

ANN ARBOR DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Staff Report

MEETING DATE: March 13, 2019

PROJECT: 545 South Main Street
Project No. DR19-002

ADDRESS: 545 South Main Street

ZONING: D2 Downtown Interface (base)
First Street Character (overlay)
Secondary (street designation) – South Main Street
Secondary (street designation) – East Madison Street

DESIGN TEAM: Von Staden Architects
Midwestern Consulting

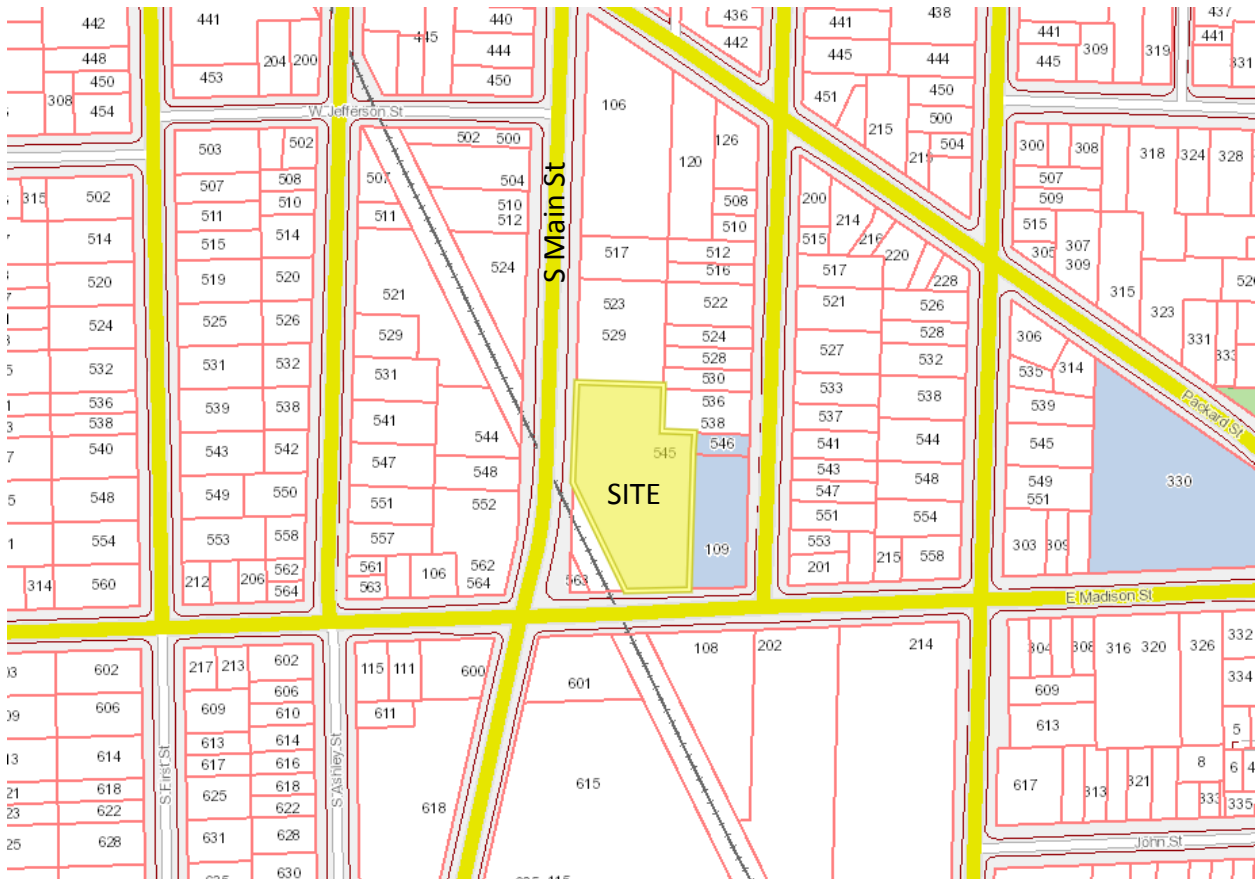


Figure 1- Location

PROPOSED PROJECT: A plan to redevelop the 545 South Main Street into a brewery restaurant. The 45,000-square foot site currently contains two multi-bay sheds and a one story now-vacant lumber and millwork building. The design plan proposed to renovate, remodel and expand the industrial building, remove a significant amount of the existing asphalt pavement, and create a loading area and small parking lot as well as outdoor entertainment space.

SITE VIEWS



Figure 2 - Perspective Sketch (looking northeast)

The [design plan application](#) illustrates the existing conditions and proposed redevelopment.

STAFF COMMENTS:

1. **Zoning Compliance (Area, Height, Placement).** A cursory review of the proposed development for compliance with the D2, First Street Character, secondary frontage designation area, height and placement regulations indicates there are many issues that must be addressed by a future site plan application. Those issues include:
 - a. **Nonconforming Streetwall** – None of the existing buildings form a streetwall along either South Main or Madison. Buildings must be within 10 feet of the

front lot line for the width of the lot on streets with “secondary” frontage designation.

b. **Minimum Building Height** – The D2 district requires buildings to be at least two stories in height, and the second floor must be at least 75% of the first floor. None of the existing buildings meet this requirement. The proposed addition to the main building appears to be only 25% of the first floor.

c. **Adjacency to Residential District** – The two legs of the property boundary at the northeast corner of the site abut a residential zone. Therefore, a 10-foot (for side lot lines) or a 15-foot setback (for rear lot lines) is required. Also, a 15-foot conflicting land use buffer is required when nonresidential zoning districts abut residential zoning districts.

Conflicting land use buffers include three components: width; plantings; and continuous screening. The existing buildings encroach into the required side/rear setback area adjacent to the residential zone, and there is no conflicting land use buffer.

d. **Floodplain** – The 100-year, or 1% Chance, Floodplain of Allen Creek covers the entire site. The main building and north shed are in the flood fringe (shown in green on Figure 4) and the west shed is in the floodway (shown in blue in Figure 4). City policy encourages all buildings in the floodway to be removed. No new barriers such as fencing or walls are permitted in the floodway. Buildings in the flood fringe must be flood-proofed when construction costs exceed 50% of the market value of that particular building. It appears the improvements to renovate the main building into a restaurant and brewery

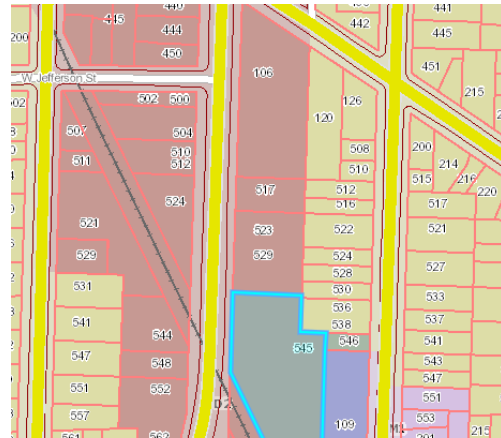


Figure 3 - Zoning Map

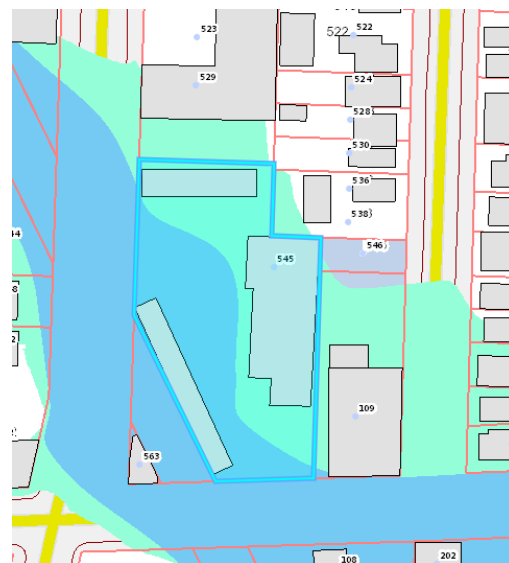
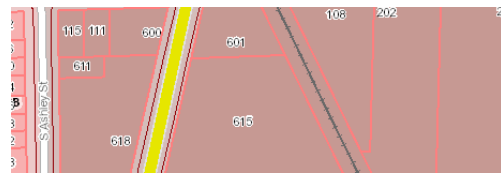


Figure 4 - Floodplain

must include flood proofing. Also, it appears bathrooms are proposed in the west shed. Any plumbing fixture connected to the sanitary sewer system must be elevated above the base flood elevation.

2. **Downtown Design Guidelines** – An underlying assumption of the Downtown Design Guidelines is that a design plan will propose demolition of an existing, underutilized site or will include significant expansion of an underutilized site to approach the maximum FAR allowed. The Guidelines do not address adaptive reuse of existing sites. They also presume, in fact demand, that the main open space of a site is the public street and sidewalk in front of it. There are guidelines for on-site open spaces, but these assume the open spaces are small percentages of a site.

Because of these underlying assumptions and the lack of guidance for simply reusing existing (nonconforming, underdeveloped) buildings, the initial draft staff report was extremely harsh and found almost no redeeming qualities about the proposed design plan. However, that is clearly not true. There is much to appreciate and support in the proposed design plan.

Staff's report focuses on applying the overarching goals of the Downtown Design Guidelines and the intent of each level of design.

3. **Site Context and Site Planning.** Staff finds more can be done to meet the spirit and intent of the design guidelines for site context and planning, where “designers should assess the character of the adjacent streetscape, open spaces, and buildings to determine how they function as places and facilities supporting human use.” Staff find the proposed design plan does not function as a *downtown* place or support the *pedestrian experience* to the fullest extent possible. Specific comments include:
 - a. The site lacks a clear, distinct, primary entrance. Then, from the primary site entrance, there must be a clear path for pedestrians to access the proposed restaurant and brewery without crossing any vehicular use area. Direct access from the public sidewalk to a building or venue is hallmark of downtown.
 - b. The proposed used of the new lawn area should be explained. How will it contribute to the enrichment of the downtown pedestrian experience? Will it be an active space? Used for storm water management? Why don't the concrete approaches to the building doors connect to the walkways? Why is manicured lawn the proposed surface material?
 - c. As with any downtown site, the number of curb cuts must be the minimum necessary. One of the existing curb cuts should be closed, preferably the curb cut on South Main.

- d. The proposed use of the sheds must be clarified. As structures within the floodplain, their use should be critical to the development program of the venue. They must contribute to the “function of the place and support human use.” If there is no significance to the sheds other than decoration, these floodplain impediments should be removed.
4. **Building.** The design guidelines for buildings focus on breaking down massing of presumably larger buildings from their presumably lower-scale neighbors. In this case, it is the subject site that is less intense and has a lower scale than its neighbors.
5. **Building Elements.** The design guidelines for building elements call for features and architectural details at the street edge to have a direct impact on the quality of the pedestrian experience, for building entries to be located to enhance the street level experience, windows to have a high level of ground floor transparency, and awnings to protect the sidewalk. The design plan should explore what can be done to make a proper street edge to the site.
6. **Summary.** The fundamental issue between the proposed design plan and the Downtown Design Guidelines seems to be the inward orientation of the existing site and the modest scope of the proposed improvements. Industrial facilities are designed to be enclosed islands, solitary fortresses, keeping everything contained inside and out of sight. Downtown development is meant to be inviting, engaging, active, transparent, and continuous. A balance must be found between adaptively reusing an industrial facility and contributing to the urban, pedestrian-oriented, active and enriching streetscape experience that Ann Arbor is known for and desires.