



**Project Address:** 33 W Johnson Street (aka 200 Wisconsin Avenue)  
**Application Type:** New Hotel Development in the Downtown Core (DC)  
**UDC is an Advisory Body**  
**Legistar File ID #:** [90072](#)  
**Prepared By:** Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

## Background Information

**Applicant | Contact:** Bruce Pfeifer, Drury Madison, LLC | Brenda McClure, Potter Lawson

**Project Description:** The applicant is proposing the construction of an 8-story, 205-room hotel with structured parking to be located on the northeastern, currently vacant, portion of the block bounded by W Johnson Street, W Dayton Street, N Carroll Street and Wisconsin Avenue.

Staff note that the former Madison College building is not part of this proposal. The applicant has indicated that a Subdivision Application will be pursued in the future to subdivide the block into two parcels.

### Project Schedule:

- The UDC received an Informational Presentation on October 8, 2025.
- The Plan Commission is scheduled to review this proposal at their January 12, 2025, meeting.
- Common Council is scheduled to review this proposal (rezoning) on January 27, 2026.

**Approval Standards:** The applicant is proposing to rezone the project site from Planned Development to Urban Mixed Use (UMX). As such, the Urban Design Commission (UDC) is an **advisory** body on this request. Pursuant to section [28.076\(b\)](#):

*"All new buildings and additions to building with greater than six (6) stories shall obtain conditional use approval. In addition, the UDC shall review such projects for conformity to the design standards the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#) and shall report its findings to the Plan Commission."*

As noted above, the UDC is an **advisory body** to the Plan Commission on this request. Staff recommend that as an advisory body, the UDC should structure a motion as a recommendation to the Plan Commission with or without specific findings and conditions. For example, such a motion may look like the following:

*"The UDC finds that the development is consistent with the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, with the following conditions being met...and recommends that the Plan Commission approve the proposed development subject to the recommended conditions."*

**Related Zoning Information:** The Zoning Code outlines design standards that are applicable to all new buildings in both the UMX and Downtown Core zoning districts ([MGO 28.071](#)), including, but not limited to those related to building entrance orientation, façade articulation, height, fenestration, and materials.

As noted in the Downtown Height Map, the maximum height allowed for the project site is eight (8) stories with the potential for two additional stories. The Zoning Code also notes that buildings must meet both the maximum number of stories and the maximum height. Staff note that while ultimately, the Zoning Administrator will

determine compliance with the Zoning Code requirements, as proposed the development **appears to be consistent** with the height limitations.

**Design-Related Plan Recommendations:** The project site is located within the [Downtown Plan](#) planning area, within the Downtown Core subarea. 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 the highest intensity of development in this area and encouraging a mix of uses that will help to retain the area's vibrancy.

The Plan also identifies Wisconsin Avenue as a "Premier Street", which are streets intended to be designed with the highest level of design and amenity, including many characteristics of "complete streets" which are designed to host all users, including bicycles, pedestrians, and vehicles. Currently, Wisconsin Avenue includes metered on-street parking, tapered medians, sidewalks and very wide, embellished terraces.

## Summary of Design Considerations

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

- **Site Access and Circulation.** As indicated on the site plan, an auto-oriented drop-off area is proposed introducing two curb cuts along Wisconsin Avenue. While a previous proposal was ultimately approved with a similar feature, staff are again noting concerns related to the potential adverse impacts of the proposed drop-off area on the existing uninterrupted pedestrian and vehicular traffic patterns, design of the streetscape and pedestrian environment, and relationship of the building to the street. Additionally, staff note inconsistencies with the adopted plan recommendations and Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, especially considering Wisconsin Avenue's recommendation as a "Premier Street" in the Downtown Plan and the those guidelines that speak to site access and circulation.

As noted in the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines that speak to site access and circulation one of the primary goals is to maximize uninterrupted pedestrian access within a given block. More specifically, the guidelines state that *"Porte-cochere type entries, drop-offs or circular drives should not be parallel to the street or within the right-of-way, nor should they be oriented to require more than one curb cut."*

Given the plan and guideline consistency concerns, if the Urban Design Commission were to recommend approval, staff recommend that the Commission make specific findings related to the proposed site access and circulation being an alternative that is of a higher quality or aesthetic than would otherwise be achieved if the adopted plan and guidelines were followed. Consideration should be given to the minimizing the vehicular infrastructure as much as possible, the building setback, entry orientation and the mass/scale of architectural design elements, creating an enhanced design aesthetic at the pedestrian level, utilizing human scale architectural elements, creating a free and clear pedestrian zone, treatment of public spaces, landscape treatment, etc.

Staff note that in coordination with Traffic Engineering staff, the applicant is encouraged to continue to work with Traffic Engineering staff to reduce the driveway and curbcut widths as much as possible, which appear to have been widened since the previous submittal.

- **Building Design and Composition.** The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines generally speak to building design and composition in terms of creating one cohesive architectural expression, balancing vertical/horizontal proportions, creating distinctive building components (base, middle, top), maintaining positive building and entry orientation to the street, providing ground level activation on all street

frontages, minimizing blank walls, creating positive termination at the top of the building, and creating a successful transition between buildings, etc.

Generally and in summary, the Commission's Informational Presentation comments spoke to the following design considerations:

- Given the location of the site consideration should be given to making bigger design moves with regard to the asymmetrical application of the materials, incorporating as much glazing as possible - giving the design a more modern take,
- Incorporating more shape or massing to complement the context and location,
- Accentuating the building corners more,
- Incorporating design detailing and elements to highlighting the main building entrance,
- Revisiting the design at the base of the building, especially along W Johnson Street, to ensure that the pedestrian/human scale is being maintained, and
- Maintaining the beautiful masonry detailing, which the Commission was complementary of.

With regard to overall building design and composition, staff request the Commission's feedback and findings on the following items:

- Building corners. The project site has frontages on three streets and two prominent intersections along Wisconsin Avenue, a premier street in the heart of downtown. As such, consideration should be given to maintaining strong corner elements.

In addition, the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines speak to reinforcing the urban block form and to maintaining a consistent build-to line along street frontages. Special consideration should be given to maintaining the building setback and building relationships between the proposed development and the existing MATC Downtown Campus Building along W Johnson Street.

- Street-level activation. Consideration should be given to the design of the building base component as it relates to providing a higher level of interest or richer level of architectural detailing along the lower levels of the building along all street frontages.

Of particular interest, however, is Wisconsin Avenue, which appears to be the main entrance to the building. This entrance is significantly setback from the street due to the proposed drop-off area and there appears to be another active entrance along this elevation, it is also recessed. Consideration should be given to incorporating architectural details and elements that engage the street/sidewalk, identify building entrances and that integrates architecture with landscape/streetscape design (i.e., planters, canopies, awnings, etc.).

In addition, there are vehicle entrances that are located along the ground floor on both the W Johnson and W Dayton Street elevations that leave voids in the streetscape. Consideration should also be given to the design and detailing of these entrances to ensure their integration in the overall building design and in maintaining an active streetscape/richer level of detailing at the pedestrian level, especially as it relates to incorporating transparency/glazing, maintaining datum lines, etc.

- Design of Building Components. The overall design and integration of the second and third floors into the larger building design and composition as these floors are part of the structured parking amenity, and the design details at the top component and creating positive visual termination at the top of the building, and

- **Four-sided architecture.** As noted on the site plan, there is a thru-block private drive along that serves the back-of-house operations and parking access. Consideration should be given to the design of this space as a shared space that will not only serve service-oriented uses and vehicles, but pedestrians and also provide a transition to the adjacent development.

As indicated on the southwest elevation, the first two levels of this wall are primarily blank and the upper floors are primarily clad in metal panels, which is a different expression than on the other outwardly facing elevations. Consideration should be given to utilizing a similar level of design and detailing across all elevations.

- **Bus Shelter and Bench.** While the elevation drawings and site plan indicated that there will be a bus shelter and bench located along the W Johnson Street frontage, material and design details were not included in the submittal materials for these amenities. As site amenities along the street contributing to an active streetscape, consideration should be given to the design and integration of these elements into the overall building design and composition.
- **Architectural Louvers.** While HVAC wall packs are not shown on the elevation drawings architectural louvers are indicated in the garage space on the second and third floors on the southwest, northwest and northeast elevations. It has been the current practice to locate louvers so that they are not located on street-facing or on highly visible facades, although they have been approved in some situations when found to be well-integrated into the façade's design.

Staff request the Commission's feedback and findings related to the design and finish detailing of the proposed architectural louvers.

- **Building Materials.** As indicated on the elevation drawings, the proposed material palette will be comprised of a modular brick veneer, concealed fastener flat metal panel, and concealed fastener corrugated metal panel. The applicant indicated that where material transitions occur, a change in plane will also be introduced to add depth and dimensionality to the façade, although the details of the material transitions were not provided in the submittal materials.

The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines state that *"An integrated palette of high quality, durable building materials can enrich the pedestrian environment through the use of scale, color, texture, and architectural details."*

Staff request the Commission's feedback and findings on the proposed material palette and overall composition.

- **Long Views.** Due to the prominence of this site along the outside loop of the Capital Square spanning several heavily trafficked thoroughfares in the Downtown Core, including Wisconsin Avenue, W Johnson Street and W Dayton Street, consideration should be given to the overall composition of the building as part of the overall cityscape and how it will read from a distance, including the longer view from W Johnson of the southwest corner of the building, which is primarily a blank wall at the ground floor, mechanical louvers on floor 2-3, and corrugated metal panel starting at the fourth floor.

As noted in the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, corner buildings should define street intersections with distinctive architectural features and demonstrate a higher degree of architectural strength, one that aligns with their location.

- **Landscape.** Generally, the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines speak to landscape designs being focused on creating an “urban” landscape that not only is context sensitive but that also softens hard edges, incorporating site amenities (i.e. planting beds, seat walls, street furniture, public art, lighting, and landscape materials, etc.) in combination with plant species that are compatible with an urban environment and that provide year-round texture and color.

Staff request the Commission feedback and findings on the proposed landscape plan and plant selections as it relates to the appropriateness of the plant selections given the space limitations and urban environment, providing year-round screening, color and texture, as well as creating an enhanced design aesthetic at the pedestrian level along all street frontages.

In addition, while precedent imagery for the proposed planters was included in the submittal materials (refer to Sheet L200), final materials and details have not been confirmed. As noted by the Commission in their Informational Presentation comments, consideration should be given to tying the materiality of the planters/walls to the rest of the building; they should not be cast in place concrete. Staff recommend the UDC address this in their formal recommendation.

Staff note that in coordination with Traffic Engineering staff, dedication is required along both W Johnson and W Dayton Street to accommodate a six-foot terrace, eight-foot sidewalk, and one-foot for maintenance, as measured from the face of the curb. In reviewing the plans, it appears that this condition may not be met as currently shown. There may be potential impacts to landscape planter beds as a result. Staff encourages the applicant to continue to work with Traffic Engineering staff to confirm that the required dimensions are being met.

- **Lighting.** Staff note that while a photometric plan was provided for the ground floor, additional information is needed to fully evaluate the proposed lighting for consistency with the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, including those that speak to lighting being adequate, but not excessive, limiting glare, and accentuating the building architecture, but not being excessive, and utilizing full cutoff fixtures, etc. To complete the evaluation of lighting a light level calculation summary is needed that provides the average maximum and minimum light levels of the roof, as well as the uniformity ratios.

In addition, architectural lighting is indicated on the drawings (Sheet A201), however a fixture cutsheet was not provided for the proposed architectural lighting. Consideration should be given to the proposed architectural lighting as it relates to the fixture placement (i.e., up vs down light), integration (i.e., mounting detail), balance of light, and design objectives (i.e., wall washing, highlighting architectural elements, etc.) of the proposed lighting across the front (Wisconsin Avenue) façade of the building.

As noted by the Commission in their Informational Presentation comments, a nighttime rendering was requested to show a better understanding of the proposed lighting on and around the building.

Staff recommend the UDC address lighting in their formal action.

- **Signage.** Staff note and the applicant is advised that while signage is shown on the elevation drawings, signage is not a part of this review nor subsequent approvals. A separate review is required. The applicant is encouraged to work with Zoning staff to confirm whether the proposed signage complies with the [Sign Code](#).
- **Relocated Arch.** Planning Division staff have noted the following related to the historic arch:

One particular area of concern, identified by staff, the area alder, and neighborhood groups during previous proposals for the redevelopment of this site, is the relocation and re-use of the historic arch that remained on Wisconsin Avenue from the now-demolished Madison Central High School building. The arch was most recently located on Wisconsin Avenue at the entrance to the pedestrian bridge running over the former sunken parking to the Madison College atrium entrance. In the first Drury proposal ([52574](#)) from 2018, the applicant proposed preserving the arch in the public realm as an art piece that also serves as the main architectural accent and focal piece of the hotel's Wisconsin Avenue design, as well as a functional entrance. In that design, the arch was to be disassembled and relocated to act as a main entrance, leading pedestrians to either a restaurant and retail space, or through the access drive to the hotel's main entrance and lobby. That previous [letter of intent](#) called the arch an "important piece of Madison's architectural history" and committed to preserving it in the public realm as an art piece that would also serve as the main architectural accent and focal piece of the hotel design as well as a functional entrance from Wisconsin Avenue. When that proposal was approved and demolition of the site began, the arch was dismantled and put into storage. It is staff's understanding that the arch is still in storage, though the applicant has not confirmed this. The subsequent proposal for this site ([81199](#)) by NCG Hospitality also proposed reconstructing the arch in the garden terrace located within the courtyard of the remaining school building where it opened into the "garden terrace" and winter garden within the proposed hotel tower. During the pre-application discussions and subsequent meetings, re-integration of the arch into the future design was repeatedly stressed, by staff, the alder, and neighbors as an important aspect of any redevelopment on this site.

While the current proposal did not originally include the aforementioned arch on the site, the applicant has submitted revised plans that show the arch reconstructed on the grass lawn along the West Johnson Street frontage in front of the remaining former school building. Staff note that the conditional use for this proposed development pertains only to the lot on which the new hotel is proposed to be built, not the lot containing the school building. As such, no details for the integration of the arch into that property have been provided, nor can there be guarantees that the arch will be adequately planned for and included in those future development plans. Further, staff have questions about the appropriateness of moving historical resources around the site, especially on the lot containing the historic school building, rather than integrating the resource into the new development.

## Summary of Informational Presentation Discussion & Questions

As a reference, a summary of the Commission's discussion and questions from the October 8, 2025, Informational Presentation are provided below.

The Commission commented on the symmetrical form but asymmetrical application of materials. It should be more asymmetrical, with bigger moves or bigger swaths of materials. It's a very sophisticated massing and application of materials. Overall, a good use of materials, but if you are going to make a bold move like dropping a material or stopping one; go all out.

The Commission asked about two curb cuts on Wisconsin Avenue. The Secretary noted the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines are clear that porte cocheres are not to be parallel to the street nor within the public-right-of-way. Part of the discussion should be that an alternative design, that may not be consistent with the guidelines, does. The Commission asked the applicant to explain why they need a double curb cut on Wisconsin Avenue. They responded that most people arriving via vehicle would come to the front of the building, and would want to have an entry. The proposal minimizes the intrusion into public space and all improvements are on private property within the building. The site isn't very large, which eliminates cut through, this is the best way to accommodate that and keep both drives away from Dayton and Johnson Streets. This also allocates all back-of-house elements away from the street.

The Commission acknowledged this is a difficult site.

The Commission noted that this site is really primo real estate, but the corners should be accentuated more and that does not seem to be the focus is here. There is beautiful masonry detailing, which is appreciated, but this is extraordinary real estate, so there should be a special shape or massing that goes with how fantastic this site is. The Commission noted that the design seems kind of safe for the spectacular real estate, including the corners and inquired if that is the design intent or if this is trying to figure out if the massing is ok. I hope you are going toward something really special.

The applicant replied that they wanted to design a good citizen building that works for the city. The strong brick corners create a very strong element, but maybe there is something that could do more to highlight the entry element. There is also a double height first floor (20 feet), it will feel very tall and grand and very transparent.

The applicant clarified that the glazing on the first 2-3 floors will not be transparent because it is parking.

The Commission was curious about the base of the building along Johnson Street, and the human scale, noting it was worth another look. The applicant did note they will have to have a bus stop on this side of the building that is not currently shown.

The commission agreed that the building is too safe and needs to look like it was built in 2027. You have a dynamic opportunity to create an awesome piece of architecture right by the Capitol. Bring some of the panels down and lighten that up, make it as glazed as it can be, bring the glazing up the corners, and give it a modern take on how you're applying your materials. In most hotels there are floor to ceiling windows; you're missing an opportunity for those views to the Capitol. You have the massing, but now look at how you are placing the materials on your massing. There is an opportunity now to dress your massing in a special way. You are going to want to step it up a little to get an exception for the inconsistencies with the guidelines.

The Commission noted the timeless quality, detailing and design is appreciated. The big-ticket item is that drop-off, because it so deliberately opposes the Downtown Design Guidelines. The Commission also noted the importance of maintaining tree canopies on all the street frontages. What is especially problematic is that the second third floors have parking – it is not just a matter of building materiality, but it is opaque glass with cars behind it – is there a way to peel back some of the parking away from the corner?

The Commission talked about street level pedestrian activation. Provide some tie in materiality of planters/walls to the rest of the building. Question if there is enough space for those planters; they should not be cast in place concrete.

The Commission commented that the plans may not match the renderings, and to make sure there is sufficient space to do what is being shown in the rendering related to landscape and planters.

The Commission noted a nighttime rendering will be good to see, as well as a better understanding of lighting on and around the building. The Commission inquired about wallpacks and louvers not being strongly indicated on the elevations. The applicant responded the mechanical system will be more of an institutional system, not through the wall. There will be a mechanical screen on the roof, but we can expect louvers in the back alley for the parking area.