



ANN ARBOR DESIGN REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: May 15, 2024

PROJECT: DR24-0001 – 611 Church Street

ADDRESS: 611 Church St [main address]

ZONING: D1 Downtown Core (base)
South University Character (overlay)
Primary and Secondary Street (street type designation)

DESIGN TEAM: Midwestern Consulting, Inc (civil engineer); DLR Group (architect); Core Spaces (developer); J Bradley Moore & Associates (consultant)

LOCATION: This site is located on the east side of Church Street between South University Avenue and Willard Street and includes 611 Church, 621 Church, 625 Church, 1207 Willard and part of 616 S Forest.

BACKGROUND: The applicant has created a site consisting of four existing lots (611, 621, 625 Church, 1207 Willard) and intends to acquire a portion of a fifth lot (616 S Forest) currently owned by the City of Ann Arbor, for which the City Administrator has given permission to apply for Design Review Board review and site plan approval. The City Administrator has indicated the requested portion of 616 S Forest will be divided and sold to the applicant while reserving all rights from a point 25 feet above the ground downward for continued access to the remaining portion of 616 S Forest from Church Street. The applicant will own the space 25 feet above the ground upward.

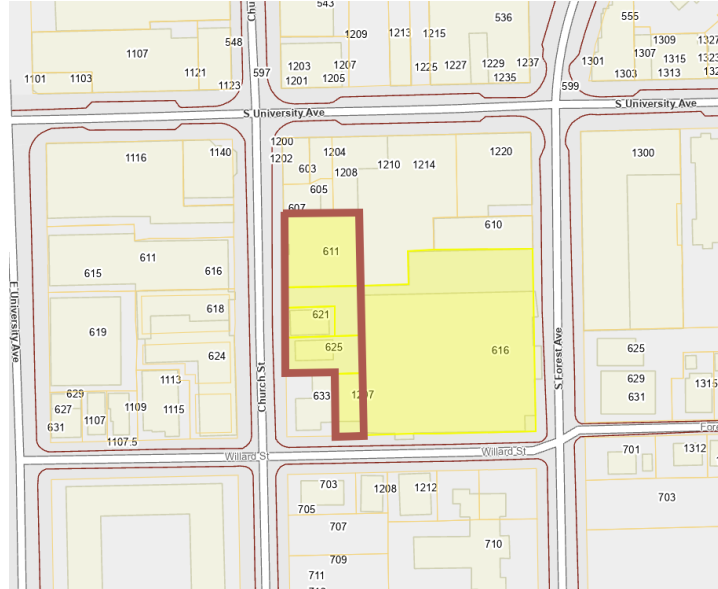


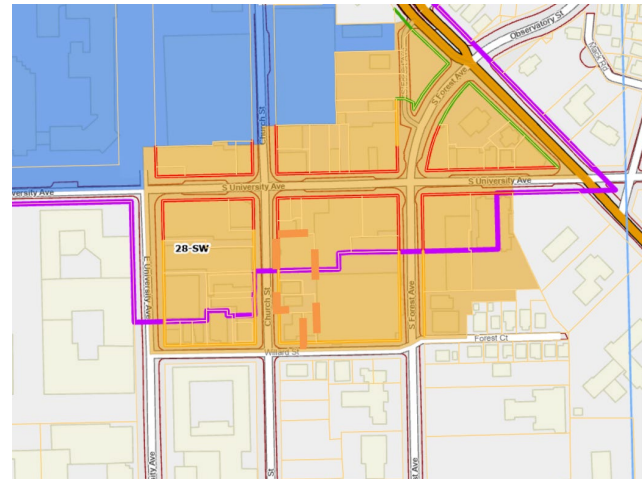
Figure 1: Location Map

APPLICATION: A proposed design for a 19-story apartment building to redevelop 611 Church, 621 Church, 625 Church, 1207 Willard and the portion of 616 S Forest between 611 and 621 Church. The proposed building has a dark masonry two-story base and a warm, undulated and articulated multi-story tower perched above. The building is stepped and undulated to emphasize the base and break up the tower mass. Panelized cementitious system materials in warm hues are selected to bring shine during winter months. The combined site has approximately 25,000 square feet and is located in the D1 (Downtown Core) base and South University Character overlay districts with part Primary Street and part Secondary Street frontage designations.

ZONING REVIEW: The following provides a cursory review of the proposed project for compliance with the applicable dimensional standards for the zoning designation in which it is located to help assure that the future site plan associated with the project can be approved substantially as presented.



Base Zoning Map



Overlay Zoning Map with Street Types

Zoning Designations – D1 Downtown Core (base district), South University Character (overlay district), First Street and Secondary Street type.

| Dimension | Standard | Review |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Lot Area | No minimum | Complies (approx. 25,000 sq ft) |
| FAR (Floor Area Ratio) | No maximum | Complies (1382%) |
| Front Setback | Primary: 0 ft min, 1 ft max Secondary: 0 ft min, 10 ft max | |
| Side and Rear Setback | None | Complies (5 ft) |
| Streetwall Height | Min 2 stories, max 3 stories | Complies (2 stories) |
| Average Offset at Top of Streetwall | 5 ft min | Does not comply (average 0 ft offset) |
| Height | 2 stories min 150 ft max (+30% exception = | Does not comply (199 ft 6 in) |

| Dimension | Standard | Review |
|--|-----------|--------------------------------|
| | 195 ft) | |
| Building Module Length (Articulation) | 45 ft max | Complies (approximately 22 ft) |
| Tower Diagonal | N/A | N/A |
| Building Coverage | None | N/A |
| Open Space | None | N/A |

DESIGN GUIDELINES REVIEW: Staff have identified the following design guidelines from the [Downtown Ann Arbor Design Guidelines](#) as being particularly relevant to the proposed project.

Downtown Ann Arbor Design Guidelines

General Design Guidelines

Design Guidelines for Context and Site Planning

A.1 Urban Pattern and Form. When considering urban pattern and form, the petitioner should assess the character of the adjacent streetscape, open spaces, and buildings to determine how they function as places and facilities supporting human use.

The project team's assessment should seek to define opportunities to enrich the design excellence of that project.

A.1.1 Identify and then reinforce the positive characteristics of adjacent sites.

A.1.4 For mid-block sites, identify adjacent site and building design qualities, noting that a design may be appropriate for a mid-block site that best serves the area in a secondary role.

A.1.6 Where adjacent properties are underdeveloped and/or the block lacks inviting and interesting characteristics, consider a building, site and streetscape design that helps to create a vibrant pedestrian setting.

A.1.7 On sites that abut an alley, design the alley entry connection to the street to minimize pedestrian/bike/vehicle conflicts while taking advantage of the alley as an open space from which to see and access the new/proposed site and buildings.

A.2 Site Planning and Natural Systems. An urban setting can be a challenging environment in which to respond to natural systems. Consider natural systems such as sun and wind patterns, climates and seasonality, rainwater harvesting, and significant individual features such as street tree patterns and landmark trees on public and private sites.

A.3 Open Space. Open spaces can include public and private courtyards, plazas, patios, terraces, alleys, and gardens. Throughout downtown, site features and elements that invite use should be provided. In commercial areas, open spaces should have an urban quality and character that enliven the street and enhance the pedestrian experience. Outside the commercial core and in civic areas, open spaces may be more park-like settings for human activity. Private property open spaces should be sized relative to the intended use and level of anticipated adjacent pedestrian activity.

Design Guidelines for Buildings

B. 1 Building Massing. Building massing principles address the overall height, size and shape of a building. Although these guidelines refer to the visual aspects of structures, it is important to note that downtown zoning districts address key building massing considerations including floor area ratio, building height, streetwall height, offset and module length.

B.1.1 Design a building to minimize its impact on adjacent lower-scale areas.

Suggested strategies include:

- a) Step taller building elements away from adjacent lower-scale buildings and/or neighborhoods
- b) Locate taller building elements at the intersection of streets
- c) Provide variation in building massing to reflect the underlying pattern of established lot widths

B.1.2 When a new building will be larger than surrounding structures, visually divide it into smaller building modules that provide a sense of scale.

Suggested strategies include:

- a) Vary the height of individual building modules.
- b) Vary the height of cornice lines and other roof finish elements.
- c) Change wall surface materials, colors or texture.
- d) Use vertical moldings to express different building modules.
- e) Align projecting features, such as balconies or sun screens, to express different building modules.
- f) Use underlying established lot widths to help determine the width of building modules at the street level.

Design Guidelines for Building Elements

C.1 Street Edge. Building elements and architectural details used at the street front have a direct impact on the quality of the pedestrian experience and should be combined to create an active and interesting street front. Creative use of materials, textures and architectural details is especially important where there are few windows at the street front of a building.

C.1.1 Use building elements to create a street edge that invites pedestrian activity.

Suggested street edge elements include:

- a) First floor canopies that complement the design character of the building and its street front
- b) Architectural details that provide a sense of scale
- c) Wall surfaces with visually interesting detailing, textures and colors
- d) Art features including sculptures, friezes, and murals

C.2 Entries. The location, spacing and general pattern of building entries impact the quality of the pedestrian experience downtown. Building entries should be located to enhance the street level experience and help give a sense of scale. Entries should be clearly defined, accessible, and located to express rhythm and visual interest along a street front. Although traditional building entry designs may be appropriate, creative and contemporary interpretations are also encouraged.

C.2.1 Clearly define a primary entrance and orient it toward the street.

Appropriate strategies include:

- a) Create a recessed area that signifies a break in the building wall line
- b) Use a canopy or awning positioned over the entry
- c) Design a change in wall materials, textures, or colors that frames the entry
- d) Include distinctive paving pattern leading to the entry
- e) Use accent lighting to define the entry way
- f) Locate the entry at the street level

C.4 Awnings. The use of awnings is encouraged at the sidewalk level to provide shelter from the rain, to modulate natural light, and to indicate entry and provide transition from the outdoor to the indoor environment.

C.5 Materials. Building materials should reinforce the massing and architectural concepts and enhance the character of the building and its context.

C.5.1 Apply materials to provide a sense of scale in proportion to the scale and mass of the building.

Design Guidelines for Character Districts

South University Character District. This district is located on the southern and eastern edges of Central Campus (refer to the map for boundaries). Current architectural character includes diverse styles ranging from older eclectic forms to new/contemporary ones, expressed through a wide variety of architectural materials including wood siding, brick, limestone, precast concrete, and various metals. Building heights

range from one and two floor/low-rise to mid and hi-rise. Rooflines vary from two and three story frame houses to flat roofed contemporary expressions at various building heights and façade expressions.

This area is a mixed-use district, largely consisting today of university population-focused restaurant and commercial services, and student housing. This district is busy and vibrant with automobile and pedestrian activity. Sidewalk level doorways provide access to upper floor offices and apartments. The urban landscape includes sidewalk extensions (bump-outs) with circular tree sized planters; a well-developed tree canopy over some sidewalks; and outdoor dining spaces at sidewalk and rooftop levels. First floor facades are more transparent with clear, large display windows, allowing inside first floor retail activities to be visible from, and contribute to, the district's active street life.

The cumulative character can be described as a busy and vibrant urban setting that encourages and accommodates a diverse range of downtown activities.

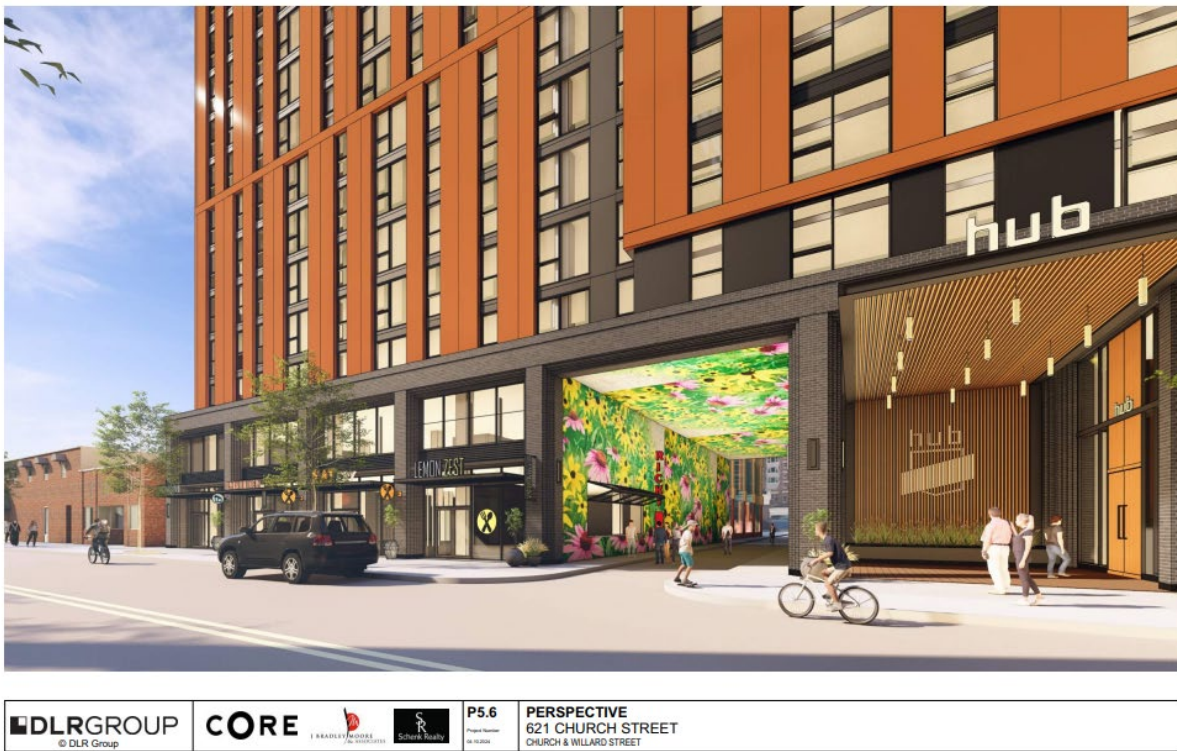


Figure 2: Street Edge Rendering

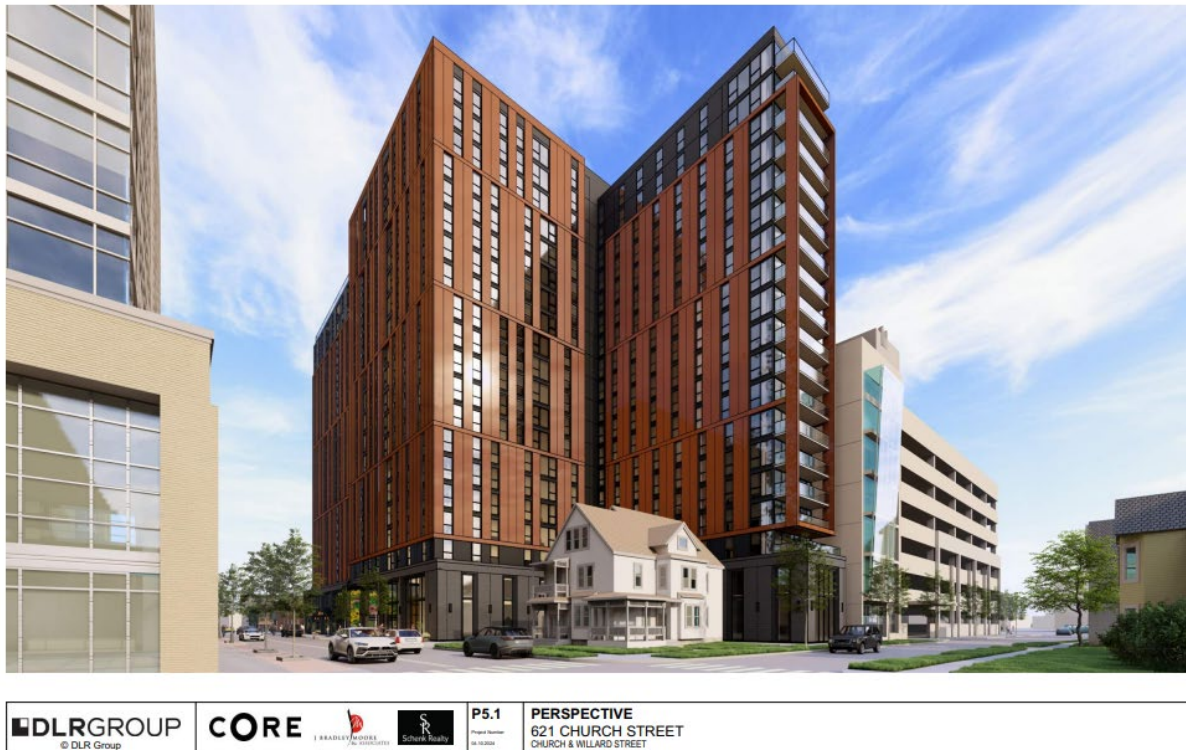


Figure 3: Perspective Rendering

STAFF REPORT:

1. The urban pattern and form in the South University Character area has significantly changed in the past decade. The proposed project is consistent with the emerging character.
2. Although the project does not include any open space courtyard or plaza, it does include an alley of sorts. The application renderings of the alley show an enlivened, inviting, and enhanced pedestrian experience across and in this alley.
3. Building elements and architectural details at the street edge create a particularly high-quality pedestrian experience and active and interesting street front. Almost all of the relevant *design guidelines for building elements* have been incorporated into the street edge design.
4. The proposed building massing does not conform to the dimensional standards of the South University Character overlay district – there is no offset at the top of the street wall. This is a zoning standard without any administrative flexibility beyond the fact that it is already an average dimension, so staff cannot find it anything but unacceptable. That said, the fact that building has no variation in

height of individual building modules or cornice lines and no variation in depth or relief of the west façade has a more direct impact to the quality of the downtown skyline than compliance with the required offset at the top of the street wall.

5. Overall, staff find the square, flat west façade of the building should be redesigned to provide variation in both height and depth.
6. If 633 Church is ever incorporated into the development site, staff strongly suggest it becoming a public plaza with elements such as seating, outdoor dining, trees and flower beds, and art.

Attachments: Zoning Maps
 Applicant Presentation
 Design Narrative

Prepared by Alexis DiLeo, City Planner
May 10, 2024