



Agenda Item #: 6

Project Title: 535 W. Johnson Street - Planned Development (PD) Alteration for Exterior Modifications to the Existing Building. 4th Ald. Dist.

Legistar File ID #: 74228

Members Present: Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Lois Braun-Oddo, Russell Knudson, Jessica Klehr, Christian Harper, Shane Bernau, Amanda Arnold and Juliana Bennett

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Summary

At its meeting of November 9, 2022, the Urban Design Commission **RECOMMENDED INITIAL APPROVAL** of exterior modifications to the building located at 535 W. Johnson Street. Registered and speaking in support were Joseph Lee and Daniel Zutter, both representing JLA Architects; and Chris Houden. Registered in support and available to answer questions were Carole Schaeffer, representing 725 E. Johnson; and Patrick Terry, representing JLA Architects.

The existing twelve-story, 93-unit student housing building completed in 2001 fronts W. Johnson Street, with the main design goal to treat the penthouse level as a new focal point for the building. Views show the overall proposed framework which helps define the pool in elevations and sections, defines an outdoor room with amenities (sink, fridge, grill, seating) and strengthens the floors by squaring off the angles and bringing the wrap down to create a strong framework at the penthouse level. The rooftop amenity will offer 360 degrees of downtown Madison, using glass where they can to give the open visibility, with the structure wrapped in an off-white metal panel. The framework also allows for lighting that is not overly intense for more of a glow. The client feels these improvements are necessary to keep up with the market of newer student housing options and reinvest in this building.

The Commission discussed the following:

- This building has an Art Deco nod, I'm not seeing that you're enhancing that at all; you're really going away from that.
 - The project team felt that the Art Deco gestures of the existing building were pretty minimal and abstract. We're not completely ignoring it but felt the gestures weren't strong enough to continue to build on that theme.
- The element that comes down over the pool is really heavy and coming down part way through the building, maybe it is supposed to relate to the new entry. It's very heavy and I'm not sure if it has to be that thick, it seems very foreign to the elevation.
 - Unfortunately we don't have an elevation view that would show it from the street level all the way up to the top that reads as one element. Seeing it straight on might ease your concern, it is a rectangular frame that carries down.
- I also felt like that element, the piece centered on the pool was a bit heavy. It struck me as it comes down the face of the building that it doesn't really seem to terminate at anything, it's just spires hanging there. It might be more successful if it intentionally terminated or found some resolution at the side, and it was not quite so heavy.
- I didn't see a landscape plan. My recommendation is to carve out some space, whether it's planters or built in space to support some plant life and not just extensive thin sedums. Something that supports pollinators, color

and texture, I would like to see this with some plantings on that roof terrace that would be a benefit to the tenants and the space as well.

- Right now it's a sea of concrete in front of the building, we eliminated and replaced that with low vegetation, grass, and trees. I like the suggestion of plants that are portable at the penthouse level.
- The white frame coming down is intentional. We wanted it to be more beefy than the surrounding framework, because it is that central element, its high up on the façade, we thought the scale was appropriate.
- The further out you get, it makes sense.
- I still feel like my comments are valid. As that element comes down, it's terminating at a datum but that there would be something there instead of it just hanging there. It could still come down slightly and have hierarchy.
 - We can see what we can do to reduce that.
- What a wonderful excuse to see these mint green arched projections with the slender columns, a really nice design element we don't see very often anymore. Seems like an opportunity to replicate some of that, bringing something that's a little more cohesive with what we find on the building today. What's preventing us from having more of that mint green arched projection? Looks like an exciting rooftop, nice design and activation of that rooftop. I disagree with some of the comments about the heaviness with the rest of the building in context.
- To look at the existing elevation it has an elegance because of those corner windows, the way they're framed with the head plate that extends beyond the window into the brick, it makes this building elegant proportions and lines. I would debate with whether or not that white frame fits with that. This building has really nice details, I would debate that the frame is so heavy it negates the nice detail that is already there. The balconies are delicate with their railings, and how thick that slab is, it might be worth reviewing that top again more in proportion with the details that are already on the building.
- The water extends beyond the edge of the building and you could sit with your back against a glass railing?
 - Correct.
- I understand the beauty of that, but I also can imagine somebody accidentally stumbling backwards. Bad behavior choices, just a thought. The shape on top of this building and the details that are already there are lovely and to maybe revisit those a little bit more.
- If this was a brand new building we would think things don't match. There is an opportunity to take the Art Deco to a whimsical expression on this. It's student housing, it's a new thing, maybe lighted finials at the ends of the structures, or trying to do a soft curve somewhere in there, but I do feel it's worth a little more effort to make a nod to the Art Deco style that the rest of the building is trying to mimic. Take it to almost an expression rather than trying to follow it exactly, through lighting or finials that are more of a folly.
- Just a little additional level of detail, then? Those barrel vaults don't say Art Deco to me.
- If you are trying for an expression there, you could take it a little further than these rectilinear things.
- The red reminds me of red solo cups and bad behavior. I can see where you're coming from and how this will make the rooftop more lively. But back to the point, that pool is going to be closed most of the year, I'm really curious to understand why your client thinks it's necessary to have a pool.
 - We keep it open from May to October, we also own The Waterfront on Henry Street which has a pool. We see it as a dramatic element to an amenity stack to maintain competitiveness in this ever changing market. While your point is absolutely valid that the usability of pools in the Wisconsin climate doesn't reach its peak, we do see the utility and the value of being able to present this option to potential tenants.
- I've heard from tenants that having a safe livable place to live is more important than having a place that has a pool. Some previous comments noted that there isn't much green space on the roof. The pool is a huge square bed that could be used for greenspace.
- The railing comes up all the way, do you have any safety measures? Is that a glass railing containing the pool? What if that glass shatters?
 - The railing has to be designed and installed to meet certain forces and safety considerations. I believe that's six-feet around the pool, which is taller than it has to be.

- Even within our UDC guidelines for downtown districts, we understand there are more amenity spaces available in the downtown area. There doesn't need to be excessive amenity spaces and I think this is excessive and unnecessary. We are not in a pool shortage in the City of Madison.
 - Multi-family and student housing, especially those built 20 years ago have to evolve and accommodate changes to keep up with the market and the amenity stack is a big consideration in that.
- I've always admired this building, it's so refreshingly different than the other high rises in this area. The mix of rectangular and circular balconies, and interesting things like the angled balconies on the corners on the top floors, and down on the ground level there are some posts and lights on the corners; it's really a nice looking building. I'm afraid this detracts from all that. My initial thought was to also maintain the parabolic arches that are present on the building, keep that and raise it up higher. I echo the comments that the white blockiness and the gauge and scale of this just looks really bolted on and does not meld with the architecture of the building. I'm not a big fan of the stark whiteness of it and it is way too large. We ran into a similar discussion with the project by the Interstate, with concerns with the timber supports looked a little too medieval, and they needed to be scaled down to size. The same design considerations fall into place here. Somehow shrinking those and possibly the accompanying ones that wrap around the side of the building would be well advised. Agree, that the way they stop on the second from the top balcony looks awkward. Not sure what the solution is there, maybe disappearing into the brick or not terminate in a squared off fashion or maybe rounding it would play off some of the Art Deco influences. Changing the corners of the building where you took out the diagonal balconies and squared them off, which resulted in additional space for two more chaise lounges, a small tradeoff for what was an interesting design element that existed before.
- I echo those comments, it is the owner's prerogative to improve your properties, but people are not going to fill your building because you don't have a pool. It's a little of our prerogative too, and I laugh at this as a minor alteration because it's pretty visually significant; it needs some tweaking.
- I'm curious about how the transition works on the side, how the railing ends, why it stops in the middle over the window.
 - The railing stops where there's solid wall and counter space with higher chairs. Solid makes more sense functionally there.
- Shouldn't the railing come all the way to the end of that side façade?
 - That was intentional, the glass turns the corner into something else. That bay of the frame is a different dimension and we wanted to treat it differently.
- I would enjoy the design more if it went all the way to the end of the side façade, it looks abrupt.
- The entrance too, it doesn't meld as well with some of the lovely details this building already has. Color does a lot and the green could be debated as a good feature. The same comments that apply to the roof are applicable to here as far as style and cohesiveness with the building.
- The brick fence and posts are going to be removed?
 - That's slab concrete on the planter box, the fence is in really rough shape and the lights have been ripped out and the planters are deteriorating. Our idea was to create a fluid streetscape and provide more greenery to the pedestrians.
- It would have been good to see more plans with those changes, I thought this was just the rooftop.
 - To your point with the plantings, we would as a condition of this process submit a landscape plan amenable to the UDC in order to satisfy that concern. As far as the portable planters on the roof, we can absolutely add that element. I'm trying to do everything I can within the realm of financial feasibility. Permanent planters with irrigation systems is really expensive, but was look into portable planters on the rooftop and can supplement with a landscape plan on the streetscape
- What about the changes shown to the windows on the first and second floors on the northeast and northwest corner?
 - Those are not proposed at this time, those window components would be part of a future phase.
- (Secretary) The UDC is advisory, staff felt the changes and design were significant enough for the UDC to review. The Plan Commission will not see this, so technically UDC is advisory to the Planning Division Director.

Action

On a motion by Knudson, seconded by Klehr, the Urban Design Commission **RECOMMENDED INITIAL APPROVAL**. The motion was passed on a vote of (5-2-0) with Bernau, Klehr, Arnold, Knudson and Bennett voting yes; Harper and Braun-Oddo voting no; and Goodhart non-voting.

Discussion on the motion:

- Initial Approval given the significant improvements to the rooftop terrace and activation, and ask that future plans show a design that is more cohesive with the existing Art Deco style.
- An appropriate lighting plan should be part of the return as noted in the staff memo, and a landscape plan, and corrected elevations that show what exactly you are asking for.
- I would like to add an amendment for additional green space.
- That was not part of the motion.
- Are we allowed to make a recommendation to not to have the pool? I would like to add a friendly amendment to not do the pool.
- We could make the recommendation, if it was supported by a majority of the members.
- That is an amendment that we should take a vote on.
- I want to note that students lined up overnight for apartments in a building that didn't have a pool or rooftop amenities. With our current vacancy rates and amount of students being added, the addition of a pool or changing the rooftop is not going to greatly affect your rental rates.
- (Secretary) When looking at the pool, you are considering open spaces and it needs to be tied back to the Planned Development review and approval criteria. The motion would need to make findings that is the pool is inconsistent with the Planned Development criteria because if x, y, z.
- I'll remove the amendment to not have the pool.
- Is there a heating element to the pool?
 - Yes.
- A possible friendly amendment is asking the development team to try to repurpose that space, ways to cover that pool and repurpose the space for the time of year that it's not being used as a pool. I think it's an appropriate use to that space, but agree with some of the notions of added landscaping as a nice touch to create a nice experience.
- The amendment then would find ways to use the pool space when it's not being used as a pool.
- The request for a friendly amendment is withdrawn.
- Amend to find uses for the pool when it is not being used.

The motion included the following conditions:

- Future plans show a design that is more cohesive with the existing Art Deco style.
- An appropriate lighting plan should be part of the return as noted in the staff memo.
- A landscape plan shall be submitted.
- Corrected elevations that show what exactly you are asking for.
- The applicant shall provide information related to the repurposing of the pool space when it is not in use.