



Agenda Item #:	3
Project Title:	304-318 N Broom St/408-430 W Johnson St/407 W Gorham St - New Student Housing Building. 4th Ald. Dist.
Legistar File ID #:	76205
Members Present:	Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Lois Braun-Oddo, Shane Bernau, Russell Knudson, Christian Harper, Jessica Klehr, Rafeeq Asad, and Marsha Rummel
Prepared By:	Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Summary

At its meeting of May 10, 2023, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** for a new student housing project located at 304-318 N Broom Street/408-430 W Johnson Street/407 W Gorham Street. Registered and speaking in support were Jeff Zelisko, and Brian Munson. Registered in support and available to answer questions were Austin Scott Pagnotta, Suzanne Vincent, and Andrew Savoy.

Munson introduced the complex site, noting the team is seeking additional height under the new height definition per the recently adopted ordinance for a fourteen-story building on Johnson Street and a seven-story building along Broom Street. They are creating multiple building expressions, breaking the project down into two tower elements with a bridge connection, and working through iterations of architecture to refine the building. They have been in conversation with the owners of the Equinox who support tonight's proposal.

The project is broken into four separate buildings, taking inspiration from the lakes as a design expression. Vehicular access is off of Johnson Street, with rowhouses along that frontage providing activity along the street. A promenade provides a connection between Gorham and Johnson Streets. The building slopes from west to east up fourteen feet; retail and residential on Broom Street is at grade. The main entry level shows over 22,000 square feet of amenities for the 425 units. There is separation between the existing and proposed buildings, with the project feeling like a collection of buildings within the landscape of the city. The entrance makes references to landscape access as a powerful element. The landscape plan shows the promenade with amenities areas, private outdoor seating, a turn-around element for vehicles to come within the site, and a plaza area in the northeast corner that opens out onto the amenity areas. They have provided a color palette of earth tones with metal panels and brick elements, contextual within the four buildings and the fabric of the neighborhood.

The Commission discussed the following:

- This is a huge, massive project. There's not going to be any mistaking this building when it starts to go up, I hope Commissioners have some comments to share. Everything is not fully baked, now is the time to dig in and work with them on it.
- The staff report talks about building scale, massing, long views, context and materials. One of the things that really stands out to me is the height of the building surrounding the Equinox (Building 1, 2 and 4). If it was up to me and I could grab that Building #1, 8-story mass, and slide it back toward that bump-out and just have a pavilion that's one or two stories where your main entry is, and really open up that corner, it would give some relief to that corner where that big cube is jutting out toward the street. Also, I think it would make Building #2 much more prominent in its slender, elegant, tall and soaring thing. The nice thing about Building #2, is that it

steps away back from the Equinox. I see this really working as Building 1 being back and Building 2 bumping out and then the Equinox out a little bit further. That's the comment with regard to making the building scale and massing reading as a collection of multiple buildings.

- Going back to the Johnson Street side, I can see where on Broom the walk-up units almost work like townhouse units, but here, these walk-up units don't really give me the sense that these are townhouses because of the huge tower that they're associated with. When I look at how the Domain handled it, they don't have their units walking up right into the units except on the Dayton Street side where everything is much more low scale. I am wondering if you would look at having an internal entrance and handle it a little more like with the Domain where it is raised up but there is street activity but then there is a really nice landscape buffer there. What we are looking at here (Page 29 of presentation file) there are these two towers crushing these townhouses as though they were built as townhouses and then two big towers came imposing on top of them. One other thing on this image, if that one walk-up, where that one unit is in the middle of the two towers got pulled back to create a mini pocket park, like ten feet or so, not all the way back, that would really help at the street level to reinforce the fact that these are working more like two separate towers.
- With regard to long views and sensitivity to context, Building #4, next to the Aberdeen, that really pops up (refer to page 20 of the presentation file). Just looking at how much taller it is than the Aberdeen, it's even taller than the Equinox. From the long view, as you're walking toward this building to see the top three stories of that building be pushed back and recessed, the collection of buildings along Gorham Street would be much more successful because this building is really close, very close to the street. The overall scale would be improved if that were the case.
- With regard to building design and composition, I already talked about the townhouse design along Johnson looks crushed underneath these towers. I know it's early on but I think these big grids you have on the various design elements are kind of over scaled and somewhat institutional looking without any residential cues. This one is probably most successful (Building 4), but if you look at the other two, the eight-story units with the oversized grids, such as residential size windows, balconies (Building #2). Anything you can do to give it a more residential scale by softening up the enormous grids will look a little bit less institutional. The building materials I find to be a little drab and cold. We get so many days in the wintertime when the sky is brown and gray, where you would think that something colorful or warm, like a red brick or metal panel that had a little brightness of color or some warmth to it would really help the skyline out a little bit. With the snow banks, clouds, leaves me feeling a little bit cold.
- One thing I want to look at when you come back is I want to know how it feels to be a pedestrian user of the building and a passer-by. I like the uses of drop-off and pick-up being taken off the street but I'm wanting it to look like a cool space and not just where the cars are. The bridge is mentioned in the staff report, I'm interested in the applicant responding to the staff concerns. I like the way there is different building and I look forward to seeing how this gets refined.
 - That bridge connects Building #4 to the amenities, it's very purposely glassy and far away from the street behind the vehicular access drive. That sort of element is not uncommon in other cities in an urban context, to connect buildings that are not together, especially in this climate. It's very important as a functional element. It was closer to the street previously, the adjustment into the middle of the site makes for a better design.
 - It is being designed as a study space with tables to give a point of activation. It's pushed significantly into the site so it is seen as an internal block element.
- How far is it from the ground level, and is there any potential for people thinking it's a drive aisle?
 - There will be physical stops (bollards) there so you can't go through with a vehicle. It's about 12-14 feet above grade there.
- The corner (plan northeast, Sheet 33 of the presentation file) does seem to fight against the geometry of the city adjacent to it against the streetscape, it's a really hard point against that curb. The renderings may not be 100% accurate, but regardless there's a real tension point right there, the building responding to the street and the fabric of the city in that particular location would be beneficial to the project, the streetscape and pedestrians. There are a lot of people who use that crosswalk at that radius and they're not always following the crosswalk.

With the site design, that plaza space is pretty cool and exciting, it's great to see that you're thinking about this as something more than a patch of lawn. Given the busyness and activity, and the need for safe crossings at that corner I would encourage you to think about strong edges whatever some of those cool shapes and colors in the rendering are, they should help form an edge that would lead people specifically to where they're going to cross and give them a little bit of a buffer if you're inside that landscape site space so you feel comfortable there. It needs to be the right height to see through it so it's safe for pedestrian and cars turning the corner. Without strong edges it won't be a comfortable space, it'll be a dead space that people just walk through. Where #2 is, they will cut straight to that entry to the cross walk, take a look at the yellow people will be walking right to the edge of that, it will be a strong desired path through that corner. The pedestrian amenity space (#9) is a really deep valley and will be dark. As great as some of the things are on the ground plane it would be nice to get some canopy in there, even if it's over structure, you could create a system of upright narrow tree canopy, that will give a ceiling to the people that are down in that site space, that there might be a little bit of a filtered ceiling, not a fishbowl effect. But also if you're in the building, there's something green a little bit closer. It would be a nice visual as you look into that from the street.

- Architecturally, I know it's early, but nothing's really screaming excitement yet, which may be the color palette. As this progresses with more details and renderings it's going to get there, but right now there's not really a spark of creativity or excitement that really makes me want to champion the project. Whether its color or something else, that I look forward to seeing this next time.
- What style were you intending for this to be?
 - To have buildings contextual with the surrounding while having a modern character. The forms changing, for instance the framing elements in some, with different architectural articulation with materials and how we've massed them. A modern take with warm traditional materials.
- The design is overall subjective but this is not modern at all it is more brutalism. There's a lot of heavy concrete and brick, the grids and ledges, it's not modern at all. When you look at student housing or residential, the people moving to these places are looking for that modern contemporary lifestyle in a vibrant, busy, dense, downtown environment. This project is missing all of that. It's missing awnings, balconies, the voids of the windows that are larger and more modern, you have these big mullions. It is not modern at all. I think that's part of the problem, the renderings are a little off and further enhancing this brutalism look, the renderings could be adjusted. It is big, this is a bulky buildings. It is surrounding the hold out on the block, forcing the building out by wrapping around it. In an urban environment it's okay to do stuff like that, but do it while at least recognizing that there is something adjacent to you and your building does not do that. It doesn't match any setbacks, heights, or datums or anything. It's going to be this big, massive, cold, hard building regardless of what's next to it. As you further fine thins, look at some of those design moves and not just match the materials of the context but elements of design, whether it's datums or the like. There's a missed opportunity with your ground level (page 30 and 31) that's not really pedestrian friendly. Whether its amenities or commercial, you want that to be activated with larger windows and activity. There's some very big planters there but nothing that says 'come in, come out,' anything to pull you into the building. That's your missed excitement. There's a lot of things that happen at the top and middle of that building that come down. You can't really tell where the entry is for any of these separate buildings or how they work. There's more modern refinements that need to happen. Agree with the comments on the grids; the grids are heavy and I think it's hurting the design. They could be a lot lighter and more implied. The Grid on the 8-story is 4-5 feet deep, it's more like a ledge and could easily be a balcony.
- I agree with most of what I've heard from other Commission members. I'd like to reiterate that I feel strongly about, one is how the curve at Broom and Gorham is addressed. I feel that really does need to be looked at again. The massing of the taller elements, Building 4 in particular, it's almost the architecture, the materials and the expression of the grid makes it look even taller than it is, which is not a good thing. Look at potentially setting back the top three floors and using lighter materials. If you look at the James, that darkness at the lower level is not inviting at all and I wonder if part of the Building 4 experience is lightening up, especially at the pedestrian level, lightening up the mass, the materials, and adding some interest. There are some interesting design elements you have going, one is the slot building – the long narrow one with the curved element at the bottom is unique. If you could add more of those unique elements, that would be appreciated.

- The walk-up units on Johnson Street, I agree that's not necessarily an appropriate place, especially with the mass above it, but if you're looking at those two stories, the elements and details shown at those walk-ups is more successful than the walk-ups on the smaller building. Those are cold and not inviting. I would also encourage the planters to have small trees if there is room rather than grasses, we depend so much on the trees in the easement and they don't thrive or last. It would be nice to be able to have at least a couple of larger or medium size trees on the site, it would add a little more interest and help with the coldness we're experiencing, along with changing materials.
- This is an exciting project, I really appreciate the development team really looking at what I would say is a pretty efficient use of these properties and really creating a lot of housing opportunities which our city needs. I like that the materials gestured at here, are going in the direction of a higher quality, with some nice brick options with finer details in the brick work starting to be gestured at. I like that the architectural expression through the fenestration reads as a residential building for the most part, that's a plus. I commend you for that we do not see that all the time. A few comments on missed opportunities. Looking at the Gorham side, I commend you on this concept of creating different looking buildings; that is successful. I agree with the comments on how you do that could be looked at. I do wonder, it is such a unique opportunity, the fact that this is a single development and the context with the Equinox, I never thought it was that interesting until I saw it compared to this design. I agree with some of the comments regarding flaring, canopies, there's interest there that I wish I could see expressed and recognized by the surrounding design. I wonder if it would be very counter to the whole design move, because it's one property, is there something that could be done to say yes, this is one development as it relates to this Equinox building, some expression that signifies that fact. Looking forward to seeing how this develops.
- I couldn't agree more on the color palette. I understand trying to make it look like four different buildings, but the thin one that looks the most Brutalist of them all with the curve down at the bottom (page 25 of the presentation file), looks a little forced, foreign or shoved in. I wonder if it's not worth trying to make that into a fourth building, or something to be reviewed. Pretty much agree with all the other comments.
- This is one of the first attempts at asking for extra floors in exchange for affordability, versus what we didn't want to see seemed to be just stretching the allowed buildings up an extra couple of floors, using the term extruding. That's what I see here, seems like there was no attempt at doing anything different with those extra floors, other than just bumping them up in elevation. I can appreciate the fact that they attempted to give the Equinox building some space, I think there's been reports that they shared their massing plans with the owners and they have been received favorably. It still reads to me like it's trying to swallow the Equinox, just the way it wraps around it. The one thing that struck me, after the article in the paper, the whole notion of demolishing an existing building that's only thirty years old, just rubs a lot of people the wrong way from any number of way we build and destroy building in the name of progress. I know that sometimes the ends can justify the means sometimes in these sort of things. I have no problem getting rid of the small three flats on Broom Street, and wrapping around, those are old tired buildings that haven't been kept up very well, but this was remodeled some 10 or so years ago and is actually kind of an interesting looking building. I don't find the extension of the building that is now squeezed in to be nearly as visually interesting as what it's replacing. I will echo the comments about the color palette, I find it really cold and uninviting. The project on the other side of this block and across the street, they really changed the palette and materials on their building from the initial to what they ended up with to the benefit of everyone who walks and drives by. I would encourage you to rethink the colors and materials.
- As the Chair, in the spirit of sharing information at this point in the process, I wanted to invite the applicant team to provide some closing remarks or if they are looking for clarification to make sure that they are leaving with the information they need.
 - Thank you for the specific comments, that is the best sort of feedback we can get; we appreciate that. Relative to the townhomes on Johnson, there seems to be a lot of positive feedback from staff that there is activity on the street with entry points, also we need to provide relief in an urban context at the street, so that is where some of that landscaping came from. Do you feel strongly that that is the wrong use there or do you want to see how we approach it?

- I would say given you're looking to have these towers read as a collection of multiple buildings, looking at it from the street level, I see these walk-up units/townhouses that are kind of being crushed by these two towers. What I might expect to see if this was to read as a separate building, is that somewhere into this building there is a separate a lobby or amenity space at least on part of it. I know where your entrance and main lobbies are, you're trying to make it look as though it could stand alone as its own building. These walk up units on a twelve or fourteen-story building seems incongruous. There's this huge tower and how to get into it? It doesn't look like its own building at all, and it's a really busy street. I see all the amenity space on that floor, I would think that some of that maybe could face the busy, noisy street versus somebody's walk-up, which is more appropriate for a less busy street. It was also pointed out that while maybe this is not the best location for that townhouse look, this level of articulation and detail would be better served on the walk-up units on Broom Street.
 - There may be an opportunity to look at amenity space on that side too. This is very helpful for us, our team will be looking at your comments carefully.
- The next time, could you show us in more detail, one of the issues we have with really large developments like this is the turn-around zone. Is that the only place that Grub Hub and the like will pull up, and how do people move in and out of this place? It's a ton of units with lots of people moving at the same time. If you could relieve some of the congestion of trucks on Gorham or Johnson Street, some kind of indication would be helpful to point that out at the next iteration.
 - It is a turn-around but there are also four spaces right there for ride share/Uber Eats type vehicles. People can pull over and park in addition to the turnaround.
- Maybe the count of how many vehicles can be accommodated that are either package delivery or waiting for somebody and how that is managed. Those walk-up units on Johnson will be making orders and that's not a place you can pull over, there's a lot of traffic going through there.
- The nice thing about the site plan is the main parking entrance is off the turn-around zone and not off the street so we're not faced with a huge garage door. Appreciate that for sure. That helps get the big anonymous looing holes off the streetscape.

Action

Since this was an **INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** no formal action was taken by the Commission.