



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 501 E Washington Avenue

Application Type: Informational Presentation for a New Residential Building in Urban Design District 4
UDC will be an Approving and Advisory Body

Legistar File ID #: [87243](#)

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Nick Orthmann, Bear Development, LLC | The WMC Foundation, Inc.

Project Description: The applicant is proposing a seven-story residential building containing 223 dwelling units.

Approval Standards: Upon formal submittal, the UDC will be both an **approving and advisory body** on this request. The site is located in Urban Design District 4 (“UDD 4”), which makes the Urban Design Commission an approving body related to the design standards and guidelines for that district in [MGO Section 33.24\(11\)](#).

In addition, per MGO Section 28.076(4)(c), *“All new buildings and additions greater than 20,000 square feet or that have more than four stories in UMX zoning shall obtain conditional use approval from the Plan Commission following review by the Urban Design Commission for conformity to the design standards in Section 28.071(3) of the Zoning Code and the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#) and report its findings to the Plan Commission.”*

Zoning Related Information: The project site is zoned Urban Mixed Use (UMX). The Zoning Code outlines design standards that are applicable to all new buildings in both the UMX and DC zoning districts ([MGO 28.071](#)), including, but not limited to those related to building entrance orientation, façade articulation, height, fenestration, and materials. Staff notes that while the UDC is tasked with evaluating the development proposal for general consistency with the design-related standards in the Zoning Code, ultimately, the Zoning Administrator will determine compliance.

As noted in the Downtown Height Map, the maximum height allowed for the project site is eight stories/116 feet. As noted in the Zoning Code, buildings must meet both the maximum number of stories and the maximum height. As proposed, while an accurate height in feet was not indicated on the elevation drawings, the development **appears to be consistent** with the maximum height limitations at eight stories S Blair Street.

Design-Related Plan Recommendations: The project site is located within the [Downtown Plan](#) planning area, within the Downtown Core subarea. As such, development on the project site is subject to the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#). The Plan recommendations for development in this area generally speak to encouraging the highest intensity of development in this area and encouraging a mix of uses that will help to retain the area’s vibrancy.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff recommends that the UDC provide feedback on the development proposal regarding the aforementioned standards as it relates to the design considerations noted below.

- **Building Design and Composition.** The project site is located at the intersection of S Franklin and E Washington Avenue. Due to the site’s topography, prominence, and scale of the proposed building and

surrounding context, it is believed all four facades will be highly visible. Staff notes that the Downtown Plan also identifies East Washington Avenue as a “Premier Corridor” as one of eight major streets that frame views to and from the Capitol.

UDD 4 Building Design guidelines and requirements generally speak to designing with a sensitivity to context, avoiding large unbroken facades, utilizing four-sided architecture, etc. The building design guidelines also speak that the architecture of new in-fill buildings are compatible with adjacent buildings.

In addition, the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines speak to utilizing building modulation and articulation to distinguish architectural components (top, middle, base), the appropriateness of setbacks/stepbacks to minimize perceived mass and scale, balancing proportions and horizontal and vertical datums with design details, including windows/window openings and incorporating articulation in transitions between materials, utilizing a strong architectural corner element at street corners, creating positive termination at the top of the building, and utilizing an enhanced level of design and detailing at the pedestrian level, etc.

Staff requests that the UDC provide feedback on the overall building design and composition, including as it relates to the building design incorporating a strong corner element, and utilizing a richer level of design details at the pedestrian level along E Washington Avenue and S Franklin Street, especially as it relates to minimizing blank walls and the design and detailing of the individual walk-up units and integration of the garage door.

Staff also requests feedback regarding the portion of the building that extends towards Blair Street, specifically as it relates to mass/scale and design, especially given the site topography. This portion of the proposed building will wrap the recently approved corner development, for which staff has concerns related to the relationship between the two development sites. Staff requests UDC’s feedback on possible massing changes or façade detailing that could improve this relationship and the internal/external appearance of this portion of the proposed building. Consideration should be given to some of the other large-scale buildings that have been reviewed by UDC in the recent past, which have utilized design strategies to create the appearance of multiple buildings versus one large building. As a large-scale development, staff requests UDC’s comments about whether this portion of the building should be designed as a distinct element or maintain consistency with the other parts of the building.

Staff notes that limited information was provided as it relates to the southeast and internal elevations, which are adjacent to existing development. Although these elevations are adjacent to the back and side yards of the adjacent development, consideration should be given to the design and detailing of any blank walls expanses, especially given the grade change across the site which may result in the potential for them to be a full story, or more.

- **Materials.** The exterior material palette is anticipated to primarily be comprised of fiber cement or fiber cement and/or metal panel, including corrugated metal panel, and a slate-colored masonry. UDD 4 Building Design guidelines and requirements state that exterior materials shall be low maintenance and harmonious with those used on other buildings in the area. In addition, 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. Among the most significant concerns is the use of standing seam vertical metal siding at this highly prominent location, identified as a premier corridor in adopted plans.

Staff requests the Commission provide feedback related to the proposed material palette, especially as it relates to the surrounding context, utilizing a consistent level of design detailing across all elevations, including those walls that are adjacent to existing development, incorporating articulation in material

transitions, and the appropriateness and number of materials/colors, especially the corrugated metal panel, etc.

- **Wall Packs.** While not indicated on the elevations, wall pack units are commonly associated with residential units. It has been the current practice to locate wall packs and their associated louvers so that they are not located on street-facing or on highly visible facades, although they have been approved in some situations when found to be well integrated into the façade's design. Staff requests the Commission's comments on the potential use wall packs and the preferred location, as well as it relates to the design detailing and their overall integration with architecture.
- **Long Views.** Due to the prominence of this site near the Capitol Building, very careful consideration should be given to the building's overall design impact relative to the surrounding context and viewsheds, especially as to how the upper levels are viewed from longer distances. This should be considered in concert with the aforementioned comments to create a strong corner element, minimizing the blank wall expanses.