PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

October 8, 2025

PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

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 **UDC is an Approving Body**
Legistar File ID #:	87242
Prepared By:	Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

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

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the construction of two buildings; a 5-story, mixed-use 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 UDC granted Initial Approval on August 13, 2025.
- The Plan Commission is scheduled to review this project on October 20, 2025.
- The Common Council is scheduled to review this project (rezoning and CSM) on October 28, 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).

As noted above, at the August 13, 2025, meeting, the UDC granted Initial Approval of this item with conditions, including those that generally, and in summary, spoke to:

- Making refinements to the proportions exhibited on the townhome building,
- Providing a section of the townhome development,
- Revising the building along N Fair Oaks to incorporate design elements to reduce the mass and scale and soften the elevation,
- Explore changing the accent material color to be more consistent with the other materials,
- Explore connectivity opportunities between the townhome building and the mixed use building, and
- Add a protective element at the corner for the patio area.

<u>The Commission's subsequent review and continued evaluation of this item is limited to the Initial Approval conditions. It is the role of the UDC to focus only on whether those conditions have been addressed</u>.

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 requests the UDC's continued review and evaluation of this proposal for consistency with the conditions of approval as outlined below. The UDC's role is to ensure that these previously established conditions are met. The UDC cannot waive or change these requirements.

- The townhome building design shall be refined to reflect a better distribution of the proportions between the windows, sills and masonry base with the goal of minimizing the appearance of the parapet wall or space above the second-floor window as much as possible.

  As noted in the applicant's Letter of Intent, the townhome building has been refined to adjust the window placement improving the relationship between the horizontal masonry cap and the window trim. In addition, windows were also added to the end wall elevations.

  Staff believe this condition has been met.

  Staff note and the applicant is advised that the sprinkler room does not appear on the north elevation, which will require plan corrections prior to submitting for Site Plan Review.

- The applicant shall provide a section of the townhome development.

  Staff believe this condition has been met; a section has been included in the submittal materials.

- The building design along N Fair Oaks Avenue shall be revised to incorporate design elements or design techniques to reduce the mass and scale and soften the North Fair Oaks elevation, including but not limited to incorporating stepbacks, articulation in the base, human scale architectural elements, landscape, yard spaces/fences, etc.

  As noted in the Applicant's Letter of Intent and as reflected on the elevation drawings, both the N Fair Oaks and E Washington elevations have been refined to include additional detailing and banding at the

unit entrances and window jambs. In addition, a shallow black-painted steel canopy element has been added to all walk-up entrances, providing additional emphasis.

Staff request the Commission's continued review and evaluation of this condition.

For reference, the Commission's comments and discussion from the Initial Approval are provided in general and summary below:

- Previous comments about the scale of the E Washington Avenue versus N Fair Oaks Avenue were reiterated noting that a better transition to the existing single-family neighborhood should be provided.
- The Commission noted that having the exact same language on E Washington Avenue and N Fair Oaks is troublesome, especially given the differences in intensity.
- The Commission encouraged the development team to think about scale and context.
- Consideration should be given to maintaining a human scale and walkability.
- Consideration should be given to exploring design alternatives that would help break down mass and scale and provide a better transition, including lowering the N Fair Oaks elevation, incorporating design elements that can enhance the pedestrian experience like canopies, things along the brick base, maybe pulling it out could work too, but also recognizing that changing the massing may not be the answer.

- Explore changing the white accent material to be more consistent with other material colors on the building.

  As reflected in the elevation drawings, the accent panel has been changed to black to match the other materials. Staff believe this condition has been met.

- Further explore the connectivity between the townhomes and the residential building, including minimizing parking, increasing landscape, etc.

  The Site and Landscape Plans reflect an overall reduction in the paved area across the site, as well as an increase in the landscape provided on site. In addition, while there appear to be multiple pedestrian connections being shown from the townhome building to Building 2, there are no labels or design details shown that confirm the proposed connections (i.e., signing, striping, paving, etc.), including those details that are noted in the applicant's Letter of Intent, or those indicated in the perspective drawings.

  Staff request the Commission's continued review and evaluation of this condition, including as it relates paving and landscape.

  In addition, staff note that a retaining wall has been added to the site east of the townhome building. Limited information is provided related to this wall, including height and materials. As a new design element, staff recommend the UDC address this element in their formal action.

- Adding a protective element at the corner for the patio area, including a seat wall and/or landscape.

  As reflected in the revised Site and Landscape Plans, a seating wall has been added to the corner patio area, although information related to the height of the wall or the material was not indicated. While staff believe this condition has been met, staff recommend the UDC confirm the wall material and height and address those items in their formal action.

Summary of Initial Approval Discussion and Comments

As a reference, a summary of the Commission's discussion and comments from the August 13, 2025, Initial Approval are provided below.

The Commission discussed the 9' ceiling height in the townhomes, in relation to the parapet height of 25'-8" noting that the proportions seemed off.

The larger apartment building, material palette matches the context very well, it's a simple, nice design. The Commission noted that they would hate to lose those walk-up units on N Fair Oaks.

The Commission reiterated previous comments about the scale of E Washington Avenue versus N Fair Oaks Avenue, and questioned if the applicant looked at lowering this elevation, especially with the addition of new units to provide a better transition to the existing single-family neighborhood. The applicant noted they did discuss it, but noted that the addition of the two properties came at a cost, which needs to be accounted for.

The Commission liked the improvements to the articulation and design. The colors pop and give you the datum both horizontally and vertically. The Commission inquired about the white panel color and how that was chosen. The applicant responded that they were concerned about the heaviness of the gray palette, the clean freshness of the white was intentional to give more articulation and contrast.

The Commission commented that the proportion of parapet on the townhome building should be looked at. There is no exterior breathing room between the sill of the window and the stone cap of the masonry on the first floor, with so much siding above it. Play with the proportions and sized of the punches, it needs a little bit more study.

The Commission noted that changing the white accent panel color to black or dark gray to make the other colors pop more.

The Commission commented that if the three walk-up units are not feasible along N Fair Oaks Avenue due to footing and foundation locations there could be significant redesign of those entries.

Commissioner McLean commented that the glass box at the front entry seems out of place and not well integrated into the overall design.

The Commission asked for an aerial view of the neighborhood. This is a high traffic, commercial area, that changes quickly at N Fair Oaks, where further down it's all individual family dwellings and a school, at a much different scale. There is more opportunity to relate to that scale, it's surprising that this building has a very strong presence on E Washington and continues the same language on N Fair Oaks, it doesn't need to or maybe shouldn't. The Commission noted that having the exact same language on E Washington Avenue and N Fair Oaks is troublesome, especially given the differences in intensity.

The Commission encouraged the development team to think about scale and context. Families love this neighborhood, one of the biggest goals is to keep it human scale and walkable. The language on N Fair Oaks is not as successful as it is on E Washington; it is not doing a very successful job of transitioning from high traffic corridors to residential scale. The townhomes seem disconnected from everything else, that could be helped with paving or connecting sidewalks. This is a big site, maybe it could be more unified, looking at it from a pedestrian experience. The step down for one window bay's worth on N Fair Oaks, which does not seem sufficient enough to provide an appropriate transition.

Commissioner Asad asked the Commission to consider if this multi-family project, zoned appropriate for x amount of stories, taking into account future plans of the neighborhood, should drop dramatically in height to relate to a transition zone because a single-family unit is next to the project? Commissioner Klehr responded yes, and this firm did it successfully across the street. This one is longer and not broken down as much, she questioned the appropriateness, and how we go about transitioning into neighborhoods and the precedent it sets.

The Commission commented that the step down isn't as efficient, and doesn't work as well as we think it does. It's still a big, long building. Across the street examples work, but the unit mix and density count, we can't necessarily say it should be the same. This is a very good project, there are things that can enhance the pedestrian experience like canopies, things along the brick base, maybe pulling it out could work too, but don't know that changing the massing dramatically is the answer as this point. Something about the white is really stark, maybe a light gray, the contrast is foreign to everything else that is going on.

The Commission noted that if the white is changed to black or gray, it would tie together with the glass box in the front entry.

Action

On a motion by Asad, seconded by Mbilinyi, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL**, with the following findings and conditions:

- The townhome building design shall be refined to reflect a better distribution of the proportions between the windows, sills and masonry base with the goal of minimizing the appearance of the parapet wall or space above the second-floor window as much as possible.
- The applicant shall provide a section of the townhome development.
- The building design along N Fair Oaks Avenue shall be revised to incorporate design elements or design techniques to reduce the mass and scale and soften the North Fair Oaks elevation, including but not limited to incorporating stepbacks, articulation in the base, human scale architectural elements, landscape, yard spaces/fences, etc.
- Explore changing the white accent material to be more consistent with other material colors on the building.
- Further explore the connectivity between the townhomes and the residential building, including minimizing parking, increasing landscape, etc.
- Adding a protective element at the corner for the patio area, including a seat wall and/or landscape.

The motion was passed on a unanimous vote of (5-0).