PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

June 11, 2025

PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: **139 W Wilson Street**

Application Type: Informational Presentation - New Multi-Family Residential Building in UMX Zoning
UDC will be an Advisory Body

Legistar File ID #: 88479

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Doug Pahl, Aro Eberle Architects | Torque Companies

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the demolition of an existing multi-family building and construction of a 16-story, 320-unit building. The proposal includes three parking stalls for the resident on-demand vehicle-sharing program, at grade open space, community lounge, and fitness center.

Project Background: A similar development proposal was reviewed at the January 24, 2024, UDC meeting. At that time, the UDC made an advisory recommendation to the Plan Commission for denial of the proposal finding that the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines and some of the related Conditional Use Standards related to building design, lighting, and site circulation were not met. Please refer to Legistar File ID 70108 for additional information.

Generally, and in summary, the Urban Design Commission's previous design-related comments noted the following design considerations:

- Incorporating more diversity in the material palette, consider changing the concrete panel size or reducing the amount of articulation in the panel itself, incorporating more of the faux wood panel,
- increase the size of the windows, voids, punches, maybe larger openings, but fewer of them to break-up the heaviness of the panels,
- Create a cohesive building middle and distinguishable building top,
- Incorporate more dynamism in the design of the lakeside of the building, and
- Applying the same materials and level of detailing across all elevations.

The Plan Commission reviewed the proposal and UDC's recommendation at their August 26, 2024, meeting, and at the request of the applicant, referred the item back to the Urban Design Commission to address additional design modifications.

Approval Standards: The Urban Design Commission (UDC) is an **advisory** body on this request. Section 28.076(b) includes the related design review requirements which state that: "*All new buildings that are greater than twenty-thousand (20,000) square feet or that have more than four stories shall obtain Conditional Use approval. In addition, the UDC shall review such projects for conformity to the design standards in Sec. 28.071(3) and the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines and shall report its findings to the Plan Commission*."

Related Zoning 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 the Capital View Preservation limit. At this time, at is unclear at this time if the elevator and stair tower overrun project into the Capitol View Preservation Limit. Staff notes that while height information is provided in the application materials, ultimately the Zoning Administrator will confirm that the building height, including the height of any proposed projections into the Capital View Height Preservation Limitation, is accurate.

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 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 horizonal and vertical datums with design details, including windows/window openings and incorporating articulation in transitions between materials, creating positive termination at the top of the building, and utilizing an enhanced level of design and detailing at the pedestrian level, etc.

  The overall proposed building design is relatively simple in nature with minimal façade modulation and articulation outside of that exhibited by the primary building material (profiled faceted acid etched concrete panels). Staff note that while design details and articulation appear to be reflected in the elevation drawings, including changes in plane between flat and articulated materials, horizontal banding, window systems, etc., the profile and/or articulation or materiality of these details is not fully understood based on the information provided.

  Staff note that the revised plans appear to create a top element, with the material change on the north and south elevations on the upper two stories. While this treatment wraps the corner, it does not continue along the longer side elevations, which staff anticipate will be visible. Staff request the UDC's feedback on whether having a more cohesive treatment at the top of the building, i.e., extending the two-story expression around the entirety of the building's upper two floors would be beneficial. Staff further request the UDC's feedback on whether there is enough differentiation between these materials, as proposed.

  Staff requests the Commission's feedback on the overall building design and composition as it relates to the design guidelines, as well as the Commission's previous design-related comments noted above, particularly those that speak to incorporating material transitions, size and rhythm of windows, creating distinguishable building components and positive termination at the top of the building, as well as a more dynamic design along the lakeside of the building, and increasing the presence of other materials, etc.

- **Materials.** The Downtown Urban Design Guidelines generally speak to utilizing high quality materials, four-sided architecture, as well as using a palette that is simple, provides visual interest, and that is context appropriate. As noted in the elevation drawings, the material palette is comprised of primarily an articulated acid etched concrete panels system and a faux wood aluminum accent panel. While a darker

base material and flat panel material on the top two floors of the building is evident on the elevations, these materials are not labeled.

Staff requests the Commission's feedback on the overall material palette.

- **Longviews.** Due to the prominence of this site from Lake Monona and John Nolen Drive, consideration should be given to the composition of the highly visible rear façade as part of the overall cityscape. In addition, the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines generally speak to buildings being designed to reflect the prominence of their locations, including giving consideration to roof forms, incorporating relief from the building façade or visual interest in the building form as it meets the sky, etc. Staff requests the Commission's feedback on the overall design and detailing of the upper floors of the building, as well as the lakeside of the building.

- **Wall Packs.** As noted on the elevation drawings, HVAC louvers are included on both the longer east/west elevations. 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 feedback on the use of wall packs, as well as it relates to the design detailing and their overall integration with architecture.