



Agenda Item #: 4

Project Title: 428-444 State Street - New Mixed-Use Building in the Downtown Core (DC) District. 2nd Ald. Dist.

Legistar File ID #: 69486

Members Present: Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Christian Harper, Lois Braun-Oddo, Shane Bernau, Rafeeq Asad, Amanda Arnold, Marsha Rummel, and Russell Knudson

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Summary

At its meeting of May 31, 2023, the Urban Design Commission made an **ADVISORY RECOMMENDATION** to the Plan Commission to grant Final Approval of a new mixed-use building located at 428-444 State Street. Registered and speaking in support was Kevin Burow. Registered neither in support nor opposition and wishing to speak was Ald. Juliana Bennett.

The building has been stepped back to provide additional fenestration and windows facing the park. They have reduced the footprint of the uppermost loft to step that back, resulting in one unit with reduced loft space that is stepped back on all sides. The exterior materials have been simplified to light colored masonry, weathered zinc metal panel, and consistent window fenestration on all sides of the building. The previous corner element has been removed for a more successful design that provides additional balcony space on that corner of the building, resulting in both sides of the building now being balanced, and somewhat symmetrical. They have eliminated the trellis above the fifth floor level, as well as all the mullions between the windows, while still trying to maintain a high level of detailing in the masonry for a more classic looking building along State Street with traditional proportions. They have maintained the mural space for artwork facing Lisa Link Peace Park. The scale and texture, overall massing, and recessed upper story all fit in the context of State Street.

Questions for staff and/or the development team:

- (Ald. Bennett) This is replacing some public art that is currently at this location. Would you be thinking about replacing that?
 - Yes, we have allocated space on the backside of the building to provide a mural element.
- (Ald. Bennett) Have you been able to work with Parks staff so the design is cohesive with the neighboring park?
 - Yes, we coordinated with the Parks Division and are no longer infringing on the park property.
- I saw in earlier presentation a shadow study in previous versions, does anything change with this version?
 - We have recessed that upper level back, it would be a subtle difference, but it does reduce the amount of shadows to the north.
- Can you explain in more detail how the building and landscape interface with the park on the south or west elevation – the lower plaza on the park side of the building? The current building does retain a lot of grade up against the park with the retaining walls and art mural, it's a very important defining element of the character of the park. I saw some landscape restoration happening inside the property line. Elaborate a little more on the grade change and landscape.
 - We are modifying the landscape because it does go up against the current building, it will be replaced. We show an exit sidewalk along the side where we recessed further back, but we are restoring landscaping in the park area and bringing it down to be flush with the park. To the north it does still

berm up against the building. We're reworking the natural stone retaining walls and landscaping will be restored. We will coordinate with the Parks Division on those plantings.

- UDC recommended to remove the loft, what changes came from that?
 - The loft area was larger, we coordinated with the client and discussed removal but it's a key feature of the building that provides an amenity to that unit and critical for them to maintain the loft. We stepped it back further and reduced the overall size, and eliminated one additional apartment in the process.
- This was the best location for it as opposed to moving it to one side?
 - We have to maintain a 30-foot setback along State Street so it can't shift.

The Commission discussed the following:

- This is a huge improvement, it fits within the context of State Street now, and looks like it belongs there as opposed to what we saw before. Looks like it's in place and blends in with the surrounding context.
- Certainly much more soothing to look at.
- I agree, greatly improved in its simplicity. We're not reviewing signage, but I would caution the type of signage you show now, it seems like something we'd see on buildings viewed from much farther away than the scale on State Street; look at other similar sized buildings on State Street for your signage. It's a white brick, what is the mortar color?
 - We have not selected it yet, but it is our intention to do a lighter color, there are some off whites that are more cost effective that we can pursue. We don't want it to read as a dramatically different color.
- I agree with everything that has been said so far. It is improved over the last time, it has a classic understated value. However, I still struggle with aspects of the project; the loss of the character of buildings being replaced, the scale, the impact of the project to the park and the streetscape. It's very mixed, there's opportunities for activation on both those fronts; for art that you're depicting on the back, but I'm still not certain it can justify what the public is losing, specifically along State Street and in the park. I do like the green roof you've designed and plant selections, other components of the project, but going back to an earlier submission on Legistar by Madison Trust for Historic Preservation, which quotes the Downtown Plan recommendation #75, in this letter it struggles to see how this project "*encourages preservation, rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of sound older buildings that contribute to the distinct character of this part of our city.*"
- While I do agree it has improved, I took myself all the way back to our first round of this project. I remember it was of paramount importance to consider the rhythm of State Street. I do not feel this project is really considering that. I see little nod to honoring and preserving the rhythm of State Street. I do think some of the larger developments have made significant efforts to acknowledge that rhythm. Previous versions had some noble attempts at that, unfortunately the more times we see a project we can't lose sight of earlier findings from this body and earlier recommendations we have made. I still feel fundamentally this proposal still does not meet some of those important concepts.
- I will echo my agreement and share the concerns about the rhythm of State Street. This is such an intact block, more changes may be coming but I really believe the impact to the park is significant, the scale of the street will be changed and I'm not convinced it meets the standards of the Downtown Plan and will not be supporting it.
- Looking at the front elevation, I wasn't here for the earlier iterations and I really find this quite attractive. It doesn't follow many of the trends that we see a lot of.
- We are advisory to the Plan Commission, we need to make a finding that the development is consistent with the Downtown Urban Design requirements and the zoning code on entry orientation, façade articulation, door and window openings (percentage required), quality materials, massing, proportions, alignment of architectural features, etc. Those are the kind of things to keep in mind when thinking about a motion and whether or not so support a motion.
- Based on what you just read, this project does fall within those guidelines for height, size, design, and articulation.

- I would say the zoning code guidelines are probably more objective and the Downtown Urban Design requirements are probably more subjective and would require this body to weigh in on making a finding that the project is consistent with those requirements.
- (Secretary) The zoning code requirements have to be met and ultimately that is up to the Zoning Administrator.
- Asad made a motion for approval, seconded by Arnold.

Discussion on the motion:

- If we look back to previous iterations, one piece of feedback given was a comment about the Juliet balconies. The second and third iterations minimized those pretty substantially, now we're seeing a design proposed that brings those back. I don't necessarily have a strong problem with them but it is interesting to watch, we have seen this project so many times now and it seems like we're losing track of key findings from our discussions and review. The rhythm comments: this project clearly has three bays that aren't distinct at all, but are quite uniform in their overall aesthetic and appearance. This project has missed a clear opportunity to express those three bays in a distinct and rhythmic way; earlier versions of this did do that. There were issues with materials in the same plane. There were things to resolve but we were back to what we saw earlier. The project we see now looks a lot like what we saw in the beginning, and the criticism was a lack of rhythm. I can't support a project that has continued to come back to us until we backed down and lost track of some of our asks; particularly the loft; we asked it to be removed and we keep seeing it, and now we'll back down to them.
- I have mixed feelings about this; I have not commented a lot along the way. It's rare that we get a single project that keeps coming back repeatedly, changing significantly based on our comments and feedback. I don't want to make it seem like since this is the third or fourth version, this might be as good as it gets, how many times do we make them come back with a design that is different enough or acceptable enough for everybody? That diminishes their efforts and our comments on it. I've seen this street change up and down, all I can think of is some of the changes that have happened in other places up and down the street, there's some pretty plain, some would say ugly replacements for what was there before all up and down the street. This one seems to have been a much more thoughtful process to replacing some admittedly beat up old buildings, but buildings that had a history and charm to them. I myself think that this version here I like, I find that keeping the white brick is minimal, there's articulation but not a lot of it, I could live with a bit more detailing in the brick and maybe that is going to happen. It has an understated elegance to it. The balconies add an understated charm along the front. I would have liked the loft removed entirely but give credit for the effort to diminish the impact visually on the building in general. I think this ended up in a fairly good place. All these new buildings, they are going to be here for a long time. They are not going to remember what was there; we need to make good looking building. This could have been a historic district, but it isn't and we're left with this process. The building shows some respect for the landscape next to it at the park, I this is something that I can support it but I certainly feel a lot of the same things that those who don't support it feel.
- I agree the understated elegance of it is what State Street needs. It doesn't need a bunch of buildings and facades screaming out for attention. It sits well in its context, breaks the main building mass into three, those structural bays are within the context of what you would see. There's a large variety of what on State Street. State Street is that kind of tapestry of different buildings going up and down and we would be ill advised to ask the designer to make it look like three different buildings when it is one building. I also really like that it puts eyes on the park at night, the simple grid of white brick and dark openings along the park gives it a nice calm, serene background without calling attention to itself. Overall the building doesn't call attention to itself. It fits in pretty well.
- I'd offer an amendment to the motion for approval that the building use modular brick and not utility brick that is a scale issue that is very important on State Street.
- Yes, amendment accepted.

Action

On a motion by Asad, seconded by Arnold, the Urban Design Commission made an **ADVISORY RECOMMENDATION** to the Plan Commission to grant Final Approval. The motion was passed on a roll call vote of (5-3) with Asad, Arnold, Braun-Oddo, and Harper voting yes; Bernau, Rummel, and Knudson voting no; and Chair Goodhart voting yes to change the outcome.