

ANN ARBOR DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Staff Report

MEETING DATE: September 4, 2015

PROJECT: McKinley Technology Center Phase 2

ADDRESS: 310 Miller Avenue

ZONING DISTRICTS: D2 (Downtown Interface) Base, First Street Character Overlay

DESIGN TEAM: David Esau, Cornerstone Design, Inc.
Thomas Gritter, McKinley, Inc.

PROPOSED PROJECT: The 81,802-square foot site, located at the northwest corner of Miller Avenue and North First Street, currently contains a single-story office building and a 50+ space surface parking lot. The site is almost entirely within the 100-year floodplain of Allen Creek, which bisects the site and runs underneath the existing building. The applicant proposes to construct a 3-story, 30,000-square foot office building elevated above the 100-year floodplain with parking underneath in the northwest portion of the site. Because the building must be placed outside of the easement for Allen Creek, a planned project site plan approval will be requested to allow an increased front setback from the front lot lines. Normally, the maximum front setback allowed is 10 feet.

APPLICABLE GUIDELINES: From the Ann Arbor Downtown Design Guidelines

Staff has identified the following Guidelines as applicable to the proposed project. 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. The project team's assessment should seek to define opportunities to enrich the design excellence of the project.

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

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.2.6 Where location and site size allow, consider use of a rain garden or vegetated roof to retain rainwater and serve as a site amenity, and employ rainwater harvesting methods for use in landscape irrigation systems.

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.

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.4.2 Provide a pedestrian-friendly street edge at street level adjacent to surface parking areas and enclosed parking structures. Provide a landscape buffer appropriate for urban conditions at the edges of surface parking areas.

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.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

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.

C. 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.

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.

C.3 Windows. Window design and placement should help establish a sense of scale and provide visual interest.

C.3.2 If contextually appropriate, upper floor windows should reference established patterns of adjacent and nearby buildings in size, shape and spacing by aligning sills and headers and using similar window proportions.

C.3.3 Window depths should be appropriate to the building design concept. For example, windows flush to the wall surface are often appropriate for modern

designs, but traditional concepts should have punched or recessed windows.

- C.5 Materials. Building materials should reinforce the massing and architectural concepts and enhance the character of the building and its context.
- C.7 Sustainability in Building Elements. Consider sustainability when selecting structural and façade materials and designing functional building elements.

First Street Character District

The First Street character area lies to the west of the Main Street and Kerrytown districts, and forms the eastern edge of the Old West Side Historic District. The topography forming the Allen Creek Valley with its flood plain, the buried/piped Allen Creek, the Ann Arbor Rail Road track with its historic, turn-of-the-century industrial architecture, and the proposed future Allen Creek Greenway, are distinct aspects of this district needing recognition during any First Street District proposed project design. The mixture of historic and non-historic residential and industrial architecture, and the valley land form, gives this area a distinct difference from other downtown character districts.

The area is a mixed use linear district (north to south) that follows the railroad tracks' older industrial railroad buildings, some of which have been converted into occupied industrial, construction, and other office uses, occasional art and dance studio activities, bars and nightclubs. The district also includes residential frame two and three story structures. The relatively quiet mixed-use neighborhood streets are highlighted by elevated train tracks with trestle bridges above east-west crossing streets from Washington Street north to Miller, and with wooden warehouse-like structures along the tracks, some of which are currently empty. The presence of the Allen Creek Flood Plain and the railroad track and its trestles are unique attributes worthy of design consideration.

The district's urban landscape largely consists of tree lined streets with relatively consistent lot spacing, and an occasionally vacant parcel. At times, a triangular shaped parcel caused by the orientation/alignment of the tracks is in contrast with the local streets. The future Allen Creek Greenway should be given design consideration as a potential element of all First Street Character District proposals.

STAFF COMMENTS:

1. The 100-year floodplain and the buried Allen Creek create significant challenges for new development on the site.
2. The existing context of the site is undeniably industrial. The surrounding neighborhood is in transition from single-family frame homes to multi-story, industrial-inspired, modern residential structures.

3. Many proposed building element details are somewhat vague, perhaps because the proposed project is a speculative office building. The design as shown in the application appears does not appear to staff as strongly industrial. Rather, it has a suburban feeling more suited to an office park or campus.
4. More attention should be given to reinforcing the existing and evolving context as well as how the proposed building enhances the pedestrian experience for both existing and future tenants as well as passers-by.
5. Given the size of the site and the constraints of the drain easement that bisects the site, there is an excellent opportunity to introduce unique landscape features that reflect the site's position on the floor of the Allen Creek valley. This could be incorporated into the required storm water management system.

Prepared by Alexis DiLeo, City Planner
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