

AGENDA # 9

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

PRESENTED: August 7, 2013

TITLE: 425 West Washington Avenue – Mixed-Unit Development in the UMX District Known as “The Washington Plaza.” 4th Ald. Dist. (29495)

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Alan J. Martin, Secretary

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: August 7, 2013

ID NUMBER:

Members present were: Richard Slayton, Acting Chair; Dawn O’Kroley, Melissa Huggins, Tom DeChant and Cliff Goodhart.

*Wagner and Lufler recused themselves on this item.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of August 7, 2013, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL** of a mixed-use development in the UMX District located at 425 West Washington Avenue. Appearing on behalf of the item were John Sutton, Michael May, representing the Bassett District, Capitol Neighborhoods Steering Committee; and Rosemary Lee. Appearing in support and available to answer questions was Erik Minton. Sutton presented changes to the development to make the building more contemporary, focusing on materials with a strong cast stone base and vertical elements for the stairs in a wheat color. The windows will be a dark bronze with metal shingle in the recessed areas of the building in a weathered zinc. The windows are fixed over awning to be more contemporary with forty of the fifty apartments having their own recessed outdoor space. The decks will be all anodized metal with flower boxes in the same bronze as the railing. Many of the trees on the site are in bad condition and will come down, with some remaining along the western edge where there is more of a setback; new trees will be planted. Planter areas will be displayed in the front of the building with seasonal vegetation. There is a major recess of the building on the far side that brings the carport for the entrance back and diminishes the elevation for a symmetrical façade for the entry with more focus on the main entry. The lighting will be fairly simple with fixtures in service areas and on each deck with frosted glass and downcast lighting. The same larger fixture will be on both sides of the canopy. The building setback is approximately 19-feet. In order to achieve the parking counts they want (two levels) they are asking for a bonus fifth floor, which creates a potential for a rooftop terrace and green roof. Two elevators are also proposed for the total of seven stories.

Michael May spoke in support, noting their five page advisory statement, with nine distinct items they want the Commission to consider. The project is asking for a variance for the rear yard setback and this is the template project under the 2012 Downtown Plan for West Washington Avenue and will set the standard. The Steering Committee does not feel the design is at a truly exceptional level in terms of earning the bonus story. The Committee is adamant that the terrace and the two trees within are protected during construction.

Rosemary Lee spoke in support of the project as a neighborhood resident. She noted that no TIF money is being requested. The physician's office and the Capitol Fitness space will be highly utilized and employ many people, and there will be an on-site manager in residence.

Staff noted that a Planning Division report was prepared but not made available for hand-out at the meeting. It was also noted that applicants are encouraged as much as possible to develop under zoning designations within the new code and stay away from PDs. Any comments relative to design will be forwarded to the Plan Commission.

In response to how he incorporated the Commission's concerns from their last review of the project, Sutton noted that cast stone lintels will put a lid on the commercial areas to distinguish them from the rest of the building, the central curio for the entry will be all cast stone for more entry focus, more masonry has been added to the back of the building, the potential fifth floor is stepped back, and mechanicals will include two condensers but will not be visible on the roof.

Comments and questions from the Commission were as follows:

- The building architecture does not pop. It seems very sober and mundane, I think it's the fenestration.
- Without drawings showing context it's very difficult to move forward with initial approval, particularly because your setback on West Washington, compared to other properties (particularly towards the Capitol), they may be holding the setback line with their porches, but the built mass is 8-feet back. With a built mass, especially this rigid and serious I really think it needs to push back.
- The height issue, your neighbor to the other side would make an argument for height being appropriate, but without seeing that it's hard to make a case for you.
- Interior and exterior, you have a lot of fully enclosed bedrooms without windows, I'm curious if staff will be commenting on that.
 - We've had discussions about that. Erik will tell you those are his most popular apartments.
- Generally speaking the mixed-use with the exception of setbacks, the volume seems comfortable for the site.
- Taking into account staff's requests, can we give it initial approval?
 - To bulk, mass, height, stepback.

The comments that I'm hearing are how do we give this a little more life, which is something we can do at the final.

If we set the building back further how does that effect the front elevations?

- Need to look at articulation of the building façade, not comfortable with front setback but volume seems appropriate to the site.
- The site plan submitted does not meet the neighboring setbacks. It's substantially forward and the built planters are going to add another edge. I think it needs to be pushed back; needs to meet building mass of adjacent buildings.
- I agree with the comments about the heaviness. It doesn't appear as a mixed-use building as much as an office building. I see some interesting volumes that I think you could take to your advantage in the design of this building.
- What is the iconic piece on this design?
- I think pieces coming down to the ground might help make this more dynamic.
 - I agree. I made the comment about the heavy, rusticated base. It still seems very fortress-like.

ACTION:

On a motion by Huggins, seconded by DeChant, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL**. The motion was passed on a vote of (5-1) with O’Kroley voting no. The motion required address of moving the building back, resolve of the “bland” appearance of the building’s façade and to make the West Washington Avenue’s elevation’s upper façade more iconic.

After the Commission acts on an application, individual Commissioners rate the overall design on a scale of 1 to 10, including any changes required by the Commission. The ratings are for information only. They are not used to decide whether the project should be approved. The scale is 1 = complete failure; 2 = critically bad; 3 = very poor; 4 = poor; 5 = fair; 6 = good; 7 = very good; 8 = excellent; 9 = superior; and 10 = outstanding. The overall ratings for this project are 6 and 6.

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION PROJECT RATING FOR: 425 West Washington Avenue

	Site Plan	Architecture	Landscape Plan	Site Amenities, Lighting, Etc.	Signs	Circulation (Pedestrian, Vehicular)	Urban Context	Overall Rating
Member Ratings	6	6	5	-	-	-	6	6
	5	5	6	7	7	7	7	6
	6	5	6	-	-	-	-	-

General Comments:

- Design seems austere given mixed-use program.
- Not distinguished, especially West Washington façade. Very important site – deserves better design.