

AGENDA # 7

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

PRESENTED: September 11, 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: September 11, 2013

ID NUMBER:

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

*Wagner recused himself on this item. Slayton acted as Chair.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of September 11, 2013, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED FINAL APPROVAL** of a mixed-use development located at 425 West Washington Avenue. Appearing on behalf of the project were John Sutton, the project architect; Erik Minton and Carole Schaeffer. Registered and speaking neither in support nor opposition was Michael May.

Sutton provided an update to the plans as modified, noting that the average setback was 19-feet which is where they’re at. The front massing now has more defined depth; the storefront is setback 1-foot on the first two floors so it expresses masonry and feels substantial. The steel lintels give it depth and hold the frame. The window sashes are pushed back 6-inches from the brick for an expression of depth. The canopy is standard steel shapes with a glass lid so the expression of steel is seen through. The landscape planters are pushed back so they are 7-feet out from the building. Landscaping and a 3-foot wall will screen the bicycles and mopeds. A strolling garden is proposed for the rooftop terrace. On the east side the body of the building is integrated with the vertical shaft. There is a further polish put on the architecture. The monument sign was not desirable by Planning staff and is no longer proposed; the name of the building will be just below the spandrel on the metal face as raised letters.

Erik Minton expressed his appreciation for the process that has brought the project a long way. He showed photos of rooftop gardens with substantial plants and a strolling path. This creates an area with a gardening opportunity and an area where people enjoy being.

Michael May spoke to his advisory statement to the Commission on behalf of the neighborhood that listed eight points.

1. Architectural enhancement to improve compatibility. The architect has worked with the neighborhood to continually improve the project. The steering committee’s opinion is that this

- project has moved from 1st base to 2nd base. Comparing it to the Downtown Plan for a bonus story means it has to be exceptional design, to hit a home run. There is work here yet to do.
2. The rear setback. At present, with the flip flop with Zoning, this building doesn't comply with the early rear yard setback of 33-feet, shifting to UMX did not help that process. This building is still very out of compliance with setbacks.
 3. Capitol Fitness automobile parking on-site. What if in five years this fitness center is wildly successful and has to move out somewhere else? Who will take a full second floor? Commercial or office user with zero parking.
 4. Permanent security controls for the 5th floor terrace and the garden. We want to make sure there is a fenced 5-foot setback from that 42-inch parapet wall, zero physical interaction, zero visual interaction between the people on the terrace and those on the sidewalk on West Washington Avenue. This project is one block from Mifflin Street.
 5. Plant a large number of trees (self-explanatory).
 6. Provide trash recycling bin transport plan over the terrace. When the terrace is wet and muddy and you roll wheels across it, you will get ruts. Week after week of this you'll get a permanent path that will never get planted.
 7. The screening on the bicycle/moped area is very improved.
 8. There is a third terrace tree on the property line between the two driveways, we'd like that fenced to keep it alive as it's been there for 50 years.

Carole Shaeffer spoke in support. This project was good when it first came through, and now after working with City commissions and the neighborhood it is very much improved and raises it from great to exceptional. She asked not to get bogged down by what is exceptional, but look at the Zoning Code and Downtown Plan and what we are getting as a result from the extra story. We don't want to get bogged down on what is considered extraordinary and miss out on an opportunity.

Staff commented positively on the removal of the monument sign, while at the same time noting Sutton should work with staff on a very detailed signage plan for the building. The Urban Design Commission is charged in having to make the finding of exceptional design the Planning Division report notes that bonus stories are based on that finding; if the Commission grants this approval it has to make a finding that this has been met.

Comments and questions from the Commission were as follows:

- I love what you've done with creating that depth. It's very successful and this is a really exceptional building.
- I like the changes. I think the green roof is a boost. I have to ask myself if this is what we strive to have or something that has gone beyond the call. I want to hear some more thoughts about what makes this exceptional.
- Thank you for showing context. The one piece that plays off successfully with the immediate smaller scale context is that two-story gesture that you've got on your entry now. It acknowledges the other scale that's on the street.
- One piece I think would stand out as exceptional is the idea of an active commercial front and something that would feel permeable and approachable and the place you want to be and walk by. Right now the planters I don't feel are helping you. The playfulness on the stair towers and the massing all around the corner I think are really nicely composed, it's along West Washington, how do I know it's meant for me as a member of the public walking by, how do I get up there?

- The grand entry doesn't do it?
Not for me, no.

- Should there be other doors? To penetrate the building in multiple different places rather than just the central door?
- I think that would be successful. I think about the El Dorado Grill building where you enter at one point and it splits. If you took advantage of that grand terrace on West Washington, maybe there's a way to spark more activity on the street.
- What if rather than a planting design you did something more like a passive plaza that people could actually come to, with places to sit? Just to create a space if someone wanted to wait for someone to go to the health club, or wait for a bus, a little bit of respite that would welcome you.
 - I like that idea. What I was concerned about is that from the sidewalk we're 19-feet back and if we have too much hard surface there, this block is almost entirely asphalt.

What I'm seeing is the bases on the canopy supports, to me that looks fussy. I'd almost like to see what those columns look like coming down to the ground level without that square piece of decoration around it. The building is strong but you're decorating the front of it. I see something that would accentuate that more, like the opportunity for a silhouette of a columnar tree that would be more open, with a shadow on that tower.

- I'd get rid of the planter but I'd still put a columnar in here so it accents with the architecture.
- I think that the building is closer to that magnificent piece that we want to see than your rendering is allowing us to realize, and I think it's the ground treatment. You did the things we asked for, you got this great connectivity, I'm excited about the way it looks. The only piece that falls a little short, for me, is that you have this great column which next to the entry feature they're the same color and kind of fighting with each other. I think using that column as a background for a tree would help that. It's big pieces, not decoration in the landscape.
- I think the planting plan is fine but I don't think it's exceptional by any means. With this building it could be much more. The species selection could be more unique.
- Relook at planting wall and landscaping, current design not taking advantage of bringing people in from the street.
- Look at passive plaza rather than just a planting design; eliminate planter so vertical column comes down to the ground.
- The way you're treating the bays in the front are going to play into that activity at the street. Something to create synergy and openness to this building.
- It's definitely evolved but I'm still a little concerned about this garage entry. It's a very square little column and from the renderings it almost appears like a drive-thru and I'm imagine looking at a plaster ceiling where the cars coming out and there's a garage door back there. You must have a better drawing of it than this. What is that ceiling in there? Is there another element you could bring down so it doesn't look like a teller window? I can't say that it's exceptional because that's an entry into the building as much as the front door. And what does that garage door look like? It's important how that's lit.

ACTION:

On a motion by Huggins, seconded by DeChant, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED FINAL APPROVAL**. The motion was passed on a vote of (5-0-1) with Wagner recused. The Commission made a finding that the architecture has indeed met the exceptional requirements and therefore granted the bonus story, but the landscape plan needs improvement to further support this finding and shall return for further consideration.

The motion provided for the following:

- That a revised planting plan incorporating some of these comments come back so that the planting plan is as exceptional as the building, including a more detailed green roof design.
- A lighting plan comes back to the Commission.
- Details on the garage.

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 7 and 8.

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	8	6	6	-	8	9	8
	-	8	6	-	-	-	8	-
	-	8	5	-	-	-	-	-
	7	8	6	-	-	-	7	7

General Comments:

- Enhancements to landscape integration with architecture and garage entry.
- Much improved – depth of front façade excellent.
- Landscape needs to be exceptional.