



# PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

November 29, 2023

PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

**Project Address:** 304-318 N Broom Street/408-430 W Johnson Street/407 W Gorham Street

**Application Type:** New Student Housing Building in UMX Zoning  
**UDC is an Advisory Body**

**Legistar File ID #:** [76205](#)

**Prepared By:** Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

## Background Information

**Applicant | Contact:** Brian Munson, Vandewalle & Associates | Chad Matesi, Core Madison Broom, LLC

**Project Description:** The applicant is proposing an eight and fourteen-story student housing development with frontages along Broom, Gorham, and Johnson Streets. The project will include a mix of unit types and configurations and resident amenities spaces.

### Project Schedule:

- UDC received an Informational Presentation on May 10, 2023.
- UDC received a second Informational Presentation on August 16, 2023.
- UDC made a recommendation for Initial Approval to the Plan Commission on November 1, 2023. The UDC's recommendation included two conditions; that the request return to UDC for Final Approval, and that a connection to the street be incorporated along the W Johnson Street frontage.
- Plan Commission conditionally approved this item at their November 13, 2023 meeting, adopting the UDC's recommended conditions of approval (Legistar Files [79967](#)). The Plan Commission's condition required that UDC provide a final recommendation prior to final staff sign-off and the issuance of permits.
- The Common Council is scheduled to consider rezoning aspects, land combination, and related land use agreement aspects of this request at its November 21, 2023 meeting.

**Approval Standards:** The Urban Design Commission (UDC) is an **advisory** body on this request. Section [28.076\(b\)](#) includes the related design review requirements which state that: *"All new buildings that are greater than twenty-thousand (20,000) square feet or that have more than four stories shall obtain Conditional Use approval. In addition, the UDC shall review such projects for conformity to the design standards in [Sec. 28.071\(3\)](#) and the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#) and shall report its findings to the Plan Commission."*

As noted above, the Plan Commission approved this request at their November 13, 2023, meeting, including the adoption of the UDC's conditions of approval. As such, it is the UDC's role to review the revised drawings for consistency with the previously recommended condition of approval. Staff advises that the UDC review the updated plans and confirm that the condition of approval, as noted below, has been met.

**Related Zoning Information:** The property is currently zoned a combination of Urban Mixed-Use (UMX) and Planned Development (PD). With this proposal, the entirety of the project site would be rezoned to the UMX zone district.

As noted on the Downtown Height Map, the maximum recommended height is up to 12 stories (172 feet) as it relates to those properties fronting on W Johnson and W Gorham Streets and six stories (88 feet) for those fronting on N Broom Street. In addition, the Capitol View Preservation Limit will also apply to the proposed development. The Zoning Code requires that buildings must meet both the maximum number of stories and the maximum height. However, a recently approved modification to the Zoning Code allows, in cases where applicants

voluntarily enter into a contractual agreement to provide affordable housing, the maximum number of stories may be exceeded, provided the building remains at or below the maximum height (172 feet and 88 feet, as noted above). The applicant is seeking this affordability bonus.

The UMX zoning district also outlines design standards that are applicable to all new buildings. As a reference, the design related zoning standards outlined in the UMX zone district are included as an attachment to this report, including, but not limited to those related to building entrance orientation, façade articulation, height, fenestration, and materials.

**Design-Related Plan Recommendations:** The project site is located within the [Downtown Plan](#) (the “Plan”) planning area in the Johnson Street Bend Neighborhood. As noted in the Plan’s recommendations, this district should continue as a primarily higher density student housing area with some new neighborhood service retail uses. Development on the project site is also subject to the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines as noted above.

## Summary of Design Considerations

It is the role of the UDC to review the revised drawings for consistency with the conditions of approval as outlined below. Please note that as a Plan Commission condition or approval, the UDC cannot waive or change this requirement; the condition is required to be met. The UDC’s role is to ensure the previously established condition is met.

1. That a connection to the street be incorporated along the W Johnson Street frontage.

## Summary of UDC Initial Approval Comments

As a reference, the Commission’s comments from the November 1, 2023, Initial Approval are provided below.

The Commission had the following questions for staff and the development team:

- This is like the most improved thing that I have seen in a very long time. For where it was and where it is now, the way materials are starting to overlap, intersect, transition, I love the details. Very good improvements. Do you only have two very small MEP penthouses – is that all you need?
  - They are not small. They are 10,000 square feet, they are significant. As we continue with that, if there are any adjustments we would come back to you with those.
- I don’t think the penthouse has to match the façade. Lighter would blend into the sky, but darker could work. Very good job of improving the design.
- Was there an intent to light those mass elements in some way?
  - No that was not a part of what we were focusing on.
- Can you describe why the second level is so important for the bridge?
  - There are amenities that can be accessed by the residents without having to go outside. We like the bridge idea, it’s dynamic, the buildings are separated but still tied together.
- We’ve seen a clearer vision for the rooftops and I’m thinking about the people in Building 4 getting there. Wondering if a higher bridge would be a better benefit.
  - The rooftop is all within Buildings 2 and 3 intentionally. We were trying to build off of staff’s recommendation to separate these into two masses as much as possible. This reinforces that expression for the upper floors as completely detached buildings.
- There are a lot of changes and some of them are quite attractive. With regard to the staff report looking at the residential units located on the auto court and whether they should be on Johnson Street at all, as opposed to somewhere else, Broom Street?

- The grade transition across Johnson creates both opportunities and challenges. It becomes a full exposed lobby space on Building 4. As you go into Building 3 and move up towards Broom Street, it eventually comes down to the amenities at grade with Broom Street. We looked at how we both activate and transition across that. On the Broom Street corner where we're flush it's mostly a landscape treatment that comes down the hill. The Transition from Building 2 down to the western edge of Building 3 where we have a half floor, we have a combination of landscape treatment but also opportunities for public art panels. The maintenance room is where we start to transition from a partial exposed floor to a full floor exposure. Those are townhome units so you would enter from the second floor and come down into this living room level. We felt it was important to continue that activity down to the sidewalk.
- Could you show the rendering?
  - We had townhomes with residential along this whole stretch, there was discomfort with that. When we brought the residential down we didn't want two units with direct access from the street. There is activity because there are recessed terraces behind the face of the building. Good for activity without adding two small entrances that didn't seem to be enough.
- I think that one of the difficulties is that this development is broken into four buildings. 1, 2 and 4 do a really nice job of expressing themselves as buildings because they have entries or retail, or big amenity spaces. This expresses itself certainly as its own building, but it defies entry. You look at that and think that could be a separate building, but without the retail, you can't get in there anymore. This is the urban design problem of the whole project, it probably has a lot to do with the grade. You look at this and say "this can't be its own building, you can't even get in there." There's this screen on top of the maintenance room, and I think it's the one element that's giving me the biggest heartache and concern, this rendering. I'm also a bit confused about the metal panel over the brick and being the same color, but that's not really an urban design issue. That may have something to do with the staff report about blank walls, street orientation and entry.
- I'm having a hard time understanding the space between the south side of the existing building, the U-shape, what happens in there? It's hard to tell. I wish there were some sections through there, I'm curious what it feels like. Over on the east side coming around, is that the Equinox building? Curious about the safety in there, if it's dark at night what it feels like.
  - There are a bunch of things going on back here. Coming off the plaza on our side we have a sidewalk and exiting path for the building. This area through here is lawn, but it tips down. There is a retaining wall that spans that grade, this area of the Equinox is up a floor. They have some sidewalks through here but not a lot of activated space on that side of the building. We do have some lighting along there for the exiting path, but there's not a lot of back and forth. This side is the driveway entry to their underground parking. At street level we're roughly at grade, this sidewalk will be higher in sections than the driveway down to the Equinox. Then as you come to the south it begins to transition back down to grade. This is designed here for people to go through, all the combinations of lighting in there to make that inviting. This zone here is not an activated zone, it's a transition in grade adjacent to some of the utility rooms within our building, and the retaining wall on the Equinox side.
- The exiting path on the east side, is that high building on one side and retaining wall on the other?
  - No, it might be a little bit higher than sidewalk grade is for the Equinox. It's not a hidden zone along that east side.
- Can you clarify again where you said the blank façade is on the upper floors?
  - This is the wall. The higher units have bathrooms in those locations. That's where we end up not having windows there, that's where plumbing walls are located. Its better that there aren't windows there in relation to the Equinox building.
- On that elevation, there are windows on the first five floors or so?
  - Right.
- Those aren't looking directly into the Equinox?

- There's glass that does wrap around on those lower floors. Those are bedroom windows from 9 down. There's a living room window here, totally different planning from the floors above.
- I'm confused why on the upper floors it would be a concern that you're looking into the Equinox, but it's not a concern on the lower floors where you do have windows.
  - We have almost a single-sided hallway. We wanted to move as much of the glazing out to the exterior viewpoint, which by default, we've got this narrow expression here above floor 9. We wanted to keep windows out which means the bathrooms are clustered in that corner.
- One questions for staff; on Johnson Street, the narrow white building, it has a very cool canopy, but it looks like it is coming out over the sidewalk. Is that allowed?
- (Secretary) Yes, a Privilege in Streets Permit would be required, depending on the encroachment.
  - We are anticipating obtaining a Privilege in Streets Permit.
- Are you planning on a restaurant amenity for that second floor of Building 2 or 1? I am asking about kitchen exhaust. Thinking about the conditions of that alley.
  - Yes, we are planning for it, and it is a good use for that space, but we cannot guarantee that. That is what we envision there and would set aside the provisions for putting in ducting and proper exhaust for a restaurant space.
- I would recommend you try to avoid putting kitchen exhaust into that area [the promenade] and take it out to the street where air and wind can take it away. I am also thinking about that generator. No one wants that running. It needs to be tested, it will add emissions, noise, etc. into that tight area.
  - Similar to what we have done at the Oliv, James and The HUB, the design of that front façade retail is going to be set-up to address venting points to give us flexibility because we don't know. As far as the generator there is a retaining wall right here that will help shelter some of that noise, but the thought is to vent towards the side yards and not the promenade.
- I want to point out some things I like: the art panels going up Johnson, that is really exciting and a cool splash of color, and the landscape, that will be a nice addition to that foundation. I like the healthy sized green roofs. Architecturally, I like the material palettes are how they are limited – it strengthens the identity of each building and mass without endlessly changing between materials like we often see. It really reinforces the mass which is great. Bike parking, I trust that you have all that you need, is there any at grade bike parking along Johnson?
  - We tried to scatter it throughout the site, clustered it around entrances. We have bike rooms at grade at Building 4 accessible from the exterior. We have bike parking components in the middle, left of the entry of Building 3. We have bike parking clustered in the plaza space. We do not have bike parking on the Johnson frontage but do in the auto court, which is visible from the street, outside the building.
- The corner of Gorham and Broom – that plaza is nice. The tapestry of paving and protecting edge with low raised planters that you can see over is very successful.
- Can you elaborate on the planting scheme for the green roofs? Profiles, intensive, extensive?
  - With regard to the Broom Street plaza I will just note that we are working with staff, entertaining the idea that the slip lane goes away, but hopefully one day that plaza could be expanded, but that is outside of our scope.
  - The lower roof deck on level 9, this is our most intensive green roof treatment; a 12-inch system with lots of perennials, color, texture, plants that would provide a benefit for pollinators.
- What is defining those edges of the pattern – is that planting to planting or is it a pavement band?
  - There will be a maintenance edge along the perimeter but the interior line work is the division of planting areas. We are not thinking there will be anything exposed there.
  - On this level, on top of Building 2, there is more of a traditional green roof 6-inch profile with sedums, within that there will be some strategic areas with taller plantings mixed in, but generally it is more of what you think of when you think green roof. On the top of Building 3, there is a range of depths, some we can do small trees and large shrubs, definitely perennials too. Kind of a little bit of everything.

- Going back down to grade, am I right that most of the street terrace is lawn where all the street trees are?
  - Yes.
- It looks like you are protecting a lot of trees? Curious what if anything is changing?
  - These are all the existing that are going to remain. Two on this frontage and one here. We are keeping the rhythm but filling in the gaps where driveways are being removed. To clarify, there are two removals on W Johnson, there is a root condition and the other will be removed due to the new driveway.

The Commission discussed the following:

- The staff memo talks about the height, materials, long views; I am ok with all of those things. I like the simplified forms, and the attention to details. I am not uncomfortable as it relates to those items.
- I agree, I know staff asked us to look at height, mass, and scale and note the tallest capital view height limit, but I do not have issues with those. In general the refinements that were made to the materials and detailing are much improved; it is looking to be quite handsome. The concern about the massive urban design problem – the building that has no entry, also remains my only concern. I do not have issues with the detailing of the bridge connection, the design detailing along the promenade and building. It is a bit odd and problematic and I am not sure how it gets solved. In some sense that screening makes it worse, not only is it not an entry but it is actually blocked. That is for me problematic and it is also enhanced by the linearity of the landscape that runs straight through. There is not an entry, there was never going to be an entry, and you are cut off from the street. It is the one thing that I am really stuck on. Most buildings have an entry and so it is odd; I understand that they are doing form follows function, but this is truly an urban design problem and the biggest hang up to getting an approval.
- This is half the block, Building 3. When we are all talking about hitting it out of the park 99 percent of the time, I don't necessarily feel like we can't criticize a focused area and ask for improvement there. This is on paper and there are certainly other ways to look at it. I'm not suggesting we completely redesign the building, but I especially, what you mentioned about this wall here. I could see a set of cascading stairs coming down, this is a little courtyard I think and it probably doesn't even need to be accessible because there are other accessible paths to that area. It is not up to us to design it, but if this is to give us the illusion of a separate building, it is a little fortress like.
- The staff report did talk about not having any entrances along Broom Street, but Broom Street is so open and glassy it doesn't given the illusion that you cannot get in there. And Building 4 is really successful because you have these two entrances here on the north and south sides. You can see the difficulty in the slope there and it makes it really tough because you have parking on side and apartments on the other. It's not an easy problem to fix, but it is an urban design problem.
- If this was one building and it looked like one building, this would not be a concern, right? I'm trying to think out loud and play this through. If there were two entries on Johnson Street, this wouldn't be a problem?
- We don't know. They are trying to make them look like separate buildings, so therefore this looks like a separate building with no entrance.
- I understand that. I personally have no issue with it. Would it be better with an entry, yes, but to me it's not a deal breaker. They could turn the maintenance room and put an entry in there, they could come up with a solution. If we require an entry, they will make an entry.
- I don't know that we dictate entry, but here's an outdoor open space. If there was a connection to the sidewalk, it doesn't necessarily have to be an entrance to the building.
- I agree, to me it is the last little problem, that street connection. Otherwise I have no other comments or critiques. They will figure it out.
- Are we speaking mainly to the access or lack thereof of the two five-bedroom units, or just the building in general? The functionality of having a Johnson Street entry to those, they're the only two residences on that floor, the rest is retail and amenity space.

- There's no entrance along here but certainly street activation. It's not something that is a prescriptive solution, it's a concern that staff raised and since it's half a block of Johnson Street, a main thoroughfare, that's something to be addressed. And the continuous landscaping makes it more of a barrier.
- It's a straight arrow that is preventing the connection from the building to the sidewalk. We don't need to design it but there needs to be at some point that urban connection.
- I'm open to any kind of elegant solution to your concerns, but personally it's not rubbing me the wrong way.
- I think the townhouses there are awkward. I understand the concern from that perspective. I wonder if there is an easy solution, a way to empower pedestrians to go into the vehicle space/promenade, and a stronger way to connect all the way through for a pedestrian that also activates that lobby. I wonder if there is a way to activate internally so people know that's how you get into this building, you go in and under, it's well lit and there's a purpose towards that elevator. Any similar thoughts?
- I'm trying to grapple with this façade because it is so monumental. It reminds me of downtown Chicago retail with these enormous three-story glass walls. But that's not what it is, it doesn't feel like it's accomplishing...I want to make sure we're all keeping in mind the height, the bonus stories.
- (Secretary) The model we're using to evaluate height is afforded to them under the UMX zoning district. We won't be looking at the PD standards, they are in the process of negotiating a voluntary land use agreement for the bonus stories. That is something the Plan Commission and Common Council will be evaluating. The UDC is looking at the building in terms of the Downtown Design Guidelines.
- You all taught me as the citizen member to look at a building as four-sided. This is a six-sided building, this side doesn't work as part of a four-sided building to me. It looks pretty but doesn't feel pedestrian friendly, it's too monumental.
- Are we dying on the hill that this needs to have an entrance?
- I don't want to die on a hill, and I don't know that it needs an entry. I think it needs a connection to the street somehow.

A motion was made by Asad, seconded by Von Below, to make a recommendation for Initial Approval with the condition that they incorporate a connection to the street along the W Johnson Street elevation.

Discussion on the motion:

- I do agree that it can be a little bit better. Seeing how much it improved from the last time, I know when it comes back it will be ready for Final Approval. The other side on Broom Street is not an entry, but it's classy, it's active, there are things you can easily do. Look at it one more time, there are so many options to solve that problem.

## Action

On a motion by Asad, seconded by Von Below, the Urban Design Commission made an advisory recommendation to the Plan Commission for **INITIAL APPROVAL**. The motion passed with the following condition:

- That a connection to the street be incorporated along the W Johnson Street frontage.

The motion was passed on a unanimous vote of (7-0).