



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 418-446 W Washington Avenue/413-417 W Mifflin Street

Application Type: Alder Referral for an Advisory Recommendation to the Plan Commission for a New Multi-Family Residential Building
UDC is an Advisory Body

Legistar File ID #: [84628](#)

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: CRG Acquisition, LLC | Michael Hanley, The Lamar Johnson Collaborative

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the construction of a six-story, 163-unit multi-family residential building with a single level of underground parking.

Project Schedule:

- UDC received an Informational Presentation on August 14, 2024.
- The Plan Commission is scheduled to review this proposal at their November 18, 2024, meeting (Legistar File IDs [85416](#), and [85418](#)).
- The Common Council is scheduled to review the proposed Certified Survey Map at their November 26, 2024, meeting (Legistar File ID [85420](#)).

Standards: The UDC is an **advisory body** on this request. This application is before the UDC at the request of Alder Verveer, who is specifically requesting the UDC's feedback on the overall design, composition, and consistency with those recommendations in the Mifflandia Plan.

Section 33.24(4)(a) MGO states that the Urban Design Commission ("UDC") shall make recommendations to the City Plan Commission, Common Council and any other concerned commission on all matters referred or assigned to it under the provision of this ordinance and other City ordinances. Additionally, for a conditional use, Section 28.183 5(a)6 states that the applicant may choose to go to the UDC for an advisory recommendation if advised by the Plan Commission Secretary or District Alder.

As a reference, the Plan Commission will consider the following Conditional Use Standard (MGO 28.183(6)a.8) when evaluating this request:

*"When applying the above standards to any new construction of a building or an addition to an existing building the Plan Commission shall find that **the project creates an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with the existing or intended character of the area and the statement of purpose for the zoning district.** In order to find that this standard is met, the Plan Commission may require the applicant to submit plans to the Urban Design Commission for comment and recommendation." (Emphasis Added)*

The UDC has been requested to make an advisory recommendation to the Plan Commission because of an alder referral. The Commission's action should be structured as a singular action of the body. The UDC should not refer this item back to itself and should not structure their recommendation using a two-part Initial/Final Approval framework.

Adopted Plans: The project site is located in the [Downtown Plan](#) (2012) planning area, in the both the West Washington and Mifflin neighborhood areas. The Downtown Plan includes various recommendations for each neighborhood area, including those that generally and in summary speak to encouraging flexible building designs to foster a mix of uses, including residential and neighborhood serving commercial uses, establishing minimum and maximum building heights, encouraging shared access to limit vehicular/pedestrian conflicts, maintaining and enhancing the unique character of West Washington Avenue as a gateway “grand boulevard,” as well as preparing a detailed concept plan and design standards to guide redevelopment. It is this recommendation that was the impetus for the Mifflandia Plan, which outlines more specific design-related recommendations for new development in this area.

The Downtown Plan Height Map recommends building heights of four stories, plus two bonus stories possible along W Washington Avenue if there is a noticeable stepback, and up to six stories along Mifflin Street. As proposed the development **appears to be consistent** with the height limitations.

The project site is also located in the [Mifflandia Plan](#) (2019) planning area. Similar to the Downtown Plan, the Mifflandia Plan recommends the project site for residential or mixed-use development with maximum height of four stories with an allowance for two additional stories provided that development meets the required stepback above the fourth floor (30 feet from the building face on W Washington Avenue and 15 feet from W Mifflin Street). The plan notes that building setbacks shall closely align with the existing and historic setbacks for the neighborhood (20 feet on W Washington Avenue and 15 feet on W Mifflin Street) with the encroachments of stoops, porches, etc. being encouraged.

In addition to recommendations noted above regarding setbacks, stepbacks and height, the Mifflandia Plan also enumerates specific urban design and other recommendations, which are intended to help guide new development in the neighborhood and which were intended to serve as the foundation for the creation of a new Urban Design District. While a new design district has not been formally created, the recommendations contained in the Mifflandia Plan still apply, including those that speak to:

- Stepbacks noting that minimum stepbacks (ten feet) above four stories on non-street facing sides,

Staff again notes that the proposed development **does not appear** to be consistent with the recommendation for a 10-foot stepback for masses above four stories on non-street facing sides. As noted in the applicant’s Letter of Intent articulation (i.e., changes in plane) has been incorporated into areas where materials change with the intent of further breaking down mass, minimizing the appearance of sheer walls, and maintaining consistency with the intent of the Mifflandia Plan. The Commission did note in their Informational Presentation comments that incorporating building façade stepbacks is not always practical or desirable and that there are other ways to incorporate articulation.

- Setbacks, including a minimum side yard setback to maintain building separate and rhythm (five feet), as well as 20 feet from W Washington Avenue and 15 feet from W Mifflin Street,

Staff notes that the proposed development **appears to comply** with the W Mifflin Street setback (15 feet) and the W Washington setback (20 feet), as well as the minimum five-foot side yard setback.

- Building Materials, including prohibiting EIFS, stucco,
- Building Design, including, incorporating relief where materials transition, utilizing complementary simple materials palette, locating active unit entries at the street, designing main building entries as prominent features,
- Building Mass and Scale, including using modulation and articulation to break down mass and scale, as well as

- Guidelines for the transition between public and private spaces, etc.
- Consider the establishment of an alley or “inter-block lane” in the subject block that would parallel W Washington Avenue, running generally through the rear lot lines in this block.

For additional information please refer to pages 15-20 of the Mifflandia Plan.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff recommends that the UDC provide feedback and findings on the development proposal regarding the aforementioned standards and guidelines noted in the Mifflandia Plan and Conditional Use approval standards as it relates to the design considerations noted below.

The UDC has been requested to make an advisory recommendation to the Plan Commission because of an alder referral. The Commission’s action should be structured as a singular action of the body. The UDC should not refer this item back to itself and should not structure their recommendation using a two-part Initial/Final Approval framework.

- **Building Massing.** Although the façade design continues to evolve, the overall mass of the building appears to be substantially similar to earlier concepts. As previously noted, among Planning staff’s primary concerns that have been raised with the development team throughout this process is the establishment of a “through-lot” building that runs through the entirety of the block, with frontages on both W Washington Avenue and W Mifflin Street. Staff has previously communicated that a two-building solution that better reflected the surrounding context and mass and scale was preferable as it would be more consistent with the surrounding development pattern and the other larger buildings that have recently been approved in the surrounding blocks. Considering the building’s large size, consideration should be given to how the resulting mass/scale fits into the surrounding context and rhythm along the street.

Overall, the UDC’s Informational Presentation comments included some concerns regarding the appropriateness of the building mass and scale, especially as it related to the through-block connectivity, mass and scale of the surrounding context, as well as other recommendations in the Mifflandia Plan. Overall, the Commission noted that the setbacks and stepbacks are not the issue, it is the character of the street, especially along W Mifflin Street; the pattern of development.

Staff requests the UDC’s feedback and findings on the overall building mass and scale.

- **Building Design and Composition.** Staff notes that several positive site layout and design-related modifications have been made since the Informational Presentation, including shifting the site access from W Washington Avenue to W Mifflin Street. Staff requests the UDC’s feedback and findings on the overall building design and composition giving consideration to the following:
 - The design and composition of the three masses along W Washington Avenue, including as it relates to their overall bulk and scale,
 - The design of the upper stories and their integration into the overall building design and composition,
 - The design of the W Mifflin Street entryway and elevation as it relates to the surrounding context, and
 - Minimizing the blank wall expanse on the east elevation.

In summary, and generally, the UDC’s Informational Presentation comments related to building design and composition are as noted below:

- The Commission expressed concerns for the design of the three masses along W Washington Avenue, noting that there should be a rhythm/repetition, or complementary design shared between them,
 - Consideration should be given to refining the design of the upper levels so that they are more integrated into the overall building design and composition,
 - The individual at-grade unit entries should be refined to have a more residential appearance,
 - A more human scale, richer level of detailing needs to be incorporated at the ground level,
 - Consideration should be given to making refinements that recapture the idea of the front porches that are being removed, especially on the Mifflin side of the building, and
 - The design of the above-ground walkway connecting the building masses along W Washington Avenue is of particular interest.
- **Building Materials.** As noted in the Mifflandia Plan recommendations, exterior building materials shall reflect those as allowed by the Zoning Code, except for EIFS and stucco, which are prohibited, and primary building materials, should be limited to three different materials. A proposed, the building material palette is primarily comprised of masonry and fiber cement panels with metal accents. Staff requests the Commission's feedback on the overall building material palette.

As part of the UDC's Information Presentation, the commission noted the overall palette of materials needed to be simplified, and that the "wavy" metal panel should be reconsidered, noting that if a metal panel was used, while texture is acceptable, it should be a gauge metal that did not appear to "oil can".

- **Wall Packs/HVAC Louvers.** Staff notes that while the applicant has previously indicated that wall packs/HVAC louvers will not be used for the residential units. Staff notes, and the applicant is advised that should these be proposed at a later time, it will require additional review and approval.
- **Landscape and Open Spaces.** Consideration should be given to the planting plan and plant selections, especially in terms of creating an enhanced pedestrian environment, as well as creating a transition between public and private spaces. Staff notes that the emphasis here should be on plantings on the subject site as the right-of-way is not within the UDC's jurisdiction. Special consideration should be given to the "front yards" along W Mifflin Street and W Washington Avenue, the through-block pedestrian pathway, screening the blank wall on the east elevation, as well as screening, including the "dog run" area.

Staff requests the UDC's feedback and findings related to the proposed landscape plan, including those related to softening hardscape areas, incorporating elements to clearly define public/private space, complement architectural features, and providing year-round color, texture and screening where needed, all of which were noted in the UDC Informational Presentation comments.

Staff notes that there are several amenities noted on the plans for which details were not provided, including the "prefabricated aluminum trellis", the "aluminum fence", and the "custom prefabricated metal fence with access controlled gate" on the south elevation (W Washington Avenue), which appears to be opaque and over five feet in height.

- **Lighting.** Staff notes, and the applicant is advised, that refinements to the lighting plan will be required to meet MGO 29.36 requirements, including those related to uniformity ratio and average light levels. Further review and approval will be completed as part of the Site Plan Review process.

Summary of Informational Presentation Discussion and Comments

As a reference, the Commission's discussion and comments from the August 14, 2024, Informational Presentation are provided below.

Summary of Commission Discussion and Questions:

Commissioner Asad discussed materiality, noting there is too much going on. While the massing and overall concept is nice, the wings and each different material are unnecessary. The art on soffits and under canopies gets very busy, very fast. It's still a big building no matter what you wrap it in, but it is going in a nice direction. The metal shingles shouldn't "wave" like they are shown, they should be a gauge of metal that does not look like oil canning. The materials need to be revisited.

The Secretary noted that the Mifflandia Plan recommends setbacks and setbacks on W Washington and W Mifflin Streets, as well as side yards. The setback along W Mifflin Street and the setbacks along the side yards are not being addressed according to the Mifflandia Plan. The intent of the plan is to break down mass and scale, and have sensitivity to context. The Secretary acknowledged that while there is room for flexibility in how those are applied, that is the ultimate goal. The Alder's concerns are with conformance with the Mifflandia Plan.

The Commission discussed the driveway, noting a reduction of curb cuts from five to one on W Washington Avenue is good. The idea of moving the driveway to W Mifflin Street would not be fair to those who live on Mifflin to bear the brunt of all that traffic.

The Commission noted that the upper floors are all exactly the same – consider revising to be more integrated design-wise. In addition, the individual entryways – the entrance to any apartment looking like storefronts – they look commercial. The ground floor seems commercial looking.

The Commission commented that trying to break up lower levels to look like different buildings is the right direction, but it's undercut by having the 5th and 6th floors being exactly the same, making it look really obvious that floors 1-4 are a façade for essential sameness to what's behind it.

The Commission inquired about future development along W Washington Avenue and how this dog leg onto W Mifflin Street seems odd and might be regrettable in the future. The applicant noted the increased density of housing, and that similar scale projects are in the works nearby. When asked why this couldn't be two buildings, the applicant noted that access and service reasons. Separation means providing redundant services in both buildings which is a much larger challenge.

Appreciation was noted for taking the time to put the interest of art on the soffit.

Handsome building. Green roof area is a nice touch. Have both green and occupiable roofs, as balconies stepping out to the green roofs. Additional stormwater management will be provided along W Washington Avenue as well.

Commissioner Klehr appreciated the break down of massing, hoping finer details will be more developed. She remarked that new buildings on this street have a lovely human scale and detailing which results in a nice pedestrian experience. So far, this is a little cold and plain. Moments of detailing are just as important. This façade [W Washington Avenue] warrants a really deep look at interest and detailing. She encouraged the applicant to use blue wavy panels, while being careful it doesn't look like oil canning; the shadows that could cast, or snow being caught would add much interest. The three distinct buildings on W Washington with the back unified don't work, consider all blue, all white in back and all red brick on the right.

The development team was encouraged to think about how people will receive deliveries, drop-off, loading.

Commissioner Bernau appreciated protecting the W Washington street trees, as well as the subtraction of driveways on W Washington, and does not have an issue with one curb cut remaining. The building creates voids and recesses with courtyards and passageways that have light and shadow. However, he is not convinced that the Mifflin Street building being connected to the rest is a benefit to the community, the City, or either street. Understanding how it aids in the project proposal, in terms of benefitting the community 20-30 years from now, he is not convinced. The perspectives interior to the site are nice, however, some of that is missing along the W Washington streetscape and feels reverse to what we're used to seeing; the streetscape feels backyard-esque. It is not truly taking advantage of this iconic corridor leading up to the Capitol Square. There is opportunity to capture the idea of the porch that is being replaced.

The Commission inquired about Zoning requirements and how those are different from the Mifflandia Plan. The Secretary responded that by virtue of meeting Mifflandia you meet the zoning requirements, and that the portion of the building setback is measured from its closest element from the street, which would be the large columns that are set at 10-feet.

Commissioner Asad remarked that side setbacks are a structural nightmare and not always practical. He asked about the Commission approving something that does not necessarily meet all those expectations. The Secretary reminded the Commission of the Mifflandia Plan intent, which is clearly to break down mass and scale, and to be contextually sensitive, while reiterating there is flexibility in how those guidelines are applied. The Commission will need to make findings that the overall development is generally consistent with the Mifflandia Plan recommendations and intent.

The Commission inquired about the sustainability measures that will be incorporated into the development other than the green roofs. The applicant noted all electric appliances, energy star appliances, high efficiency windows, efficient mechanical system, the development does not have window wall packs, the development will use high efficiency heating/cooling.

The Mifflin Street elevation has too many materials; there is a lot going on for such a small area. W Washington rendering, the smaller two masses should be more similar. The connection piece in the background could be more of a pop of color versus fade away – none of this is going to fade away – it's a big building. The buildings fronts should be highlighted more with more landscape.

Further discussion by the Commission focused on how the proposal aligns with the Mifflandia Plan:

- The Commission noted that they will need to make findings on the appropriateness of building mass and scale. The Mifflandia Plan talks about an alley or inter-block lane. This goes against the idea of an open air space. We're going to have to think hard about making a recommendation that this project is consistent in its mass and scale with that plan. There is no rear setback because it's a thru-lot now. The applicant is going to have to look hard at how that appears from the breezeways and how high that connection is off the ground.
- The Commission expressed concerns with the massing diagram reflecting three different masses along W Washington Avenue. There should be a more cohesive design along W Washington. Concerns about CBA #4. Maybe two masses should be considered instead of three (AA and C or BB and C). As an example, the new 500 Block apartment is really well done, and also goes to comments about the special details. The walk-up elevations are problematic.
- The Commission noted that the setbacks are really not the issue, it's the character of the street, especially along W Mifflin. The pattern of development is with front porch encroachments. This is the opposite of that. This also reads as a commercial space versus a residential space. It gets back to the

pattern of development. This is not working and is inconsistent with the pattern of development on Mifflin Street.

- The Commission generally noted that they are supportive of the curb cut on W Washington.

Overall, the commission acknowledged that there is a lot of potential on this project. Thank you for volunteering to come and listen to all these comments and questions. The biggest thing is mass and scale related to whether it is one building or a two-building solution. Conform architecturally to the Mifflandia Plan.