

# ANN ARBOR DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

## Staff Report

**MEETING DATE:** January 18, 2017

**PROJECT:** The Jefferson  
Project No. DR16-016

**ADDRESS:** 112-118 West Jefferson Street and 441 S. Ashley Street

**ZONING DISTRICTS:** D2 Downtown Interface, First Street Character, Secondary Frontage

**DESIGN TEAM:** Alex De Parry – W. Jefferson St. LLC/Ann Arbor Builders  
Brad Moore – J. Bradley Moore & Associates Architects  
Kathy Keinath – Macon Engineering

**PROPOSED PROJECT:** A new 4-story, 35,000-square foot residential condominium building is proposed at the northeast corner of West Jefferson and South Ashley streets. The site includes four parcels – 112, 116, 118 West Jefferson and 441 South Ashley – that each contain an existing building. The assembled site is 18,500 square feet. Active railroad tracks cross the surface and an underground piped creek, the Allen Creek drain, runs underneath the southwest corner of the site. The 100-year floodplain of the drain covers the southwestern third of the site. These features make the site both unusual and slightly irregular, and are a major influence over the design and placement of the proposed building.



Figure 1 - Location

The proposed building has been designed to be a sister development to another nearby development, The Mark at 318 West Liberty Street (in the Old West Side Historic District). Like The Mark, The Jefferson will also have a brick body with deep red colored smooth cementitious panel window bays and bent metal coping. A recessed penthouse level is clad in gray cementitious panels. Unique to The Jefferson, it has a stone veneer base. (The Mark is one story shorter than The Jefferson and does not have an exposed base on the street-side.)



Figure 2 - Southwest Elevation

A recessed penthouse level is clad in gray cementitious panels. Unique to The Jefferson, it has a stone veneer base. (The Mark is one story shorter than The Jefferson and does not have an exposed base on the street-side.)

Vehicular access to the site and underground garage is proposed from South Ashley Street. The

main residential entrance is located at the inside corner of the L-shaped building. A metal awning helps to clearly identify it.

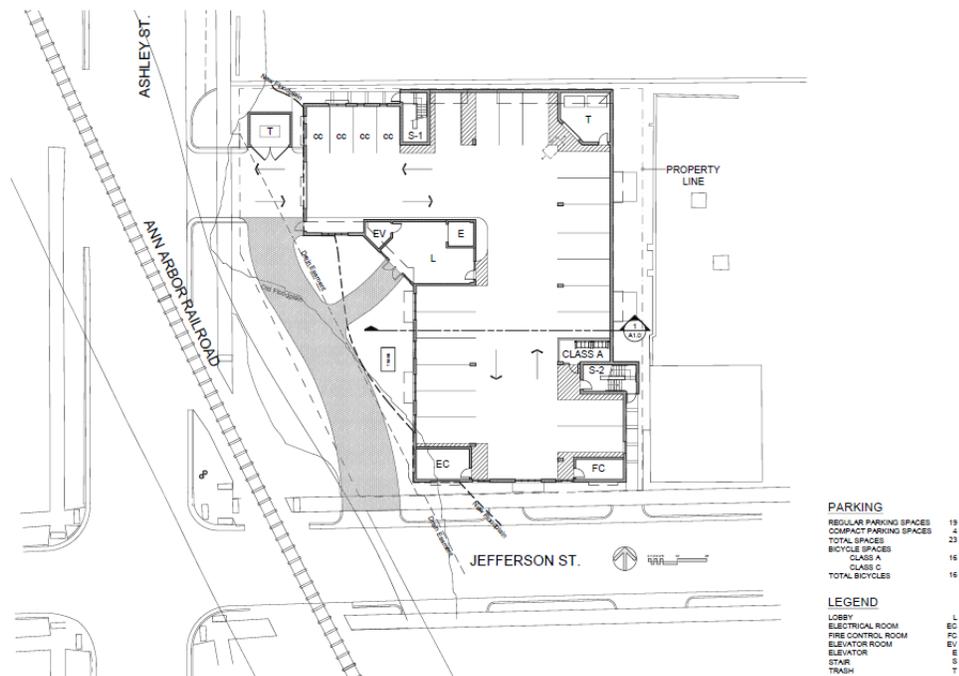


Figure 3 - Proposed Site Layout

**STAFF COMMENTS:**

1. The area, height and placement regulations for this site (D2, First Street character, secondary frontage) are provided in the chart below. A cursory review of the proposed development indicates some data has not been provided and some zoning requirements might not be satisfied.

	<b>Required</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
<b>FAR (Floor Area Ratio)</b>	Up to 200% (37,164 sq ft)	188% (34,987 sq ft)
<b>Front Setback</b>	Min 0 feet, Max 10 feet	W. Jefferson: 3 ft S. Ashley: (Not provided, appears 15 to 20 ft)
<b>Side Setback</b>	None	6 feet (East side)
<b>Rear Setback</b>	None	0 ft (North side)
<b>Streetwall Height</b>	Min 2 stories, Max 3 stories	Not Provided (Appears 4 stories)
<b>Offset at Top of Streetwall</b>	Min Average 5 feet	Not Provided (Appears >5 ft)
<b>Total Height</b>	Maximum 60 feet	55ft
<b>Massing Articulation</b>	Maximum 66 ft	Not Provided (Appears None)
<b>Building Coverage</b>	80% Maximum	Not Provided (Appears <80%)
<b>Open Space</b>	10% Minimum	Not Provided (Appears >10%)

- a. As a corner lot, the site has two front lot lines, one rear and one side. The front lot lines are on West Jefferson and South Ashley streets, including the portion adjacent to the railroad tracks. The north lot line is the rear and the east lot line is the side.
- b. The proposed setback is within the minimum and maximum allowance on West Jefferson but exceeds the maximum setback on South Ashley Street. Up to 20% of a building's streetwall may exceed the maximum setback for an entry court or plaza, however, the proposed development appears to exceed even this amount of flexibility.
- c. No acknowledgment of the required streetwall height, the required offset at the top of the street wall, or the massing articulation has been included in the design plan. It does not appear that any of these standards have been met by the proposed design plan.
- d. No information regarding the building coverage or the open space has been provided. These standards do appear to have been met by the proposed design plan.
- e. The applicant may have to consider requesting planned project modifications as part of the site plan petition, or seek a variance(s) from

the Zoning Board of Appeals, if the dimensional standards for front setbacks, entry court or plaza, streetwall height, required offset at the top of the streetwall, and/or massing articulation are not met.

2. In staff's opinion, the proposed development is in keeping with the applicable **design guidelines for context and site planning**. It identifies and reinforces positive characteristics of adjacent sites (A.1.1). Its open space at the southwest corner maximizes activity and usability for a diverse population of different abilities (A.3.1), where there is a high level of existing or potential pedestrian activity (A.3.2), and in a location that serves as a focal point (A.3.4). Its open space also is oriented towards both the street and a natural resource (A.3.5) and is enriched with special details (A.3.7). The open space is linked directly to the public sidewalk (A.5.5).

However, staff does suggest the design team review the proposal for opportunities to further express a focal point or dominant architectural feature at this corner site (A.1.3). Staff also suggests the driveway across the site be reduced in width to a pedestrian, not vehicle, scale and the curb cut to West Jefferson is eliminated. This would minimize the impact of the driveways and access points on pedestrians and maintain pedestrian safety, circulation and comfort (A.4.1).

3. In staff's opinion, the proposed development is not consistent with a strict interpretation of the **design guidelines for building massing** as provided in the Downtown Design Guidelines. The 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 guidelines are somewhat reflected in the Zoning Ordinance in the dimensional standards for streetwall height, offset at the top of the streetwall, and massing articulation, with which the proposed development does not appear to conform.

Setting aside the zoning requirements for discussion purposes, the proposed development is generally in keeping with the broader intent and spirit of those guidelines. The proposed massing is consistent with its neighboring developments and with the First Street character area overall. It also provides details, variation and design treatments that combine for an agreeable, pleasing, pedestrian scale development. Once the design meets the zoning requirements, the proposed design can be re-evaluated for building massing compliance.

4. Staff believes the proposed development meets the **design guidelines for building elements**. The proposed elements, including entries, windows, materials, and balconies give character and detail to the building which is the focus of this section of the Downtown Design Guidelines.

## **APPLICABLE GUIDELINES: From the Ann Arbor Downtown Design Guidelines**

Staff has identified the following Guidelines as applicable to the proposed project. These include Guidelines with which the proposed project both 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.1.3 Corner sites are an opportunity to express an architectural gateway or focal point and a dominant architectural feature.

**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.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.3.1 Design an urban open space to maximize activity and usability for a diverse population of different abilities.

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.3.7 Enrich the space using special paving, plants, trellises and site structures.

**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.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.5.5 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.

## **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.

B.1.3 Provide a clear definition between the base (the lower floor or floors) and upper floors to maintain a sense of scale at the street level. Suggested strategies include:

- a) Use a distinct horizontal molding to define the base
- b) Provide variation in the façade plane of the upper floors
- c) Provide a distinct change in the ratio of solid to void (wall to window percentage) to distinguish the base from the upper floors

B.1.4 If appropriate to the context, establish a design treatment that includes a differentiated building top.

Suggested strategies include:

- a) Use a distinctive cornice line or roof form
- b) Change wall surface materials, colors or texture of the building top

### **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.

### **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.

Prepared by Alexis DiLeo, City Planner  
January 13, 2017

118 W Jefferson St



<b>Zoning Districts</b>	Railroads
Township Islands	Tax Parcels
City Zoning Districts	Huron River



Map date 12/22/2016  
 Any aerial imagery is circa 2015 unless otherwise noted  
 Terms of use: [www.a2gov.org/terms](http://www.a2gov.org/terms)

# 118 W Jefferson St



-  Railroads
-  Tax Parcels
-  Huron River



Map date 12/22/2016  
Any aerial imagery is circa 2015  
unless otherwise noted  
Terms of use: [www.a2gov.org/terms](http://www.a2gov.org/terms)

118 W Jefferson St



-  Railroads
-  Tax Parcels
-  Huron River



Map date 12/22/2016  
Any aerial imagery is circa 2015  
unless otherwise noted  
Terms of use: [www.a2gov.org/terms](http://www.a2gov.org/terms)