



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

**Project Address:** 428-444 State Street  
**Application Type:** New Development in the Downtown Core District  
**UDC is an Advisory Body**  
**Legistar File ID #** [69486](#)  
**Prepared By:** Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

## Background Information

**Applicant | Contact:** Kevin Burow, Knothe & Bruce Architects, LLC | Joe McCormick, JD McCormick Properties

**Project Description:** The applicant is proposing the development of a five-story mixed-use building containing approximately 23-26 dwelling units and ground floor commercial space.

### Project Schedule:

- The Landmarks Commission reviewed a Demolition Permit request for 430-444 State Street on January 31, 2022, and made a recommendation to the Plan Commission that the buildings have historic value.
- The UDC received an Informational Presentation on February 9, 2022.
- The UDC referred this item on June 29, 2022.
- The UDC referred this item on December 14, 2022, to provide the applicant more time to resolve outstanding design related considerations related to the conditional use standards specific to development adjacent to the park ([MGO 28.139](#)).
- The Plan Commission is scheduled to review this proposal on April 10, 2023.
- The Common Council is scheduled to review the proposed CSM on April 18, 2023.

**Approval Standards:** The project is located within the Downtown Core. Pursuant to Section 28.074 (c): All new buildings and additions greater than twenty thousand (20,000) square feet or that have more than four (4) stories shall obtain conditional use approval. The Urban Design Commission (“UDC”) is an **advisory body** on this development request. As a new development in the Downtown Core Zoning District, the UDC shall review such projects for conformity to the design standards in [Sec. 28.071\(3\)](#), if applicable, and the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#) and shall report its findings to the Plan Commission.

The proposed project site is located adjacent to a park. Pursuant to MGO Section 28.139, *“nonresidential development immediately adjacent to the boundary of a City-owned public park shall be reviewed as a conditional use.”* The purpose of that review is to evaluate and hopefully mitigate any adverse impacts of the proposed development on the park, including but not limited to drainage, accessibility, landscape, noise, light, shadow, etc.

As noted above, the UDC is an advisory body on this request. Staff recommends the Commission’s findings and recommendations to the Plan Commission be framed as a motion based on the applicable review criteria, including the Downtown Design Guidelines and the Zoning Code. Additionally, while the UDC utilizes the Initial/Final Approval framework in certain situations, as an advisory recommendation, staff believes it would be procedurally preferable to provide a singular motion with the Commission’s findings and recommendations.

**Adopted Plans:** The [Downtown Plan](#) (the “Plan”) includes the project site within the State Street Subarea that recognizes that while there are opportunities for some larger scale redevelopment within the State Street Subarea, the Plan recommends that heights along the State Street frontage be maintained at 2-4 stories. Generally, the Plan includes recommendations that speak to buildings being designed to maintain the

predominant smaller-scale rhythms of the street frontage, reserving ground floor spaces for retail sales and services uses, and encouraging the preservation, rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of sound older buildings that contribute to the districts character.

**Supplemental Information:** As noted above, the proposed development is located adjacent to a public park. As such, the Parks Division has provided a letter documenting their nonstandard conditions of approval, which are intended to mitigate adverse impacts of the proposed development on the park, including those related to construction, restoration of the park property, and tree protection. As noted in the Parks Division letter, the review and approval of the improvements within the park will be reviewed and approved by the Parks Division.

## Summary of Design Considerations

Staff requests that the UDC review the proposed development and make findings on the design considerations noted below based on the aforementioned standards and guidelines for development in the Downtown Core.

- **Building Mass, Scale, and Height.** Staff first requests the UDC's feedback and findings on the overall building mass, scale, and height (including proposed loft space) related to the surrounding context. As noted in the Downtown Plan and DC zoning district requirements, there is a four-story height limitation along the State Street frontage and a six-story height limitation 30 feet back from the State Street right-of-way line. As proposed, the building appears to be consistent with those maximum building height limitations, though buildings over four stories require conditional use consideration from the Plan Commission.

Staff notes that while a shadow study was included in the plan set that shows some of the anticipated impacts of the proposed development on the park, it does not compare the difference between the existing condition, nor a smaller, four-story building mass.

- **Façade Design, Composition, and Articulation.** Staff next requests feedback on many of the proposed façade details, including the points summarized below. The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines speak to building facades being oriented toward public spaces, including guidelines that encourage active uses and entries being located at the street level, maintaining sensitivity to context and rhythm by incorporating similar façade modulation, vertical and horizontal articulation patterns, and pedestrian scale design details, etc. into the overall building design. Relevant excerpts include:

Visual Interest: *"Well-designed buildings add visual interest and variety to the massing of a building, help define public space, engage the street, create an interesting pedestrian environment, and help break up long, monotonous facades,"*

Terminal Views and Highly-Visible Corners: Consideration should be given to incorporating a *"...higher degree of architectural strength to emphasize location, or incorporate distinctive architectural features into the design of buildings that reflect the prominence of the site,"* and

Door and Window Openings: *"...it is especially important to create a comfortably-scaled and thoughtfully detailed streetscape and how the openings in building walls (windows, doors, etc.) are incorporated have an influences on the perception of a building's mass and how it is experienced by pedestrians."*

The project site undoubtedly has multiple public frontages and will be visible from several vantage points not only along State Street, but also other surrounding streets, including W Gilman and W Gorham Streets,

and the Lisa Link Peace Park. As proposed, the building is primarily oriented towards State Street with active entries and storefront glazing located along that frontage, leaving the facades facing the public park primarily blank walls. While window and door openings are limited along the elevations fronting the park due to the setback being less than ten feet from the property line, consideration should be given to the architectural detailing, materials, and screening of these elevations.

Staff requests the Commission provide feedback and make findings related to the design and orientation of the proposed building to the park, as well as how the building is viewed from other vantage points.

- **Along State Street:**
  - Consider the overall façade composition as it relates to creating/contributing to the storefront rhythm that is more commonly found in surrounding blocks. Feedback is also requested regarding the appropriateness of façade details, including the organization of primary materials and the “red frame” accent feature.
  - Providing separate entrances for residential and commercial uses.
  
- **Along the Park Frontages:**
  - Feedback is requested on the materials and their organization and whether a more unified, cohesive façade composition is desirable. As proposed the building uses a different primary material and different window patterns along the upper stories/loft spaces. Staff notes that these facades are not stepped back and are in the same plan along the park frontages. Staff further requests feedback on how these elements will “read” as they will be visible from different vantage points created by the park and from the street.
  - Provide feedback on the proportions and patterns of voids and solids on façade walls, especially the level of ground level and adjacent to the park\*.
  - Feedback is requested on the design of building corners and end walls, especially those directly abutting Lisa Link Peace Park and the east elevation. Consideration should be given to designing for the current condition, visibility, and minimizing and screening blank walls.

*\*Note: Staff notes that the building code limits openings in facades that are setback three to less than five feet from the property line to 15 percent, if the building is sprinkled. Setbacks of five to ten feet would allow for a higher percentage of openings, up to 25 percent, if the building is sprinkled.*

- **Landscape and Open Spaces.** As generally noted in the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, landscape can soften hardscape edges and rooftop open spaces, add color, texture, and scale to a development making it more inviting, provide screening of blank walls and utility services, and enhance the pedestrian environment. Staff requests the Commission provide feedback and make findings related to the proposed landscape plan and plant palette.

## Summary of June 29, 2022 UDC Comments

Staff refers the Commission to the comments from the June 29, 2022, meeting:

- The staff report asks that we comment on building mass, scale and design elements.
- The overall façade composition reads wider than the smaller, narrower storefronts seen on surrounding blocks. The 100 Block of State Street (opposite side of street) has newer buildings that aren't the mega student apartment buildings, but a nice example of modulating a façade so it does not appear wider than it is taller. It can be done and it has been done successfully.

- There aren't a lot of balconies facing State Street. The corner element with the cap we see a lot of, you might think that's the building entrance but that's an entrance for the commercial. The apartment entrance is not expressed, there's an opportunity there to modulate the façade so you have distinct expressed entrances.
- Overall the building is a difficult problem, this is a very prominent site. You have this real conservative five-bay element, a freeform six-story part around the corner that conforms to where the stepback needs to be. Why isn't the building a bit more of a modern expression that takes advantage of the unique geometry it's faced with?
- The challenge of this project is somewhat precedent setting. We heard great commentary from the public that I very much appreciate. Everybody wants to protect our beloved State Street. I remember my first experience of this pocket park, it's a vivid memory. As much as that experience resonates with me, the Downtown Plan is such that we do envision increasing heights of buildings in this area. I have not heard that this is necessarily a direct solution to affordable housing, but it is more housing nonetheless. As much as the shading analysis is valuable, I don't know there's much we can do related to the growth of our city and the need to densify and build upward. I do agree with the earlier comments, we've made them before and I don't know they are yet resolved. This design is so disruptive to what is there currently and the context around it. I would potentially be supportive of this building height-wise, but I don't know that this particular design can help me support this project.
- There's not a lot of finesse. We just saw a good example of when you have a good brick material, how you can articulate openings and elements with little finesses to break down the scale and mass. If brick is your choice of materials, more articulation could be used. The big openings at the corner may be working against you, it has a heaviness to it and are not in keeping with the rhythm at the pedestrian level. Then you have this typical articulation of the cornice, there's a lot of opportunity here to break down the mass of this with lighter materials. In keeping with what they're doing at the Hub and much larger buildings, you want to start articulating the pedestrian level in quaintness. I am concerned with the precedent of the four-story flat up against the property line. You start that rhythm down State Street and pretty soon you're in a canyon. This precedent setting for a replacement building, it has to have a lot more sensibility to breaking down at the pedestrian scale. The contradictory elements with the more modern style, the Juliet balconies with fussy grading, maybe one or the other has to go. All in all, it just has a mass that is off putting for continuing the rhythm of State Street.
- We have a responsibility to make some recommendations the best we can so the designers have the best opportunity to give us something approvable.
- I'm in agreement with the detailing comments, the human scale of being around this building. It is hard to see things change, but people might very well respond to those balconies in a favorable way. Understanding that aesthetic here on State Street, there is a sense of playfulness; turning that corner gray gives it a much more somber tone. It's right next to a park, an ideal place to be more playful with architecture and color.
- The architecture is rather attractive and a nice combination of materials, in a different context. It definitely changes the character of the streetscape and sets a precedent. The design of Lisa Link has this amphitheater grade change bowl-like experience. Right now those existing buildings are retaining four-feet of grade against that one wall and it really contributes to that topography that you're nestled in. You're losing all of that with this project, until you get further back in the park. It changes pretty dramatically and I think what is there now is very successful, not to mention it has a big mural on the wall for the color that Jessica was referencing. I don't have an issue with the corner tower element or the Juliet balconies. The proposed mural brings color and creativity if you're on that side to see it, but in order to be an approvable project, it needs to have that break down of more division along State Street, less width of the appearance of a single building and more of that rhythm we know and love about State Street itself. One story less in height would certainly help the approval process. This is not moving in the right direction for State Street.

ACTION:

On a motion by Braun-Oddo, seconded by Knudson, the Urban Design Commission **RECOMMENDED TO REFER BACK TO URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION**. The motion was passed on a unanimous vote of (6-0).

The Urban Design Commission found that this proposal sets a precedent and recommends that the building as proposed not be approved based on the following:

- The proposal needs to relate better to the pedestrian scale.
- The proposal needs articulation of materials that is not matching, but that is not foreign to the other architectural elements on State Street.
- The corner tower element is too heavy for the scale of the building and needs articulation and more of a unification of the front, back and side façades.
- The project would benefit from, if not a complete removal of a floor, perhaps a portion going from four to three-stories at the street.
- More articulation along the State Street façade with a slight setback to appear less sheer along the sidewalk.
- Look at the rhythm of the bays so that they are more vertical and the building reads as a series of vertical elements vs. a more egg crate design.
- The Commission recognizes that having units facing Lisa Link Peace Park on the other side is a good thing. However, it is unfortunate the building goes the full six-story height along there, whereas it's much lower along that side now.
- It is a blank wall right now and could be pretty neat to have lit apartments there at night vs. a blank brick wall.
- There are many successful infill projects that use more variety of modern materials in a creative way without mimicking the exact period of architecture next door, while still having very pedestrian scale elements.