



Project Address: 1601 N Sherman Avenue
Application Type: Public Building for MMSD Sherman Middle and Malcom Shabazz High Schools
UDC is an Approving Body
Legistar File ID #: [88482](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Scott Chehak, Madison Metropolitan School District | Susan Bowersox, OPN Architects

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the construction of a new two-story combined middle school and high school to be constructed on the unused portion of the site while the existing school remains open. Upon completion of the new construction the existing building will be demolished and replaced with new parking and greenspace.

Project Schedule:

- The UDC received an Informational Presentation on June 11, 2025.
- The Plan Commission approved this request at their October 6, 2025, meeting.
- The UDC granted Initial Approval on September 17, 2025. The Initial Approval included the condition to revise the building design of the Sherman Middle School to incorporate more color (i.e. metal panel insets in the window openings, screen shades, entrance overhang, or in the architectural elements at the entrance, or on the north elevation in the case stone/metal panel, etc.).

Approval Standards: The UDC is an **approving body** on this request. Pursuant to MGO Section 33.24(4)(d), *"The UDC shall approve plans for all buildings proposed to be built or expanded in the City by the State of Wisconsin, the University of Wisconsin, the City of Madison, Dane County, the Federal Government or any other local governmental entity which has the power to levy taxes on property located within the City."*

Staff note that as an item returning for Final Approval, the UDC's subsequent review and continued evaluation of this item is limited to the Initial Approval condition. It is the role of the UDC to focus only on whether that condition has been addressed.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff requests the UDC's continued review and evaluation of this proposal for consistency with the conditions of approval as outlined below. The UDC's role is to ensure that the previously established condition has been met. The UDC cannot waive or change these requirements.

- Revise the building design of the Sherman Middle School to incorporate more color (i.e. metal panel insets in the window openings, screen shades, entrance overhang, or in the architectural elements at the entrance, or on the north elevation in the case stone/metal panel, etc.).

As noted in the applicant's Letter of Intent and as reflected in the elevation drawings, color was integrated on both the north and east sides of the Sherman Middle School building, including as it relates to the sun shades, and vertical blades. In addition, a painted wall pattern is also proposed.

Staff believe this condition has been met.

Summary of UDC Initial Approval Discussion and Comments

As a reference, the Commission's comments and questions from the September 17, 2025, Initial Approval are provided below.

The Commission questioned the blue tile being iridescent. The applicant clarified that it is not iridescent, but does have a finish that reacts to angles and shadows.

The Commission inquired about the shading devices and materiality. The applicant noted that they are different between the two schools, with the middle school having a wood element like the entrance, and the Shabazz side relating to the shingles of the blue green color on that side.

The Commission liked the massing, commenting on adding color to the sun shading devices.

The Commission asked about bicycle parking. The concentration of it is on the middle school side.

The Commission inquired about pulling in the drop-off/pick-up rather than having it as one driveway entrance. It is aligned with the intersection but limited by the stormwater basin, as well as the existing shed. It may be something to ask Traffic Engineering about, to locate another exit at the southwest corner of the site, if there enough room in the corner, to add another entrance/exit and eliminate the turnaround.

The Commission noted that all of the color is on the Shabazz High School; why not add that same color on the middle school? The applicant noted at the Sherman entrance, the canopy has a large soffit, with a wood accent color underneath that ties to the accent color of the middle school. We do have two age-groups and demographics. The light color brick and accent brick is the same all the way around as the primary brick masonry.

The Commission inquired as to why the shading devices on the middle school are not on the first floor. It was noted there is a berm and mature trees, and a sun study showed there was natural shading already occurring here. The size and distribution is a direct result of the sun studies and solar impacts on this side of the building.

The applicant noted that the metal panel in the window openings is to manage window sizes so as to not trigger bird glass. The metal panel is integrated into the framing of the windows.

The Commission asked about landscaping near the building. The applicant noted errors on the renderings, with the landscape plan being correct, showing foundation plantings along the building.

The Commission commented on the lack of color, and the difficulty of approving a school such lackluster materials. Color is beneficial for children in so many ways.

The Commission discussed and appreciated the differentiation between the two schools. The middle school is more of a general middle school, whereas Shabazz is more exceptional than others in the City, with a different form of the general population of schools in the City. The uniqueness is appreciated.

The Commission agreed with comments about the lack of color, with a suggestion of yellow as a possible accent color.

The Commission liked the softer wood tones in the masonry, noting that middle schools need to be durable. The Commission thanked the team for their efforts with all these lush plantings.

The Commission commented that this is an opportunity to not be so mild on the color on the middle school, it can be an icon to the neighborhood, reinforce the idea of color.

Action

On a motion by Klehr, seconded by Asad, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL**, with the following condition:

- Revise the building design of the Sherman Middle School to incorporate more color (i.e. metal panel insets in the window openings, screen shades, entrance overhang, or in the architectural elements at the entrance, or on the north elevation in the case stone/metal panel, etc.).

The motion was passed on a unanimous vote of (5-0).