

ANN ARBOR DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Staff Report

MEETING DATE: December 14, 2022

PROJECT: 350 South Fifth Avenue (Old Y Site)
Project No. DR22-2008

ADDRESS: 350 S. Fifth Avenue

ZONING: D1 Downtown Core (base)
Midtown Character (overlay)
Secondary (street designation) – South Fifth Avenue
Secondary (street designation) – East William Street
Secondary (street designation) – South Fourth Avenue

DESIGN TEAM: SmithGroup

PROJECT LOCATION: The site is bounded by the Blake Transit Center to the north, East William Street to the south, South Fifth Avenue to the east, and South Fourth Avenue to the west.

PROJECT HISTORY: The site was home to the Ann Arbor YMCA from 1960-2005 until the current YMCA opened on West Washington Street. The former YMCA building was demolished in 2008 including 100 affordable housing units associated with the former building. The site served as a surface parking lot for approximately 10 years. City Council recently adopted Resolution R-18-173 that outlined the City's priorities and criteria for redeveloping the lot. The Housing Commission hired SmithGroup to conduct a public participation process to get feedback on the potential development of the site and to develop a conceptual plan for the project. The concept plan accompanied a PUD zoning application and was presented to the DRB in October 2020. It included massing drawings without any façade detail. Since then, Housing Commission staff has asked SmithGroup to provide full architectural elevations for the project. The Housing Commission intends to get final site plan approval of the project prior to identifying a developer partner who can construct the project.

PROPOSED PROJECT: The proposed concept includes two attached towers that will accommodate a total of 296 dwelling units (201 in the east tower and 95 in the west tower). The west tower is anticipated to be owned and managed by the City of Ann Arbor Housing Commission and will consist of affordable housing units while the east tower is anticipated to be owned and managed by a private entity and will consist of mostly market rate units. The west tower is proposed to be 17 stories tall while the east tower is proposed to be 18 stories tall (approximately 231 feet tall). The building is

proposed to have floor area ratio of 884% which is close to the maximum FAR allowed (900%) with affordable housing premiums. The first two floors on the northern portion of the site are open-air and have been designed to accommodate a bus lane for three bus bays adjacent to the Blake Transit Center as well as a service lane that can accommodate solid waste pickup for the project. No vehicular parking is proposed as part of the project. The ground floor is proposed to accommodate separate lobbies, elevators, bicycle parking and solid waste areas for each community. Approximately 4,700 square feet of retail is proposed on the south side of the ground floor of the east tower abutting the W. William Street right-of-way. The second floor is anticipated to be devoted to separate common areas such as community rooms, fitness center and bathrooms.

The City has developed the following objectives for redeveloping 350 S 5th Ave:

- Maximize affordable housing units
- Maximize market rate housing
- Develop a mix of housing types and prices
- Expand bus parking areas for the Blake Transit Center
- Activate the ground floor for public benefit
- Maintain some city ownership/control
- Recapture the cost of purchase

Primary building materials are proposed to include brick and precast concrete with secondary materials proposed to include concrete panel/terra cotta rainscreen with aluminum storefront metal frame canopy.

The towers provide a variety of unit types include studio (415 SF), 1-bedroom (550 SF), and 2-bedroom (825 SF) units. Ground floor space uses are flexible, but it is assumed this would be leasable space (19,000 SF) for commercial, retail, office type uses, or a municipal space for community use.

Additionally, the petitioner provided an alternative option for the ground floor service alley on the north side of the site, which widens the alley to 45 feet. This option would be pursued potentially to accommodate additional AAATA bus parking on the site, immediately adjacent to the existing Blake Transit Center.

ZONING COMPLIANCE AND SITE CONTEXT:

1. **Zoning Compliance (Area, Height, Placement).** The following provides a cursory review of the proposed development project for compliance with the D1, Midtown Character Overlay District, secondary frontage designation area, and area, height and placement regulations.

	Requirement	Proposed
Lot Area	NA	34,848 sq ft
Floor Area	313,632 sq/ft MAX with affordable housing premium	309,800 sq ft (excludes shafts, terraces, penthouse; includes basement)
FAR (Floor Area Ratio)	400% standard MAX, up to 900% MAX with affordable housing premiums (313,632 square feet MAX)	884% FAR
Rear Setback-North	0 ft MIN; 0 MAX	10 ft, 2 inches
Front Setback-West	0 ft MIN; 10 MAX	Varies from 0 ft to 10 inches
Front Setback - South	0 ft MIN, 10 ft MAX	Varies from 0 ft to 3 ft
Front Setback - East	0 ft MIN, 10 ft MAX	Varies from 0 ft to 2 ft
Streetwall Height	Min 2 stories, Max 4 stories	2 stories along E. William, S. Fourth, and S. Fifth
Offset at Top of Streetwall	Average 5 ft MIN	Varies: 4 ft on east side; 17 ft on west side; 14 ft on south side; 10 ft on north side
Total Height	207 ft MAX (increase of 15% from 180 ft MAX with affordable housing)	230 ft, 8 inches (18 stories)
Massing Articulation	Not applicable	NA with this petition
Tower Diagonal	Not applicable	NA with this petition
Building Coverage	Not applicable	Approximately 88%
Open Space	Not applicable	Potential patio space: 3,170 sq/ft in west tower; 3,230 sq/ft in east tower; 3 rd floor public terraces: 1,045 sq ft; 3 rd floor private terrace: 1,930; total: 9,375 sq/ft

- 2. Site Context and Site Planning.** The site is the former YMCA site located on the south end of the DDA district. To the north of the site is the Blake Transit Center (AAATA/TheRide). To the east is the Ann Arbor District Library-Downtown Branch and the Library Lane underground parking structure. To the south is a residential neighborhood, a small portion of which is designated locally as the East William Street Historic District. To the west is the 8-story Fourth & William Parking Garage. South Fifth Avenue is a one-way south-bound street. East William Street is a two-way street with a newly completed cycle track on the north side directly adjacent to the site. South Fourth Avenue is a two-way street that accommodates additional on-street bus loading for the transit center. The design guidelines for context and site

planning address the arrangement of buildings and features on the site, including how the site relates to its neighbors, and suggests preferred ways to express and articulate some of the minimum and maximum area, height, and placement standards. Staff finds that the design team assessed the character of the adjacent streetscapes and buildings in keeping with the recommendations of the design guidelines and incorporated the positive characteristics into the proposed project. The following guidelines are particularly relevant:

- a. Guideline A.1.1 – Positive characteristics of adjacent (and nearby) sites are reinforced.
- b. Guideline A.1.2 – Enhances pedestrian sidewalk level features and facilities to enrich the pedestrian experience.
- c. Guideline A.6.2 – New bicycle parking facilities will be proposed near the main entrances on the east and west sides of the site.

3. **Building.** The design guidelines for buildings focus on breaking down massing of larger buildings from their lower-scale neighbors. Staff find that the building mass includes most of the suggested strategies to visually divide the mass, provide clear definitions and a sense of scale. The following guidelines are particularly relevant:

- a. Guideline B.1.1 – Step taller building elements away from lower-scale buildings, locate taller elements at the intersection of streets.
- b. Guideline B.1.2 – Vary the height of building modules, cornice lines and roof finish elements.
- c. Guideline B.1.3 – Use a distinct horizontal molding to define the base, provide district change in ratio of solid to void to distinguish base from upper floors. The design guidelines for buildings focus on breaking down massing of larger buildings from their lower-scale neighbors.

4. **Building Elements.** Building elements include specific features that give character and detail to a building and influence the degree to which a new building contributes to the urban fabric. This section of the design guidelines call for features and architectural details at the street edge to have a direct impact on the quality of the pedestrian experience and to create an attractive and interesting street front. Staff finds the design achieves the goals of the design guidelines for building elements. The following guidelines are particularly relevant:

- a. Guideline C.1.1 – Wall surfaces with visually interesting detailing, textures and colors. First floor canopy that complements the design character of the building and its street front, wall surfaces with interesting detailing, textures and colors

- b. Guideline C.2.1 – Clearly define a primary entrance and orient it toward the street. Design a change in wall materials, textures, or colors that frames the entry.
- c. Guideline C.3.1 – High level of ground floor transparency is encouraged throughout downtown.
- d. Guideline C.7.1 – Use sustainable building materials whenever possible.

5. **General Comments**

- a. The design team should consider providing solar panels on the roof of the building in order to reduce energy costs and the building's carbon footprint.
- b. Consider designing the first floor retail space to accommodate uses other than retail. Retail may succeed in this location or it may fail. The second floor space in the east tower should be designed to accommodate future dwelling units if retail isn't feasible on the first floor. If retail fails, the developer may want the flexibility to locate the community rooms, fitness center and bathroom to the first floor and convert portions of the second floor to residential uses.
- c. The west tower provides the brick panels in a symmetrical configuration. The east tower provides the brick panels in a staggered configuration. Can you provide an elevation showing what the panels would look like on the east tower if they were symmetrical instead of scattered?

DESIGN NARRATIVE FROM THE PETITIONER:

- 6. **Theme of the Design Concept.** The objectives defined by City Council resolution provide the framework for the design concept. This includes maximizing residential density through towers, respecting adjacent buildings with the step back, providing an active ground floor along East William Street and South Fifth Avenue, and the potential to accommodate additional capacity for the transit center.
- 7. **Design Guidelines and Character District.** The proposed concept reinforces the street wall along South Fifth Avenue which is the primary north-south street in the Midtown District. The stepped down 2-story corner at East William Street and South Fifth Avenue respects the mid-rise character of the district, while also providing a visual gateway along East William Street. The active ground floor strengthens the east-west connection between South Fifth Avenue and South Main Street and enhances the pedestrian realm. The project has the potential to increase the loading capacity of the Blake Transit Center and enhance the transit rider experience which is a significant public benefit. The 296 units of residential will also increase the

daytime and evening activity in the area.

8. **Design Guidelines for Context and Site Planning.** The site is currently a parking lot. The proposed development will improve the pedestrian experience by reinforcing the street wall and creating a sense of place. The proposed towers are set back from William Street to respect the residential neighborhood scale to the south, while the 2-story corner at William Street and Fifth Avenue enhances a gateway treatment. The concept provides a service alley along the north side for the building underneath the east and west tower overhangs, creating a covered exterior space with columns along the north side. Taking service vehicles off the street will allow for better curb management along 4th and 5th Avenues and strengthen the pedestrian environment. The concept includes an option for an expanded transit area, either as a shared service lane or additional lane. The space will be designed to minimize pedestrian, bike, vehicular, and bus conflicts while also creating an interesting and inviting space for people to linger.

The project site is location between two major parking structures. Required parking will be secured by a parking contract with the Downtown Development Authority (DDA). There are no parking spaces provided on-site. The petitioner explored an expansion of the Library Lane parking garage at a connect point under 5th Avenue. Any physical connections to existing parking structures would be developer driven. Bicycle parking for residents will be provides on the ground floor and basement. Additional public bicycle parking will also be provided to encourage multi-modal transportation.

9. **Design Guidelines for Buildings.** The proposed FAR is 884%, which is less than the maximum 900% FAR with affordable housing premiums. The east tower is 18 stories (231 FT), which is more than the maximum building height for D1 zoning. The proposed streetwall height is two-stories with a 4-17 ft offset. This is largely influenced by residential unit sizes. The building massing responds to the adjacent buildings, with taller structures positioned adjacent to the parking structure and transit center and more mid-rise portions facing the library and the residential neighborhood. While the building is taller than the surrounding structures such as the Fourth and William parking deck and public library, the building footprint is similar. The proposed massing varies heights of individual components and shows a clear base, middle, and top. The ground floor is active, and the residential units are grouped by type to allow for a rhythm of windows and exterior projecting features such as balconies.

10. **Design Guidelines for Building Elements.** The ground floor features a high level of transparency along East William Street with an active storefront wrapping the corner along Fourth Ave. East William Street is the primary retail entrance for the ground floor. The current massing study provides comprehensive detail regarding fenestration, projections, materials, operational systems, and/or sustainability.

Attachment: [Elevations and Floor Plans](#)
[Narrative](#)

Prepared by Jeff Kahan, City Planner
December 5, 2022