



Project Address: 425 N Frances Street + 450 W Gilman Street

Application Type: Informational Presentation for a New Multi-Family Residential Building in DC Zoning
UDC will be an Advisory Body

Legistar File ID #: [89583](#)

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Brian Munson, Vandewalle & Associates | Brad Aycok, Villas Student Housing, LLC

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the construction of a 16-story mixed-use building comprised of 115 multi-family residential units and ground floor retail along N Frances Street. The development will be served by underground parking stalls and rooftop amenities.

Staff note that, both a land division to combine parcels and rezoning of the project site from Urban Mixed Use (UMX) to Downtown Core (DC) will be pursued as part of a future Land Use Application request.

Approval Standards: The Urban Design Commission (“UDC”) will be an **advisory body** on this development request when a formal application is submitted. Pursuant to [Section 28.074\(4\)c](#):

All new buildings and additions greater than six (6) stories shall obtain conditional use approval. In addition, the Urban Design Commission shall review such projects for conformity to the design standards in the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#) and shall report its findings to the Plan Commission.

Adopted Plans: The project site is in the [Downtown Plan](#) planning area, in the State Street Neighborhood. Generally, the recommendations included in the Downtown Plan speak to encouraging a diverse mix of uses, and creating a unique sense of place, an enhanced design at the pedestrian level and human-scale development.

Zoning Related Information: While the project site is currently zoned Urban Mixed Use (UMX), the applicant will be seeking a rezoning to Downtown Core (DC). The Zoning Code outlines design standards that are applicable to all new buildings in the Downtown and Urban Zoning Districts ([MGO 28.071\(3\)](#)), including, but not limited to those related to parking, building entrance orientation, façade articulation, design of street-facing facades, door and window openings, and building materials. Staff note that ultimately, the Zoning Administrator will determine compliance with Zoning Code requirements.

In addition, as noted in the Downtown Height Map, pursuant to MGO 28.071, the maximum permitted height for the project site is 12 stories/172 feet.

While the proposed building at its tallest is 16 stories (approx. 171 feet), which is in excess of the maximum height allowed in the Downtown Height Map in stories, staff note that additional stories may be requested as part of a voluntary land use restriction agreement to provide income restricted dwelling units provided the overall building height in feet (172 feet) is not exceeded. It is staff’s understanding that the applicant is proposing to pursue the land use restriction agreement. With that, the applicant is encouraged to work with the Zoning Administrator to confirm that the proposed building will meet the height limitations in feet and that stories are being reported correctly.

Historic Preservation Related Information: The project site is adjacent to the Grimm Book Bindery at 454 W Gilman Street. The proposed development will trigger compliance with [MGO 28.144](#) for development adjacent to a landmark or landmark site. While the Plan Commission will be the approving agency on this request, the Landmarks Commission will make an advisory recommendation as to “...whether the proposed development is so large or visually intrusive as to adversely affect the historic character or integrity of the adjoining landmark or landmark site.”

Staff recommend that the applicant team work with the Historic Preservation Planner to confirm and coordinate the Landmarks Commission review process, which will need to take place prior to any future UDC formal action.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff recommends that the UDC provide feedback on the development proposal regarding the aforementioned standards as it relates to the design considerations noted below.

- **Building Mass and Scale.** While the proposed building is adjacent to larger scale development, including the Hub Madison, it is also adjacent to the Grimm Book Bindery, a designated landmark, and several other buildings that are of a much smaller scale along both the N Frances and W Gilman Streets. As such, consideration should be given the overall mass and scale, and the appropriateness of how the building mass is broken down and transitions to surrounding properties. As a note, typically the landmarks commission provides their advisory review prior to UDC.

The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines generally speak to creating visual interest as a means of breaking down mass and scale, including utilizing building modulation and articulation to distinguish architectural components (top, middle, base), the appropriateness of setbacks/stepbacks to minimize perceived mass and scale, balancing proportions and horizontal and vertical datums, etc.

Staff requests the UDC’s feedback related to the overall mass and scale.

- **Street Level Activation – W Gilman.** The project site has frontage on both N Frances Street and W Gilman Street. Staff has concerned about the lack of building orientation to both streets. As proposed, while the N Frances Street elevation appears to include active building entries and uses, based on the floor plans, the W Gilman Street elevation is primarily comprised of service-oriented uses, including garage door and parking, pump room, trash room access, generator room, etc.

The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines generally note that how a building addresses the street and defines the public/private spaces along the public way is the primary factor in creating an active urban environment. Consideration should be given to locating active uses at the street, incorporating a richer level of design detailing at the pedestrian level, minimizing the presence of service-oriented uses (i.e., pump room, utility rooms, garage doors, parking, etc.), utilizing architectural elements to identify main building entrances, as well as incorporating landscape elements to add interest, texture, and color, etc.

Staff note that as part of the City’s SafeGrowth Initiative a study was conducted for the 400 block of W Gilman Street. The study identified issues and goals related to improving perceived and actual safety within the block, encouraging positive community engagement and social interactions, increasing pedestrian activity, supporting economic vitality of local businesses, and creating a more vibrant downtown. As part of the initiative, recommendations were made to enhance street lighting, incorporate public art and safety measures, many of which are currently being implemented. As W Gilman Street

redevelops, consideration should continue to be given to incorporating design techniques that further the initiative's goals.

Staff request the Commission's feedback on the overall building design and orientation along W Gilman Street.

- **Building Design and Composition.** Staff requests the Commission's feedback on the overall building design and composition as it relates to creating one cohesive architectural expression and as it relates to the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, including those that generally speak to size and rhythm of windows, building mass and scale and proportions and articulation (vertical/horizontal), utilizing building modulation and articulation to distinguish architectural components (top, middle, base), incorporating positive termination at the top of the building, incorporating articulation in transitions between materials, and utilizing richer level of design and detailing at the pedestrian level, etc.
- **Materials.** The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines generally speak to utilizing a simple, high-quality palette of materials and maintaining a consistent level of design and detailing across all sides of the building.

As proposed, the material palette is comprised of masonry, brass metal panel, ribbed metal panel, precast concrete, and fiber cement panels.

Staff requests the Commission provide feedback related to the proposed material palette, especially as it relates to utilizing a consistent level of design detailing across all elevations, incorporating articulation in material transitions, etc.

Staff note and the applicant is advised that while metal panels are an acceptable exterior material, pursuant to MGO 28.071(3)f, metal panel shall be used in conjunction with a palette of materials; shall be a heavy gauge, and non-reflective. While the Zoning Administrator will determine whether the proposed metal panel complies with the Zoning Code additional information will be required to do so.