



Agenda Item #: 11

Project Title: 437-445 W Johnson Street/215-221 N Bassett Street/430-440 W Dayton Street - New Student Housing Project

Legistar File ID #: 75228

Members Present: Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Shane Bernau, Russell Knudson, Jessica Klehr, Rafeeq Asad, Christian Harper and Juliana Bennett.

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Summary

At its meeting of January 11, 2023, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** for a new student housing project located at 437-445 W Johnson Street/215-221 N Bassett Street/430-440 W Dayton Street. Registered and speaking in support were Brian Munson, representing Core Spaces; Aaron Ebent, representing Kahler Slater; Doug Tichenor, Joel Koeppen, Trina Sandschafer, and Matt Schreiner. Registered in support and available to answer questions were Austin Scott Pagnotta and Suzanne Vincent

The site has been assembled through various collection of parcels bounded by Johnson, Bassett and Dayton Streets, all zoned UMX with varying approval heights of six and twelve stories. The design has responded to that condition in various proportions related to the context, with careful consideration of how to activate the building from the ground floor all the way to the roof and in between. The project would offer a mix of studios through five-bedrooms for a total of 224 units with 725 bedrooms, “price conscious” shared bedrooms options, a rooftop pool, grilling areas, lounges and fitness amenities. The primary pedestrian entry is located on Johnson Street, with the fitness and amenity spaces wrapping around to Bassett Street. Seven short-term visitor stalls are tucked inside the Dayton side of the building, where residents would enter down to lower level parking. The first floor is filled out with townhome units, some fronting streets and some fronting internal lot lines, all with direct access and lofted bedrooms. An internal courtyard will provide daylight and views for the upper floors. An active green roof is shown on the Bassett side sixth story roof, and the upper roof plan shows a pool, hot tub, green roof and minimum access requirements where possible. The landscape is led by a site design that responds to the urban condition and enhances the building. Benches at the entry, seating nodes, and incorporation of a BRT stop on are provided along Johnson Street. The project will add color and texture to the streetscape, landscape and hardscape to define private and public spaces, and they are working to preserve as many street trees as possible. From the third story up a gridded pattern wraps the tower, with the base framed out in masonry with detail and articulation to activate the streetscape. This rich palette for the building responds to the neighborhood and context while giving the right vibe for student housing, using a light bronze metal panel background, a masonry base along Dayton Street that changes character and brings the scale down, and some frame elements. The material lines the interior of the courtyard for depth of façade.

The Commission discussed the following:

- I saw the precedents and I got super excited: I saw some lightness, design, greenery, I thought “this project is about to be something different.” Then I saw the renderings and was super disappointed. You have time to make that better. The grid wasn’t successfully applied, you have this frame but there are no voids, it’s all solid. You have a flat façade all the way down with no undulation, pushing and pulling, the tectonics are missing. I see

the attempt at a grid, but it's oversized and the proportion isn't right for this massing. On the lower tower there's no grid at all, that framing doesn't hit the mark. Look at your massing and see how you can lighten it. I understand this is student housing, but you shouldn't skip or limit the design potential because of those populations. You're in a prime location to have an outstanding building that contributes to the skyline in a highly dense neighborhood.

- It's the precedent versus the actual renderings presented. I really like the examples with the difference in windows, it seems bright and light with the greenery. The precedent is completely different, this is copying it in a cheap manner. Go for the grid style and not try to parse it out.
- What does "price conscious room sharing" mean?
 - We are including double occupancy units as well as studio units. We're trying to achieve a unit type that is price conscious for occupants that are willing to double up. Identify a price sensitive unit that would effectively be utilized by students seeking a unit that needs a more price sensitive option. We're achieving that by providing double up units within this building as a part of the mix and we're trying to find options at a lower price point with smaller units.
- We need to be conscious about the type of language we use. Equitable housing prices versus discount housing prices versus affordable housing prices. I find that extremely important, especially here where I believe you would be tearing down what is naturally occurring affordable housing in the downtown area, putting up "price conscious units" that are more expensive is misleading. That said, I strongly also believe rooftop pools and hot tubs are not necessary. We are not in a pool shortage, I don't see the value in something that gets used three months out of the year. Prioritize a green roof, a development that doesn't look and feel exactly the same as the others on this block. The precedent serves light and activity and greenery to this area and that's something we don't see with dark panels and wood accents. I would also be conscious of the fact that in this neighborhood, with all these luxury developments going up, it's creating this vertical column going down Johnson Street, that's not something that serves our City to have this dark tunnel. If there's a way to work around bringing around the light accents from the precedents, breaking up that column like look.
- Would the townhomes have access on the front floor and how would you provide safety at the back entrances?
 - All of those units would have access from the front and back. The sidewalk connections would be landscaped, lit and have controlled access at both doors.
- It's not serving what was presented to us.
- The whole building itself. When we see the precedents, you have light or white looking coloring, clear square windows expanded across the entire building. The actual renderings show dark brown masonry, the windows are rectangular and don't expand across the full panel. It looks completely different. Use lighter colors, have the windows expand across the full panels.
- The project has inspired some good discussion. I too had to cleanse my memory of the precedent, I also felt a disconnect there. What trips me up about this building, how many floors is this building?
 - Twelve stories.
- It's difficult to tell that to some degree, and maybe that's okay, but it does give me an unsettling feeling that I can't tell how tall this building is. I like the restraint in the amount of fenestration, you've taken some strong design moves and applied materials in a way that is interesting without over glazing it, the amount of glazing is appropriate for a student housing building. The use of horizontal elements, then the grid breaking them up, it might be simpler or cleaner if the vertical elements were allowed to continue. I like the lighter tone base, the restraint on the glazing, but the horizontal elements do some disservice.
- I think there is a strong start here of a very attractive project. I like the restraint just mentioned, though it is lacking playfulness and forms. How you might get there, specifically looking at the voids, you turn the corner and lose the grid. It would be interesting to wrap that pattern and some of those lines into those voids to feel more three dimensional. The color palette here is interesting and a little different relative to the neighbors in this area that I think could be successful. Don't be too discouraged by some of our comments because it has elicited a great conversation tonight and I look forward to seeing the next iteration.
- When I look at this it doesn't look residential to me. That base looks like any big city office building where there was frequently a ground level lobby and office space above. Clearly the base is supposed to be two stories, but

that base looks like it is three stories tall. I know there has been discussion about the floor to ceiling level that accounts for that visual discrepancy. Not necessarily a problem in and of itself, it just doesn't look to me like the apartments that it is. I'm just like everybody else, I looked at the precedents and I'm having trouble connecting the dots. They seem to be primarily about transparency and light, being able to see through areas that would otherwise be solid and I don't see any of that here. I'm not disparaging the overall design, I find it handsome, but I'm not seeing transparency, open spaces, voids versus volumes. Let's be honest and frank, it's an investment and you're going to put in the maximum amount of units you can in the space the City allots you to put it in. If you're going to say you're nodding to design elements that incorporate transparency and light, this just isn't it. That's what you're selling us, follow through. I'm excited to not see hanging balconies, the transition of cutting diagonally across a block is tricky, it looks like you're making a solid effort at pulling that off. Thumbs up to whatever open and green space you can do on it, I echo the comments that this race to have a pool on every rooftop of student housing is getting ridiculous and not necessary.

- Having some voids centered on most sides is really interesting. I'd encourage looking at the north side separated by ten-feet, those units are not going to get direct light. If they are only ten-feet from the Lux balconies facing that way, that tightness is something to look at. Also to piggyback that the safety of going into those townhouses at night by yourself, past other peoples' doors, with limited space can be very unwelcoming with snow, ice, and darkness. Think about those and their location, please take a look at that.
- The grid is a statement, a real organizing element. If that's the statement then the project should really embrace that, and right now as pointed out it's more applied than an organizing element; but it's a great place to start. The Dayton Street building form is really nice, I don't know you're going to be successful repeating the same articulation you have on Johnson Street. The Domain is the same situation, the way they handled the Dayton Street street façade was pretty successful. I would reiterate the townhouse entrances where that Lexington building may get developed, those long narrow dark walkways going into those units could be improved, if they get wider toward the street or somehow are more secure, that's a real consideration. I commend you on trying to do something different and bold, don't be afraid of color and pops of white, we have plenty of beige and brown buildings in downtown Madison. We appreciate you bringing it to us at this early stage.

Action

Since this was an **INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** no formal action was taken by the Commission.