

ANN ARBOR DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Staff Report

MEETING DATE: October 19, 2016

PROJECT: 1209 South University Avenue Design Project
“The Collegian East”
Project No. DR16-016

ADDRESS: 1209 South University Avenue

ZONING DISTRICTS: D1 Downtown Core, South University Character, Primary Frontage

DESIGN TEAM: Michael Decoster – Hamilton Anderson Associates
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Ronald L. Hughes – Hughes Properties
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PROPOSED PROJECT: A new 13-story, 70,000-square foot building is proposed to replace the existing buildings at 1209 and 1213 South University. The assembled site, located on the north side of South University between Church and South Forest, is 10,780-square feet (0.25 acre).



Figure 1 – Location Map

Working with a midblock site that has a narrow shared access drive on its west side which serves both the subject site and an abutting site with frontage on Church Street, the applicant describes the South University character area as “an eclectic mix of styles including the nearby university buildings, two story postmodern commercial buildings, and high rise student apartments.” The designers state the proposed concept takes “a form with a pedestrian oriented base with individually identified floor lines but doing so out of modern materials.” The design will create a “sympathetic architecture without relying on any particular adjacent architecture.”

The existing access drive will be widened from 8 feet to 18 feet and a new, 13-story, 144-foot tall, 70,000-square foot building will be constructed. The proposed building is set back 13 feet from its west property line and 6 feet from its east property line. A 3-foot front setback is proposed. An 1,800-square foot retail space is planned for the first floor along with a roughly equal sized residential lobby, and 13 open parking spaces under the northern half of the building.



STAFF COMMENTS:

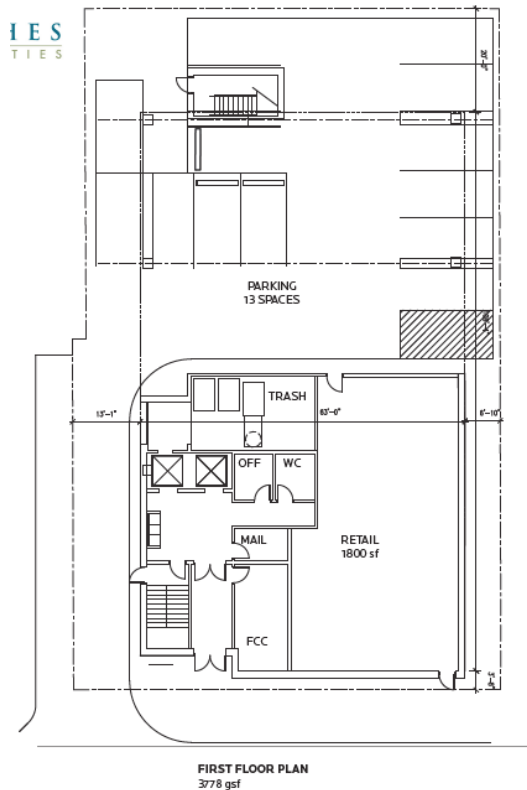
1. The Downtown Development Authority is coordinating an improvement project to reconstruct South University Avenue between East University and Washtenaw Avenue. The design phase is complete and construction is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2017.
2. The area, height and placement regulations for this site (D1, South University character, primary frontage) are provided in the chart below. A cursory review of the proposed development does not show immediate or obvious violations of applicable zoning regulations although some dimensional details are not provided.

	Required	Proposed
FAR (Floor Area Ratio)	Up to 700% with premiums (75,460 sq ft)	689% (74,314 sq ft)
Front Setback	Min 0 feet, Max 1 feet	3 ft
Side Setback	None	13 ft (W), 6 ft (E)
Rear Setback	None	0 ft
Streetwall Height	Min 2 stories, Max 3 stories	2 stories
Offset at Top of Streetwall	Min Average 5 feet	Unknown

Total Height	Maximum 150 feet	144 ft
Massing Articulation	Maximum 45 ft	Unknown)
Building Coverage	No maximum	Approximately 90%
Open Space	No minimum	Approximately 10%

- An offset at the top of the streetwall is shown on the elevation renderings but its dimension is not labeled. No information is provided regarding the proposed massing articulation. As the site is 83 feet in width and the maximum massing articulation requirement is 45 feet, some articulation is required. The proposed building is replacing a building with three distinct storefronts. Staff suggests that at least two and perhaps three distinct articulations should be provided.

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- Staff acknowledges there is an existing shared access drive on the site's west side that must be incorporated into the proposed redevelopment of the site. However, there is no such requirement on the east side of the site. The design team is proposing a 6-foot side setback for the base of the building. A new building for the adjacent site at 1215 South University Avenue was recently discussed by the Design Review Board on August 17, 2016 which proposed no side setback. The proposed development will be creating a gap in the streetwall.

5. Not only is the existing shared access drive being maintained as part of the proposed development, it is being doubled in width. Therefore, staff suggests transforming and upgrading this necessary utility into a signature feature of the design by creating a “woonerf” or European-style shared space for vehicles and pedestrians. The East University Avenue mall already operates with great success as a woonerf by allowing pedestrians, bicycles and vehicles in a shared space for work, access and recreation. For The Collegian East, the residential entrance could be relocated to the middle of the west façade facing the woonerf. This would also enable the building’s entire street frontage to be devoted to retail uses. If the adjacent site east is redeveloped (which the design team also controls), it too could use the woonerf concept. A woonerf or similar shared space of any name would transform the area currently intended solely for a handful of vehicles into an environment more suitable for a vibrant downtown block.
6. The design team should discuss how the proposed building affects and is being affected by the 1215 South University development.
7. In staff’s opinion, the proposed development does not sufficiently address the applicable **design guidelines for context and site planning**. It does not identify and reinforce positive characteristics of adjacent sites (A.1.1). Its excessive streetwall gaps do not enrich the pedestrian experience (A.1.2). As a site abutting an alley, it does not take advantage of the alley as an open space from which to see and access the new site and building (A.1.7). It is unclear if the alley will use porous materials to promote storm water infiltration (A.2.7). The site has missed opportunities to provide urban quality open spaces (A.3). The parking, driveway and service areas of the site are not designed to benefit the urban experience (A.4).
8. The **design guidelines for building massing** generally focus on minimizing the impact of a new building and providing details, variation, and design treatments that break down scale. The tower of the building has appropriate variation, details and design treatments. However, the base does not provide articulation to reflect the underlying patten of established lot widths (B.1.1.c).
9. The proposed development falls short of meeting the applicable **design guidelines for building elements**. Between the 13-foot west setback and 6-foot east setback, the proposed building only spans 78% of its lot width. The building itself has an appropriate street edge, and high level of ground floor transparency but the gaps it creates in the streetwall are excessive. Further, although the primary entrances are oriented toward the street, the majority of the streetlevel are entrances and not active space.

APPLICABLE GUIDELINES: From the Ann Arbor Downtown Design Guidelines

Staff has identified the following Guidelines as applicable to the proposed project. These include Guidelines both with which the proposed project is and is not consistent. The Design Review Board may find other Guidelines are also applicable.

Chapter 1: General Design Guidelines

A. 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.

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

A.1.2 Design sidewalk level features and facilities to provide enrichment of the pedestrian experience.

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.2.7 Use porous materials in drainage and detention areas to promote rainwater percolation into the parent soil.

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.

A.3.2 Locate an urban open space where there is a high level of existing or potential pedestrian activity.

A.3.4 Place an urban open space in a location that serves as a focal point on a site.

A.4 Parking, Driveways and Service Areas. Parking, driveways, and service areas are necessary functions, which should be designed to benefit the urban experience.

A.5 Pedestrian Connections. Pedestrian connections include sidewalks, alleys and arcades that provide pedestrian access within, through and among properties. Such connections provide access to buildings, courtyards, plazas and other site elements.

A.6 Cycling and Transit. Walking, cycling, transit and other multi-modal means of transportation are to be considered in the design of streetscapes.

B. 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:

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:

d) Use vertical moldings to express different building modules.

f) Use underlying established lot widths to help determine the width of building modules at the street level.

C. Design Guidelines for Building Elements

Building elements include specific design features that give character and detail to a building. They are not generally addressed by the requirements of the downtown zoning districts. Entries, windows, materials, and other building elements influence the degree to which a new building contributes to the urban fabric. Quality and creativity are most clearly expressed and experienced at this level of design.

The design of building elements should be compatible with its surrounding context. However, a wide range of styles or design themes are appropriate including creative, contemporary, and environmentally-oriented design solutions. Surfaces that have variations in depth with substantial shadow lines add interest.

- 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.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.3 Windows.** Window design and placement should help establish a sense of scale and provide visual interest.
- 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.6 Building Operational Systems.** Building operational systems such as waste management, utility services, heating and cooling systems, must be carefully integrated into the design of a building and not detract from the architectural concept.

South University Character District

This district is located on the southern and eastern edges of central campus. 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.

Prepared by Alexis DiLeo, City Planner
October 13, 2016