



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 5555 Odana Road & 5534 Medical Circle
Application Type: New Mixed-Use Building in Urban Design District 3
UDC is an Approving Body
Legistar File ID #: [89886](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Nick Orthmann, Bear Development, LLC | BPH, LLC

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the construction of a mixed-use development comprised of two buildings (one five and one six stories), 227 residential units and roughly 7,700 square feet of commercial space. The development will be served by surface and structured parking.

Project Schedule:

- The UDC received an Informational Presentation on September 17, 2025.
- UDC granted Initial Approval on March 4, 2026.
- The Plan Commission granted approval of the demolition and conditional use requests on March 16, 2026. (Staff note that this approval has been appealed and is scheduled to be considered by the Common Council on May 5, 2026).

Approval Standards: The UDC is an **approving body** on this request. The site is located in Urban Design District 3 (“UDD 3”), which requires that the Urban Design Commission review the proposed project using the design standards and guidelines for that district in [MGO Section 33.24\(10\)](#).

As noted above, at the March 4, 2026, meeting, the UDC granted Initial Approval of this item with conditions. Initial Approval signifies that generally the Commission is able to find that the proposed building placement and massing is consistent with the review and approval criteria, but that additional architectural or material details are needed for the Commission to make findings related to the Urban Design District guidelines and requirements. The Initial Approval conditions outline the additional information that is necessary for the Commission to make such findings.

Generally, and in summary, the Initial Approval Conditions include making refinements to the landscape plan and fence material, and with regard to building design, specifically as it relates to Building A, refinements shall be made to incorporate a change in plane where the siding and panel materials transition, revising the finish at the top of the building to create positive termination, and incorporate additional design details to break down the mass and scale of blank walls.

The Commission’s subsequent review and continued evaluation of this item is limited to the scope of the Initial Approval conditions. It is the role of the UDC to focus only on whether those conditions have 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, and as it relates to the applicable UDD 3 guidelines and requirements. The UDC’s role

is to ensure that these previously established conditions are met. The UDC cannot waive or change these requirements.

- The applicant shall revise the landscape plan to incorporate additional landscape islands along the east elevation of Building A and southern property line shared with the school, including considering full size trees, additional tree islands, reducing parking, etc.

As reflected in the Landscape Plan, two new landscape islands have been added in the parking area located along the southern, shared property line. In addition, two islands have also been added along the east side of Building A. The additional islands result in the removal of four parking stalls. Each island will be planted with a London Plane Tree, which is a canopy tree and low-grow fragrant sumac. Staff believe this condition has been met.

- The fence material shall be revised to be a more organic material to be more contextually appropriate. The applicant shall provide a fence detail.

As noted in the submittal materials, the proposed fence material has been changed to reflect a composite faux wood material (Trex Seclusions, woodland brown color as noted on Sheet L101). As noted in the applicant's Letter of Intent, this material is intended to resemble wood in aesthetic but will be more durable. Staff believe this condition has been met.

- The building design shall be revised to introduce a change in plane where the flat fiber cement panels transition to horizontal siding, including a deeper joint or larger trim.

As noted in the Letter of Intent, a metal trim piece will be used at the transition point where the flat fiber cement panels transition to horizontal lap siding, creating a ½-inch reveal. For additional information, please refer to Detail 11, "Vertical Reveal at Composite Panel/Lap Siding" on Sheet U500.

Staff requests the Commission's continued evaluation of this condition.

- The building design shall be revised to incorporate additional design and detailing along the east elevation of Building A focusing on design techniques that would help to break down mass and scale of the building base, as well as differentiate between building components, similar to the other facades.

As noted in the Letter of Intent, a change of color was incorporated in the upper floors on the east elevation to provide a break in the light gray material. In addition, "panel features" that are comprised of smooth face CMU have been added to the east elevation of Building A to create articulation in the wall. In addition, garage doors that include glazing have been added to further reduce the blank wall expanses.

Staff requests the Commission's continued evaluation of this condition.

- Revise the finish at the top of the building to provide a positive termination.

As noted in the Letter of Intent, a 14-inch "cap" has been introduced at the top of both buildings to create more of a positive termination/finish treatment at the top of the building. The cap will project 2-4" from the face of the building and be of a dark color (Evening Blue). Staff note that while a detail was provided on Sheet U601, the description in the Letter of Intent does not seem to align with the specifications noted in the detail.

Staff note that, as reflected in the elevation drawings, the cap element is not consistently applied across the top of the buildings. In areas where the cap element is not applied, a metal coping, painted to match the siding below will be used.

Staff requests the Commission's continued evaluation of this condition.

- The Commission requested a site section and surrounding site contextual information to the landscape and site plans. If the applicant has conducted a shadow study, the Commission requested that it be provided.

As reflected in the Existing Site Plan, Sheet U002, Contextual Site Plan Exhibit, and Landscape Plan, Sheet L100, the applicant has provided additional information related to how the project site relates to the surrounding context. In addition, the applicant has provided the shadow studies, which can be found on Sheets U450 and U451.

Summary of Initial Approval Comments & Discussion

As a reference, a summary of the Commission's comments and discussion from the Initial Approval on March 4, 2026, are provided below.

The Commission inquired about the northwest elevation on Odana Road, the pedestrian pathways and the utility banks along the ground floor. The applicant clarified that the walks are private and the intent is that the walks will serve the residents, but that non-residents would also use them.

The Commission inquired about the utility banks and the transistor pad in this same location. The transformer is located to the southeast of Building A. There are gas meters and a concrete pad.

The Commission noted that the façade on Odana and Medical Circle, the windows seem higher and smaller with less glazing on those two facades. The applicant noted the grading pushes the building up a little, the windows are up higher, but not fewer in quantity. They are less connected to the sidewalk but will screen blank walls with landscape. The entry will be lowered to grade.

The Commission inquired about the landscape and the location of the fence; the fence is not rendered in. The Commission confirmed that the landscape plan is correct versus the renderings.

The Commission inquired about the grade across the site. The applicant noted that the site sits higher on the Odana Road side and Medical Circle side. The overall site elevation is being lowered. There is 18 feet of fall from Odana to Medical Circle. The small concrete flume will be removed – will be cutting down 5-6 feet on the backside of the playground, which will be closer to the grade of the school's playground, but the site's grade at Medical Circle will be slightly lower.

The Commission inquired about the site's cross-access agreements and what is required; the drive aisle and parking or just one or the other. The applicant confirmed that the drive aisle is not on the project site, but will stay long term. There is a parking easement that multiple users would like to continue for the parking along the building and south of Building A.

The Commission commented on the southeast corner of Building A, and how it transitions to a windowless base, expressing concerns for the lack of buffer and screening. There is an understanding that the cross-access agreements lock in the parking but the landscape is inadequate, including the lack of ornamental scale or deciduous trees and is what would help to step down the building mass.

The Commission inquired about whether it would be possible to create a couple of tree islands in that row of parking or additional landscaping. The applicant noted that tree islands would be difficult given the agreement and the number of parking stalls that need to be provided. There is a number of ornamental grasses that are planted there to break down hardscape.

The Commission noted that the swath of ornamental grasses does not do much against a six-story structure. It is this space along the east elevation that a tree or trees is needed to step down the building mass. Can we get much needed tree islands in the parking spaces? The applicant acknowledged that they can look at that right away – another option would be trellises.

The Commission inquired if the entire parking lot was being replaced. Yes, the intent is to start fresh – noting that the trees on the south side of the site are in ok shape, not great shape, and will be removed due to undergrounding utilities. The applicant noted that they are open to coming back with refreshed landscape package; putting trees back along the property line and a more robust planting plan.

The Commission inquired if their heat island effect, lighting and reflectivity were studied. The applicant noted that they do have a lighting plan and they feel it complies with the ordinance noting that the school only operates until 5 PM, so night lighting would not impact them. The applicant noted that a stormwater management plan for the site has been done and it will be managed through different methods, including green roofs to underground storage. The parking lot proposed is reducing the amount of paving that is there now, so they are reducing the amount of paved area. The building materials and how they impact the surroundings were studied and a shadow study was completed, which showed that there is limited impact on the neighboring properties, minimal even during the winter solstice. A lot of that is driven by the pattern of the sun – we did look at the context of the buildings and the impacts that this development would have.

The Commission clarified that there are multiple entry points into Building A from the parking areas – specifically on the south side of Building A – there is a man door and garage door.

The Commission asked about the base condition of Building A versus the top of building noting that the language is pretty different, especially the alignment of the windows. The applicant noted that the first two levels are precast, the windows flank the columns. Above is stick frame and the base is separated with a banding. The alignment of these windows is ok and acceptable, it will be viewed always in perspective. The east elevation is going to be highly visible. Something to think about.

The Commission inquired about the decision to locate the retail entrance not on Odana. The applicant noted that the vast majority of the commercial space is in Building B. The entryway to the commercial space on Building A is focused close to the walkway and convenient for those coming from Odana and providing separation from the residential lobby.

The Commission asked about the use of materials noting the West Area Plan calls for modern designs; why lap siding? The applicant note that the materials are cued from the Urbana Building; the color palettes were changed to be cooler too.

The Commission inquired about the grade difference between the parking lot and the adjacent site. The applicant noted that the parking lot is lower than the neighboring property. There is also functionally a berm condition between the parking stalls and the neighboring property. There will be a three-foot-tall berm after proposed conditions are installed. There are two fences, one on the school site and one on the subject site.

The Commission asked if alternatives to the white vinyl fence were considered. They are shiny and reflective; the applicant noted that they are open to a different application.

The Commission asked if setbacks were considered. The design team noted that they referenced the zoning code and adopted plans when they designed the building and the building complies with those requirements. Incorporating setbacks would take away livable space.

The Commission inquired about the transitions between panel materials and if there was a planar transition between panels. Currently there are 4-foot recesses for the balconies. There is a trim that separates the two materials but they are in the same plane.

The Commission asked if there was a way to increase the depth of transition change or provide something that separates them in a planar fashion. The applicant noted that they could look at a deeper trim so that it is more pronounced and creates a shadow.

The Commission inquired about the paired balconies on the east side of Building A and whether opening the top of the building so they were not covered would create variation in the roof line.

The Commission inquired about adding more interest to the east elevation of Building A. The applicant noted that the goal was to make the corner the main field, the accent blue color is the attempt to break up the monotony. The challenge is to create more articulation and have the elevation not be busy. The Commission acknowledged that long facades are not easy to design, but noted that the west façade is broken up more and has more interest than the east.

The Commission inquired about the stone plinth where the lap siding abuts it. The applicant confirmed that there is a concrete band where the two materials meet. The Commission suggested maybe introducing a color there to differentiate those. There may be a better way to transition between the two different materials.

The Commission was not necessarily drawing a parallel between tall building height and an unsafe environment, which is where much of the registrant discussion has been presented. There are some really beautiful, amazing outdoor play spaces, schools, and playgrounds that are surrounded by very tall buildings and look like incredible joyful vibrant spaces. Concern with the project isn't so much in the height of the building, but feeling the tension of a really large footprint maxing and pushing out. If the building was shifted west there would be enough space for trees, transition for grade, help with heat island effect, fit in better with context, all the things UDD 3 talks about. There's some additional space that needs to be allocated for transitioning to the neighbors. The earlier comments about pedestrian connectivity, that is cleaned up and better. The landscape buffer immediately to the west of MCH is a pretty generous space, you are improving that condition dramatically, but removing more landscape than providing new, and that is felt in other edges and areas of the project.

The Commission agreed that the pedestrian path could use some work, and questioned the outdoor area abutting the next door building, wondering if the courtyard belongs on the opposite side facing the pool. The Commission also commented that the utility banks are a pretty unfortunate view from Odana Road, noting a priority of the West Area Plan is walkability of the street. The path is not there yet.

The Commission commented on adding more planting so there is more connection to nature at the base of the building. The applicant team has addressed a lot of the Commission's previous comments, this is a great improvement from last time.

The Commission encouraged the applicant to coordinate with MCH to create a beautiful and artistic edge to their property with the fence, in addition to establishing that boundary and security.

Commissioner McLean asked other Commissions how they felt about the parapet detailing and language opinions. Commissioner Klehr responded that the parapet is just one question on this façade, in addition to other massing and material questions. It may not functionally be a problem, but it is questionable, as well as subjective.

The Commission commented the architecture is acceptable for the most part, most of the comments deal with landscaping and other site issues. The building massing creating the courtyard space versus displacing it to the east side could be a pretty big shift in massing, initial approval approves general massing. Softening those surfaces means making the building smaller, and requires reordering and shifting in the site plan to accomplish these landscaping issues. Full sized trees are needed along that edge.

Initial Approval Action

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

- The applicant shall revise the landscape plan to incorporate additional landscape islands along the east elevation of Building A and southern property line shared with the school, including considering full size trees, additional tree islands, reducing parking, etc.
- The fence material shall be revised to be a more organic material to be more contextually appropriate. The applicant shall provide a fence detail.
- The building design shall be revised to introduce a change in plane where the flat fiber cement panels transition to horizontal siding, including a deeper joint or larger trim.
- The building design shall be revised to incorporate additional design and detailing along the east elevation of Building A focusing on design techniques that would help to break down mass and scale of the building base, as well as differentiate between building components, similar to the other facades.
- Revise the finish at the top of the building to provide a positive termination.
- The Commission requested a site section and surrounding site contextual information to the landscape and site plans. If the applicant has conducted a shadow study, the Commission requested that it be provided.