

## ADVISORY STATEMENT II

Bassett District Steering Committee  
Review of 425 W. Washington Development  
Resubmittal to the Urban Design Commission, September 11, 2013

### Introduction

The Bassett District Steering Committee previously submitted an Advisory Statement on the original application for this proposal, and an August 28 Resubmittal to UDC. The architect and steering committee met again September 4th to review project changes. The committee believes that the comments made in its original statement remain pertinent to the consideration of this proposal. This second Advisory Statement is a supplement to that document focused on the issues raised at the August 7 and 28 UDC meetings that the applicant has attempted to address.

### Zoning

Rather than using a Planned Development, the application is now requesting a zoning change to UMX. The change appears to be driven by the proposed commercial occupancies. As noted in our prior report we believe changing the zoning code to allow for additional conditional uses under the current DR2 zoning is a preferable approach.

City Staff has noted that preserving the broad front yard setbacks along W. Washington is an important aspect of maintaining the character of these blocks. The revised application moves the building closer to the rear lot line resulting in a rear yard setback that appears to be less than 15'. Ironically, the proposal is now inconsistent with the UMX requirement for a maximum front yard setback of 10'.

Again this demonstrates that playing with the zoning for the parcel is not the appropriate means to allow for the proposed commercial uses.

### Architecture and Building Height

The September 4th meeting provided a proposal that made further refinements to the building's design which added some strength and more detail to the structure. The committee feels that the design has progressed significantly from the original, but that is not the standard for considering the extra story. The steering committee does not believe that the proposal meets the requirements of the four specific standards to allow for an additional story noted in the staff report, specifically items a. and b.

- a. "the mass and height is compatible with the surrounding ... area including; scale, mass, rhythm and setbacks."

The proposal does not meet the setback requirements of either the current DR2 zoning of the current site and surrounding properties or the proposed UMX zoning. Further changing the zoning should not be the means to obtain an additional story.

- b. "The excess height allows for a demonstrated higher quality building than cannot be achieved without additional stories."

The applicant has provided no information to support that this standard has been achieved. On September 4th the architect stated that "amenities" such as a roof garden, two elevators, and better quality tenants were of significant benefit to the neighborhood. While this might be true, such factors are a normal part of good design and property management. As noted in our prior comments, the proposal demonstrates rather unexceptional features, and shows little if any awareness of its

neighborhood context. In granting initial approval UDC appears to have agreed in this regard. The revised proposal has done little alleviate this concern.

The Downtown Plan states that the opportunity for extra stories should be used to encourage “buildings of truly exceptional design and accomplish specific objectives defined for the area”. This proposal does neither. In fact, in the applicant’s Statement of Rationale the extra story is needed to “warrant the cost of developing two underground stories of parking.” The only reason the applicant provides for the additional story is to cover the costs of constructing parking. In the downtown there are no specific zoning requirements to provide parking, let alone plan objectives to provide extra stories for providing more parking.

At last check, the current submission to UDC did not use the June 18th letter of intent included in the first formal application. Current plans do not show 5th floor patio landscaping or the 5-foot setback from the parapet walls. The front yard planter needs to be extended westward to screen the bike parking.

While there have been further design improvements, the architecture is no more than the minimum we would expect for any proposal. The materials used are like those found in recent similar projects. There is still nothing ‘exceptional’ about this design and the building does nothing to accomplish Downtown Plan objectives that wouldn’t be required of any new development at this location.

The first proposal in the W. Washington corridor to be approved for extra stories will set the bar for future projects. Establishing a high bar for ‘truly exceptional design’ is vital from the outset to ensure that development in this gateway area fulfills the goals of the Downtown Plan and the new Zoning Code.

### **Summary**

The steering committee believes that eight of the nine specific recommendations from the initial Advisory Statement are still valid and they are shown below for ease of reference. (revisions underlined)

1. Architectural enhancements to improve the structure’s compatibility with the neighborhood’s history, character and gateway context. (see DP; App. “c” extra height criteria)
2. Adhering to the rear yard setback dimensions (33’) set forth in DR2 zoning.
3. Provide fitness center client automobile parking onsite.
4. Permanent security controls for the 5<sup>th</sup> floor roof terrace and garden with a 5’ fenced setback from the 42” parapet wall. Impose restricted hours, video monitoring and no amplified music or decorative lighting.
5. Plant the maximum number and size of large trees.
6. Provide trash/recycling bin transport plan protective of the terrace.
7. Landscape screening and striping of moped/ bike parking areas.
8. Total fenced protection of the entire terrace, and Keller property “driveway” tree, prior to and during construction.

Respectfully submitted,

425 W. Washington Steering Committee  
Bassett District, Capitol Neighborhoods