



## PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

**Project Address:** 139 W Wilson Street  
**Application Type:** New Residential Building in UMX Zoning  
**UDC is an Advisory Body**  
**Legistar File ID #** [70108](#)  
**Prepared By:** Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

## Background Information

**Applicant | Contact:** John Seamon, SEA Design

**Project Description:** The applicant is proposing the demolition of an existing multi-family building and construction of a 16-story, 320-unit building. The proposal includes four parking stalls, an on-demand vehicle-sharing program, at grade open space, and fitness center. Resident vehicle parking will be provided in the Dane County ramp.

### Project Schedule:

- The UDC received an Informational Presentation on July 27, 2022.
- The UDC received an Informational Presentation on March 9, 2022.
- The UDC referred this item to a future meeting date on January 11, 2023.
- The Plan Commission is scheduled to review this item on October 2, 2023.

**Approval Standards:** The Urban Design Commission (UDC) will be an **advisory** body on this request. Section [28.076\(b\)](#) includes the related design review requirements which state that: *"All new buildings that are greater than twenty-thousand (20,000) square feet or that have more than four stories shall obtain Conditional Use approval. In addition, the UDC shall review such projects for conformity to the design standards in [Sec. 28.071\(3\)](#) and the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#) and shall report its findings to the Plan Commission."*

As noted above, a Conditional Use approval is required. As part of the UDC's evaluation of the proposed development, the Commission should also give consideration to the applicable Conditional Use Approval Standards, including:

Conditional Use Standard No. 9, which in summary states: *"When applying the above standards to any new construction of a building or an addition to an existing building the Plan Commission shall find that the project creates an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with the existing or intended character of the area and the statement of purpose for the zoning district..."*

Conditional Use Standard No. 17, which in summary states: *"When applying the above standards to an application for allowable projections into the capitol view height area, the Plan Commission shall only approve the projection if it determines the encroachment is the minimum necessary and does not significantly impact the long views of the State Capitol building."*

Staff recommends that the Commission include findings related to these standards, especially as it relates to the design considerations noted below, in their recommendation to the Plan Commission.

**Related Zoning Information:** The property is zoned Urban Mixed-Use (UMX). The Planning Division understands that the proposed development is considered a Conditional Use under the Zoning Code. In addition, the Capital

View Preservation Limit will also apply to the proposed development. As noted in the application materials, the elevator and stair tower overrun project into the Capitol View Preservation Limit, although it is unclear what that projection is conflicting information is provided between the elevations and height exhibit. Staff notes that while height information is provided in the application materials, ultimately the Zoning Administrator will confirm that the building height, including the height of any proposed projections into the Capital View Height Preservation Limitation, is accurate.

The UMX zone district also outlines design standards that are applicable to all new buildings. As a reference, the design related zoning standards outlined in the UMX zone district are included as an attachment to this report, including, but not limited to those related to building entrance orientation, façade articulation, height, fenestration, and materials.

**Design-Related Plan Recommendations:** The project site is located within the [Downtown Plan](#) planning area. As such development on the project site is subject to the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines. As noted in the Downtown Plan, the maximum recommended height is up to the Capitol View Preservation Limit.

## Summary of Design Considerations

Staff recommends that the UDC provide feedback and make findings on the development proposal regarding the aforementioned standards related to the items noted below. Staff has multiple significant design concerns on this proposal. As part of this review, staff recommends consideration be given to the following:

- **Building Design, Composition, and Visual Interest.** The proposed building design is relatively simple with minimal articulation and façade modulation in the building's form with the exception of the recessed main entry on W Wilson Street, as well as very limited architectural detailing and ornamentation (i.e. balconies, material transitions, canopies, color, etc.).

While staff supports the development of a simple façade and often recommends restraint be considered regarding the number of material or color transitions, in this case staff has questions the adequacy of the resulting visual interest, especially considering the prominence of this site. In concert with the "Long-View" comments below, staff requests the Commission's feedback on whether some modifications, even subtle changes, could appropriately increase the visual interest along the building's base, middle, and top. UDC should comment in regards to both the Conditional Use Standard No. 9, which speaks to creating an environment of aesthetic desirability and the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, especially those that speak to creating a cohesive architectural expression, including:

- Maintaining sensitivity to context in design, including maintaining build-to lines, appropriate scale, and datums, etc.
- Building massing, proportions, and articulation, including incorporating balanced vertical and horizontal articulation, and creating building components, including top, middle, base,
- Street orientation, including the recessed front entry and incorporating uses and design elements that engage the street and create an enhanced pedestrian environment,
- Utilizing a consistent level of design across all elevations, including the general organization, size and rhythm of windows, especially on the Wilson Street façade as well as along the longer visible side elevations, and application of materials and accents, creating positive termination at the top of the building, and incorporating elements and materials that add visual interest.

- **Long Views.** Due to the prominence of this site from Lake Monona and John Nolen Drive along one of the City's most prominent viewsheds, very careful consideration should be given to the building's overall design impact when considering the surrounding context and datums.

Among the most prominent features is the lighted, upper-level mural. While the City's adopted plans promote the development of interesting and varied tops to buildings, staff has very significant concerns on this element, as proposed. In addition to the lighting considerations and impacts noted below, staff has questions on the cohesiveness of this element related to the rest of the building's simple, concrete façade. Staff recommend that the applicant explore alternative approaches to providing building accents that are better integrated with the façade and better reflect the surrounding context.

As noted above, there are considerable blank walls on both the lower and upper levels of the building on the east and west elevations, including those that would be visible from the lake and John Nolen Drive. The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines speak to providing a higher degree of architectural strength and design in areas of prominent viewsheds.

- **Architectural Lighting.** Staff requests the Commission's feedback and findings on the internally lit wall art component, which occupies a portion of the highly visible John Nolen Drive façade, as well as the W Wilson façade. While staff does not object to the incorporation of an art feature, staff has significant concerns with the current configuration and varied extents of this feature across elevations and its resulting impact on the read of façade. In addition, noting the relatively limited lighting that exists in this highly visible corridor, staff also has concerns related to the resulting light levels.

With regard to the proposed light fixture itself, while staff believes that this fixture is consistent with the code requirements related to cutoff additional information is required to determine light levels. Staff recommends that as part of the Commission's recommendation a condition be included related to architectural lighting.

- **Building Materials.** The building material palette primarily consists of an etched concrete panel system with metal panel and internally illuminated wall art accents. As shown in the material details, each panel in the concrete panel system is comprised of angles and dimension. As proposed, the material palette has been determined by the Zoning Administrator to be consistent with the Zoning Code requirements.

In the Commission's previous Informational Presentation comments, general concern was expressed for utilizing a uniform application of the proposed concrete panels noting that consideration should be given to the scale and size of each of the panels, and whether articulation or modulation could be created in how the panels are oriented or grouped or colored.

From a contextual standpoint, buildings in this area feature a variety of styles, materials, and finishes, though staff is not aware of a building of this scale and prominence that featured this amount of concrete panel as a primary material.

Staff requests the Commission's feedback and findings on the proposed material palette as it relates to both the Conditional Use Standard No. 9, which speaks to creating an environment of aesthetic desirability and the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, including those that speak to creating an interesting pedestrian environment, breaking up/minimizing long monotonous facades, utilizing materials that are of a human scale, incorporating articulation through color and materials transitions, etc.

Staff notes that there appears to be materials shown on the elevations that are not clearly labeled, including the white panels adjacent to windows. These panels appear to be the same color as the concrete,

but it is unclear what the materiality of these panels is (i.e. flat concrete or metal). In addition, the faux wood aluminum panels are only shown on the north elevation.

- **Wall Packs.** As noted on the elevations, wall pack units are proposed on all elevations, including along the prominent Lake Monona / John Nolen fronting façade. While it has been the current practice to not locate wall packs on street facing or highly visible facades, they have been approved in some situations when found to be well integrated into the façade's design. Staff requests the Commission's feedback and findings on the integration of the wall packs with the overall building design and materials, especially as it relates to the aforementioned standards.
- **Site Lighting.** While a lighting plan was provided, there appears to be inconsistencies with MGO 29.36, Outdoor Lighting. The applicant is advised that modifications to the lighting plan will be required to reflect the requirements of MGO 29.36, including providing uniformity ratios, and average minimum and maximum light levels along pedestrian pathways in footcandles versus lum. watts, lumens, and watts, as well as the light levels at the property line. Staff recommends that as part of the Commission's recommendation a condition be included related to site lighting.
- **Landscape and Open Space.** As noted on the site plan, an at-grade open space is located along the east side of the building, significantly below the adjacent development. Staff requests the Commission's feedback and findings on the successful planting of this space, as well as softening/screening the blank wall expanses along the ground floor on the east, south and west elevations, and the landscape along the W Wilson Street creating an enhanced pedestrian environment. Consideration should be given to the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, which generally speak to softening urban edges, providing year-round texture and color, utilizing context appropriate plantings, etc.
- **Capitol View Preservation Considerations.** As noted above, the Capitol View Preservation Limit will apply to the project site. The applicant has requested conditional use approval for elevator and roof access overruns, as allowed by the Zoning Code. Please note, such projections can only be approved by the Plan Commission, though the UDC can provide any advisory feedback as it relates to the overall building design.

While limited projections and elevator overruns above this height limit are allowable with Conditional Use approval, staff has urged the applicant to explore solutions that eliminate or minimize such projections as much as possible to maintain consistency with the Conditional Use Standard No. 17. While some perspective drawings include depict the overruns, staff do not believe that these exhibits accurately depict how such projections will impact the long views of the development, when viewed at eye level from vantage points such as John Nolen Drive and Lake Monona.

In addition, consideration should be given to the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, including those that speak to utilizing appropriately scaled equipment, integrating rooftop mechanical equipment to be part of the overall architectural composition and providing appropriate screening to conceal the elements.

## UDC Informational Presentation Comments

As a reference, the Commission's comments from the July 27, 2022, Informational Presentation are provided below:

- What is the sequence for loading/unloading, guest parking, service vehicles? How does this site work with relation to those things? This type of population will probably be getting a lot of deliveries.

- We see deliveries as an example not occurring on the street but pulling into the private drive parking and then going back out. We see loading and unloading in a very similar way. We don't want loading trucks bringing residents goods from the street. We are considering provisions for access directly into the elevator lobby. Same for trash removal and move-in/move-out, that would be scheduled appropriately so there's not an overlap. We do have a dedicated secured room for packages.
- Do you have a built example of that proposed paneling system?
  - There's no precedent for this yet, it's a custom form of that facet on 10' x 40' panels with punched openings for fenestration. We don't have a mock up for that yet, and a smaller scale mock-up will be about 8'x10' with different paints to get a much better sense of how this will work, and whether or not it will gather dirt.
- I would highly encourage a large scale mock-up tested in weather and light conditions. There's a lot of unknown and a lot of surface area on that building.
- I share the same concerns Mr. Evans brought up. We were excited about the color shifting material.
  - It came down to a cost issue.
- I don't find the new material to not be interesting but I share the concerns with seeing a more hands-on version. I'd encourage shifts in the widths and angles of those facet panels, maybe three different versions would be enough to dramatically change as the light shifts during the day. Given the size of the building it would be monotonous to have it all be the same.
- As a Commission we're all on-board with the idea of having housing not tied into the car culture, but this is a big mass of units and providing six Zipcars, that's a little naïve. Even if only 10% of residents have cars, that's 30 cars in an already scarce parking area. For workforce type housing, where are these cars going to go? It's idealistic to think this will all work out and I have issues with that aspect of it.
- You have the right idea with the limited landscaping available on the site, utilizing columnars and plants that are happy in low light.
- I also have concern with the parking, the view may not be realistic. What is the plan for those that have cars?
  - We are in talks with a nearby garage for some off-site tenant parking.
- The texture is a bit monotonous. It's a very striking entrance, is there any way to give that nod on the Monona side of the building? There might be opportunity to add interest on that side as well. It will take finesse in how you align those fenestrations with that panel size, how you break it up and make it interesting all the way around the building.
  - Efficiency is driving a lot of the cost in a project like this. We're trying to minimize the amount of openings on each panel, but do like the idea of variation. The Monona side will pretty much only be experienced from a textural standpoint.
- There's something elegant about it, it's a little austere. I do wonder the appetite for more depth of those façade elements and whether more depth gives you the ability to have some variation. Maybe introduce different colors on different facets of the panels? I hope the art installation lighting is subtle, the rendering is pretty eerie. Neat idea for that portal.
- Are there any other opportunities or program elements that could take the place of the fitness center? Is that really the best program to put there?
  - We think the 16<sup>th</sup> floor facing the lake is best for the community room and this facing the sidewalk for the fitness, to activate at the street level.
- I'm not sure it's the best to present publicly, or that people really want to be seen working out in a public way.
- The hazy and shadow on this building will be quite beautiful, and the addition of snow will make these facades pretty interesting. You mentioned the lakeside as a priority, the common spaces might be portrayed differently. This is primo real estate, with Monona Terrace parking directly across, it's really visible from the lake. As part of the Madison skyline you could add interest there.

- Everything is really clean but the human scale of that giant corner pillar may need some detailing or a base. It's a little intimidating looking and brutal along the streetscape. I'm also curious about what the walpaks look like.
  - It's a louver, the size and shape will be driven by the window frame.
- You have a great opportunity to do something different there with colors. I'd encourage you to introduce some visual interest with color, but more importantly the building is a little too rusticated. If you were to play with the balance of flat and rusticated you might find a little bit more support with some of the Commissioners who raised concern about the texture.
- It's really good that the walpaks are well integrated.
- Can you describe the construction of that backlit panel?
  - The backlit area is a typical metal frame scenario, the panel is printed and put on top of something similar to Masonite, with a polycarbonate panel in front of that air space, lit with an LED system. We are still working through all those details.
- It will be important for us to understand because it is such a large feature.
- (Secretary) In regards to the Capitol View Height limit and how it relates to rooftop mechanicals, the parapet is just over and will have to come down, with the mechanicals above that height limit. Ultimately the Plan Commission will make that determination.
- It should come down, I'm not sure if that means you lose a floor but you could do something more with the thru-wall units and go wider.
- There will be elevator overruns, no matter how many stories it is.
  - We have an elevator overrun with one fire access stair housed in one enclosure.
- Does it somehow impede the long views? As long as the elevator overrun or the stair tower isn't right on the lakeside facing view, recessed back toward the middle of the building it may not be an issue.
- The column in the corner, p. 203, there was this patterning of the way the windows come down and where that opening is. It feels like if you centered that opening you wouldn't have to have that column. A center alcove with the two sides of the building bearing down.
- Take that all the way to the ground and shift your opening. It feels off balance, the pattern of the windows changes, it feels like this very strong vertical element, maybe it just needs to be brought all the way to the ground.
- That column seems out of place.
- It would help solve the street presence issue. Having a fitness room on the street isn't really activating the street as much as perhaps a leasing office.

**ATTACHMENT:**  
**28.071 (3) DESIGN STANDARDS FROM ZONING CODE**

(3) Design Standards.

The following standards are applicable to all new buildings and additions, within any ten- (10) year period, exceeding fifty percent (50%) of existing building's floor area for non-residential buildings, mixed-use buildings, lodging houses, and residential buildings with 8 or more dwelling units.

(a) Parking.

1. Parking shall be located in parking structures, underground, or in surface parking lots behind principal buildings. Parking structures shall be designed with liner buildings or with ground floor office or retail uses along all street-facing facades.
2. For corner lots or through lots, rear yard surface parking areas abutting any street frontage are limited to fifty percent (50%) of that frontage, and shall be located a minimum of ten (10) feet from the street property line.
3. Parking garage openings visible from the sidewalk shall have a clear maximum height of sixteen (16) feet and a maximum width of twenty-two (22) feet. Garage doors or gates shall be located a minimum of ten (10) feet from the front property line. Doors to freight loading bays are exempt from this requirement.
4. No doors or building openings providing motor vehicle access to structured parking or loading facilities shall face State Street, King Street, or the Capitol Square.

(b) Entrance Orientation.

1. Primary building entrances on all new buildings shall be oriented to the primary abutting public street and have a functional door.
2. Additional secondary entrances may be oriented to a secondary street or parking area.
3. Entries shall be clearly visible and identifiable from the street, and delineated with elements such as roof overhangs, recessed entries, landscaping, or similar design features.
4. Within ten (10) feet of a block corner, the facade may be set back to form a corner entry.

(c) Facade Articulation.

1. The facades of new buildings more than forty (40) feet in width shall be divided into smaller vertical intervals through techniques including but not limited to the following:
  - a. Facade modulation, step backs, or extending forward of a portion of the facade.
  - b. Vertical divisions using different textures, materials, or colors of materials.
  - c. Division into multiple storefronts, with separate display windows and entrances.
  - d. Variation in roof lines to reinforce the modulation or vertical intervals.
  - e. Arcades, awnings, window bays, arched windows, and balconies to reinforce the vertical intervals.

(d) Story Heights and Treatment.

1. For all buildings, the maximum ground story height is eighteen (18) feet, measured from the sidewalk to the second story floor. An atrium that exceeds eighteen (18) feet will be considered more than one (1) story.
2. Upper stories shall not exceed fourteen (14) feet floor to floor.

3. For all buildings, the minimum ground story height is twelve (12) feet, measured from the sidewalk to the second story floor.
4. For non-residential uses, the average ground story floor elevation shall not be lower than the front sidewalk elevation nor higher than eighteen (18) inches above the sidewalk elevation.
5. For ground-story residential uses, landscaping, steps, porches, grade changes, and low ornamental fences or walls or similar treatments shall be located between the sidewalk and the front door to create a private yard area.

(e) Door and Window Openings.

1. For street-facing facades with ground story non-residential uses, the ground story door and window openings shall comprise a minimum of fifty percent (50%) of the facade area.
2. For street-facing facades with ground story residential uses, ground story openings shall comprise a minimum of fifteen percent (15%) of the facade area.
3. For all buildings, upper story openings shall comprise a minimum of fifteen percent (15%) of the facade area per story.
4. Garage doors and opaque service doors shall not count toward the above requirements.
5. Glass on all windows and doors shall be clear or slightly tinted, allowing views into and out of the interior. Spandrel glass may be used on service areas on the building.

(f) Building Materials.

1. Buildings shall be constructed of durable, high-quality materials. Table 28 E-1 below lists allowable building materials.
2. All building facades visible from a public street or public walkway shall use materials and design features similar to or complementary to those of the front facade.



**Table 28E-1:** Building Materials in Downtown and Urban Districts.

| Building Materials                   | Trim/Accent Material | Top of Building | Middle of Building | Base/Bottom of Building | Standards (see footnotes) |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Brick (Face/Veneer)                  | ✓                    | ✓               | ✓                  | ✓                       |                           |
| Smooth-Face/Split-Face Block         | ✓                    | ✓               | ✓                  | ✓                       | A                         |
| Wood/Wood Composite                  | ✓                    | ✓               | ✓                  | ✓                       | B                         |
| Fiber-Cement Siding/Panels           | ✓                    | ✓               | ✓                  | ✓                       | B                         |
| Concrete Panels (Tilt-up or Precast) | ✓                    | ✓               | ✓                  | ✓                       | C                         |
| EIFS/Synthetic Stucco                | ✓                    | ✓               |                    |                         | D                         |
| Stone/Stone Veneer                   | ✓                    | ✓               | ✓                  | ✓                       |                           |
| Metal Panels                         | ✓                    | ✓               | ✓                  | ✓                       | E                         |
| Hand-Laid Stucco                     | ✓                    | ✓               |                    |                         | D                         |
| Reflective Glass/Spandrel            | ✓                    |                 |                    |                         | F                         |
| Glass (Transparent)                  | ✓                    | ✓               | ✓                  | ✓                       |                           |

A - Shall be used in conjunction with a palette of materials and shall not comprise more than thirty-three percent (33%) of any building.

B - Wood and fiber cement panels shall not be used on the ground story except between the sidewalk and the bottom of storefront windows or as an accent material.

C - Shall incorporate horizontal and vertical articulation and modulation, including but not limited to changes in color and texture, or as part of a palette of materials.

D - Shall not be within three feet of the ground or used on building facades facing State Street, King Street, or the Capitol Square.

E - Shall be used in conjunction with a palette of materials; shall be a heavy gauge, non-reflective metal

F - Shall be used in limited quantities as an accent material.

(g) Equipment and Service Area Screening.

1. Outdoor loading areas or mechanical equipment are not permitted in the front yard. When visible from an abutting public street or walkway, they shall be screened by a decorative fence, wall, or screen of plant material.
2. No doors or openings providing access to parking or loading facilities shall about the Capitol Square, State Street or King Street.
3. Fences and walls shall be architecturally compatible with the principal structure.

(h) Screening of Rooftop Equipment.

1. All rooftop equipment, with the exception of solar and wind equipment, shall be screened from view from adjacent streets and public rights-of-way. Rooftop equipment shall be screened from view from adjacent buildings to the extent possible.
2. The equipment shall be within an enclosure. This structure shall be set back a distance of one and one-half (1½) times its height from any primary facade fronting a public street. Screens shall be of durable, permanent materials (not including wood) that are compatible with the primary building materials. (Am. by ORD-15-00104, 10-15-15)