



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

**Project Address:** 1601-1617 Sherman Avenue  
**Application Type:** Residential Building Complex – Informational Presentation  
**Legistar File ID #:** [74227](#)  
**Prepared By:** Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

## Background Information

**Applicant | Contact:** Darrin Jolas, Vermilion Development | Tenney Place Development, LLC

**Project Description:** The applicant is providing an Informational Presentation for a Residential Building Complex consisting of four buildings ranging in height from three to six-stories, containing approximately 445 residential units and 600 parking stalls.

**Approval Standards:** The UDC is an **advisory body** on this request. [Section 33.24\(4\)\(c\)](#), MGO states that: *“The Urban Design Commission shall review the exterior design and appearance of all principal buildings or structures and the landscape plans of all proposed residential building complexes. It shall report its findings and recommendations to the Plan Commission.”*

**Adopted Plans:** The project site is located within the [Emerson East-Eken Park-Yahara Neighborhood Plan](#) (the “Plan”) planning area. The Plan identifies the project site as being within Focus Area Four, the Sherman/Yahara Neighborhood Area, and provides two potential conceptual redevelopment plans for the project site. Both of which take into consideration the redevelopment guidelines and recommendations noted in the Plan, which includes a recommendation for a change in land use from employment to residential. The Plan identifies additional design considerations for future redevelopment, including those that generally speak to encouraging a mix of residential land uses varying in height from two to five stories and creating a residential streetscape, utilizing classic design with some modern elements, designing parking areas to include innovative stormwater management features, preservation of wooded areas along property lines and lake views, and incorporating gateway features (public art, landscape, streetscape enhancements, etc.), enhanced pedestrian connectivity to the adjacent parklands and surrounding neighborhood, and gathering spaces into site redevelopment plans.

The Plan also recommends future street connections that would run through the project site to connect Sherman Avenue to Fordem Avenue. The Plan recommends that the design of future public streets utilize a grid-like pattern to improve access and circulation through the site and to the surrounding neighborhood, with an east-west connection shown extending through the center of the site. However, City staff believes that the recommended connection could be achieved if located elsewhere on the property. In addition to increasing connectivity, staff feels that the east-west street could provide an orienting feature for some of the proposed buildings, particularly at the rear of the site. A future street connection is not shown on the proposed site plan.

**Related Zoning Information:** The applicant is proposing to rezone the project site from Suburban Employment (SE) to Traditional Residential-Urban 1 (TR-U1). The proposed rezoning is consistent with the Plan recommendations. In addition, the TR-U1 zone district has a maximum height limitation of five stories, 65 feet, with additional height being permitted with conditional use approval. As proposed, at six stories a conditional use approval would be required for Building A, fronting Sherman Avenue.

## Summary of Design Considerations

Staff requests that the UDC provide feedback on the development proposal regarding the aforementioned standards, including as it relates to the items noted below:

- **Building Design and Height.** As proposed, building heights range from three to six stories with the tallest and largest building being located along Sherman Avenue. While the adopted neighborhood plan recommends building heights of two to five stories, the proposed zoning district would allow for taller buildings with conditional use approval, which will be a factor that is ultimately evaluated by the Plan Commission. Given the UDC's role to review the *exterior design and appearance of all principal buildings or structures* in residential building complexes, staff requests the UDC provide feedback on the proposed six-story building height as it relates to the surrounding context, overall building design and orientation, and mass and scale, etc., as well as generally to Conditional Use Standard 12 as noted below.

*Conditional Use Standard 12* states, that “When applying the above standards to an application for height in excess of that allowed in the district, the Plan Commission shall consider recommendations in adopted plans, the impact on surrounding properties, including height, mass, orientation, shadows and view; architectural quality and amenities; the relationship of the proposed building(s) with adjoining streets, alleys, and public rights of ways; and the public interest in exceeding the district height limits.”

- **Building Design and Composition.** Recognizing that limited information was provided with regard to the architectural design of all buildings, with the exception of Buildings A and C, which appear to have similar detailing and design. Staff requests the UDC's feedback on the overall building design, specifically as it relates to the surrounding context and character, utilizing four-sided architecture, rhythm and articulation (vertical and horizontal building elements), and architectural details, including as they relate to roof mass and configuration, scale and proportion of architectural details, treatment of exposed walls, and building orientation and street connectivity.
- **Building Materials.** As shown on the elevations, the material palette is relatively simple in nature, being primarily comprised of fiber cement siding and details. As a result, there are expanses of the same material, especially on building long walls. Staff requests the UDC's feedback on the overall building material palette, especially as it relates to the treatment of long walls.
- **Landscape.** As part of the Commission's review, consideration should be given to the location of landscape in relationship to blank wall expanses, screening, providing year-round color and texture, and programming details for the interior courtyard space.
- **Plan Consistency Considerations.** As noted above, there are several recommendations in the adopted neighborhood plan, including those related to building design, height, and transportation. Ultimately the Plan Commission will evaluate the development proposal for plan consistency, as well as consistency with the applicable Conditional Use Approval Standards, including Standard 9 as noted below. However given the potential impact that incorporating the Plan recommendations into the development plans could have on building and landscape design, staff provides the following as a reference to the UDC and requests feedback on related issues that could arise as part of UDC's formal recommendation.

*Conditional Use Standard 9* states that: “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.”*

- **Future Roadway Connectivity.** As noted in the adopted neighborhood plan, an east-west street connection that runs through the project site is recommended. In addition, the Plan also recommends that a grid-like street pattern be utilized to improve future connectivity within the neighborhood and through the site, as well as serve as an orienting feature for buildings and site features. As proposed, a street connection is not included in the site plan and buildings appear to be largely surrounded by head-in parking.
- **Pedestrian Connectivity.** Providing enhanced pedestrian connectivity was identified as a development goal that was enumerated in the adopted plan. As such, consideration should be given to incorporating enhanced pedestrian connectivity and the design of pathways, not only internal to the project site, but external connections as well, including to open spaces.
- **Site Planning Considerations.** The proposed concept includes a collection of four buildings varying in size and height, with the largest and tallest building being located along Sherman Avenue. Staff requests the UDC provide feedback on the overall concept and whether modifications to building size/footprint or reconfigurations of the buildings and parking (i.e. angled or parallel vs. head-in parking) could result in better site layout, pedestrian circulation, scale and connectivity, especially along Sherman Avenue, or better connected or larger internal open spaces.