



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 223-225 W Gilman Street
Application Type: Second Informational Presentation
Building Addition in the Urban Mixed Use (UMX) District
UDC will be an Approving Body
Legistar File ID #: [81421](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Hamid Noughani, Assemblage Architects | Mendel Matusof, Rohr Family Chabad at the University of Wisconsin

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the demolition of an existing building to construct a three-story addition to an existing building to accommodate expanded programming and event space, including study areas, offices, library, classrooms and rooftop event space. Underground parking will be provided.

Staff notes that the overall project scale and scope appear to have been decreased from the initial Informational Presentation proposal, which included a four-story addition.

Approval Standards: The Urban Design Commission (“UDC”) will be an **approving body** on this development request when a formal application comes forward. Pursuant to Section 28.076(4)(b):

All new buildings and additions that are less than twenty-thousand (20,000) square feet and are not approved pursuant to (a) above, as well as all major exterior alterations to any building shall be approved by the Urban Design Commission based on the design standards in Sec. [28.071\(3\)](#), if applicable, and the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines.

Related Zoning Information: The project is zoned Urban Mixed Use (UMX) zoning district. Staff notes that the design-related zoning standards as outlined in MGO 28.071 are not applicable to this project as the floor area of the proposed addition does not exceed 50% of that of the existing building. In addition, the proposed use is considered an “Institutional Building.” As such, the “Door and Window Openings” standards also do not apply.

The applicant is advised that changes to the floor area of the proposed addition may change the applicability of the design-related zoning standards, which will be confirmed with the Zoning Administrator as part of their formal review.

Design-Related Plan Recommendations: The project site is located within the [Downtown Plan](#) planning area, within the State Street neighborhood. As such, development on the project site is subject to the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#). The Plan recommendations for development in this neighborhood generally speak to maintaining and enhancing the district as a premier designation for a variety of commercial and civic uses, the unique sense of place, the diverse and vibrant mix of uses, encouraging human-scale developments that actively engage the street, and creating pedestrian-oriented streetscapes. As noted in the Downtown Plan, Downtown Height Map, the maximum recommended building height is six stories. As proposed the addition is under the maximum height.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff requests that the UDC review the revised development proposal and provide feedback regarding the aforementioned standards related to the items noted below.

- **Building Massing and Composition.** Staff notes that the development proposal has been reduced in mass and scale from the previous Informational Presentation which was a full four-story addition. The current proposal reflects a three-story addition, with the third story being significantly setback from the street to limit its visibility. Staff believes that the transition between the existing building and proposed addition, as well as the surrounding uses, has been improved with the reduction of mass and scale. With that, it remains important that the proposed addition visually ties into the existing building composition in order to create a cohesive and/or complementary architectural expression.

The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines generally speak to the overall massing and proportions of architectural components (top, middle, base), balancing vertical/horizontal lines and datum, size and rhythm of windows and doors, creating positive termination at the top of the building, etc.

Staff requests the UDC provide feedback on the overall building composition, and mass and scale of the proposed addition.

- **Street Orientation.** Staff believes that there have been positive design efforts made in how the proposed addition meets the street, as well as it pertains to addressing the UDC's previous Informational Presentation comments, including those related to the building setback and existing pedestrian environment, incorporating additional glazing, utilizing a transparent garage door, and meeting or exceeding minimum setback requirements for the garage door (10 feet), as well as minimizing the opening size.

As noted in the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, *"The street level of a building should be designed with active uses and architecture that engages the street/sidewalk in a contextually appropriate manner and integrates the building architecture and the landscape architecture."*

Staff requests the UDC provide feedback related to the design of the street-facing elevation.

- **Building Materials.** The building material palette, both existing and proposed, appear to be comprised of masonry, terracotta panels and shading devices, and glass. The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines generally speak to utilizing high quality materials and four-sided architecture, as well as using a palette that is simple. Staff requests that the Commission provides feedback on the proposed material palette and composition, especially as it relates to creating a cohesive building design.

Summary of UDC Initial Informational Presentation Comments and Discussion

As a reference, the Commission's discussion and comments from the January 10, 2024, initial Informational Presentation are provided below.

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

- It's a difficult design problem with a tight site, a very old building, an addition you did. Generally speaking, it works well but I would ask for a couple of considerations. What works well are the building material palette and design elements you repeat at the bookends. A couple of concerns, it's lower than

what zoning would allow, but what about the context, a bit broader than the building and bookends. When you get more straight on you really see it's quite a different building type than what's on the site. To understand more of what's happening left and right of that. It also looks from an urban design perspective, seems like it's pulled forward a little bit more. Am I reading that correctly?

- It's as far out as the existing porch and canopy. I don't think it's much further out. It is pulled out. There's a really tall building and church across the street, we should have done a better job of expressing that.
- You might want to consider, we're responsible for speaking to urban design where we get some of those setbacks to align and speak to the street. Just having somewhat of a blank pedestrian experience, again you're trying to squeeze in a lot of programs so I understand, but you're trying to integrate a graphic element into the façade, but we're supposed to be activating our street level, that's one of our tasks so I would ask for that consideration.
 - One of the challenges, there is a garage door setback of 15-feet. If we can somehow adjust that and allow more space for the plaza, is that within your purview?
- (Secretary) That's a zoning requirement and even the Zoning Administrator can't modify that, it's required and shall be met.
- This is a fun project. Could you speak to the existing building that will be in the middle, is that existing building of any historical significance for you, emotional significance, and was it studied to look at adding another floor on top of that building or trying to create this added program you need but on some of the existing footprints of the existing buildings you have?
 - Yes, it's a contributing structure beloved by the neighborhood. You don't touch that one, it took literally about a year and a half to get the adjacent building touched and that was deteriorated. One of the challenges is that the existing Chabad will continue to operate while we build this new building. The design of this addition is one of the more complicated ones. He'll continue to live there except for a very short time we're connecting the buildings. We considered touching that building about 10 years ago but at this point in time, I don't think that would be an easy path forward.
- Just wanted to know what considerations there were. I think this is a fun design and there's a lot of really exciting things happening here. One thing that does stick out is the exposure of that stair in the corner on Gilman Street. I don't see where else that could go but it's prominent and I don't know how active that stair would be. I'd ask if that's really the best place for that stair and is the design and experience of that stair really what you want.
 - That's a worthy discussion. We looked at 37 different options for this floor plan. This is the one place that can link three different program requirements together and provide the egress it needs. And the openness of it, we had it more as a more solid element and it was recommended to make it more exposed, which I think is improved.
- The easement along the edge of the park. As we know from the attempts to build something on the other edge of this park, people are pretty sensitive to what goes on in this space. There are some very mature trees along that property line, I'm wondering if there are concerns about that cantilevered overhang on that side of the building stretching out over that easement and its possible effect on those trees. How much modest pruning would be deemed acceptable to allow the building to reach out across the driveway and presumably into the canopy of those trees?
 - We would like to preserve them, they're an incredible amenity to the site. We contacted Forestry and have a plan to prune them, we raised the cantilever to just above the cone of the tree. In our model we don't think we will negatively affect those trees but we will monitor as we go along.
- Regarding the front of the building, staff has concerns about what the face of the building on Gilman Street involves. It seems like there's an office above the garage door, is that an opportunity for a window to active the front of the building? And could you explain more about the signage that's out front? I'm unclear if it's a surface application, is there something behind that, what is the nature of that?

- The Chabad emblem is a menorah, it was recommended to us to open up the stairs so people can see inside. As a gesture we thought we could introduce a menorah into the mullions where the window can become a symbol, not an exact replica. That is not a make or break kind of situation. Right above the garage door, it sits back 15-feet which is a concern because it creates an opportunity for trash to gather. That space above the door is mechanical space and the office starts on the lower left hand side where the first glazing is. And the mechanical space is just above the elevator shaft. The core elevator is essentially a freight elevator, that's what the Fire Department wants, not just a regular elevator.
- I appreciate that's a window behind the menorah. It's a nice looking project, I think the addition does a pretty nice job of mimicking the earlier addition on the other side even with the rather strange Tudor building in the middle.
 - I think its transparency will contribute to how the park is perceived, as more of a lantern over the park. It's a very prominent building, you can see it from all four sides.
- There was a conversation about the setback. What is the 10'8" at the garage door?
 - That's a zoning requirement. The fact that it needs to be setback from the property line is a requirement, non-negotiable.
- I'm doing a Google street search, 225 W Gilman is in the National Register District. Have you looked at trying to relocate it or some way of saving this building that adds to our cultural heritage? Seeing if there's a viable way to save it by moving it.
 - If you can find somebody who wants it I'm happy to talk the Rabbi into donating it.
- We could ask Planning staff to help you advertise the building is available.
 - If you can find a buyer, I can sweet talk the Rabbi into donating that.
- One of our early agenda items was someone who took two buildings and moved them.
 - It's a little tall for that kind of move, mainly if the building is taller than most of the traffic lights it becomes an issue; most of the buildings they move are below that. You can cut it horizontally and move it in two sections, but that is a remarkably difficult task. If you find a buyer willing to move it, I can manage to talk to the Rabbi about that.
- (Secretary) There are a couple of design standards related to garages: shall have a clear maximum height of 16-feet and maximum width of 22-feet, and garage doors or gates shall be located a minimum of 10-feet from the front property line.
- With regard to all the solid masonry, we're really looking at 20-feet from the sidewalk up to where you have windows. I would encourage you to rethink the composition and bring the glassiness of that stair all the way down. Maybe some of that overhang could be pushed back and have that glassy stair come all the way down, that might help the transition between the old house and this new much larger building. With regard to the opening for the garage door, maybe that hole in the wall could be a big opening instead of this little tunnel. A way to lighten up that corner and make the building feel less like it's teetering on the base because it's so huge for the site. It's so big it's almost teetering on its foundation; this gets wider as it goes up. You've got so much program and I wonder if it's too much program for the site, but a glassy stair would help that transition and the requirements for more pedestrian enhancement and experience there.
 - I'm really grateful. Let me ask you a question, I wonder if by making the base a little lighter if it would, that might relieve some concerns about that projection onto the street.
- You don't necessarily need the projection above where the stair tower is. Maybe the part that pushes out over the sidewalk above the garage door entry comes down further and screens that blank brick wall up there. You don't necessarily have to worry about repeating this vertical element in the original addition and then it can be two more slender elements versus one big box teetering on a narrow foundation.