

# ANN ARBOR DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

## Staff Report

**MEETING DATE:** March 21, 2018

**PROJECT:** 309 North Ashley Street Design Plan  
Project No. DR18-001

**ADDRESS:** 309 North Ashley Street

**ZONING:** D2 Downtown Interface (base zoning)  
Kerrytown Character (overlay zoning)  
Front Yard (street designation)

**DESIGN TEAM:** Bowers + Associates – Architect  
S.M. Engineers - Engineer

**PROPOSED PROJECT:** A new 5-story residential building is proposed on a 14,500-square foot site that is assembled from four lots (307 and 309 North Ashley Street and 206 and 210 Miller Avenue). The site is currently occupied by two single-family structures that have each been converted to a duplex.



Figure 1 – Location Map

In the submitted [design plan](#) and [project narrative](#), the applicant addresses the design concept, development program, describes the site context, the inspiration and theme of the project, and how the design responds to the each of the four sections of the Downtown Design Guidelines.



Figure 2 – 309 North Ashley rendering

As noted in the project narrative, the design reflects and continues the evolution of the area – that portion of Kerrytown east of North Main Street and north of Miller Avenue – from converted single-family homes to mid-rise residential buildings. The proposed design continues the trend towards modern, boxy, industrially-inspired buildings clad with masonry, metal siding and large metal framed windows. 309 North Ashley also includes steel balconies, sunscreens and awnings.

**STAFF COMMENTS:**

1. The area, height and placement regulations for this site (D2, Kerrytown character, front yard street) are provided in the chart below. A cursory review of the proposed development indicates it will comply with density regulations for the site. Compliance with all of the critical zoning regulations could not be determined because of missing data.

	Requirements	Proposed
<b>Lot Area</b>		14,514 sq ft
<b>FAR (Floor Area Ratio)</b>	200% normal MAX, up to 400% MAX with premiums (29,028 to 58,056 sq ft)	279% (40,500 sq ft) Residential premiums used

<b>Front Setback</b>	15 ft MIN or Average	15 ft
<b>Side Setback</b>	0 ft MIN	Varied 0 to 14 ft
<b>Rear Setback</b>	0 ft MIN	Varied 0 to 12 ft
<b>Streetwall Height</b>	Min 2 stories, Max 3 stories	3 stories
<b>Offset at Top of Streetwall</b>	5 ft MIN Average	Appears 5 ft
<b>Total Height</b>	2 stories/24 ft MIN 60 ft MAX	59 ft
<b>Massing Articulation</b>	40 ft MIN	Appears none
<b>Building Coverage</b>	80% MAX	Not provided
<b>Open Space</b>	10% MIN	Not provided

2. The applicant must confirm the streetwall height and the offset at the top of the streetwall, the massing articulation, the building coverage and open space in order to assess whether the proposed development will comply with the zoning regulations for this site.
3. The proposed development is incorporates applicable **design guidelines for context and site planning**. It is in keeping with the style and proportions of new development in the northwest quadrant of Kerrytown.
4. 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 proposed development provides façade setbacks, plane variation and design treatments. The modern, industrial style checks off many boxes for the building massing guidelines, but does not fit in well with the zoning requirements that seek to ensure a continuous streetwall and upper-story setbacks. The Board may want to discuss how to balance being true to the design while meeting zoning regulations.
5. The proposed development also incorporates all of the applicable **design guidelines for building elements**. It has an appropriate street edge for a “front yard” street designation and for a building with residential uses at the street level.

**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.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.

**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.4.1 Locate and size driveways, access points, service entries, alleys, loading docks, and trash receptacles to minimize impact on pedestrians and maintain pedestrian safety, circulation, and comfort.

A.4.3 Locate a parking structure or a surface parking lot behind or to the side of a building, minimizing the visual presence of parking on adjacent public right-of-way.

**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.5.1 Pedestrian walkways should be well integrated with the existing

infrastructure in a way that supports pedestrian connections within and outside the areas of the proposed project.

A.5.5 Link on-site open spaces, such as courtyards and plazas, directly to a public sidewalk.

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

A.6.2 Consider use of convenient bicycle racks, including proximity to building entries, weather protection and security when selecting a location for bicycle parking and storage.

## **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:

- 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.

## **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.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.
- C.7 Sustainability in Building Elements.** Consider sustainability when selecting structural and façade materials and designing functional building elements.

### **Kerrytown Character District**

Kerrytown defines the downtown's northern edge and is the transition from commercial to residential as one moves to the east, north and west – away from the downtown. Two and three story Italianate masonry multi-use buildings with zero lot lines give way to late-19th and early-20th century wood-framed housing.

Many think of Kerrytown as home to several Ann Arbor “institutions” in the form of eateries, markets and entertainment venues. It is a lively district by day anchored by a stable retail presence, ample pedestrian elbow room and a variety of vehicular parking

options. Kerrytown is a place locals like to frequent.

In the evening Kerrytown becomes more quiet. While Community High School and the Ann Arbor Farmer's Market provide vitality by day the use of each site recedes to parking at night. Evening activity in Kerrytown is limited to a number of well-spaced dining and entertainment venues in the core area between Detroit Street and Main Street, north of Miller Avenue.

Moving from the core of the Kerrytown Character District, with its brick-paved streets, into the surrounding neighborhoods the pedestrian amenities change. The sidewalks transition from continuous hardscape between building facades and the street curb into ribbons of walkway bordered by landscape setbacks and grassy street extensions. Trees become more prevalent with way-finding signage and lighting levels diminishing.