PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

September 17, 2025

PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address:	**53 West Towne Mall**
Application Type:	Planned Multi-Use Site, New Two-Story Commercial Building with Double Drive-Thru **UDC is an Advisory Body**
Legistar File ID #:	89441
Prepared By:	Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Mylena Oliviera, Plaza Street Partners

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the construction of a two-story commercial building with double drive-through on a vacant parcel that is part of an existing Planned Multi-Use Site (West Towne Mall area).

Project Schedule:

- The Plan Commission is scheduled to review this proposal at their October 6, 2025, meeting.

Approval Standards: The UDC is an **advisory body** on this request. Section 28.137(2)(e) of the Zoning Code requires that a planned multi-use site containing more than forty thousand (40,000) square feet of floor area and where twenty-five thousand (25,000) square feet of floor area is designed or intended for retail use or for hotel or motel use, shall require conditional use approval following a *recommendation on the design of any specific proposal by the Urban Design Commission*.

Staff note that while not part of the UDC's purview, a conditional use is required for the proposed use. The Plan Commission is charged with evaluating the proposal for consistency with the conditional use standards, including those that speak generally to design. More specifically, Conditional Use Standard No. 9, which states,

> *"…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."*

Staff believe that that the UDC could reference this standard as part of the Commission's evaluation of the proposal and ultimately the body's recommendation to the Plan Commission.

Adopted Plans: The project site is located in the West Area Plan planning area (the Plan) planning area. The Plan includes design guidelines for the prominent retail and employment destinations, including the West Towne Mall area. Generally, those design guidelines speak to:

- Minimizing setbacks to create a consistent, engaging, and walkable street frontage,
- Incorporating changes in plane where materials transition,
- Minimizing blank walls, incorporating design elements to enhance the visual and pedestrian character of the street,
- Maintaining a positive building orientation to the street by locating main entrances towards the street and locating parking behind the building, and
- Encourage active uses at the ground level, including outdoor patios, dining, awnings, and display windows.

Zoning Related Information: The project site is zoned Regional Mixed Use (RMX). 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 are outlined in Section 28.060, including those that speak to building and entrance orientation, façade articulation, door and window openings, and building materials.

In addition, the project site is located in the Transit Oriented Development Overlay (TOD) zone. New development with the TOD Overlay is subject to the requirements as outlined in MGO 28.104, including those that speak to:

- Maximum principal building setbacks – At least 30% of the primary street facing façade (S Gammon Road) shall be setback no more than 20 feet,
- Entrance orientation – Principal building entrances shall be orientated towards the primary abutting street (S Gammon Road) and be located within the maximum setback (20 feet),
- Minimum number of stories – A minimum of two stories is required for a minimum of 75% of the building footprint, and
- Site standards for automobile infrastructure.

Staff note that ultimately the Zoning Administrator will determine compliance with the Zoning Code requirements. As proposed, the development **appears to meet** the TOD Overlay requirements. A complete Zoning review will be conducted as part of the Site Plan Review process.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff recommend that the UDC provide feedback as it generally relates to the design of the proposed development, including but not limited to site, landscape, building and lighting and make a recommendation to the Plan Commission.

- **Building Design.** Based on the site's corner location at a prominent intersection that serves as the main entrance into the larger West Towne Mall area, all sides of the building will be visible. Given the high level of visibility from the street and adjacent properties, the project site really has multiple "fronts." As such, consideration should be given not only to the building's relationship to the street and placement on the site but also utilizing four-sided architecture and applying the same level of design and detail on all four sides of the building.

  As shown on the building elevations there are blank walls on both the first and second floors and several mechanical louvers shown on the second floor in an open air area intended for mechanical equipment.

  Staff requests the Commission provide feedback and make findings related to the overall building design and composition, especially as it relates to creating one cohesive architectural expression, minimizing blank walls, and whether the finish design and detailing of louvers or an alternative design approach, i.e. spandrel glass would be more viable to ensure consistency in design and integration into the overall building design.

- **Building Materials.** As indicated on the elevations, the material palette is primarily comprised of fiber cement panel siding and metal panel. Staff request the UDC review, provide comment and make findings related to the proposed exterior building materials.

- **Landscape and Screening.** As part of the Commission's review, consideration should be given to providing adequate year-round screening for parking and drive-thru and refuse areas, as well as the softening

hardscape areas and providing buffers between vehicle and pedestrian areas and incorporating a variety of plantings to provide year-round color and texture.

In addition, consideration should also be given to reducing the site paving, including potentially reducing the drive-thru lane widths. Doing so could result in additional landscape opportunities, including along the north and south sides of the site where screening of vehicular uses would be beneficial. Staff note that in coordination with Traffic Engineering staff on a similar site, the drive-thru lanes could be reduced to nine feet.

Staff request the UDC provide comments and make findings with regard to the proposed landscape plan especially as it relates to providing ample year-round screening for vehicle use areas.

- **Lighting.** Staff note and the applicant is advised that additional information is needed to confirm that the proposed lighting is consistent with MGO 29.36, including as it relates to light levels at the property line, average light levels in vehicle use areas (drive driveways and drive thru lanes), and pedestrian and parking areas. In addition, as indicated on the lighting plan and elevation drawings building lighting is proposed, and while several fixture cutsheets were provided it **does not** appear that all are accounted for in the photometrics for the site, including the cylinder light fixtures mounted to the exterior building.

  Staff recommends the UDC address lighting in their formal action, including whether the continued review could be completed administratively.