URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION MEETING REPORT December 17, 2025

Agenda Item #: 4

Project Title: 33 W Johnson Street (formerly 200 Wisconsin Avenue) - New Hotel in Urban Mixed-Use (UMX). (District 4)

Legistar File ID #: 90072

Members Present: Shane Bernau, Chair; Rafeeq Asad, Anina Mbilinyi, Nicholas Hellrood, Davy Mayer

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Summary

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At its meeting of December 17, 2025, the Urban Design Commission made an advisory motion to the Plan Commission to **APPROVE** a new hotel located at 33 W Johnson Street. Registered and speaking in support were Andy Laufenberg, Michael Salerno, Kevin Yeska, and Doug Hursh. Registered in support and available to answer questions were Matt Saunders, and Jim Webb. Registered in support but not wishing to speak was Nicholas Davies.

Summary of Commission Discussion and Questions:

The Commission appreciated the tree protection on Wisconsin Avenue, and inquired about the landscape on the Johnson and Dayton Street frontages and how landscape is being accommodated. The applicant noted they are in discussions with Madison Metro for a bus boarding platform on Johnson Street, and silva cells will be used. Dayton Street will have the same condition, but there is a grass terrace there as well.

The Commission confirmed that there is currently no activity on the other half of the block. The floor plans seemed to have a parking connection on the lower level. The lower level is intended to only show that the floor plates align between the two.

The Commission acknowledged that the green roof is a positive, as well as the façade articulation, and the shadows in the material detailing. The Commission asked if there was a reason that the masonry stopped where it does. The applicant replied that the goal was to create a playful pattern by stopping and starting the masonry and metal panel, to create visual interest for the exterior that is not necessarily related to the interior.

The Commission noted it is best practice to show how changes have been made, and that they were not seeing how some of their previous comments were being addressed, especially with regard to the big things like materials and how they fit in with the context, the addition of a curb cut where it specifically doesn't allow one, as well as how the building corners have been activated more. Those things haven't changed and they are not consistent with the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines. Are there other entries, and how are they being highlighted or articulated at the corners? The applicant noted that the material palette is a red brick, a direct response to the Madison College building. It is a strong and durable material that will prolong the lifespan of the building. Metal panel was used, with sawtooth brick piers to add modern flair and a lighter, more contemporary feeling. With regard to the corners, they are strong and do a good job anchoring the site; eroding them and creating a more porous texture would detract from the arrival point, taking away from the hierarchy erodes that use and intent.

The Commission noted that the added specialty design moves in the application of the materials made the building design better, but that the building corners could still be stronger.

The Commission inquired about louvers on street facing façades and how they are articulated and integrated into the overall design. The applicant responded that louvers are articulated similarly to the other openings and vocabulary that already exists on the Johnson and Dayton Street façades. There are no louvers for the hotel rooms, only exhaust for the kitchen and parking garage. The back alley side is all louvers to account for garage ventilation.

The Commission asked about the planter material, if it was precast, and if so, were alternative materials explored? The Commission noted that there is an opportunity to enhance the planters more. The applicant responded that they are still exploring other options, but that poured in place with stone veneer would take up too much room, and corten steel would not work well with the architecture – they are looking for a slim profile and a Wausau Tile product, something similar to the precedent imagery provided – exposed aggregate, small finishes on those walls could be special. Ultimately, the Commission noted that the precast may be a better match to the materials on the building and is more durable.

The Commission inquired about the bus stop and bench, if that is the same material as the building. The applicant noted it would be a similar finish to that of the bronze metal panel on the building.

The Commission asked about the historic arch and if any alternatives to integrating it back into this part of the site or architecture were explored. The applicant stated that it feels foreign to this architecture. The location was shown as an exercise to see where it could be placed elsewhere on the site, and they have been working with the "Friends of the Arch" group as well. An alternative location may be pursued altogether, they are still working to explore locations. The Commission noted that the arch does not seem to be shown in the right place, but that the project site also may not be the right location given its style and design.

The Commission appreciated higher ceiling heights on the ground floor, and inquired about any horizontal shading and an energy study. The applicant replied that the individual hotel rooms will have black out shades, but that horizontal shades don't work great in the other locations. Dayton is already heavily shaded by the Concourse Hotel. They have not done an energy study.

The Commission confirmed that all the base planters being shown in the renderings are accommodated in the landscape plan. The applicant acknowledged that they were. In addition, the Commission noted that if an encroachment into the existing easement cannot be accommodated, those will have to move back at least one foot. The Commission noted that utilizing a similar material to the architectural base material would tie the planters well into the building.

The Commission asked why the drop-off cannot be located on Dayton Street to mimic the Concourse directly across the street. Having it on Wisconsin Avenue is a direct contradiction to the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines. The Commission noted that Johnson Street does not seem like a good fit, but that Dayton Street had potential, or that loading could not occur in the street on Wisconsin Avenue. The applicant responded without this drop-off on Wisconsin they couldn't have two entrances at either of the other streets; a single curb cut would use too much floor space in the building which would put back of house elements towards more active streets, and the proposed site plan resulted in a better overall design. They looked at vehicular drop off on Johnson or Dayton Streets, but there is not enough space. They have it designed with as minimal an impact as possible on Wisconsin Avenue, they are saving trees for minimum disturbance.

The Commission discussed not being fully convinced, without a true analysis, that a drop-off sequence on Dayton Street isn't a better design. This is hard because it goes against the one document the Commission uses to evaluate the project.

The Commission talked about other downtown hotels and their drop-off sequences, noting the AC Hotel, Embassy Suites at Judge Doyle Square, and the Hyatt on W Washington Avenue.

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The Commission liked the drop-off sequence, it is good design in terms of sequencing, but the entries need more highlighting. Consideration should be given to more active seating areas at the entries.

The Commission questioned not framing the ceiling in the drop-off area, noting the piers stop at an odd location; consideration should be given to framing that ceiling.

The Commission noted that tree preservation is very important on Wisconsin Avenue. Having a drop-off in the terrace is a non-starter because it would impact the trees. This design can push boundaries. This location on Wisconsin Avenue makes the most sense for the drop-off area. Madison is changing and growing, it might be time to reevaluate some of our documents.

The Commission liked the materials, the symmetrical massing and asymmetrical use of materials, it is an interesting building. Framing the two-story larger elements makes it look more substantial than small, it has a monumental feel.

Action

On a motion by Asad, seconded by Mayer, the Urban Design Commission made an advisory motion to the Plan Commission to **APPROVE,** with the following conditions and findings:

- The bus stop design and materials shall be a similar material to the building (bronze metal).
- Louvers shall fit within the context of the design and existing rhythm of openings.
- Finding that the activation of the meeting spaces and tall windows provide an enhanced design at the pedestrian level, along with landscape, a separate, clear pedestrian pathway, maintenance of the trees on Wisconsin Avenue, while not meeting the letter of the guidelines, do maintain the intent of the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines that speak to site access and circulation.
- The Commission noted that if the arch should become integrated as a part of the proposed development, additional review and approval should be undertaken to evaluate how it is integrated in and consistent with the site plan, landscape, and building.

The motion was passed on a unanimous vote of (4-0).

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