

## ANN ARBOR DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

### Staff Report

**MEETING DATE:** October 14, 2020

**PROJECT:** 350 South Fifth Avenue (Old Y Site)  
Project No. DR20-027

**ADDRESS:** 350 S. Fifth Avenue

**ZONING:** D1 Downtown Core (base)  
Midtown Character (overlay)  
Secondary (street designation) – South Fifth Avenue  
Secondary (street designation) – East William Street  
Secondary (street designation) – South Fourth Avenue

**DESIGN TEAM:** SmithGroup, WadeTrim, SME

**PROJECT LOCATION:** The site is bounded by the Blake Transit Center to the north, East William Street to the south, South Fifth Avenue to the east, and South Fourth Avenue to the west.

**PROJECT HISTORY:** The site was home to the Ann Arbor YMCA from 1960-2005 until the current YMCA opened on West Washington Street. The former YMCA building was demolished in 2008 including 100 affordable housing units associated with the former building. The site served as a surface parking lot for approximately 10 years. City Council recently adopted Resolution R-18-173 that outlined the City's priorities and criteria for redeveloping the lot. The Housing Commission hired SmithGroup to conduct a public participation process to get feedback on the potential development of the site and to develop a conceptual plan for the project. SmithGroup has been working with WadeTrim and SME to provide a conceptual design with massing elevations of the site. After the DRB reviews the project, the concept plan and conceptual development agreement will be reviewed by Planning Commission and City Council with the intent of having a "pre-entitled" project. Once a developer has been identified, the developer will be required to go through the same process as any developer of a project in the DDA including submitting an application to the DRB and submitting a site plan that would be reviewed by City Staff, the Planning Commission, and City Council.

**PROPOSED PROJECT:** The proposed concept includes two high-rise towers that are 13 stories (west) and 18 stories (east) tall, creating an L-shape along South Fourth Avenue and the north side of the site, adjacent to the Blake Transit Center. The building steps down to one story along East William Street with a four-story mid-rise portion at the corner of East William Street and South Fifth Avenue. The concept includes a 30 FT

wide service alley to support the residential towers and provide for maintenance access and unloading. The ground floor is proposed as active leasable space or community use with a high level of transparency along the street. The concept does not develop over the Blake Transit Center but could provide an additional transit bay for Blake expansion of off-street services, approximately 30 FT wide with an additional 15 FT wide service lane. The proposed concept provides an approximate floor area ratio (FAR) of 866%, below the maximum 900% Floor Area Ratio (FAR) with the affordable housing premium. The concept is designed with the potential to be constructed in two phases: P1 includes the 18-story tower and P2 encompasses the 13-story tower. The project does not include any on-site parking.

The City has developed the following objectives for redeveloping 350 S 5<sup>th</sup> Ave:

- Maximize affordable housing units (minimum 100 units)
- Maximize market rate housing
- Develop a mix of housing types and prices
- Expand the Blake Transit Center
- Activate the ground floor for public benefit
- Maintain some city ownership/control
- Recapture the cost of purchase
- Appropriately scale down to the lower density area south of William Street

The concept provides approximately 400 housing units with a minimum of 100 affordable units. Affordable is defined as 80% of units at 60% AMI and 20% of units at 30% AMI. The towers provide a variety of unit types include studio (415 SF), 1-bedroom (550 SF), and 2-bedroom (825 SF) units. Ground floor space uses are flexible, but it is assumed this would be leasable space (19,000 SF) for commercial, retail, office type uses, or a municipal space for community use.

The [complete application material](#) illustrates the proposed redevelopment project concept. [Supplemental documentation](#) is also provided.

Additionally, the petitioner provided an alternative option for the ground floor service alley on the north side of the site, which widens the alley to 45 feet. This option would be pursued potentially to accommodate additional AAATA bus parking on the site, immediately adjacent to the existing Blake Transit Center.

## **ZONING COMPLIANCE AND SITE CONTEXT:**

1. **Zoning Compliance (Area, Height, Placement).** The following provides a cursory review of the proposed development for compliance with the D1, Midtown Character Overlay District, secondary frontage designation area, and area, height and placement regulations.

	<b>Requirement</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
<b>Lot Area</b>	NA	34,848 sq ft
<b>Floor Area</b>	313,632 sq/ft MAX with affordable housing premium	302,020 sq ft
<b>FAR (Floor Area Ratio)</b>	400% standard MAX, up to 900% MAX with affordable housing premiums (313,632 square feet MAX)	866.7% FAR
<b>Rear Setback-North</b>	0 ft MIN; 10 MAX	0 ft
<b>Front Setback-West</b>	0 ft MIN; 10 MAX	0 ft
<b>Front Setback - South</b>	0 ft MIN, 10 ft MAX	0 ft
<b>Front Setback - East</b>	0 ft MIN, 10 ft MAX	0 ft
<b>Streetwall Height</b>	Min 2 stories, Max 4 stories	1 story along E. William and S. Fourth, otherwise varies
<b>Offset at Top of Streetwall</b>	Average 5 ft MIN	5-7 ft
<b>Total Height</b>	207 ft MAX (increase of 15% with affordable housing)	193 ft (18 stories)
<b>Massing Articulation</b>	Not applicable	NA with this petition
<b>Tower Diagonal</b>	Not applicable	NA with this petition
<b>Building Coverage</b>	Not applicable	Approximately 100%
<b>Open Space</b>	Not applicable	Potential rooftop open space of 5,500 sq/ft

2. **Site Context and Site Planning.** The site is the former YMCA site located on the south end of the DDA district. To the north of the site is the Blake Transit Center (AAATA/TheRide). To the east is the Ann Arbor District Library-Downtown Branch and the Library Lane underground parking structure. To the south is a residential neighborhood, a small portion of which is designated locally as the East William Street Historic District. To the west is the 8-story Fourth & William Parking Garage. South Fifth Avenue is a one-way south-bound street. East William Street is a two-way road with a newly completed cycle track on the north side directly adjacent to the site. South Fourth Avenue is a two-way road that accommodates additional on-street bus loading for the transit center.

**DESIGN NARRATIVE FROM THE PETITIONER:**

3. **Theme of the Design Concept.** The objectives defined by City Council

resolution provide the framework for the design concept. This includes maximizing residential density through towers, respecting adjacent buildings with the step back, providing an active ground floor along East William Street and South Fifth Avenue, and the potential to accommodate additional capacity for the transit center.

4. **Design Guidelines and Character District.** The proposed concept reinforces the street wall along South Fifth Avenue which is the primary north-south street in the Midtown District. The stepped down 4-story corner at East William Street and South Fifth Avenue respects the mid-rise character of the district, while also providing a visual gateway along East William Street. The active ground floor strengthens the east-west connection between South Fifth Avenue and South Main Street and enhances the pedestrian realm. The project has the potential to increase the loading capacity of the Blake Transit Center and enhance the transit rider experience, a significant public benefit. The 400 units of residential will also increase the daytime and evening activity in the area.
5. **Design Guidelines for Context and Site Planning.** The site is currently a parking lot. The proposed development improves the pedestrian experience by reinforcing the street wall and creating a sense of place. The proposed towers are set back from William Street to respect the residential neighborhood scale to the south, while the 4-story corner at William and Fifth enhances a gateway treatment. The concept provides a service alley along the north side for the building underneath the east and west tower overhangs, creating a covered exterior space with columns along the north side. Taking service vehicles off the street will allow for better curb management along 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenues and strength the pedestrian environment. The concept includes an option for an expanded transit area, either as a shared service lane or additional lane. The space will be designed to minimize pedestrian, bike, vehicular, and bus conflicts while also creating an interesting and inviting space for people to linger.

The project site is location between two major parking structures. Required parking will be secured by a parking contract with the Downtown Development Authority (DDA). There is no parking provided on-site. There is an opportunity for a pedestrian skyway to the Fourth & William parking garage. This connection would provide a gateway opportunity for South Fourth Avenue. The study also explored an expansion of the Library Lane parking garage at a connect point under 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Any physical connections to existing parking structures would be developer driven. Bicycle parking for residents will be provides on the ground floor. Additional public bicycle parking will also be provided to encourage multi-modal transportation.

The proposed concept provides for a roughly 5,500 SF rooftop space (located on the second floor) facing William Street which may be designed as a public

courtyard space. The east-west oriented pedestrian walkway between the service lane and the existing Blake Transit Center will serve as a public plaza including lighting, seating, and other elements to enrich the tenant and transit rider experience. The current study does not include a detailed site plan.

6. **Design Guidelines for Buildings.** The proposed FAR is approximately 866%, which is less than the maximum 900% FAR with affordable housing premiums. The east tower is 18 stories (193 FT), which is less than the maximum building height for D1 zoning. The proposed streetwall height is one-story (15 FT) with a 5-7 FT offset. This is largely influenced by residential unit sizes. The building massing responds to the adjacent buildings, with taller structures positioned adjacent to the parking structure and transit center and more mid-rise portions facing the library and the residential neighborhood. While the building is taller than the surrounding structures, the building footprint is similar. The proposed massing varies heights of individual components and shows a clear base, middle, and top. The ground floor is active, and the residential units are grouped by type to allow for a rhythm of windows and exterior projecting features such as balconies. The current massing study is limited in terms of architectural details.
  
7. **Design Guidelines for Building Elements.** The ground floor features a high level of transparency along Williams Street and Fifth Avenue, with an active storefront wrapping the corner along Fourth Ave. The building also incorporates an overhang which reinforces the streetwall and provides a sense of enclosure and pedestrian scale. The primary residential lobby is located on Fifth Avenue near the transit center and Library Lane, providing a visual and physical connection between the proposed building and the existing Blake Transit Center. East Williams Street is the primary retail entrance for the ground floor. Access to a public or semi-public rooftop area could be provided from East William Street and/or South Fifth Avenue. The current massing study does not provide comprehensive detail regarding fenestration, projections, materials, operational systems, and/or sustainability.

Attachment: [location map](#)