

PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

October 24, 2018



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 555 W. Washington Avenue
Application Type: New Development in UMX District – Final Approval Requested
Legistar File ID # [51507](#)
Prepared By: Janine Glaeser, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Kevin Burow; Knothe & Bruce Architects, LLC; 7601 University Ave. Suite 201; Madison, WI 53562

Project Description: Construction of a new five-story, multi-family apartment building in UMX District. 4th Ald. Dist.

Project Schedule:

- The UDC received an Informational Presentation on **May 23, 2018**, and
- The UDC referred the project on **August 8, 2018**.
- The Plan Commission is scheduled to review on **November 7, 2018**.

Approval Standards:

The UDC is advisory to Plan Commission on this request.

UMX District Design Review. The subject site is zoned UMX (Urban Mixed Use District). **Section 28.076(4)(c) MGO** states that all new buildings and additions greater than 20,000 square feet or that have more than four stories in UMX zoning shall obtain conditional use approval from the Plan Commission following review by the Urban Design Commission for conformity to the design standards in Section 28.071(3) of the Zoning Code and the [Downtown Urban Design Guidelines](#) and report its findings to the Plan Commission.

Conditional Use Standards. As a conditional use, the Plan Commission is the approving body on this request and they must review this request against the **Conditional Use Standards of 28.183(6) MGO**. This includes *Conditional Use Standard 9* that states “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.”

This also includes *Conditional Use Standard 14* related to Additional Height. The applicant requests approval of a five-story building, a story taller than the base height allowed by zoning. The Zoning Code allows up to two additional stories above the four-story limit may be approved provided there is a 30-foot setback. The specific standard states:

When applying the above standards to an application for height in excess of that allowed by Section 28.071(2)(a) Downtown Height Map for a development located within the Additional Height Areas identified in Section 28.071(2)(b), the Plan Commission shall consider the recommendations in adopted plans, and no application for excess height shall be granted by the Plan Commission unless it finds that all of the following conditions are present:

- a. The excess height is compatible with the existing or planned (if the recommendations in the Downtown Plan call for changes) character of the surrounding area, including but not limited to the scale, mass, rhythm, and setbacks of buildings and relationships to street frontages and public spaces.
- b. The excess height allows for a demonstrated higher quality building than could be achieved without the additional stories.
- c. The scale, massing and design of new buildings complement and positively contribute to the setting of any landmark buildings within or adjacent to the projects and create a pleasing visual relationship with them.
- d. For projects proposed in priority viewsheds and other views and vistas identified on the Views and Vistas Map in the City of Madison Downtown Plan, there are no negative impacts on the viewshed as demonstrated by viewshed studies prepared by the applicant.

Summary of Adopted Plan Recommendations

The Downtown Plan has several design-related recommendations for the 400 and 500 blocks of West Washington Avenue. A copy of the defined objectives and recommendations for West Washington Avenue is attached. In regards to height, plans recommend buildings up to four stories with the ability obtain an additional two bonus stories. In regards to additional stories, the plan specifically recommends:

“Where additional stories are available, it is not intended that they be earned merely by complying with standards and criteria that would be required and expected in any case, such as underlying zoning regulations, good design, or sensitivity to an adjacent historic landmark. The intent is not simply to allow a taller building and additional stories should not be considered “by right” heights. Rather additional stories are to be used as a tool to encourage and reward buildings of truly exceptional design that respond to the specific context of their location and accomplish specific objectives defined for the area.”

Summary of Design Considerations and Recommendations

The Urban Design Commission is advisory to the Plan Commission on this request. Staff advise that ordinance requirements do not allow the UDC to refer this request a future UDC meeting. The body should make a recommendation that the Plan Commission to Approve, Approve with Conditions, or Deny the request.

In making their recommendation, staff requests that UDC comments include feedback on the following items, in addition to other comments.

1. Provide findings related to previous UDC comments from the August 8, 2018 report including:
 - Review W. Washington elevation stone material detailing, including both the overhang and sill
 - Assess proposed building scale & height and how it fits within the existing context, including the directly adjacent residential buildings
 - Study the proposed brownstone features and how it creates an edge on the corner.
 - Study the relationship of the two proposed architectural styles: warehouse/brownstone
 - Improve the main entry detailing/visibility so that the entrances are not competing with each other
 - Assess viability of the terrace on West Washington as a garden space. Is it appropriate to that level?
2. Provide findings related to the Downtown Design Standards and Guidelines as required by 28.076(4)(c)
3. Provide findings related to proposed five-story height, in relation to plan recommendations and conditional use standards (including 9 and 14), as referenced in this report.

■ West Washington

The 400 and 500 blocks of West Washington Avenue have a special character that is different from either the Mifflin district to the north or the Bassett district to the south, although it shares attributes with both and serves as the transition between them. Similar to the adjacent districts, the West Washington district is also currently characterized by significant amounts of older housing stock predominantly rented to university students — although the houses tend to be larger and better-maintained, and the building types more varied. The predominant physical characteristic of the West Washington district, however, is created by the Avenue itself. The width of the street, the broad terraces, large canopy street trees and generally consistent building setbacks provide an engaging public realm and the opportunity to further enhance a truly engaging entryway to Downtown.

The West Washington district is proposed primarily for residential uses — especially on the upper floors. Neighborhood-serving mixed-use development should be located primarily at the ends of blocks, but West Washington is not intended to become an employment or large retail district. Substantial redevelopment with larger, taller buildings is anticipated over time, and long-term preservation of older structures is not a specific recommendation, except in the case of designated landmarks. Selective conservation and rehabilitation of buildings with architectural or historic interest would be compatible with the development concept, however. Buildings up to four stories in height are recommended along both sides of West Washington Avenue, with the potential for two additional stories if there is a noticeable setback. The design of new developments should engage the



Scenes from West Washington

street and help maintain an active, pedestrian-scale environment through façade articulation and provision of multiple front entrances to larger buildings, porches and balconies, and other street-oriented features.

West Washington Avenue is also an important gateway to the Capitol and the Downtown Core, and design standards and streetscape improvements are recommended to maintain and enhance the special visual character of these blocks. Of particular importance to this character is the grand appearance created by the consistent building setbacks, wide terraces and large canopy trees, and these features should be maintained as public amenities as redevelopment occurs. Driveway openings along this frontage should be minimized and use of the terrace for vehicle pull-outs or other private activities should not be allowed.

The illustrations on the following page show conceptually how the West Washington district might appear after the area is substantially redeveloped, although the drawings are not site-specific and many other building arrangements are possible.

West Washington Recommendations

Objective 4.4: Enhance the distinctive physical character of West Washington Avenue as a gateway to Downtown, while providing opportunities for the development of additional high-quality housing and creation of an engaging transitional district linking the predominantly residential Bassett district and an evolving mixed-use Mifflin district.

Recommendation 83: Maintain predominantly residential uses along West Washington Avenue, with neighborhood serving mixed-use development located primarily at the ends of blocks.

Recommendation 84: Establish a minimum two-story and maximum four-story building height on the West Washington Avenue frontage, with up to two additional stories allowed if there is a noticeable setback.

Recommendation 85: Maintain and enhance West Washington Avenue as a “grand boulevard” entryway to Downtown, with wide terraces (but not a median); large canopy street trees; consistent building setbacks; and special lighting, signage and other streetscape improvements.

Recommendation 86: Restrict vehicle pull outs, wide driveways and street facing garages or parking areas on the West Washington frontage, and encourage cooperative solutions to vehicle access and parking, including underground parking and shared parking, to reduce driveway cuts and facilitate development of larger footprint buildings.

Recommendation 87: Prepare a detailed development concept plan, design standards, and a comprehensive implementation strategy to guide future redevelopment. Recommendations may include building form as well as streetscape design standards to help create a distinctive urban character and sense of place. This plan should be prepared as soon as possible and be adopted prior to a comprehensive rezoning of the area to implement these recommendations.