# PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

**July 30, 2025**

PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

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| **Project Address:** | **3357-3375 E Washington Avenue and 922-930 N Fair Oaks Avenue** |
| **Application Type:** | New Mixed-Use Multi-Family Building in Urban Design District 5<br>**UDC is an Approving Body** |
| **Legistar File ID #:** | 87242 |
| **Prepared By:** | Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary |

## Background Information

**Applicant | Contact:** Kevin Burow, Knothe & Bruce Architects | Travis Fauchald, Volker Development, Inc.

**Project Description:** The applicant is proposing the construction of two buildings; a 5-story, mixed-use multi-family building with 171 residential units, 3,300 square-feet of ground floor commercial space which will be served by 114 underground parking stalls, and a two-story, six-unit townhome building with individual private garages.

Staff notes that, as part of the development proposal, the applicant is actively seeking to rezone those portions of the project site that are zoned Traditional Residential-Varied 1 (TR-V1) to Commercial Corridor-Transitional (CC-T).

In addition, staff note that since the Informational Presentation, the development proposal has been expanded to include two adjacent parcels and a second, townhome, building.

**Project Schedule:**

- The UDC received an Informational Presentation on March 5, 2025.
- The Plan Commission is scheduled to review this project on August 11, 2025.
- The Common Council is scheduled to review this project (rezoning and CSM) on September 2, 2025.

**Approval Standards:** The UDC is an **approving body** on this request. The site is located in Urban Design District 5 ("UDD 5"), which requires that the Urban Design Commission review the proposed project using the design standards and guidelines for that district in MGO Section 33.24(12).

**Zoning Related Information:** The project site is zoned Commercial Corridor-Transitional (CC-T). Within the mixed-use and commercial zoning districts there are general provisions related to building and site design that are intended to foster high-quality development. These standards will be in addition to the UDD 5 standards and are outlined in Section 28.060, including those that speak to building and entrance orientation, façade articulation, door and window openings, and building materials.

Staff note that ultimately, the Zoning Administrator will determine compliance with the Zoning Code requirements.

**Adopted Plan Recommendations:** The project site is located in the Northeast Area Plan planning area, which recommends the project site for Community Mixed Use (CMU) land uses. As noted in the plan, development within the CMU land use category is intended to provide a more intensive mix of residential, commercial and civic uses, including mixed use buildings that range in height from 2-6 stories. Generally, development in these areas should be walkable and well-connected to surrounding development, transit oriented with buildings placed close to the sidewalks, and where structured and on-street parking are encouraged, and where surface parking shall be screened from view. The plan further identifies the corner of E Washington Avenue and N Fair Oaks as a

Commercial Core, which are areas where ground floor commercial uses intended to provide goods and services to the surrounding residential development.

## Summary of Design Considerations

Staff recommend that the UDC provides feedback and makes findings on the development proposal related to the UDD 5 standards, especially as it relates to the following design considerations.

- **Building Design, Composition, and Massing.** UDD 5 Building Design guidelines and requirements generally speak to buildings being designed with a sensitivity to context, low maintenance materials that are complementary to those present in the area, utilizing four-sided architecture and limiting large unbroken facades, especially on elevations visible from roadways or other properties.

  Giving consideration to the UDD 5 guidelines and requirements, as well as the Commission's Informational Presentation comments, staff requests UDC provide feedback and make findings on the overall building design and composition as it relates to:

  <u>Building 1 – Mixed-use Building</u>.

  - Building Mass and Scale. Building 1 has long very lengths on both street-facing façades, over 300 feet and 200 feet on East Washington Avenue and N Fair Oaks, respectively. Staff had previously noted concerns regarding the overall building length and scale and raised related questions regarding whether the repetition in the design and detailing were contributing to the perceived length of the building. As such, consideration should be given to breaking down mass and scale and architectural detailing (vertical and horizontal elements)
  - Architectural Corner Element. The project site is located at a flatiron corner at the intersection of E Washington Avenue and N Fair Oaks Avenue, a major multimodal intersection. As such, consideration should be given to the design and detailing for the architectural building corner element and maintaining a strong corner element, and
  - Overall Design. Application of materials and details, including as it relates to providing the same level of detailing across all elevations and the treatment/screening of blank wall expanses, especially those along pedestrian pathways where the grade falls away from the building.

  As part of the Commission's Informational Presentation comments, the Commission noted that consideration should be given to the following:

  - Providing an appropriate transition to the existing neighborhood along N Fair Oaks Avenue, including stepping the massing down, should be explored,
  - Maintaining a strong architectural corner is important,
  - Incorporating the potential for a covered outdoor space at the corner,
  - Further refinements are needed to the design and detailing of individual entries to further break down mass/scale.

  <u>Building 2 – Townhome Building</u>.

  - Overall Design. While Building 2 is internal to the site, consideration should still be given to the overall design and detailing of the building, especially as it relates to not only creating a cohesive, complementary collection of buildings, but also as it relates to creating consistent design aesthetic for those living in and visiting the development. As such, consideration should be given

to screening/minimizing the blank end walls (i.e., adding windows or landscape) and maintaining a similar design aesthetic across all elevations and between buildings.

- **Materials.** UDD 5 "*Building Design*" guidelines and requirements generally speak to utilizing building materials that are low maintenance and that are harmonious with those of adjacent buildings. As indicated on the elevations, the material palette is primarily comprised of composite lap siding and panels and a brick veneer base course.

  Staff requests the UDC provide feedback and make findings on the proposed exterior building materials.

- **Wall Packs.** As part of the Informational Presentation, while the applicant indicated that wall pack units would be located in the individual balcony returns to limit visibility, consideration should still be given to the design and detailing of those elements. Staff requests the Commission's feedback and findings on the design detailing and their overall integration with architecture.

- **Landscaping and Screening.** The UDD 5 guidelines and requirements state that "*Landscaping shall be used for functional as well as decorative purposes, including framing desirable views, screening unattractive features and views, screening different uses from each other, and complementing the architecture of the building*." Consideration should be given to:

  - Providing adequate year-round screening of the surface parking areas*, especially the parking area along E Washington Avenue, which will be highly visible given its proximity to the street, as well as
  - Incorporating a variety of plantings to provide year-round color and texture, especially along pedestrian pathways where the grade falls away from the building, leaving blank walls, and
  - Providing adequate transitions, buffers and screening to the adjacent single-family residential development.

  Staff request the UDC provided feedback and make findings on the landscape planting plan and plant selections.

  *Staff note that the "Hatched Parking Pending Easement Approval" is an offsite improvement that will require separate review and approval.

## Summary of Informational Presentation Discussion and Comments

As a reference, a summary of the Commission's discussion and comments from the March 5, 2025, Informational Presentation are provided below.

Summary of Commission Discussion and Questions:

The Commission was excited about the project and that this end of E Washington Avenue is getting attention and good design. They appreciated the design of this project and the number of affordable units. Regarding the massing, they said that it was a long façade, but there were a lot of strengths in how the applicant was breaking it down. They asked why the building wasn't stepped down as you turn onto Fair Oaks Avenue, which is a residential street where the traffic speed, tone, and scale all change. They pointed out that the adjacent Rise building does a nice job of stepping down. The applicant said they needed to achieve a specific unit density, but if it is deemed to be critical, they can see if there is room to adjust. The Commission said that it is a tricky intersection, but if they were to step down more, they would get into middle housing types that the Northeast Area Plan calls for.

The Commission pointed out that this is across from a BRT stop. Along with the commercial activity, people from the BRT station will need room to maneuver there, so it could be quite a lively corner. They asked if Traffic had reviewed the plans. The applicant said they had, and the original request from Traffic was to have traffic only on Fair Oaks. The neighborhood had concerns about the amount of traffic on Fair Oaks, so this was a compromise to have some traffic access on E Washington. The Commission suggested the surface parking include some parallel or 45-degree parking, so headlights aren't turning into residences to the south.

The Commission noted that the Northeast Area Plan encourages commercial on the first floor, so they hoped there was consideration of more commercial space. We are trying to create walkable communities, so the applicant should consider additional commercial, service type tenants to which people want to walk. They asked if there was any street parking, and the applicant confirmed there was not.

The Commission noted that maintaining a strong architectural corner is important and that the patio space is an opportunity to embrace the transit users consideration should be given to making this space should be larger.

The Commission spoke about breaking up the long lines of the building. They pointed out the dark gray materials on the first 1 ½ stories and asked if there was a way to make it look more individualistic and delineating the private space versus public space with fencing or railings. They also shared concerns about the units with individual entrances on E Washington. The applicant noted that there is some change in elevation as you move west, so there are stairs and railings, but it is a challenge to balance access when you have a strong commercial street.

The Commission thought the design did a decent job of breaking up the massing and giving some relief with materials and recesses, but that further refinement is necessary. They asked about the wall packs and how they will be integrated into the cladding. The applicant said they would be on the recessed balconies.

The Commission said the individual entrances on E Washington help break up the building's massing and asked why they weren't also on the Fair Oaks side of the building. The applicant said it was due to topography and utility easements, but they are working on ways to add them. The Commission suggested they consider the parking lot layout in terms of complete streets and trying to make it feel like less of a parking lot and continuing the pedestrian connectivity internally. They agreed with earlier suggestions about angled or parallel parking. They suggested looking into the pedestrian facilities from E Washington to Fair Oaks and thinking through how pedestrians could have more access.

The Commission thought the applicant did a great job breaking down the façade, and they liked the deep shadows and depth. They suggested including more covered or protected exterior space on the corner to embrace people using the bus and businesses in the building.

The Commission suggested using lighter colors because it is on a residential street with smaller houses. The massing will be a big change, and lighter colors could help with throwing light. They referenced the lighter color of the Rise building. Other commissioners thought the color palette was fine as is.

The Commission referenced comments submitted from the Hawthorne Neighborhood Association and their wanting more opportunities for businesses in the building. The applicant said they did increase the size of the commercial space in response to comments heard at the neighborhood meeting. They want to be careful not to exacerbate any parking challenges and make sure it is a walkable, neighborhood-focused space.