



Department of Planning & Community & Economic Development

## Planning Division

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**TO:** Urban Design Commission

**FROM:** Katherine Cornwell, Director

**DATE:** May 6, 2015

**SUBJECT:** ID 36901 & 37589 – Approval of a demolition permit and conditional use to allow demolition of an existing two-story mixed-use building and construction of a new mixed-use building containing approximately 8,740 square feet of commercial space, 3,000 square feet of flex space, and 367 apartments at 510 University Avenue and 435 W. Gilman Street in the UMX (Urban Mixed-Use) zoning district.

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On March 4, 2015, Core Campus, LLC and The Mullins Group submitted a request to construct a 12-story mixed-use building at 510 University Avenue and 435 W. Gilman Street. Those plans called for 8,750 square feet of commercial space, 3,000 square feet of flex space, and 348 apartments with 830 bedrooms, and 3 levels of parking on the 1-acre site. The project includes preservation of the street-facing façade of a two-story, approximately 16,000 gross square-foot mixed-use building at 435 W. Gilman Street, which was constructed in 1929 (“1929 building”). As a result of discussions with Planning staff about the design of the project since the March 4 submittal, the applicant submitted revised plans on April 8 and April 29 that proposed modest variations in the scope of the mixed-use building. The current scope of the proposed mixed-use building is contained in the Subject of this memo.

The project is zoned Urban Mixed-Use (UMX) and is subject to the Downtown Height Map, which allows up to 12 stories in this location. In UMX zoning, however, buildings greater than 20,000 square feet and in excess of 4 stories are subject to conditional use review. Additional height and mass must be considered through the lens of the Downtown Design Standards, which apply to new buildings or additions in excess of 50% of floor area in the Downtown area, and the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines. Both the standards and the guidelines provide the framework for design review consistent with the Downtown Plan.

The Downtown and Urban Districts were created to, among other purposes, recognize and enhance the **unique characteristics** of Downtown neighborhoods; recognize the **architectural heritage** and cultural resources of Downtown neighborhoods; facilitate **context-sensitive development**; and foster development with **high-quality architecture and urban design**. The Downtown Design Standards include standards for parking, entrance orientation, **façade articulation**, story heights and treatment, door and window openings, **building materials**, and equipment and service area screening.

The maximum height and bulk that may be achieved within the 12 story height limit is a function of consistency with the Downtown Design Standards. To meet these regulatory standards, the project should be reviewed through the lens of the statement of purpose for the Downtown and Urban Districts, with consideration for how the unique characteristics, the architectural heritage and urban

design of the context inform the aforementioned elements of Downtown Design Standards. Staff has reviewed the proposed project concept carefully and concluded that it should not be approved at this time due primarily to concerns about the massing and composition of the W. Gilman Street portion of the building, which Planning staff believes needs significant improvement for the following reasons:

1. **Massing.** The massing of the W. Gilman Street side of the building should be significantly reduced. Ideally this would be achieved by a reduction in height and a modulation of the façade to correspond to the finer grain, and vertical orientation of W. Gilman Street, which features a building pattern similar to State Street. A majority of the buildings in the 400-block are 2-4 stories in height and were constructed prior to World War II, including the two-story building on the subject site. This development pattern creates a unique pedestrian-scale environment in the 400-block of W. Gilman Street, which is among the longest and most historically intact mixed-use blocks off of State Street in the Downtown.
2. **Composition.** The composition should give the appearance of a collection of buildings to help break down the perceived mass of the structure and diminish the sense of a single, new building looming over the existing context. At W. Gilman Street, additional height above the loading dock should be added in concert with an improved façade west of the façade of the 1929 building to give the appearance of an infill building at the street. Above the preserved façade, an additional stepback greater than 20 feet should be considered to allow the 1929 façade to be emphasized and to prevent the tower behind it from looming over the lower building. Reduction in the height of the building through the center of the site and block should also be considered to create an orderly transition in the mass of the building from south to north, to allow distinction between the Gorham-University and Gilman sections of the building, and to allow sunlight through the block.
3. **Integration with Historic Resource.** The new construction should create a strong relationship to the 1929 building. This portion of the collection of buildings should give the appearance of a unified standalone building. The new construction in this portion should take its design cues from the existing structure, with a brick color that matches the existing brick. The pilasters of the existing building define three building modules that should be repeated in the new construction. There are a number of ways that this could be achieved. Because the existing construction will define the base of the building, its classical architecture should define the style for the floors above. The upper floors should be stepped back from the existing façade significantly. The mass should be further broken down into a cohesive base, middle, and top. The two-story base should be followed by a distinct middle and top that repeats some of the design embellishments of the base. Modulation of the middle and additional stepback of the top would also be appropriate to further resolve massing issues. The datum of the floors should correspond to the floors of the existing context.
4. **Loading Dock Integration.** The design of the portion above the loading dock should be different from the portion associated with the existing 1929 structure. The impact of the loading dock needs to be mitigated so as to preserve the integrity of the pedestrian realm. A contrasting architectural style may be appropriate for this portion of the building in order to play off of the asymmetry of the width of the loading dock and the remainder of this module while differentiating this section of the W. Gilman façade. The second floor should correspond to the datum of the floors of the existing historic resources.
5. **Materials.** The appearance of the building along W. Gilman Street is primarily informed by the proposed mass. However, staff also feels that the skinning of the building draws attention to the

mass of the structure rather than allowing it to recede. Simplification of the skin would: better correspond to the context, break down the mass of the component forms, and lessen the sense that the upper floors of the building loom over the lower levels. Visual interest could be created by cladding the aforementioned portions of the building in different colors (such as a complementary brick color on the portion of above the historic resource and a dark, rigid, heavy gauge metal panel on the portion that includes the loading dock to give it a more industrial, modern, abstract feel). The materials should clad the structure in a uniform way that helps to define and break down the mass of the component forms.

Finally, while Planning staff is most concerned with the W. Gilman Street side of the building, it also recommends that the Urban Design Commission give specific consideration to two aspects of the W. Gorham Street-University Avenue façade in determining whether the project merits approval.

First, the Fire Department has advised that the number and size of wall openings on side and rear façades adjacent certain property lines may be limited due to code-based limitations, which is apparent on some of the renderings. Specific resolution of this design issue should be provided prior to approval of the project to ensure that highly visible façades are sufficiently articulated. The use of vision glass in combination with a palette of materials should be used to address this concern; the use of spandrel or the avoidance of openings on this façade should be avoided.

Secondly, staff recommends that specific consideration be given to some of the design elements proposed on the sweeping southerly façade. The applicant recently revised the project to increase the height of a portion of the building to 4 stories in response to an earlier staff comment that the height of the base floors of the building be sufficient to give the sense of supporting the weight of the building above; staff's initial comments concerned the provision of a taller floor to ceiling height on the base stories, the comments were not intended to suggest adding two floors to the base. Adding two floors to the base distorts the proportions of the building, making the base feel bulky and heavy, rather than structurally supportive.

In closing, the Planning Division recommends that the Urban Design Commission refer this matter to a future meeting to allow the applicant the opportunity to address the design issues outlined in the memo.

Additionally, at its May 4 meeting, the Plan Commission referred the project to the Landmarks Commission for an advisory recommendation at the request of Ald. Mike Verveer, as allowed by the Zoning Code for demolition permits. The Urban Design Commission should determine whether it is appropriate to refer this matter until the Landmarks Commission has reviewed the project as requested by the alder. The development team is hoping to submit for the Landmarks meeting of May 11.

KC/ Jw/ tp