

MEMORANDUM

To: Ann Arbor City Council

From: Ann Arbor Historic District Commission
Jill Thacher, City Planner/Historic Preservation Coordinator

Date: April 13, 2023

Re: 415 W Washington

The Historic District Commission is pleased to see progress on the redevelopment of the 415 West Washington site. Despite its many challenges, 415 has great potential as the setting for a project that is positive for the neighborhood, downtown, and future residents.

At a March 9, 2023 Working Session, the HDC reviewed the most current conceptual mockup of a future building on the site. The HDC did not review or look at the proposed PUD zoning ordinance, but rather sought to better understand the site layout and potential building massing. Since the white box mockup does not represent an actual project, the HDC's thoughts are general in nature.

For any project on the site, the HDC's most immediate concern is new development's relationship to the abutting historic buildings on West Washington, Third Street, and West Liberty. While the viewshed approaching the site's east side from downtown is important, of higher priority to the Historic District Commission are the western and southern sides of the site. Since most of the abutting historic resources are 1 3/4 to 2 1/2 story houses or offices originally built as houses (the one exception is St. Paul's Lutheran Church), the tallest parts of a new building at 415 should be pulled away from the west side of the site where the smallest houses are located. It is important that new construction does not loom over existing buildings. This is applicable on the south side, as well, though the historic buildings (and the Mark residential development) on West Liberty are taller and sit at a significantly higher grade than the 415 site.

A future project will be compared by the HDC to the [Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines](#). 415 West Washington falls within the downtown historic districts area. Guidelines for new downtown construction are on pages 7-7 through 7-22, and address site features like building mass, open space, setbacks and alignment of new buildings, parking, and site context. They also reference the First Street Character Area section of the *Downtown Ann Arbor Design Guidelines*.

The Historic District Commission thanks City Council for the opportunity to learn more about the future 415 West Washington project and provide input to staff and the project consultant. At their April 13, 2023 regular meeting, the HDC voted to transmit this memo to City Council.