

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

PRESENTED: September 11, 2013TITLE: 425 West Washington Avenue – Mixed-
Unit Development in the UMX District
Known as “The Washington Plaza.” 4th
Ald. Dist. (29495)**REFERRED:****REREFERRED:****REPORTED BACK:**

AUTHOR: Alan J. Martin, Secretary

ADOPTED:**POF:**

DATED: September 11, 2013

ID NUMBER:

Members present were: Richard Wagner, Chair*; Richard Slayton, Dawn O’Kroley, Melissa Huggins, John Harrington, Cliff Goodhart and Tom DeChant.

*Wagner recused himself on this item. Slayton acted as Chair.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of September 11, 2013, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED FINAL APPROVAL** of a mixed-use development located at 425 West Washington Avenue. Appearing on behalf of the project were John Sutton, the project architect; Erik Minton and Carole Schaeffer. Registered and speaking neither in support nor opposition was Michael May.

Sutton provided an update to the plans as modified, noting that the average setback was 19-feet which is where they’re at. The front massing now has more defined depth; the storefront is setback 1-foot on the first two floors so it expresses masonry and feels substantial. The steel lintels give it depth and hold the frame. The window sashes are pushed back 6-inches from the brick for an expression of depth. The canopy is standard steel shapes with a glass lid so the expression of steel is seen through. The landscape planters are pushed back so they are 7-feet out from the building. Landscaping and a 3-foot wall will screen the bicycles and mopeds. A strolling garden is proposed for the rooftop terrace. On the east side the body of the building is integrated with the vertical shaft. There is a further polish put on the architecture. The monument sign was not desirable by Planning staff and is no longer proposed; the name of the building will be just below the spandrel on the metal face as raised letters.

Erik Minton expressed his appreciation for the process that has brought the project a long way. He showed photos of rooftop gardens with substantial plants and a strolling path. This creates an area with a gardening opportunity and an area where people enjoy being.

Michael May spoke to his advisory statement to the Commission on behalf of the neighborhood that listed eight points.

1. Architectural enhancement to improve compatibility. The architect has worked with the neighborhood to continually improve the project. The steering committee’s opinion is that this

- project has moved from 1st base to 2nd base. Comparing it to the Downtown Plan for a bonus story means it has to be exceptional design, to hit a home run. There is work here yet to do.
2. The rear setback. At present, with the flip flop with Zoning, this building doesn't comply with the early rear yard setback of 33-feet, shifting to UMX did not help that process. This building is still very out of compliance with setbacks.
 3. Capitol Fitness automobile parking on-site. What if in five years this fitness center is wildly successful and has to move out somewhere else? Who will take a full second floor? Commercial or office user with zero parking.
 4. Permanent security controls for the 5th floor terrace and the garden. We want to make sure there is a fenced 5-foot setback from that 42-inch parapet wall, zero physical interaction, zero visual interaction between the people on the terrace and those on the sidewalk on West Washington Avenue. This project is one block from Mifflin Street.
 5. Plant a large number of trees (self-explanatory).
 6. Provide trash recycling bin transport plan over the terrace. When the terrace is wet and muddy and you roll wheels across it, you will get ruts. Week after week of this you'll get a permanent path that will never get planted.
 7. The screening on the bicycle/moped area is very improved.
 8. There is a third terrace tree on the property line between the two driveways, we'd like that fenced to keep it alive as it's been there for 50 years.

Carole Shaeffer spoke in support. This project was good when it first came through, and now after working with City commissions and the neighborhood it is very much improved and raises it from great to exceptional. She asked not to get bogged down by what is exceptional, but look at the Zoning Code and Downtown Plan and what we are getting as a result from the extra story. We don't want to get bogged down on what is considered extraordinary and miss out on an opportunity.

Staff commented positively on the removal of the monument sign, while at the same time noting Sutton should work with staff on a very detailed signage plan for the building. The Urban Design Commission is charged in having to make the finding of exceptional design the Planning Division report notes that bonus stories are based on that finding; if the Commission grants this approval it has to make a finding that this has been met.

Comments and questions from the Commission were as follows:

- I love what you've done with creating that depth. It's very successful and this is a really exceptional building.
- I like the changes. I think the green roof is a boost. I have to ask myself if this is what we strive to have or something that has gone beyond the call. I want to hear some more thoughts about what makes this exceptional.
- Thank you for showing context. The one piece that plays off successfully with the immediate smaller scale context is that two-story gesture that you've got on your entry now. It acknowledges the other scale that's on the street.
- One piece I think would stand out as exceptional is the idea of an active commercial front and something that would feel permeable and approachable and the place you want to be and walk by. Right now the planters I don't feel are helping you. The playfulness on the stair towers and the massing all around the corner I think are really nicely composed, it's along West Washington, how do I know it's meant for me as a member of the public walking by, how do I get up there?
 - The grand entry doesn't do it?Not for me, no.

- Should there be other doors? To penetrate the building in multiple different places rather than just the central door?
- I think that would be successful. I think about the El Dorado Grill building where you enter at one point and it splits. If you took advantage of that grand terrace on West Washington, maybe there's a way to spark more activity on the street.
- What if rather than a planting design you did something more like a passive plaza that people could actually come to, with places to sit? Just to create a space if someone wanted to wait for someone to go to the health club, or wait for a bus, a little bit of respite that would welcome you.
 - I like that idea. What I was concerned about is that from the sidewalk we're 19-feet back and if we have too much hard surface there, this block is almost entirely asphalt.

What I'm seeing is the bases on the canopy supports, to me that looks fussy. I'd almost like to see what those columns look like coming down to the ground level without that square piece of decoration around it. The building is strong but you're decorating the front of it. I see something that would accentuate that more, like the opportunity for a silhouette of a columnar tree that would be more open, with a shadow on that tower.

- I'd get rid of the planter but I'd still put a columnar in here so it accents with the architecture.
- I think that the building is closer to that magnificent piece that we want to see than your rendering is allowing us to realize, and I think it's the ground treatment. You did the things we asked for, you got this great connectivity, I'm excited about the way it looks. The only piece that falls a little short, for me, is that you have this great column which next to the entry feature they're the same color and kind of fighting with each other. I think using that column as a background for a tree would help that. It's big pieces, not decoration in the landscape.
- I think the planting plan is fine but I don't think it's exceptional by any means. With this building it could be much more. The species selection could be more unique.
- Relook at planting wall and landscaping, current design not taking advantage of bringing people in from the street.
- Look at passive plaza rather than just a planting design; eliminate planter so vertical column comes down to the ground.
- The way you're treating the bays in the front are going to play into that activity at the street. Something to create synergy and openness to this building.
- It's definitely evolved but I'm still a little concerned about this garage entry. It's a very square little column and from the renderings it almost appears like a drive-thru and I'm imagine looking at a plaster ceiling where the cars coming out and there's a garage door back there. You must have a better drawing of it than this. What is that ceiling in there? Is there another element you could bring down so it doesn't look like a teller window? I can't say that it's exceptional because that's an entry into the building as much as the front door. And what does that garage door look like? It's important how that's lit.

ACTION:

On a motion by Huggins, seconded by DeChant, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED FINAL APPROVAL**. The motion was passed on a vote of (5-0-1) with Wagner recused. The Commission made a finding that the architecture has indeed met the exceptional requirements and therefore granted the bonus story, but the landscape plan needs improvement to further support this finding and shall return for further consideration.

The motion provided for the following:

- That a revised planting plan incorporating some of these comments come back so that the planting plan is as exceptional as the building, including a more detailed green roof design.
- A lighting plan comes back to the Commission.
- Details on the garage.

After the Commission acts on an application, individual Commissioners rate the overall design on a scale of 1 to 10, including any changes required by the Commission. The ratings are for information only. They are not used to decide whether the project should be approved. The scale is 1 = complete failure; 2 = critically bad; 3 = very poor; 4 = poor; 5 = fair; 6 = good; 7 = very good; 8 = excellent; 9 = superior; and 10 = outstanding. The overall ratings for this project are 7 and 8.

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION PROJECT RATING FOR: 425 West Washington Avenue

	Site Plan	Architecture	Landscape Plan	Site Amenities, Lighting, Etc.	Signs	Circulation (Pedestrian, Vehicular)	Urban Context	Overall Rating
Member Ratings	6	8	6	6	-	8	9	8
	-	8	6	-	-	-	8	-
	-	8	5	-	-	-	-	-
	7	8	6	-	-	-	7	7

General Comments:

- Enhancements to landscape integration with architecture and garage entry.
- Much improved – depth of front façade excellent.
- Landscape needs to be exceptional.

ADVISORY STATEMENT

BASSETT DISTRICT STEERING COMMITTEE REVIEW OF 425 W. WASHINGTON AVE. REDEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

Introduction.

Below is a summary of the outcomes of the Bassett District steering committee meetings of May 8, May 15, June 5, and June 24, 2013, regarding Mr. Eric Minton's proposal for 425 W. Washington Avenue. A July 11th follow-up neighborhood meeting at Capitol Lakes auditorium was also held, attended by Alder Verveer and Kevin Firchow of City Planning. The committee met with Mr. John Sutton of Sutton Architects, representing the development team. While the committee supports the overall intent of this project, it is necessary to highlight neighborhood issues and concerns that need to be addressed by the developer, the neighborhood, and relevant city review authorities as this project is considered for approval.

Discussion of Issues and Concerns

2012 Downtown Plan Implementation.

This committee carries an added responsibility since this project may well be the "template" for all future projects in the 400/500 blocks of W. Washington under the new Downtown Plan (DP). "Bassett Recommendations, Objective 4.5" of the DP calls for "an evolving mix of new higher-density buildings carefully integrated with existing older structures that are compatible in scale and character". Also, the DP for W. Washington stresses "the grand appearance created by consistent building setbacks, wide terraces, and large canopy trees, and these features should be maintained as public amenities as redevelopment occurs."

Yet the new DP's "concept drawings" for the 400/500 blocks anticipate a near-monolithic progression of five and six-story buildings with minimum separation between structures. Only a handful of historically significant residences at Broom St. and W. Washington (SW corner) are shown as surviving this transition. Whether such changes are beneficial or harmful to the neighborhood's character is debatable, but the 425 W. Washington project will set the tone for future developments along this highly visible, tree-lined, Capitol gateway corridor.

Zoning, Massing, and Setback.

The steering committee's understanding is that the use of the Planned Development approach for this proposal is being driven by the proposed commercial uses which are not permitted within the current DR2 zoning. Residents are supportive of the proposed commercial uses for this site, an optometrist and a fitness center, one of which has operated on this site for many years.

However, the committee feels strongly that whatever method is chosen to accommodate these uses should not circumvent the underlying Design and Dimensional Standards associated with the current DR2 zoning district established for the 400 & 500 blocks of W. Washington Ave. This area was specifically separated in the Downtown Plan and the vision expressed there is most

aligned with the DR2 zoning district. The design, setback and massing standards are important elements in creating the vision described in the Downtown Plan.

In particular this proposal does not meet the rear yard setback requirement of the DR2 zoning. The requirement is for a minimum of 20% of the depth of the lot or 20' whichever is greater. The proposed rear yard setback is 20' versus the 33' requirement based on actual lot depth. If the first redevelopment in the W. Washington area under the new zoning and Downtown Plan is not compliant with the basic Design and Dimensional Standards then the vision for the area will be eroded and future proposals will likely follow suit in requesting variations from these recently adopted standards.

In fact most of the commercial uses that currently exist along these blocks are not identified as permitted or conditional uses for the DR2 district. The dental, optometry, real estate, and professional offices along with furniture sales, a coffee shop, and a financial institution currently operating on these parcels are non conforming within DR2.

The West Washington area is identified in the Downtown Plan as primarily a residential area with neighborhood serving mixed use occupancies. These are precisely the types of uses proposed by this application, yet the zoning district is out of line with the Downtown Plan.

The DR2 zoning district is used only for the West Washington, Bassett and Mifflin Districts. All three areas anticipate a range of commercial services mixed into these predominately residential areas. Going forward, continued use of spot zoning or planned development procedures is not conducive to achieving the overall unified goals of the Downtown Plan.

An alternative means of accomplishing these goals is to modify the zoning code to make the types of uses anticipated within these areas conditional uses in DR2 so that they can occur on sites which are suitable.

Architecture and Building Height.

Bassett District is a 2-4 story height neighborhood (see DP Recommendation 84). Appendix C of the DP identifies W. Washington Ave. ("Area C") as an area where up to two (2) additional stories may be allowed "... through the conditional use process if they meet specific criteria". Further, "... additional stories are to be used as a tool to encourage and reward buildings of truly exceptional design that respond to the specific context of their location and accomplish specific objectives defined for the area." (*emphasis added*).

The subject project demonstrates rather unexceptional features, and shows little, if any, awareness of its neighborhood context. The committee appreciates the 5th floor stepback as an effort to reduce the bulk and shadow impact of this structure. However, allowing such a "routine" design effort to automatically qualify for an extra story (5th floor) may set a precedent that is difficult to change. The steering committee must look to the UDC and Plan Commission for their expertise and input to find ways that the current design can be enhanced and better correlated with the neighborhood's character and gateway role. Such alterations will be

challenging, but are ultimately necessary to comply with the intent of the Downtown Plan's vision for W. Washington Avenue.

Historic Concerns.

This project adjoins smaller-scale frame and brick residences with porches, yards, and period architecture that define this portion of the Bassett/W. Washington neighborhood. The DP's Recommendation #88 states that a Neighborhood Conservation District should be considered "as identified in the Downtown Historic Preservation Plan." To date we are unaware of any actions that would serve to implement this recommendation. Once the 425 W. Washington project is underway, it may well be too late to overcome the momentum of future "lot-by-lot" project approvals if the goal of "preserving neighborhood character" is to be achieved.

Traffic, Parking, and Safety.

This is a high commuter traffic area with numerous activities both morning and night to draw visitors. Parking for events at Kohl Center, Overture Center, etc. place a premium on safe ingress/egress for vehicles and the resulting heavy pedestrian flows. The developer has carefully included on-site parking for residents and the staffs of the fitness center and Dr. Bonsett-Veals' office. However, clients of the fitness center will have no parking available and will be expected to walk, bike, or ride mopeds to the facility. This leaves automobile users to find street parking, when existing businesses already find customer parking to be very scarce. The committee recommends provisions be made for fitness center clients to use a limited number of on-site stalls, with appropriate time restrictions and access controls.

Economics.

Given that the 1st and 2nd floor commercial spaces are custom designed and fully committed for occupancy, the only issue is rental housing demand. Presently, new downtown apartment complexes have little difficulty finding tenants for units with upscale amenities. Building owners repeatedly cite the "Epic Effect" as a major driver, with young professionals seeking a downtown abode even while working in the suburbs. One future concern is how the two commercial spaces would be altered to accommodate changes in use should the proposed tenants vacate or go out of business. This could also create new zoning conflicts. Parking assignment plans would also be impacted.

Terrace Protection.

The developer's Tree Inventory and Tree Protection Plan dated 4/5/05, was provided to the committee. All 22 existing perimeter trees and 2 rear lot line trees will be removed. Mr. Sutton hopes to save a catalpa tree at the rear/center of the lot. A number of these trees have signs of disease or damage, yet they do provide canopy cover, habitat, and shade for the area. Two mature honey locust trees occupy the terrace. The committee strongly recommends including Section II (pp.3-4) of the Protection Plan in the plan submittal, requiring "fencing off" of the terrace trees. Further, we recommend the full terrace be fenced to preclude construction damage, to protect root structures and avoid soil compression. Mr. Sutton has stated that no construction activity (such as cranes) will require terrace tree trimming or removal for this project.

Signage.

The committee is comfortable with the monument signage concept, although its placement is in flux. Exterior warning and safety notice signs should also be designed and integrated early, rather than being purchased "over the counter". UDC review of signage concepts, particularly a prohibition of any future marquees, should occur early in the process, and not as an afterthought.

Public Areas and Amenities.

The architect proposes a partial green roof adjoining a common area 5th floor roof terrace. Regarding roof terrace security, the committee has been repeatedly assured that key fob entry controls, security cameras to monitor activities, and a metal fence set back five (5) feet from the 42" parapet wall will be permanently in place. This is to prevent any interaction between terrace users and pedestrians or vehicles below on W. Washington. There will be no amplified music, and lighting glare will be controlled. Also, the roof terrace hours of use will not extend beyond the fitness center's hours, so that a staff member is always present to monitor rooftop activities by video. At street level, the architect has promised striping and more esthetic screening of the moped and bike parking at the front of the project, to prevent a cluttered look near the entry. A small sideyard on the west will be available for tenant and staff seating.

Landscaping.

There will be a continuous border around the perimeter with a 9-ft. rear lawn. The committee has encouraged the maximum number and size of replacement trees, since there will be no preservation of the mature trees now on the site. The project will use city garbage/recycling services, resulting in at least eight (8) wheeled collection bins. The committee questions whether city collection bins and the proposed trash room will be sufficient to accommodate all trash and recycling for the building, especially during moveouts. The weekly round trip transport of all these bins across the terrace lawn may result in ruts and worn areas of a permanent nature. The developer needs to devise a solution to this potential eyesore.

Mechanicals and Lighting.

The mechanical equipment will be internal, except for several A/C compressors on the roof. Each apartment will have its own HVAC unit, with external grills. The committee has stressed the need to match the exhaust grill vents with the adjoining building finishes. Exterior lighting is to be designed for "dark sky" compatibility and reduced impact on neighboring sites.

Energy and Ecology. The apartments will have individual HVAC units. Hot water will be centrally sourced. The partial green roof (5th floor) is a welcome feature. Total loss of trees on site will only add to the urban warming trend.

Process. To date, the steering committee has received prompt and courteous communication from the architect and developer. The level of responsiveness to suggestions and the rapid updating of the preliminary drawings have been most helpful to these deliberations. We look forward to this level of transparency and professionalism as the review process continues.

Summary. The steering committee supports the growth of higher density mixed use projects in the Bassett district. More neighborhood oriented retail services along W. Washington can help existing merchants sustain their businesses and create the critical mass needed for greater foot traffic. The key elements for implementation that the steering committee recommends for the 425 W. Washington project are as follows:

1. Architectural enhancements to improve the structure's compatibility with the neighborhood's history, character and gateway context. (see DP; App. "C" extra height criteria)
2. Adhering to the rear lot setback dimensions (33') set forth in DR2 zoning.
3. Moving the roof's fire access stairs out of sight from the street.
4. Provide fitness center client automobile parking on site.
5. Permanent security controls for the 5th floor roof terrace with 5' setback from the 42" parapet wall. Restricted hours, video monitoring, and no amplified music or decorative lighting.
6. Plant the maximum number and size of landscape trees.
7. Provide garage/recycling bin transport plan protective of the terrace.
8. Landscape screening and striping of moped/bike parking areas.
9. Total fenced protection of the entire terrace prior to and during construction.

The 2012 Downtown Plan is now in effect. This project is the first on W. Washington Avenue to fall under the new criteria. The key issues of this project's design compatibility and setbacks need to be resolved. We expect the outcome of this complex review effort to determine the direction of W. Washington Ave. and the Bassett District's character and livability for many years to come.

Respectfully submitted,

MICHAEL D. MAY
For the 425 W. Washington Ave. Steering Committee
Bassett District, Capitol Neighborhoods

ADVISORY STATEMENT II

Bassett District Steering Committee
Review of 425 W. Washington Development
Resubmittal to the Urban Design Commission, September 11, 2013

Introduction

The Bassett District Steering Committee previously submitted an Advisory Statement on the original application for this proposal, and an August 28 Resubmittal to UDC. The architect and steering committee met again September 4th to review project changes. The committee believes that the comments made in its original statement remain pertinent to the consideration of this proposal. This second Advisory Statement is a supplement to that document focused on the issues raised at the August 7 and 28 UDC meetings that the applicant has attempted to address.

Zoning

Rather than using a Planned Development, the application is now requesting a zoning change to UMX. The change appears to be driven by the proposed commercial occupancies. As noted in our prior report we believe changing the zoning code to allow for additional conditional uses under the current DR2 zoning is a preferable approach.

City Staff has noted that preserving the broad front yard setbacks along W. Washington is an important aspect of maintaining the character of these blocks. The revised application moves the building closer to the rear lot line resulting in a rear yard setback that appears to be less than 15'. Ironically, the proposal is now inconsistent with the UMX requirement for a maximum front yard setback of 10'.

Again this demonstrates that playing with the zoning for the parcel is not the appropriate means to allow for the proposed commercial uses.

Architecture and Building Height

The September 4th meeting provided a proposal that made further refinements to the building's design which added some strength and more detail to the structure. The committee feels that the design has progressed significantly from the original, but that is not the standard for considering the extra story. The steering committee does not believe that the proposal meets the requirements of the four specific standards to allow for an additional story noted in the staff report, specifically items a. and b.

- a. "the mass and height is compatible with the surrounding ... area including; scale, mass, rhythm and setbacks."

The proposal does not meet the setback requirements of either the current DR2 zoning of the current site and surrounding properties or the proposed UMX zoning. Further changing the zoning should not be the means to obtain an additional story.

- b. "The excess height allows for a demonstrated higher quality building than cannot be achieved without additional stories."

The applicant has provided no information to support that this standard has been achieved. On September 4th the architect stated that "amenities" such as a roof garden, two elevators, and better quality tenants were of significant benefit to the neighborhood. While this might be true, such factors are a normal part of good design and property management. As noted in our prior comments, the proposal demonstrates rather unexceptional features, and shows little if any awareness of its

neighborhood context. In granting initial approval UDC appears to have agreed in this regard. The revised proposal has done little alleviate this concern.

The Downtown Plan states that the opportunity for extra stories should be used to encourage “buildings of truly exceptional design and accomplish specific objectives defined for the area”. This proposal does neither. In fact, in the applicant’s Statement of Rationale the extra story is needed to “warrant the cost of developing two underground stories of parking.” The only reason the applicant provides for the additional story is to cover the costs of constructing parking. In the downtown there are no specific zoning requirements to provide parking, let alone plan objectives to provide extra stories for providing more parking.

At last check, the current submission to UDC did not use the June 18th letter of intent included in the first formal application. Current plans do not show 5th floor patio landscaping or the 5-foot setback from the parapet walls. The front yard planter needs to be extended westward to screen the bike parking.

While there have been further design improvements, the architecture is no more than the minimum we would expect for any proposal. The materials used are like those found in recent similar projects. There is still nothing ‘exceptional’ about this design and the building does nothing to accomplish Downtown Plan objectives that wouldn’t be required of any new development at this location.

The first proposal in the W. Washington corridor to be approved for extra stories will set the bar for future projects. Establishing a high bar for ‘truly exceptional design’ is vital from the outset to ensure that development in this gateway area fulfills the goals of the Downtown Plan and the new Zoning Code.

Summary

The steering committee believes that eight of the nine specific recommendations from the initial Advisory Statement are still valid and they are shown below for ease of reference. (revisions underlined)

1. Architectural enhancements to improve the structure’s compatibility with the neighborhood’s history, character and gateway context. (see DP; App. “c” extra height criteria)
2. Adhering to the rear yard setback dimensions (33’) set forth in DR2 zoning.
3. Provide fitness center client automobile parking onsite.
4. Permanent security controls for the 5th floor roof terrace and garden with a 5’ fenced setback from the 42” parapet wall. Impose restricted hours, video monitoring and no amplified music or decorative lighting.
5. Plant the maximum number and size of large trees.
6. Provide trash/recycling bin transport plan protective of the terrace.
7. Landscape screening and striping of moped/ bike parking areas.
8. Total fenced protection of the entire terrace, and Keller property “driveway” tree, prior to and during construction.

Respectfully submitted,

425 W. Washington Steering Committee
Bassett District, Capitol Neighborhoods