony light where the occupant has switch control; they would turn it on and off when they do not need it.
- That might be a detriment as a design element that you're communicating here, but it is better to give the occupants control over that part of their environment.
- The operable windows, are they awning style, how do they move?
  - They would be awning style.
- I still like this project but I agree, if you put the two versions side-by-side, it's a slam dunk that visually I prefer the former proposal. I have spoken quite a few times about my lack of excitement of hanging balconies, I just think that if I lived here I would want that hanging balcony, but for everyone else looking at it I think it's a protrusion on an otherwise well-designed building. The ones in the courtyard bother me quite a bit, but the ones on the corners that broke up that otherwise really nice dynamic framing that accented the random pattern that has been diminished; it's going backwards as far as I'm concerned. It's disappointing because it looked better in its early version.
- Having to take away the lighting that was shown earlier, I think we all realized that it wasn't going to pass muster with the city and dark sky ordinances, which I fully support. Strangely, the under lighting of the balconies look better at night with the soft lighting underneath. It's still a cool project, looking forward to seeing it and the public spaces. Disappointed that it didn't stay closer to its previous version.
- Instead of these projecting panels, if they find a way to just do some articulation with some flat panels and clean it up, make the façade a little bit more taut and at least less random three-dimensionally; could be random in the elevation dimension.
- As a piece of urban design it is still a nice project. All of those elements are still there as you walk through the courtyard to the lake, there is still that public promenade. The important urban design elements are left intact.
- It is definitely a good urban design project. I remember the façade comments that weren't the most favorable, why are we looking at this again? Why did you change, what made you say we're just going to abandon the previous design to go to this? This was a lot of extra work, what triggered changing the façade, adding a lot more detail and reveals and vertical pieces? Why are we here?
- They indicated more visibility for occupants, but I have to think there are also some budget issues working having all that stuff projecting and recessing back in at strange angles and custom making panels like that and having your basic structure out and pushing your window jambs all the way back to begin with must have been a detailing and budgeting nightmare. But I will let the development team confirm. .
  - Yes, what you have described is certainly correct. As we've continued to look at the design and building, the budget and making it work financially of course is necessary. In terms of the panel orientation, part of it was shifting those around to better align with demising walls and vertical chases for heat pumps, things like that. With the windows sort of mullion pattern change, we needed to adjust the operable window to be more ADA compliant and more durable option. Those were certainly some of the reasons. Again, the financial feasibility of the project, the experience of the tenant in terms of maximizing window views, were some of the factors that went into these changes.
- That makes sense. Is there a way to accomplish what you tried to accomplish but with a lot less busyness? Maybe it's just one bigger angled panel rather than three. How do you simplify some of the design moves? There's an operable window and a gap that seems random, and there is this reveal, but you cannot tell if that is

a space between two vertical mullions – this little gap – so you have the operable window then you have this gap with a little peg at the bottom? What is that? Is that just a design?

- That slit is the reveal we added in an effort to create a randomness across the entire façade because the metal panels themselves were clustered. So that was a way of trying to get some randomness across the entire facade. The little ‘peg’ you’re seeing was us exploring additional lighting strategies to light these tiny little reveals, but we opted not to move forward with that. It’s just a left over light fixture that never got removed from the rendering.
- Since you are not lighting it, maybe get rid of that reveal and make something bigger, just have one singular vertical mullion. That just adds to the confusion. It’s not bad project, but it’s just not as good as it was. You don’t have the bent panels but you have the angled panels. Maybe simplifying so it’s two instead of three, it’s just too much. Take one more pass at simplifying but keeping the current design elements that work within your budgetary constraints, just tone it down a little bit.
- Before it was pleasingly random, and now it’s kind of chaotic.
- Those channels, all I see is bird nests. If you just made that a wider mullion that might get rid of some of that chaotic look. I don’t mind the larger panels in how they look, but they don’t have the rhythm the other panels had. If you could get that back a little bit, but maybe by closing those reveals off it might be accomplished.
- As much as I agree, I think the protruding balconies work on the corners, but on the inside of the courtyard and facing other buildings, people want views to the lake, but maybe in the courtyard they lose privacy. Is it possible to lose those in the courtyard? It’s a great project and I really do still like it.
- What we’ve lost was the big move of those panels and that gradation that was on a much larger scale. Now it’s so much more fine grained, it adds to that busyness. I would love to see a larger grain movement in that building façade rather than these small little pieces. Some units might have less glazing than others but I think that’s totally worth it for the building design as a whole. I did prefer the glass railing on the lakeside. We talked quite a bit about the balconies before, the exposed open corners to the balconies on the Wilson Street elevation is moving in the opposite direction of where all of our comments were previously. There was a way that still had plenty of sight lines and plenty of views without having these wide open corners.
- There are a lot of subjective things here and I’d hate to have to see it again because I think it is pretty acceptable, I would make a motion for approval, but ask that the channels that you have shown on the elevations be either filled in or removed somehow so they become a wider panel, or whatever the design team chooses. I hate to dictate how much or how little some of these panels are added or removed, it is harder unless we see it again. That would be the only condition I would make, is for the channels.

A motion was made by Braun-Oddo, seconded by Arnold, to grant Final Approval. The motion provided for the channels shown on the elevations to be either filled in or removed somehow so they become a wider panel, or whatever the design team chooses.

Discussion on the motion was as follows:

- I agree, as much as I don’t want this to come back to us again, it might be one that is worth it to see how some of these things shake out.
- If we’re going to revisit channels we may as well revisit the façade in general. Making the panels bigger, or taking one away, or filling in a channel, those are all the same details on the same exterior. If they are going to take another stab at it and take a look at this holistically and not just fill in the channels.
- I agree some of the comments about bigger moves that articulate a design across the building as opposed to little accent details that really resonated with me. I would also be in favor of seeing this project again.
- My motion is not that all the reveals have to be filled in, but that they are somehow removed or filled in. The architects can use what we’ve said about combination or contrast between the past iteration and this one to give us essentially what we’re asking for by not just filling in the reveals, but either filling them in or removing them. I wasn’t dictating that they all get filled in.

- I think it's more than just filling in those reveals, it's stepping back and looking at the composition of all these canted panels, and maybe coming up with something that's a little cleaner and more in keeping with the original design intent.

The motion failed on a vote of (2-4-1) with Braun-Oddo and Arnold voting yes; Harper, Asad, Knudson and Bernau voting no; and Goodhart non-voting.

## Action

On a motion by Asad, seconded by Bernau, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL** with the condition that the applicant relook at the window wall system and metal panel system design and detail. .

Discussion on the motion was as follows:

- I don't think anyone had an issue with the project, the massing, or anything, I think we just want them to take one more look at the articulation and design of the facades.
- That also accepts the masonry, the balcony treatments and the lighting and other proposed design progressions, correct?
- Yes.
- (Staff) To clarify, it would be good to give the applicant team a list or a few things that they should certainly be looking at. There were a lot of comments about the reveals, glass railings, balconies, metal panels. It would be good to provide some direction.
- This is an exciting project. I don't want to dictate specifics like recessed balconies or cable railings, that is part of the design and I don't want to dictate that. I do want to say the façade took a step backwards, but to look at that, and come up with some other things on their own without us saying the railing has to be glass, etc.
- Focus on the façade elements: metal panel and window mullion patterning, spacing and detailing.
- How about if we had them focus on the façade elements like the metal panel and the window mullion patterning, space and detailing.
- Right, in doing that, maybe they will say those frames need to come back so they wrap the balcony.
- We can say that the masonry, the general configuration of the balconies, the balcony railing treatments could be okay.
- If commissioners feel differently, they can come up with a list.
- My suggestion would be the window wall system and the metal panel system design and detail, and not to focus so much on the balcony reconfigurations, or the railing types, or any of the landscaping or anything else changed as a result of the design progression.

The motion was passed on a vote of (5-1-1) with Asad, Bernau, Harper, Knudson and Arnold voting yes; Braun-Oddo voting no; and Goodhart non-voting.