



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 1601-1617 Sherman Avenue

Application Type: Residential Building Complex
UDC is an Advisory Body

Legistar File ID #: [74227](#)

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary and Tim Parks, Planner, Planning Division

Background Information

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

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the development of a Residential Building Complex consisting of two, five-story apartment buildings and three, two-story townhouse buildings to be located on both sides of a new east-west public street. The development will contain approximately 331 units between the five buildings. Parking for 364 automobiles will be provided within the buildings, with 36 off-street surface parking stalls; 365 bike parking stalls will also be provided. As part of the proposal, the applicant is proposing to rezone the project site from SE (Suburban Employment District) to TR-U2 (Traditional Residential–Urban 2 District) and demolish the existing two-story office building, the former “Filene House.”

Staff Note: Several notable changes have been made to the development proposal since the October 26, 2022, Informational Presentation. The overall intensity of the project has been reduced from 445 units to 331, and the heights of the buildings have been reduced to not exceed five stories, consistent with adopted plan recommendations and the proposed TR-U2 zoning. Plans also show the inclusion of a new public street.

Project Schedule:

- UDC received an Informational Presentation on October 26, 2022.
- Landmarks Commission is scheduled to review this proposal on March 6, 2023. Section 28.144 of the Zoning Code requires that any development on a zoning lot adjoining a landmark or landmark site for which Plan Commission or Urban Design Commission review is required be reviewed by the Landmark Commission to determine whether the proposed development is so large or visually intrusive as to adversely affect the historic character and integrity of the adjoining landmark or landmark site. Landmark Commission review shall be advisory to the Plan Commission.
- Plan Commission is scheduled to review this proposal on March 13, 2023.
- Common Council is scheduled to review this proposal (rezoning) on March 21, 2023.

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.*”

As an advisory body, staff recommends that a motion should be structured as an advisory recommendation of the body and which may include conditions.

Adopted Plans: The [2018 Comprehensive Plan](#) recommends that the subject site be developed in the Medium Residential (MR) category. The MR land use category generally allows a variety of relatively intense housing types, including rowhouses, small multi-family buildings, and large multi-family buildings at a density of 20-90 units per acre in two- to five-story buildings. The Plan recommends that *“...special attention must be paid to design within MR areas where the use adjoins less intense residential development – architectural features such as a setback may be needed to transition MR development to less intense surrounding development.”*

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. The Plan 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, including the recommendation for a change in land use from employment to residential. The Plan also identifies 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 a future street connection 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 site.

Overall, Urban Design Commission staff believes that development proposal is generally consistent with the adopted plan recommendations related to land use, density, height, and transportation connectivity.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff requests that the UDC make findings and provide an advisory recommendation to the Plan Commission on the development proposal regarding the aforementioned standards, including as it relates to the items noted below.

- **Building Design and Composition.** Staff requests UDC make findings and provide an advisory recommendation on the overall building designs, specifically as it relates to the surrounding context and character, utilizing four-sided architecture, treatment of blank walls, rhythm and articulation (vertical and horizontal building elements), creating positive termination at the top of the building, and architectural details, including as they relate to the scale and proportion.
- **Building Orientation.** As shown on the plans, a new public street is proposed that will provide an east-west connection through the site. As such consideration should be given to the design of the buildings fronting the public street, especially in terms of creating an active pedestrian environment. While the western façade of Building A facing Sherman Avenue includes ground floor units accessed from the Sherman Avenue public sidewalk, active unit entries are not provided along the new public street frontage. In addition, there are limited active unit/building entries along the north side of Building C, fronting the new public street. Staff requests that the UDC provide feedback and make a recommendation regarding the orientation of Buildings A and C to the new public street.

- **Building Materials.** As shown on the elevations, the material palette for Buildings A and C will be primarily comprised of composite lap siding and masonry. Similar materials are proposed on the exterior of the three two-story townhouse buildings, B.1-B.3, although with a more distinct, modern application with composite architectural panels incorporated. Staff requests the UDC provide feedback and make a recommendation on the overall building material palette.
- **Landscape and Open Space.** 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 elevated courtyard spaces proposed on Buildings A and C. Consideration should be given to screening, softening hardscape, and shade.

Staff Note: Of note, the proposed development is located adjacent to Tenney Park–Yahara River Parkway, which is designated on the National and State Registers of Historic Places based on historic landscape plans developed by O.C. Simonds and modified by John Nolen. The landscape Plans feature Prairie School design, which emphasized the use of native tree, shrub and prairie species. Due to the proximity of the proposed development, and to ensure it is not so visually intrusive as to adversely affect the historic character and integrity of the adjacent landmark, the City of Madison Parks Division has reviewed the proposed project and is requiring that the developer grant a 30-foot wide restrictive covenant and landscaping easement to the City and enter into a landscape buffer agreement with the City to preserve a 30-foot wide buffer along the southwestern boundary of the parcel adjacent to Tenney Park and the Yahara River Parkway.

Ultimately, this is a condition of approval of the Parks Division. The Parks Division will be the agency with approval authority related plant schedule, quantities and species, design/layout as well as maintenance of the buffer area. The restrictive covenant, easement and agreement will be in effect for 20-years and will establish maintenance standards during this period of time. The easement, restrictive covenant and landscape buffer agreement will specify agreed upon maintenance standards for the buffer area and identify a phased approach to replace invasive species and improve the buffer vegetation quality in accordance with, and generally consistent with, the historical landscape plans of O.C. Simonds and John Nolen.

- **Lighting.** The applicant is advised that the photometric plan appears to have inconsistencies with the City's Outdoor Lighting requirements (Section 29.36, MGO) for low level activity areas, including light levels in excess of 5.0 footcandles in driveway and pedestrian areas.

As a potential code compliance issue, the applicant is advised that an updated photometric plan and fixture cutsheets, consistent with MGO Section 29.36, will be required to be submitted for review and approval prior to permitting.

Summary of UDC Informational Presentation Comments

As a reference, the Commission's Information Presentation comments from the October 26, 2022 meeting are provided below:

- I would like to see renderings that include the relationship to existing homes; I was struck by the public comment about those not being shown.
- Can the architect walk us through the interior space and space between the buildings?
 - Building A is U-shaped. There is a drive that goes in on the first floor for parking and a drive that goes down to the basement level. The green roof has amenities for residents like a pergola and outdoor kitchen. Buildings B1 and B2 are simpler with a small building for bike storage between them, outdoor space, and activity area with an outdoor kitchen. The space between B1 and B2 also contains stormwater management and gardens. The developer is looking into community gardens outside Building A shown in the grid area, as well as additional stormwater management and a dog run. For Building C, the ground slopes away toward the boat trailer parking lot. There is a ramp on the south side that gets you down into the parking structure below the building. There is also stormwater management between Building C and the Yahara River.
- Where are the single-family homes adjacent to this development that were referenced in public comment?
 - On the north side of the development on Sherman Ave.
- Sherman Avenue doesn't have the capacity to be enlarged, and it shouldn't be. This development will increase traffic to a capacity that the street is incapable of handling. I'm surprised a traffic study hasn't been done. Regarding water, I see retaining areas that are good to capture water in a rain event. What is not addressed is that all buildings and parking structures take up space that is currently an area where groundwater settles, so they are displacing the capacity for groundwater in an area susceptible to flooding. I was aghast at how dense this proposal is for a small, residential street that is mostly owner occupied, including Sherman Terrace. On a general level, the development is too large and over capacity of the ability for the neighborhood to absorb it, as well as for the park and natural areas to absorb it. The architecture is a little repetitive. If the development is downscaled, it should have more interest rather than rectilinear shapes with balconies. This is what one would see on a smaller site that aligns with a street, in a park-like setting. I was surprised the city was considering this much density on such a small street and in such close proximity to a well-established and historically significant park. This is too dense, I want to see something more sensitive to the park-like area being built on.
- There is consistency in what we are hearing from the neighborhood, which should not be ignored. The development team should respond to that next time we see this project. What jumped out at me was the idea of parking and the water table—the relationship to the lake and groundwater as was previously mentioned. The parking ratio is too high, which reveals a lot about the density they are trying to fit in here and that they might have issues with stormwater and groundwater. There is too much happening on a site of this size with the neighborhood and street character that it has. The development seems very internally focused. The green roof and terrace interior to Building A seem lovely with nice amenities, but they should consider the borrowed scenery in terms of proximity to the lake, sunset views, and all the things that come with this specific site. Why close off so much of the west side of the site and views to the lake? There is potential for a really amazing place to live with views to Tenney Park and the lake. I'd like to be more strategic in how the buildings are positioned and orient the site to

capture as many views as possible. Along with that, Building A is tight to the street and forms a barrier to lake views for the rest of the site; that could be opened up and more of the green roof plaza could become a void space with more views to the lake. I have concerns about the parking ratio and the amount of parking and off-street vehicular circulation is weaving between the buildings. Be more responsive to the park-like setting. In the northeast corner, is there potential for a connection? It appears to be a sidewalk or trail connection running parallel to the line of cars on the neighboring properties. Is there a master plan where greater connectivity for the neighborhood and residents can get to the lake, Yahara River, or Tenney Park? There are a lot of existing trees on the site, and I would like to know specifically what those trees are, if they are of value, and how the proposal is responding to that in terms of protection. If they plan to clear cut mature 100-year-old oak trees in the southern corner; that is an issue. Is there connectivity between the amenity spaces and Buildings B1, B2, and C—how are they getting to the roof deck terrace? It doesn't seem easy with all of the cars and grade change.

- If people think the traffic is bad now when most of the parking lot on this site is empty, it's not hard to see that if this were built as proposed with that number of cars how much worse the traffic would be on a daily basis. I was shocked at the size of this development and tried to wrap my head around how it would work on a two-lane street. There was talk in the staff memo about future connections, but looking at overheads and existing properties to the east, it's hard to see any future street that would take some of this traffic in and out. Looking at the sheer size and mass of the building, the six-story frontage on Sherman Avenue is in your face. Something that big being brought out to the street is a non-starter for me and the neighborhood. I could wrap my head around the idea of three stories along the front and possibly rising up to four or five stories as it goes back, but that would be a different-looking building than proposed. They have the right idea with the size and height of the other buildings. Who wouldn't want to live in the Sherman Avenue-facing apartments with sunsets across the lake? I don't think the city should be sacrificing the potential of this site for 50 or 60 people to have beautiful lake side sunset views; it is inappropriate. I share concerns about the existing greenery; the area where Building C is proposed is currently a wooded, jungle-like lot with a lot of large old trees that provide a lot to the ecosystem. This is a big ask for the sensitive nature of this property and where it is located along the river and park. I can picture a nice development going into this space that the neighborhood would embrace, but as proposed, this is not that. There is a lot of work to be done.
- It struck me in the presentation that the developer is excited to come to Madison and be part of the building up of Madison, so I encourage them to join us in our community and be aware that this is not only primo real estate, but also a very special part of Madison. This is one of few spots consistently used year-round, and one of the more equitable recreation spots. Families and people from all over the city come here, and it is a wonderful, very special place in Madison. Right now, this project is missing the mark on that; please consider it as you develop in the future. Year round, this neighborhood is buzzing. Even though there are private homes, the scale and interconnectivity makes the whole place feel accessible to enjoy. This project strikes me as turning its back on the neighborhood with having inclusive, private amenities inside the site, which goes against what the neighborhood around it is doing. Sherman Terrace condos are more open and engaging with the community than what I'm seeing here. We welcome the developer to Madison with excitement, but this site is special enough to pay attention to the fabric of the city and what is happening in this neighborhood.
- Did you consider maintaining the existing building. If not, why not?
 - We did not. The existing building is a two-story office building, which is not sized well for residential or to be converted to residential by adding additional floors on top.
- There is history to consider on this. I've seen Potter Lawson do amazing things with existing structures and fitting into neighborhoods that are cohesive. You've already heard about massing and access to the

site. Regarding the style, I appreciate this is not a building with a flat roof, so the reference to gable-like residences around it is positive. The scale needs to be reviewed, especially the open frames on the front and their white color. The identity in that style of architecture is not Madison or this neighborhood. Generally, the gable roof is positive, but I'd rethink how it's framed out in white. I look forward to the next iteration. Maybe it will have a street going through it from east to west as the plan wanted. Also, if there are larger units for families, I'm curious where the spill out space for children is on a site like this and how it connects to the public spaces around it.

- Regarding traffic and a potential through street between Fordem and Sherman, I think one issue is the assumption that most residents here would exit and enter off Fordem. It could also encourage residents from Fordem to cut through to Sherman, so it could potentially have an undesirable effect. The traffic study needs to be thorough and consider that.