URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION MEETING REPORT January 10, 2024

Agenda Item #: 4

Project Title: 929 E Washington Avenue - Major Alteration to a Previously Approved Project in Urban Design District (UDD) 8. (District 6)

Legistar File ID #: 80425

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

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Summary

At its meeting of January 10, 2024, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL** of a major alteration to a previously approved project located at 929 E Washington Avenue in Urban Design District (UDD) 8. Registered and speaking in support were Doug Hursh, Curt Brink, and Rebecca de Boer. Registered in support and available to answer questions was Neil Densmore.

Updates include streamlined window proportions for a more vertical expression, and reduced steel belt horses for smaller windowsills that break up the building horizontally. The upper floor has been simplified, made more vertical, the overhang and cornice has been moved to the top of the building. The height of the planter walls along the sidewalk have been reduced to experience the plants more and have less of a walled off feeling. The brick patterning adds a bit of contemporary and interesting pattern, and steps back on the upper portions of the building for ins and outs, and shadow lines within that detailing. The signage details are still being worked on and are not part of this presentation.

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

- These are parking floors. My constituents are worried about light pollution, will the glow be all night? What is the evening lighting plan?
    - I believe the LED fixtures remain on at a lower level when nobody is activating the space. Light would increase in those areas where there is movement. The lights at night will scale down and be more dim.
- That's good to hear. Do you have any renderings of the pedestrian or drive aisle, other than site plan view? WE don't really see that side of the building.
    - Looking at that corner that looks down the block. There is the drop off area for the hotel, a planter that spans between the two entrances, and some ground plantings to the north of the drop-off.
    - The sidewalk and terrace south of this project is already constructed. That sidewalk along the future 920 E Main building and parking structure, providing an area for landscape, that's part of the block's infrastructure already in place.
- Since it's already existing how does it elevate to create a best practice for bonus stories? Since I can't see the side of the building to know how it's activated, it's harder for me to get that piece of the project. Overall, I like the changes that you've made.
    - The parking floors continue on 2-4, louvers for mechanical equipment, the grayish area on the ground floor is the drop-off at the ground floor, with the interior having a nice lighting or art feature or textured material, windows towards the front, the setback entry porch at the corner, then it turns into the parking structure at the other end.

- It will be important to me to see the pedestrian feel of this area. Now it's geared toward accepting cars, we want to make sure we're creating a pedestrian-positive experience.
    - We can do these drop-offs and access points the parking garage without having to do them on E Washington, so that remains as all nice glass entry features.
- In order to earn the bonus height, the design of the mid through block pedestrian and vehicular connection is one of those items in the ordinance that the team has declared they have met. Really making sure that is a well-designed connection is integral to getting the bonus stories approved.
- This remains to be an exciting project; it's looking very good. Related to bonus stories, what's the drop-off and valet situation for the hotel? Are we seeing that on the exterior anywhere?
    - Where the drop-off would go, it's not in the renderings. That's the area, those three bays.
- Is that turn-around shared with the Indigo?
    - No, they have their own covered drop-off area.
- Could the design team speak any more to any pedestrian friendly enhancements that have been considered or design intent to celebrate that connection other than vehicle opportunities?
    - We've added some of the landscaping that occurs in the terrace. The buildings do come right up to the sidewalk in this urban setting, but we've added some landscaping there. As I read UDD 8, bonus story requirements can be filled from one element from the first list of required elements; the one element we are meeting is providing structured parking for multiple users with spaces available for public use, which is outlined in our letter of intent – between 17-27 percent of the parking stalls. For users in the neighborhood, encourage retail parking, for Breese Stevens Field, we have public parking in the center of the block. It seems like the other items are an "or," that's why we just mention we come close to meeting some of those requirements, like the through block connection, like the Wisconsin Telephone Building, but my understanding is those weren't needed to get the bonus stories.
- You are correct. Since there were no parking floor plans available, could you explain how the parking is accessed and where the public portions of that are, or are they all intermixed in the main parking structure that's already in existence?
    - The overall site plan shows two access points for the parking, one in the courtyard area, you would take that internal drive, come in and park that way. There is a secondary access on S Brearly Street.
- The parking in the new building, how is that accessed, through the existing parking ramp?
    - Yes, it's all connected. The floors are all connected.
- There's no restriction on movement between what's existing and the new hotel building?
    - No.
- That helps a lot, I didn't see any parking floor plans of those levels. If you are going for that criteria of structured parking with a substantial public component, that's really good to have that clarification.
- If the 20% of public parking were removed, would that allow you to remove significant height from this project? I'm trying to equate the added public benefit with the building being taller than allowed by zoning.
- The bonus heights, there are the criteria in the UDD that spell out the things they can do. You need one of one set and more than one of the other set. They're saying they need this height and we are meeting this particular criteria to do it. Does that make sense? They need this parking programmatically but also for the additional height, programmatically also I assume.
- I'm trying to understand whether that additional public parking benefit is driving an additional level of parking, or how close to one level of parking does just that 20% equal? I imagine the public parking is about a two-thirds of one of those levels of parking.
    - The building height that's allowed without bonus stories is 147-feet; with the bonus stories we are at 155, but we're only 8'10", with 15-stories, over what is allowed at 12 stories. The office building we had approved was 11 stories and was actually taller than this hotel building. The floor-to-floor heights are much closer together with the hotel building.
- Right now you're indicating 17-27% will be dedicated to public parking. Can you describe how that benefit will be guaranteed? Is it just as simple as the new hotel knowing how many stalls they will need, reserving those, and 17-21% as unmarked?

    - I don't have the specifics of the parking structure management, but in our experience the least you can reserve the better the parking can function to its maximum potential.
- The setback noted in the staff memo looks like it's short 8-inches. Have you had a chance to review or address that?
    - We hadn't realized we were missing that 15-feet. The front of the building is mostly lobby space so we have the ability to move those.
- With regard to the hotel lobby, there's a lot of activity when the weather is nice at Hotel Indigo. Will there be a public bar or anything like that, something that would help animate that outdoor space when the weather is nice?
    - Yes, the Tempo brand has a requirement for a café/coffee shop/bar incorporated into the lobby. It will serve breakfast, lunch, and light snacks, and it will turn into a bar at night. We do have some outdoor seating there. There's a reveal in the exterior design, a canopy, we were going to identify that as an entry into the café.
- That will really help the pedestrian experience.
- Could you walk us through the design and proportions of glazing and how that glass works with the functional interior of the rooms? Maybe describe is there something below the glass, how does that glass function with the room?
    - For the most part the windows for the hotel rooms sit maybe 12 inches above the floor and approximately 4inches from the ceiling, mostly located in the center of the rooms. There is a demising wall where the brick piers are. There will be black out shades and sheer curtains.
- Could you describe the lighting strategy on that pedestrian corridor from Main Street to E Washington?
    - We did not produce the lighting plans, but the conversations we had talked about illumination in that landscape terrace area. What exact fixtures and photometrics looks we are not sure at this point.
- Because of driveways and the other site constraints, to create a healthy pedestrian environment there's not a whole lot of things you could do other than making sure you have good lighting through that corridor.
    - The sidewalk is intentionally placed up against the building, so we have this vertical element closer to the sidewalk enough that you could put fixtures on the building that could illuminate that walking path.
- Maybe ultimately this is a staff level thing, I was just curious whether it was the building ambience, streetlights, bollards, or some other fixture.
    - We could run the photometrics on that sidewalk and add fixtures if we don't feel it is offering enough light to make it more inviting.
- Yes, even if it is a few bollards, something to make you feel like you belong in that space. Something to look at.
    - There are a couple of fixtures proposed in that landscape area. There are two fixtures per linear planting bed identified, cast aluminum housing, uplight on the base of the trees that washes that canopy. That is currently what is proposed, but we would be willing to consider other fixtures.
- I'm glad they're there, if for some reason uplighting and dark sky compliance are an issue I would hope they would stay there in some form or another.
- The roof terrace trees, you have this lovely pergola over a seating area with cherry trees, is that pergola tall enough for those or if there is a conflict in height there?
    - I don't think those are the types proposed under the planters. It gets really challenging to show these as prototypes. The planters under the pergola are Type 08, although it looks like it is very similar to 02, it has a tiger eyes staghorn sumac. No, you're right, that is a mistake, it should have the sumac like planter 09 to be lower and more shrubby. Planter 08 should match 09.
- Okay, glad we caught that. Planter prototype 01, the smoke tree cotinus, culturally seems like a good fit but I'm wondering if you've used these before? Often times they get spread out and don't have a nice tight form like the renderings.
    - We were trying to pick plants that didn't grow perfectly. I haven't used it on a rooftop before, sometimes the way we figure out whether something will work is through research, feeling like the environment could be right and a good fit, and then we try it.
- Yeah, I was asking out of curiosity.

- Very happy to see some of those industrial details return to the project because they are what sets the project apart are the details with the steel and the brick. Earlier you called them steel "belts," what was the thought behind removing those?
    - We felt like they were a bit heavy on the previous design and looked like they were placed over the building, we wanted them more integrated and to get more of a vertical proportion to some of the windows. Turn them into smaller dark precast bands.
- There is still one right above the trellis, is that intentional?
    - Yes, on the sixth floor, and at the top of the building. The two that were bisecting through the middle are the ones we reduced.
- That's a subjective design point. We talked last time about the base, middle and crown/cap. In my opinion the previous cap is a little stronger design element because it's not a simple change of material in the same plane. There's no articulation other than the change in color. It does a lot to give a bit more semblance of a cap. There is a change in plane that should set it off and I think you went too simply in trying to simplify it. It's a huge progression in the project to bring those design elements back.
- I had questions too. Overall, these are a wonderful assortment of planters up there, but I'm always concerned when I see this variety in different types of planters. Is there something left behind for the hotel, do you guys prepare a little maintenance guide or anything to guide the upkeep of these? My fear is once you step out of the picture it's hit or miss as to whether these will be maintained in a way that does justice to the design you put into it.
    - Typically, we aren't involved on the back end, but not necessarily specific to this project or the planters. We would love more involvement on the back end in terms of offering that maintenance guidelines. It's not currently in the purview of our work. We all see beautifully designed landscapes that don't come to fruition. I will say there's more skin in the game on this particular project and client, given the public access to this space, to keep those looking really nice. Maybe that influences some of the maintenance and upkeep but ultimately, we are not responsible for creating maintenance guidelines.
- That makes me sad. Whoever is going to be managing this I hope you're listening and taking into account if you're putting that money into designing this environment you need to pay attention to the back end of it. Most of the plant selections will work fine here, a couple of them will try to run rough shot over their neighbors, which is why there needs to be annual maintenance standards. The cotinus, the smoke bush, anything that's growing underneath a pergola, that's a plant that is typically cut back hard on a regular basis, some people basically cut it to the ground every year. The front planters, everybody is going minimalist on plant selections there, you have just two varieties of grass and a flowering perennial, could you address what goes into that?
    - The inspiration was to try to tie the landscape design to the Hotel Indigo, which has grasses. We wanted to pull that plant (sesleria) into this design and tie the two properties together, but to introduce something else as well (amsonia). We wanted to highlight the articulation in the walls.
- The staff report notes overall building design, potential HVAC louvers and wall packs. Can you address where those are?
    - The rooms will be heated and cooled with a pump system so major equipment is located in the parking garage behind the louvers. There's a 4" x 4" recessed louver that fits between the bricks on the brick portion of the building for each room. There are no large number of louvers associated with any of the hotel rooms.
- Current practice is to not locate on street-facing facades but you're saying they're indented?
- He is saying that they do not exist, it' s a central system along the southwest facade, those are for fresh air.
- The public parking as the bonus story element, will future plans for signage indicate wayfinding to public parking?
    - Yes, we can do that; provide some signage for public parking.
- A monument sign or other and where would it be?
    - We haven't started to look at where that would go. It could be monument, or a sign above the entrance to the parking.
- You don't go down what looks like a private road to get to public parking.

- We should make findings on minimizing blank walls including east and west elevations.
    - That portion is parking floors, reusing the metal panels. It's a temporary wall since that is a future site where parking would be extended, and those walls would be covered or go away entirely. It's not actually blank, its perforated, corrugated metal in different colors and actually has a lot of interest.
- The top floor element, I agree that the previous version is more interesting.
- The entrance to the parking, is parking controlled with gates?
    - Yes.
- So, it's public paid parking?
    - Correct.
- On one corner you've got a steel column up, but all the others are ground level, all the corners are masonry except for that one. Why that one and not every corner to make more of a base from the top?
    - That was sort of the main corner that intersected with E Washington and became the main entry for the hotel, we were highlighting that corner as being special.
- I love that detail, so I started looking for it elsewhere.
    - We do like the brick for durability elsewhere.

The Commission discussed the following:

- Bonus story elements be granted on (i). I would ask that any motion include a requirement for some substantial development on design of the drop-off area. They mentioned what to do with that blank wall that you face as you drive in and I trust they will do that, but it needs to be completed before there is final sign off on the project.
- You said this is for final, but it's initial or final, correct?
- We could grant initial; they are requesting final.
- I think it's ready for initial, I'm not ready to sign on to some of the stuff that's missing: the through block as it faces the drop-off area, even if the pedestrian characteristics of that midblock area are not counting toward the bonus stories, I would still like to see more detailing on that.
- The parking situation does give me pause. The development has chosen to not go into the ground with subterranean parking. While I feel the design is very nice, the way they've treated the parking, I like it. It complicates things with this bonus story situation, clearly this building is going to be much taller than its surrounding neighbors with these three additional stories. The fact that this parking situation is adding to that, I think there's a message being sent with this design that Madison continues to be an auto-oriented community, we need a ton of cars and a place to put them. So much so that this parking garage is a dramatic part of this design. Cars are all over this design just from an expression standpoint. A big missed opportunity for other ways to get bonus stories, like a strong sustainability strategy. I personally would support maybe an Initial Approval but would be strongly interested in hearing about a more strategy to handle these bonus stories.
- I'm going to have to disagree. The program for this project is a hotel, the likelihood of people coming with a car is strong, wanting to visit the city. I also appreciate how it is tied into an existing parking structure, which is the reason for not going underground. They are trying to capitalize on the design of the block.
- Every project in this part of the city is above grade, it's a swamp. Versus the other side of the Square where you see a lot of underground parking. Some of them do wrap units in front of the ramp, you're not going to find many projects going underground in this part of town.
- I was going to say pretty much exactly what Wendy said.

A motion was made by Asad, seconded by Klehr, for Initial Approval with conditions.

Discussion on the motion:

- We've seen this a lot, there's been significant improvement, I would have made a Final Approval motion with some conditions, but it seems like there's hesitation from other Commissioners. When they come back, they will have those items addressed and shown for less hesitation for Final Approval.
- I'm a little turned around on the height issue. Its not a matter of asking for additional stories, it's asking for 8-feet?
- No, even though the building is going up another 8 or 9 feet, the Zoning Code talks about stories. Height and stories.
- (Secretary) From a zoning perspective it's one thing, but UDD 8 has its own set of height requirements and limitations, and that's what the bonus stories apply to, our section of the code, as well as any sort of justification or public benefit being provided for that additional height. Doug is right in how he's reading the code, it's one of the elements from lower case 'i' or multiple elements from 'ii' in the code. Public parking alone could be used to request the bonus height. We've seen things plucked from multiple things on the lists. In this case it's a little bit of an anomaly because we don't see a lot of Planned Multi Use Sites of this scale in the district. There are things that will be shared with the entire development as a whole. What is planned for future development is not something we can consider. In terms of the future Wisconsin Telephone Building, additional parking ramp development or connectivity to the future residential building and screening those blank wall, we can't use those to justify height on this building.
- Are you saying a future building, if they make the criteria for additional height on this proposal that any building on the entire block gets bonus stories automatically?
- (Secretary) No, they will have to come forward with things that are for that specific development. The Hotel Indigo, WHEDA will also mention public parking, but Doug is mentioning parking for the benefit of the entire development. He is providing a large percentage of green roof. The fact that they're not using P-tack units for a hotel is huge, using a central HVAC system goes far for energy efficiency as well as design. So, they have things that are specific to this development as well as beneficial to the whole. I anticipate that we will continue to see some of those things echoed in future development proposals in the planned multi-use site, but also things that are specific to individual developments as well.
- While I really appreciate many aspects of this project, I won't be able to vote on this initial. I strongly want us to think about if this is an amenity.
- I hear Russell's comments, I don't feel so strongly that I would vote no but that's why I'm really pushing this public space be really elevated. That's the benefit for most people in the area. Maybe it's more than just a drive aisle, it really ought to be. All that circulation space could be looked at on their end to step that up.
- Isn't most of that drive completed?
- (Secretary) I believe it is. The through connection exists today. Whether or not the landscaping is installed I'm not sure but there is a sidewalk through here.
- With regard to the motion, do we need clarification on the Commission's conditions or findings for Final Approval?
- (Secretary) I have a motion for Initial Approval, it was mentioned that a finding that the bonus story can be met, but I don't think we are able to make that the finding just yet, but we can edit as we go. For now, I have a motion for Initial Approval with the following findings and conditions, first that the UDC finds that the bonus stories be granted on the use of element (i) which is the parking for multiple sites and a substantial portion being provided for public use; the applicant shall provide additional details related to the design for the through block connection, including landscape lighting, pavement type, as well as how the building adjacent to it relates to the pathway; the setback shall be adjusted to meet code requirements (15-foot minimum/maximum); the lighting shall be reviews to meet code requirements, including those related to light levels and cutoff requirements; the applicant shall provide additional design details of the drop-off area, including the design and detail of the blank wall as you enter the drop-off area; Planter Type 08 shall be revised to reflect the correct planting to match Planter Type 09; the top of the building shall be refined.

- Those sound like all of the items that I had in my notes. So those would be the conditions that would need to be met for Final Approval upon return and the official finding of the bonus story allowance.
- To clarify, the motion is the bonus story should be met and now the official finding will be maybe at the next round. Just want to make sure what we are saying...are we saying it could be met, but not yet?
- (Secretary) Since we are doing an Initial Approval, we should not make the finding just yet.
- Initial Approval says the height of the building is okay.
- (Secretary) Yes, but I think instead of making the finding on bonus story criteria we can say that the UDC finds that the height is acceptable and additional information is needed in order to make findings on the bonus story criteria.
- So that the criteria can be met.
- (Secretary) Yes, the UDC finds that the bonus story criteria can be met on the use of element (i) which is the parking for multiple sites and a substantial portion being provided for public use.
- For the shared parking portion what additional information do we need?
- (Secretary) I would like to see the letter of intent updated to provide some of more of the logistics you and the applicant team had talked about with regard to the existing infrastructure. Having more information about the operational characteristics of how that parking is going to work would be great to have in there.
- Yeah, certainly something that you would need before final sign-off anyway.
- Wondering if we could revisit, we talked about that north end of the building that looks like it might be capped off, the parking levels with reused metal screening from the existing parking ramp because it might eventually continue on into the planned future building there. I'm really tired of looking at those metal screenings, we thought it was going to be temporary facing E Washington, we're on our third version of a building to fill up the space and block the view of those. They served their purpose and it's fine to make a temporary end wall here but how long are we going to be looking at that? Below that we have a blank wall. Could something else be considered? A façade or something temporary, low cost that could possibly not have it look like an abbreviated chopped off end of the building which is otherwise so attractive, coming up E Washington you're looking at this not a great base to the building, perhaps some innovated ideas could be considered by the applicants to deal with that particular end of the building, we would love to see something like that.
- It's going to be more of a pocket now than this huge wall of panels that is sort of set back from E Washington now that the hotel is going to be there, so it's going to be more perpendicular to your view than parallel. I also think they have put some brick pilasters and a brick base to it so that it is not as I guess as flat as that portion of the parking ramp that we are tired of seeing. I would say that given the quality of the development and the projects on this site to date, I tend to give the developer benefit of the doubt that there will be a building there to close up that concern and not necessarily penalize them by having to do a lot of expensive construction that's going to be torn down in a few years.
- No, nothing that involves a lot of cost. I would even be amenable to doing plantings along there if the surface could support it. Then when the building is built next to that they could be removed. Maybe I am just not looking at this the right way, it just lacks what we always talk about, not having exposed blank expanses. Maybe even if they weren't going to start a new building right away some grass seed or sod, make a greenspace in the meantime. Everybody wants to plant that Karl Foerster reed grass, something like that, a tall ornamental grass, a double row to soften up the base would be an easy, cheap fix to soften it up. I just keep thinking every time I drive by there and see that ugly expanse of what's been sitting there the last couple of years, anything that can soften the edges would be a good thing.
- I agree with you, given the fact this is in a pocket condition, it is temporary, there are plans for future building, this is high level quality and design. I am fine with the condition they're proposing.
- (Secretary) I want to make sure Christian isn't proposing a friendly amendment to the motion that we have.
- I was but I'm sensing people don't feel the same way. I will withdraw it.
- (Secretary) The cornice detail, reinstate the previous?
- No, I don't want to design it for them. I would hope they would look at it, but I don't want to force them to.
- (Secretary) So we can say consideration should be given to [refining the cornice detail at the top of the building]?

- Yes.

Action

On a motion by Asad, seconded by Klehr, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL**. The motion for Initial Approval passed with the following findings and conditions:

- The UDC finds that the criteria for bonus stories can be met using element 'i' for parking for multiple sites and a substantial portion being provided for public parking. The applicant shall provide additional information related to the functional characteristics of the parking and existing infrastructure, including signage, pay stations, entrance/exit, etc.
- The applicant shall provide additional details related to the design of the through-block connection, including landscape, lighting, paving, as well as how the building adjacent to it relates to the pathway.
- The setback shall be adjusted to meet code requirements (15-foot minimum/maximum).
- The lighting shall be revised to meet code requirements, including those related to light levels and cutoff requirements.
- The applicant shall provide additional design details of the drop-off area, including the design and detail of the blank wall as you enter the drop-off area.
- Planter Type 08 shall be revised to reflect the correct planting to match Planter Type 09 (re: staghorn sumac instead of cherry tree).
- Consideration should be given to refining the design at the top of the building to provide more of a positive termination at the top of the building (i.e., reinstate previous design details).

The motion was passed on a vote of (6-1-1) with Asad, Klehr, Rummel, von Below, Bernau, and Harper voting yes; Knudson voting no; and Goodhart non-voting.