



UDC MEMO Planning Division

Department of Planning & Community & Economic Development

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TO: Urban Design Commission
FROM: Kevin Firchow, Principal Planner and Janine Glaeser, UDC Secretary
DATE: April 11, 2018
SUBJECT: ID 50430 & 50758 (UDC) – 717-753 East Johnson Street – Advisory Recommendation

The Common Council has referred this item to the Urban Design Commission (UDC) for an Advisory Opinion at the request of District 2 Alder Ledell Zellers.

Project Description

The applicant proposes to demolish or relocate seven residential buildings for the purpose of constructing a four-story mixed-use building with 54 apartments and approximately 2,400 square feet of commercial space. The proposed building will appear as two separate buildings above grade, though it is connected by underground parking. The development site also includes five existing residential buildings (one of which is being relocated within in this same block). Please note, two other existing residential buildings are proposed to be relocated to 827 East Gorham Street, which is also before the UDC for an advisory recommendation.

Approval Standards

This proposal has been submitted as a combination Demolition, Conditional Use, and Zoning Map Amendment request. The UDC has been formally requested to provide an advisory opinion. The proposal will be subject to the approval standards for Conditional Uses [MGO Section 28.183(7)], Demolition Permits [MGO Section 28.185 (7)(a)], and Zoning Map Amendments [28.182]. Excerpts from these Ordinance Sections are provided as an attachment to this report.

Summary of Adopted Plan Recommendations

The [Comprehensive Plan \(2006\)](#) recommends Medium Density Residential (MDR) Development for the subject property. Such areas are intended to have relatively dense multi-family housing types such as larger apartment buildings and apartment complexes with an average density of 16-40 dwelling units per acre (du/ac). The plan notes that a limited amount of other land uses may be located within MDR areas including neighborhood-serving retail, service uses and offices, especially in mixed-use buildings. The [Comprehensive Plan](#) notes that locations for non-residential support uses within these areas, as well as more-detailed planning or design standards, should be identified in adopted neighborhood or special area plans.

The [Tenney-Lapham Neighborhood Plan \(2008\)](#) includes several near-term and longer-term recommendations for the subject block. In regards to the near term, the Land Use Plan (Map 5) recommends Medium Density Residential Development between 16 and 25 du/ac. Under this recommendation, demolition and rebuilding is described as being acceptable for buildings described as “toothaches” or buildings that don’t reflect the surrounding context and adopted guidelines. From a design standpoint, redevelopment is recommended to have a maximum height limit of three stories. Near-term redevelopment is also recommended to encourage front porches, consistency of scale, spacing, and general architectural vernacular of the surrounding neighborhood. Back yards are recommended to be maintained and the ratio of footprint-to-lot-size of

replacement residential structures should be comparable to the surrounding neighborhood.

The block's longer-term recommendation includes the expansion of the mixed-use neighborhood district into the subject block. The plan states, "*While near-term goals for growth of the E. Johnson Street Business District focus on the 800 and 900 blocks, the long-range vision anticipates expansion of the Neighborhood Mixed Use District to the 700 block as well.*" Neighborhood mixed use areas are recommended as having average densities between 16 and 40 du/ac. The maximum height recommendation is again three stories. Buildings are recommended to have limited front setbacks to allow for amenities such as benches, tables, or planters. The plan recommends increasing the business use of these blocks while "keeping the residential flavor" and the adaptive reuse of existing residential structures to business uses is supported. Ground floor retail with residential units above is also listed as an appropriate design for new structures. The longer-term mixed-use recommendation does not include specific recommendations to maintain back yard areas.

The proposed height is in excess of what is recommended in either the near or longer-term recommendation. However, staff notes that the proposal is otherwise more consistent with the longer-term recommendation. The Plan does not specify a timeline when the longer-term recommendation would take precedent over the shorter term. A general vision statement is included which references (in part) that by the year 2020, ..."With the influx of more families and long-term residents, the business district has thrived and expanded along the 700, 800 and 900 blocks of East Johnson Street." As such, the Planning Division believes that it would be appropriate to utilize the longer-term land use recommendation as part of the evaluation of plan consistency. That recommendation was referenced as part of staff's evaluation of the adjacent mixed-use building, now under construction, that was approved in April 2017.

Design Considerations:

- **Height and Massing.** While the proposed building has three-story elements, it has been determined by Zoning to be a four-story structure. The building has an approximate height of 45 feet. In the proposed NMX zoning district, height above three stories (and 40 feet) requires conditional use approval. Conditional Use Approval Standard 12 states: *When applying the above standards to an application for height in excess of that allowed in the district, the Plan Commission shall consider recommendations in adopted plans; the impact on surrounding properties, including height, mass, orientation, shadows and view; architectural quality and amenities; the relationship of the proposed building(s) with adjoining streets, alleys, and public rights of ways; and the public interest in exceeding the district height limits.*

Staff request the UDC provide recommendations related to the proposed four-story height, this standard, and its relationship to surrounding properties. Staff note that the adjacent building at 707-713 East Johnson Street, approved in April 2017 and now under construction, is three-stories and approximately 36 feet in height.

- **Character and Detailing.** The Planning Division requests that the UDC provide feedback on the contemporary character of the proposed building in relationship to the surrounding context.
- **Relationship to Street.** Where residential components are at the ground floor along Johnson Street, plans show an approximately six-foot tall block wall in relatively close proximity to the sidewalk. This accounts for approximately half of the ground-level street frontage of the new building. Staff have concerns about this feature and its creation of a blank wall at the pedestrian level, and request UDC feedback on this detail.

Conclusion

The Common Council has referred this item to the Urban Design Commission (UDC) for an Advisory Opinion at the request of District 2 Alder Ledell Zellers. Careful consideration should be given to this request. The Planning Division has concerns related to the proposed height which exceeds that recommended in the adopted neighborhood plan.

Feedback from the UDC should be structured as a recommendation of the body, and not individual comments as would be provided in a typical informational presentation. This should be considered a final recommendation of the UDC, as the initial/final procedure typically applied to many other projects would not apply to this request. Staff encourage the UDC recommendation to include specific findings and provide feedback related to the design considerations noted in this report. Finally, the approval standards that the Plan Commission will use for Conditional Uses, Demolition/Removal Permits, and Zoning Map Amendments are being provided as a reference. Feedback related to these standards is encouraged, including Conditional Use Standards 4, 9, and 12 which closely relate to the design-related issues before the UDC.