



Agenda Item #: 6

Project Title: 33 W Johnson Street - Planned Development (PD), New Mixed-Use Development. (District 4)

Legistar File ID #: 80306

Members Present: Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Wendy von Below, Shane Bernau, Jessica Klehr, Christian Harper, Marsha Rummel, and Rafeeq Asad

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Summary

At its meeting of December 13, 2023, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL** of a Planned Development (PD) for a new mixed-use development located at 33 W Johnson Street. Registered and speaking in support were Andy Inman and Andrea Schaub. Registered in support and available to answer questions were Aaron Koch and Karley Bolz. Registered in support but not wishing to speak were Jay Sullivan and Jennifer Koester.

Updates to the project include flipping the building so that the loading and some of those operations are off of Dayton Street, the entry to the subterranean parking will come off of Johnson Street. The entries for both hotels have been combined, coming off of Wisconsin Avenue. Most significantly, there were strong objections both from Commissioners and the neighborhood about the arrival lane being in the terrace on Wisconsin Avenue. That has been shifted by transferring guest room loads away from the lobby, to bring that arrival lane 100% on their property and tucked under the building. This is a very efficient design that services all of their needs with this new site plan. They are committed to continue working with Forestry on the Wisconsin Avenue frontage, and with Traffic Engineering on the parking.

The vast majority of design development is at the base of the building in reaction to pulling the drive into the building and focusing on creating an enhanced design aesthetic for pedestrians. The canopy is designed to be an artistic folly that plays along the façade of the building. Building materials are proposing iron brick that will change intensity of color during different times of day, and a light mortar that will lighten up the entire system. They have introduced a copper panel for depth, warmth, and a pop of color. A fluted panel is proposed on the roof of the building to screen mechanicals and the elevator overrides, and will match the dark metal components on the building. It was noted that the window treatments on Dayton and Johnson Streets are exactly the same; the deviation shown in the corner intentionally creates a different expression for the corner, just grouping them slightly differently. That expression is carried down Wisconsin Avenue. Changes were made along the base to create a datum line and provide for pedestrian-scale experience opportunities at the ground. The parapet sits just under a foot under Capitol View, the elevator overrun does encroach.

The trees will develop and grow as matched species to what is across the street. The vast majority of lighting is at the base, all of which will be dark sky compliant, even those uplighting the roof. All the fixtures are designed as decorative or integrated into the architecture. There are no louvers in the tower, only at the base, and framed to match surrounding materials inside the courtyard area.

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

- Where there are all the curves and waves, there is a component that goes up to roof that is pure glass, could you talk about the rooflines.

- The roofline, the two bays on the right of wave, stop a little short of the roof line and that actually is a terrace on the top floor. You can actually walk out onto an exterior terrace. The two bays on the other side of that, there is a glass parapet that comes up above the roof and creates kind of a crown and finishes that thought. The very last bay to the left is a suite on the top two levels and they have walk-out terraces as well, which is why there is a cut-out that marches down the façade in each of those bays in order to create those walk-out terraces.
- The glass parapet – there is no roof on top of that?
 - It is just a parapet, that is correct. That is exactly right. The roof level is just to the right of the second wave from the end. That is the roof level.
- Even though we are advisory, we still do need to speak to the PD standards to make a complete finding.
- There is a lot to think about in the staff report. What struck me just hearing the presentation was the long view on W Johnson. Can you explain, to me that does not look like an impressive long view. Do you have another slide that would be more explanatory than what looks like a stairwell tower?
 - It's not a great representation of what we're doing there. If this photo were taken further away, you would see on the right that the City parking structure is the same alignment, the same setback from the street up to the right-of-way. That would look very different. What we are doing and is the most significant thing here is our commitment to work with Forestry and modify what you see up along the parking structure with the concrete terrace. What we are doing to improve the streetscape is we're working with Forestry in removing a concrete portion of the terrace and creating what you see on the left side of Johnson Street. A better representation would be if you could visualize that streetscape mirrored on the right side.
- You answered the street level, but the upper level is just a blank wall and that's what you're going to see up there.
- One of the PD criteria is impacts on the viewshed. Although the presentation had materials shown on it, I drilled down into some of the elevations on the full plan set and noticed that the light tan area above the old MATC building is proposed to be EIFS, as well as the portion at the very top. We have to consider the use of EIFS within the context of the recommended durable, high-quality materials on the project.
- In one of the earlier presentations, we saw annotated the use of silva cells or similar product for the street trees on Dayton. Is that still a part of the proposal?
 - It is, we'll work through that with Forestry. They have expressed a desire for a similar product as silva cells. We're committed and obligated to work with them on the final configuration of the terrace.
- Following up on the Dayton Street side, I was fairly impressed with the landscaping around most of the building, particularly the residential side. I can see that by pushing the building back off the public terrace you were forced to limit the landscaping on the Wisconsin Avenue frontage. But the Dayton side seems really lacking in any kind of plantings, and perhaps it's the infrastructure of the building and sidewalks and what's there. I'm glad to hear you're continuing along with the idea of making a healthy environment for the trees, but there's almost no greenery on that stretch of Dayton Street. Was there any consideration of planters or anything along there given that there are restraints being along a public sidewalk? It seems like a three-sided building with regard to landscape with the one side having hardly any plantings.
 - There are a number of existing trees there.
 - We were looking into this because it does seem stark on that side. The reason we don't have other planting beds currently is because the sidewalk narrows down in that area. It's only about six feet, and we wanted to maintain that width. The area where the existing historic building is located is something we need to continue working with the architect on, there needs to be accessible entries into the building. The commercial side of it is going to be on the second floor. Once we get the locations of the entries, we can add more planting beds. Along the hotel side the entry sequence takes up some of that space, and we wanted to fit bike parking closer to the restaurant. It could be a continued effort to add more greenspace to this side.
- On the presentation the height was mentioned as 139 feet, the staff report says 132 feet. Is the difference the elevator overrun?

- (Secretary) We had talked expressly about building height because the plans were showing different heights on all four sides due to grade. I asked them late last week to reassess their height, that's the reason for the discrepancy. Ultimately the Zoning Administrator would make the final determination. I'm thinking 139 is closer to being accurate than the 132.
- We have to come to an agreement to where the 144 is measured from.
- (Secretary) 144 is the maximum allowed for a ten-story building, they are under that with 11 stories.
- With regard to the drop-off, you've congregated both hotels into one drop-off and it's a huge improvement and I'm really happy to see the solution, but I'm curious as to how you plan on managing all the people who are coming and going, wanting to leave their car in the right-of-way, generally how you're going to manage that and direct all that traffic.
 - That is probably the most significant accommodation we were able to make. There's enough room, it's one lane but the difference is we've added a bypass lane, another vehicle can still get around that vehicle. That will help the operations, this will be valet parked at both hotels. We've been perfecting that operation at peak times, it's a function of staffing and directing of traffic, which is something that will be the responsibility of our valet team. In terms of traffic flow, we've shifted everything back, so the sidewalk and terrace alignment is unchanged. That returned the parking lane that was previously occupied by a new terrace, the curb line is back in the same spot. We would propose to work with the Parking Utility and convert those meters into a loading zone for delivery or ride share.
- Do you know if you could make a left turn in on Wisconsin?
 - We're working with Traffic Engineering on that. We'll integrate our plans with theirs, ultimately Engineering designs the improvement in the right-of-way and we'll build those as part of our development agreement.
- Regarding PD standards E and H, are we to consider any impact on the church across the street?
- (Secretary) I believe Bethel Lutheran is one of the landmark sites, as well as not directly adjacent but in proximity, the Masonic Temple.

The Commission discussed the following:

- I am going to start off by looking at some of the staff bullet points in the staff report. Overall, this group did do quite a bit of listening. I don't object to the height because they're still under the 144 feet, even though in excess of number of stories. The site access and circulation has been significantly improved. They still have two curb cuts, which isn't great for pedestrian flow, but I am not sure how to make it better than it is, but it's really improved to get the drop-off deeper into the site. I still find the building materials dark, especially for that neighborhood and in looking at some of the context. I don't object to mechanical louvers tucked into the courtyard with screening in front on the second floor. I would like to see more information about the long views, I am not convinced they have been adequately addressed. Relative to the building design and composition, it's a little quirky but it is improving with the kind of anchor points on the ends. In some sense, I almost want to see that glass parapet extend up higher to have more of a difference between the traditional roof and this very unusual architecture.
- I too appreciate the changes that have been made and there was some serious re-evaluating on this; thank you for that. One comment that I have is that you put energy and care into how the building meets the street on so many sides, and this is an area where lots of people are walking and biking, so the human scale of all that I hope if we see this again, if we could get more detail about the W Dayton and W Johnson elevations where you have garage doors and so on. Those are the only places on the building that start to look a little blank. To walk past that, I would appreciate knowing more about those ground-level façades.
- To add to that, we really need that particularly on Johnson Street in order to make a finding of its impact on the landmark. It may be fine, but I don't think we have enough information on it quite yet.
- The biggest comment is still those two curb cuts and two driveways on Wisconsin Avenue, and the unavoidable contradiction we see with the Downtown Plan language. It's so much better than last time we saw this, but

again the language seems so clear that this is exactly the type of condition we are supposed to avoid. I'm really struggling with that one.

- I assume that all of the plants that are under that drop off are irrigated. If we see this again that could be verified. I definitely agree about more plantings along Dayton. I know a previous proposal by another project team did have more landscape on that edge.
- In terms of the building, I'm going to defer to some of the architects here, but especially when we look at the Wisconsin Avenue elevation I struggle with the materials and the forms; it's not cohesively one building nor is it two distinct buildings. It's straddling this line between those two, and there's still a lot of tension there. There are two sides with strong forms that share in a lot of the materiality and color. I still think it's something to do with that cap or the top of the building.
- While I like the planting palette overall, there's a lot of very soft, wavy plant bed lines which to me don't seem strong or bold enough, especially given the height and mass of this building. It feels a little too residential or suburban and in some instances the planting beds have sharp corners, there's a little love that could be put into the layout of the bed edges. One specific plant comment, at the corner of the MATC building on Johnson you have a Black Hills Spruce, I would question whether that's the right selection, something so dense all the way to the ground in this urban context creates hiding places and dark corners. That might be an anchor species worth revisiting. I'm glad to hear silva cells are still part of the development. Improving the street tree health on Dayton and Johnson are all critical pieces of this project. Having four depicted on Wisconsin is good and strong, and that's not the issue I take with those driveways. Four deciduous trees will still capture that intent that was established so long ago looking up to the Capitol. I am glad that there are four trees there.
- I'm also okay with the height, as long as it stays under 144 feet. The question of the curb cuts, I can see why we feel it's contradictory when you read the standards, how could you work with one curb cut? It seems a reasonable approach to serve two hotels and all those functions inside, there needs to be enough room through the drive aisle. I'm still stuck on the long views coming from the west. This is a larger building than the existing former MATC and we haven't seen anything. What does it look like coming on N Carroll looking back, what will we see? Carroll is one of the site lines from the Capitol that I think is pretty important. I don't think you've satisfied our need to know on that one. The staff report mentioned the two buildings. This is where I get stuck because the front on Wisconsin, the Autograph building is very attractive and the other one is kind of different. Someone mentioned the same tonalities, but when you turn the corner on the Autograph down Dayton it looks like the other hotel. I get sort of stuck on that. It's going to be attractive once we get to the end and I appreciate all your work.
- Can somebody explain what's happening at this corner, is that a solid parapet? That's a rail from an accessible roof?
 - No that is not an accessible roof. The very top at the corner is just a parapet with a glass-faced façade at the front of it. Where it steps down moving to the right bays, those step down enough to be rails that open up to a terrace that comes from the top floor. That's a glass rail with a terrace behind that, the other higher components are just parapets.
- What's behind the solid roof piece? I didn't think about this until Shane made his comments. I think he had a point to where the connections are kind of off. Maybe if that organic form was either higher or lower it would work, but it being at the same height as the two crowns is in tension. If that corner element were solid and the glass parapet were lowered so that the crowns were at the same level, it would help connect the two rectilinear pieces. That would solve some of the tension that some of us are struggling with. I think that will help, it's been a great improvement in terms of site circulation, etc.
- That was exactly what I was trying to comment, so you and I were trying to say the same thing, there needs to be more distinction between the convex glass crown and the other piece.
- Ultimately, you're going to be down on the ground looking up. That's where it really has to work for us folks who are walking or driving on that corner.
- If that solid parapet wasn't there on that corner, it would be stronger.
- There is a lot to like about the changes here. I like the wave form canopies over the parking entry. The street level views of seeing those sort of echoing the curves of the concave and convex part of the Autograph is a nice

shape echo that you'll really be able to appreciate at the street level as you look up the building past the canopies up to those curves of the building; that's a nice touch. I also like the introduction of the antique copper panels, that goes a long way towards alleviating some of the concerns about the overall darkness of the building. The solution for the parking drop-off, I think the fact they pushed it back and maintained the original terrace width is huge. I don't know how you can have a functioning building here, particularly a hotel, with this being just a single curb cut on that entire block. Obviously the only reasonable thing would be a circular, one way in and one way out and obviously you would have designed a building that had that if that was the only way to build it. Sure, but it would certainly not be this building so I don't know where we're at or if this leaves our level if it is going to pass muster with Plan Commission or Common Council, but I think it's a reasonable solution and not anything I think the general public would really feel like these driveways are an intrusion on the pedestrian experience here. Certainly, it probably can be at certain times, but I think they came up with a pretty well designed and well thought out solution to the constraints put on them for that. I like the way the building has progressed, when I think back at the very first Informational. If you think back we've had two Informationals and the Residence Inn part was a light tan brick, it looked like a completely different building pushed up against this one. I think the overall design and the way it all ties together is much improved from where we started out and I still think compared to a lot of the big projects that have gone up, this one has a certain daring design that I think should be championed. We all say we want to see exciting and more dynamic buildings, and this is certainly going in that direction. It's a weird site and you look at this view here and there's this weird old remnant of MATC and before that Central High School attached to it, but that's what we've got, that's what's on the site. I do share the concerns of the long view coming up Johnson Street and I realize, you hate to nitpick about fleeting views or narrow views, but when you gave that context view coming up the street that was the first thing that jumped out at me too; you have this attractive building from almost every side but you see that big beige wall that Cliff said was EIFS, boy, that's not a good look at all. Even the part with masonry with the single row of windows is pretty plain and unadorned, but to have that tan or beige wall to the right of it and for that top level too is not a great look. I think certainly something can be done to improve that view. I already made comments about the landscaping, I think in general, the landscaping particularly on the residential it looks fairly strong. I would concur that a Black Hills Spruce is an odd choice to have as a solo tree, though I'm sure decorated would make a lovely Christmas tree for the project, but not probably the best choice there.

- Looking at the perspective views, I wanted to reinforce the discussion about color. I think the renderings, clearly colors are all over the place because MATC is not in reality a poppy red. I may not be reading the colors correctly. But I think that the curves are so exiting and so different, I wonder if a color study of making the materials on the curvaceous part a different color palette than the other ones would make it stick out even more. We don't have curves downtown a lot, bring 'em on; they're getting lost because the color palette is similar all the way across, a brown darker feel to it. We would like to see some innovative design, so I encourage you to go even further. I'm never going to stand and see the building from this perspective, but the vertical elements on the left side are fighting with the curves that are in Plan. There's so many faceted vertical elements going on here, and I just wonder if there could be a study on that, something to make it pop out more from the right side because it is really special.
- It sounds like this is coming back. If or when it does come back, I want to know about the bird glass and what the solution is. I notice it everywhere I go, and I know ordinance requires it, I want to know the strategy, is it linear, is it dots or what the strategy is. To me it has an effect on glass façades, especially when more than 50% of your façade is glazing. I want to know what that looks like because it can affect the aesthetic of the glazing. To know what the strategy is for the actual frit itself would be helpful.
- Getting back to the standards of approval that we will have to make an advisory recommendation to the Plan Commission, if we were to advance this to the Plan Commission, I think certainly that PD standard E, architectural styles and forms for compatibility with neighbors and aesthetic desirability certainly can be met, with the proportions and materials for the most part are high quality and well designed and well detailed. The standard H, granting additional height, that has been stated pretty well; it's not so much the number of stories, it's the height. You have more windows and a more delicate building than having huge floor to floors with tiny windows. The big one is the compatibility with existing or planned character of the area that goes to the

Downtown Plan and the porte cochere and number of curb cuts. The way I'm seeing it now this is not a porte cochere like in a suburban hotel where you have a big structure out proud of the building. This is more like an enclosed garage without garage doors on it. It's a pretty good solution and will really help to disguise the fact you have a lot of cars parked in front of the building. With regard to the curb cut number, the plan isn't specific. It just says a building with curb cuts. This is a whole block, if this was three parcels you could potentially have three driveway curb cuts. We're lucky this is a whole block development and we only have four for the entire block the whole way around, and they're relatively narrow. I think a finding could be made that that condition is met if we looked at it not as a porte cochere out in front of the building. My concerns would be the higher quality building that is possible by virtue of granting additional floors and having the big façade coming down Johnson and we don't really know what we're going to see coming down Dayton with expanse of EIFS. To me it's dropping the ball a bit on a really nice project. We need more information on the elevations at street level on Dayton and Johnson to make a finding whether there's any impact on the adjacent landmark.

- (Secretary) I will clarify that we are acting in an advisory capacity, not an approving capacity. We will be making an advisory recommendation to the Plan Commission because this is a Planned Development. The application did request Initial or Final Approval.
- Because of its location we're not an approving body?
- (Secretary) Correct.
- Whoever makes this mega motion, we also have to acknowledge some additional information is required for lighting compliance as well. To weigh in on color, I don't think this project is going to come off as being very dark. I think that iron spot brick and its reflectivity, being used consistently around three corners, it is going to look fine. The interface between the old high school and the Autograph hotel is well served by the brick expression as a transition in looking at it as a whole building with a glassy corner. And there is nice, really subtle detailing, people walking and driving by will notice the attention to detail on it.

Action

On a motion by von Below, seconded by Klehr, the Urban Design Commission made an advisory recommendation to the Plan Commission to **GRANT INITIAL APPROVAL**, with the following conditions and findings:

- Refine the design of the top of the building to be a more unifying element in the overall design composition. One potential option would be for the crowns being at the same level or removing the solid parapet on the corner of Dayton and Wisconsin.
- Incorporate more landscape on the Dayton Street side of the building(s).
- The UDC does not object to the proposed height being excess of 10-stories because the overall building height in feet is less than the maximum that would be permissible under the maximum permitted height for a 10-story building (under 144 feet).
- The applicant shall provide additional long views to show more context to fully evaluate impacts to cityscape and viewsheds, especially along Johnson and Dayton Streets.
- Revise the W Johnson long view to minimize the use of EIFS and blank wall expanse.
- Provide more design details on the W Johnson and W Dayton Street elevations, especially with regard to the ground level design of the building.
- The UDC finds that the proposed site layout with two curb cuts is reasonable to serve the proposed use and that it is not an intrusion on the pedestrian experience on Wisconsin Avenue.
- The UDC finds that the building as designed is consistent with PD standard E related to architectural style and design aesthetic having been met.
- Provide a detail for the frit for the bird safe glass.
- The applicant shall provide additional information related to site and architectural lighting, including a photometric plan, to ensure that it is consistent with MGO 29.36.

The motion was passed on a unanimous vote of (6-0).