



Department of Planning & Community & Economic Development

Planning Division

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TO: Urban Design Commission
FROM: Timothy M. Parks, Planner
DATE: September 29, 2017
SUBJECT: ID [49009](#) (UDC); [48497](#) (Plan Commission) – Advisory recommendation by the Urban Design Commission on a request for approval of a demolition permit and conditional use to demolish a warehouse/ retail building and construct a mixed-use building with 11,000 square feet of commercial space and 161 apartment units at 131 S. Fair Oaks Avenue; 6th Ald. Dist.

The applicant, Mike Thorson of Inventure Capital, LLC, is requesting approval from the Plan Commission to demolish the one-story, 42,200 square-foot Kessenich's restaurant supply store at 131 S. Fair Oaks Avenue to construct a five-story mixed-use building with 11,000 square feet of commercial space and 161 apartment units. Indoor parking for 122 automobiles is proposed on the first floor of the building behind the commercial spaces proposed to front S. Fair Oaks Avenue and below an elevated courtyard that will include recreational amenities for residents of the building. An additional 65 surface stalls and access drives are proposed to surround the building. The Plan Commission hearing on the project is scheduled for October 16, 2017.

During its initial review of the project, the Planning Division identified a series of concerns about the proposed mixed-use building, which it shared with the applicant in early September. Following those discussions, it was determined by staff and the project team that an advisory recommendation by the Urban Design Commission would be beneficial prior to the Plan Commission considering the project. Such recommendations are allowed under conditional use standard #9 in Section 28.183(6) of the Zoning Code, which states:

9. *When applying the above standards to any new construction of a building or an addition to an existing building the Plan Commission shall find that the project creates an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with the existing or intended character of the area and the statement of purpose for the zoning district. In order to find that this standard is met, the Plan Commission may require the applicant to submit plans to the Urban Design Commission for comment and recommendation.*

In considering its recommendation to the Plan Commission, the Planning Division requests that the Urban Design Commission consider the following:

- Staff is concerned about the five-story height of the building, particularly along the Fair Oaks frontage. The site is zoned TE – Traditional Employment, which allows up to five-story and 68-foot tall buildings. However, staff feels there is no precedent for a five-story building in the surrounding area, and the size of the proposed building seems aggressive, especially along the street. While staff feels that there may be some ability to incorporate additional height toward the northern

and eastern edges of the site away from the street, we feel that the building needs to come down at least one story along its westerly edge.

- Also on the subject of mass, staff does not feel that the nearly 300-foot long mass along S. Fair Oaks Avenue is sufficiently articulated or modulated. Given the size of the site, the onus is on the developer to substantiate why a single building is the correct solution for this site when it appears that the frontage could support more than one building. Given the frontage and proposed façade length, we feel that the scale of the building needs to be broken down along the street frontage. Varying the height along that frontage with three- and four-story sections could aid the scaling of the overall composition.
- Staff also requests that the Urban Design Commission comment on the building materials proposed and the composition of the building's exterior. While the project team has refined the exterior of the building since the project was formally submitted in mid-August and addressed some of staff's earlier concerns about the exterior and the general architectural direction of the project (industrial; modern/ contemporary, etc.), staff believes that comments from the Urban Design Commission about the intended aesthetic for the project would be useful as the project proceeds to the Plan Commission.
- Finally, staff also expressed concerns about what was felt to be a somewhat harsh appearance of the parking level on the east, south and north, in particular how the building will appear from the Capital City Trail bike path adjacent to the southern edge of the site. While staff would not recommend that the under-building parking be visible, we have concerns about the articulation of those first floor facades and an overall sense of impermeability along those walls. Since those concerns were initially shared, the applicant has added trellises to create visual interest along the walls enclosing the indoor parking. Staff requests that the Urban Design Commission provide some feedback on the treatment of those non-street first floor facades. Secondly, there were also some concerns expressed by staff about access to the parking for commercial users, and overall security within the parking level and surrounding the building from a CPTED perspective.

While there will be other factors to be considered by the Plan Commission when they review the demolition permit and conditional use requests on October 16 (consistency with adopted plans, impacts on surroundings, etc.), the Planning Division feels that the Urban Design Commission's input on the design of the proposed mixed-use building will be valuable in determining whether the project creates an "environment of sustained aesthetic desirability" consistent with the character of the area as stipulated by conditional use standard #9.