

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION **PRESENTED:** January 14, 2015

TITLE: 4525 Secret Garden Drive – Multi-Family Residential Development Consisting of Twelve Multi-Family Buildings with 102 Dwelling Units. 16th Ald. Dist. (36751)

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Alan J. Martin, Secretary **ADOPTED:** **POF:**

DATED: January 14, 2015 **ID NUMBER:**

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

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of January 14, 2015, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** for a multi-family residential development consisting of 12 multi-family buildings with 102 dwelling units located at 4525 Secret Garden Drive. Appearing on behalf of the project were Joseph Lee, representing Decker Properties; and David Decker. Prior to the presentation, the Secretary noted the concerns of the Planning Unit staff with this project:

1. While much was presented about higher-end internal finishes, the exterior site and building plans need to be of similar quality.
2. We have concerns on the amount of vinyl siding.
3. A central green feature could be a very strong organizing element and desirable amenity for residents. As proposed, it doesn’t seem like a desirable, usable space, appearing more as central landscaping for the expansive parking lot.
4. The parking ratio of 2.4 stalls per unit is very high compared to other “suburban” apartment developments.
5. A more pedestrian-focused site organization around streets/street-like features (with sidewalks and pedestrian amenities) and a redesigned central greenspace configuration could better integrate this into the neighborhood.

There are several easements on the property. Three different buildings are proposed: A would be 12-unit buildings, B and C would each be 6-unit buildings with the C Buildings also containing 3-bedroom units. There will not be any magicpaks on the building. The proposed project would incorporate vinyl siding and the aesthetics of the buildings will be the same.

Comments and questions from the Commission were as follows:

- Why isn’t the driveway opposite Battista Drive rather than the alley?

- First there is a retaining wall here, and experience-wise we wanted to come in between two building faces so we thought coming up the alley would mitigate the grade change and have a nicer arrival.
- Why do you have so many buildings? Wouldn't it be better to have fewer buildings that are larger?
 - This is what the market is for this site, it helps with construction and phasing of the units.
 - We're trying to have one 2-car attached garage for each unit, so it becomes very difficult to have a larger building and still allow for a mix of one and two-car attached garages. We would rather build a bigger building, but we also wanted to provide those garages so this is as big of a building as we could do.
 - We want to be consistent with the single-family residences in the neighborhood.
- In the past when we did approve vinyl siding we always required solid rake boards, corner boards and trim so it's not all plastic.
- My big issue with vinyl isn't whether it looks good or not. It's that it doesn't break down and you will get water in there.
- This long dimension of the building type parallel to the street makes it look, as big as it is if you turn it 90-degrees and have the short dimension, the rhythm starts to relate to the neighborhood. Consider that.
- This greenspace is actually a parking lot median strip. It's a lot of money wasted for the asphalt. This greenspace feels more accessible to the whole parcel rather than blocking it off with buildings and road. It could be integrated more, bring it into the site, double load the parking bays for more efficiency.
 - The Fire Department needs access.
- It's not going to feel like what you want it to feel like; bring more green into the site.
- I won't be able to support vinyl. I find this type of development...there's a reason I live in the City.
 - We're a mile from the closest bus stop. We're in a commuter location. I'm all about the urban setting, I walk to work and I support that concept. But the reality is this is the southeastern corner of the City, these folks are going to have cars.
- I have no problem with the cars. I have a problem with the building form and the amount of asphalt and the lack of amenities that are here. If this is the middle of a corn field then let's go down and put some underground parking. There's an example of a project they did east of the American Center awhile back.
 - The economics aren't the same.
- I understand that, but I just couldn't ever possibly approve this as it stands.
 - These units are proposed to have walk-in tile showers. I was trying to propose something unique to these apartments to make them relevant from now until time immortal. A walk-in tile shower is something you'd expect to see in a \$1 Million home. It really is a super luxury item. I think our exterior presentation is terrific. Amenities like fitness rooms, business centers and swimming pools are only used by 10% of the population. Luxury showers like this one are used all the time and will attract tenants for years to come and make the site relevant. I certainly reading all the resistance that this committee has to vinyl.
 - It's not resistance, it's the rule. We don't look at interior connections. We look at exterior design and site design and the comments that staff put forward basically deal with that, and it's got problems. When this plat was developed this was not envisioned to be the type of development to occur there. Your design challenge is to create a design not based on interior finishes but on a superior site plan, building location, landscaping, usable open space, those kinds of amenities. We have issues with those and you're offsetting those with the quality of the interior finishes, but this Commission is charged with looking at those larger issues outside of the units.
- Some members have great reservations about vinyl. It's really not a policy for the Commission to adopt. If the City doesn't want vinyl the City has to adopt that as a policy. We have approved vinyl for other projects.

- But the biggest problem is the site plan.
- When you drive in there you need some really nice feeling of a “place.” Something that’s well designed and has meaningful greenspace. I don’t think that precludes this type of building, this floor plan or the materials. It needs a bit more care in the details. I would ask on the buildings, if they are such roof dominated buildings and you do have upper stories, we’ve seen projects where they introduce dormers and bring light in. Maybe the first floor won’t benefit from that but certainly the 2nd floor would.
- I think about on the site plan how someone would ever arrive by foot, or how mail would be delivered. Just thinking about how one would circulate by foot. If you can rearrange the site plan to address Catalina Parkway, or have some walk-ups from Catalina Parkway and maybe they park behind. I know you mentioned a retaining wall; maybe you create your own public-feeling looking street, rather than entering and having a loop. The greenspace I don’t think is what you’re looking to have there. And maybe you just have parallel parking on what feels like a public street, rather than all these 90-degree stalls.

ACTION:

Since this was an **INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** no formal action was taken by the Commission.

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 rating for this project is 5.

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION PROJECT RATING FOR: 4525 Secret Garden Drive

	Site Plan	Architecture	Landscape Plan	Site Amenities, Lighting, Etc.	Signs	Circulation (Pedestrian, Vehicular)	Urban Context	Overall Rating
Member Ratings	-	4	4	-	-	-	-	-
	5	5	4	4	-	4	6	5

General Comments:

- One entry/exit for parking. Concrete moat surrounding green looks like a track.
- Rearrange the site design to maximize greenspace.