



**City of Ann Arbor Design Review Board
November 16, 2011**

The Design Review Board met on November 16, 2011 to review the **618 South Main** proposal at 618 South Main Street. The following report contains a summary of priority issues the Board would like the developer to consider in finalizing the design proposal. In addition, a summary of the meeting discussion is provided for background.

Summary of Priority Issues

Examples of applicable guidelines are noted in parenthesis; the full text of each referenced guideline is provided at the end of the summary. Please note that the First Street Character Area guidelines also apply.

Main Street Frontage/Façade

1. The pedestrian experience at the street grade could be enhanced in a number of ways. The proposed garage level façade is long, continuous, and potentially monotonous. It could be visually broken up with elements of interest added. The main pedestrian entrance on South Main Street could be enhanced with improved definition. (see Guidelines A.1.2, A.1.2, A.4.2, C.1.1, C.2).
2. The design of the South Main Street façade could be improved by dividing the structure into smaller elements using strategies such as varying the height of the roof, changing the wall surface materials, colors or textures, and averaging the required building offset. (see Guideline B.1.4).
3. The setback is shallow along South Main Street when considering the length of the building and could be moved back to create a more welcome pedestrian experience. (see Guidelines A.1.1, B.1.1, B.1.3.).
4. Care should be taken at the driveway entry on South Main Street to minimize impact on pedestrians and maintain pedestrian safety, circulation and comfort (see Guideline A.4.1)

Base Treatment

1. The base of the building transitions from 2.5 feet above grade to 9.5 feet due to the grade along South Main Street. The pedestrian experience related to the base of the building is important and should be treated with consideration and care (see Guidelines A.1.1, A.1.2, A.1.6, B.1.1).

Focal Point at South Main/Mosley

1. The discussion centered on differentiating the architectural expression of the building at the corner of South Main and Mosley. The design should acknowledge the importance of this portion of the building because it is located on a street corner at a gateway location to downtown. The treatment

of this corner of the building should attempt to create a visual point of reference (see Guideline A.1.3).

Walkway along the North Side

1. The narrow width of the proposed path on the north side of the building should be designed to encourage use and provide visual interest. (see Guidelines A.1.2, A.5.1, A.5.5).

Ashley Private Plaza/Entry

1. The Ashley Street plaza/courtyard design would be enhanced by providing opportunities for interaction between residents of 618 South Main and pedestrians walking past the open space particularly near the entry way where the boundary between the public space of the street and private space of the courtyard could be blurred. Thought should be put into fencing that provides adequate security but allows visual connections to and from this open area. Uses that activate the plaza are encouraged (see Guidelines A.3.1-2, A.3.6-7, C.1.1, C.3.1).

Referenced Sections of the City of Ann Arbor Downtown Design Guidelines

Design Guidelines for Context and Site Planning

- 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.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.3.1 Design an urban open space to maximize activity and usability for a diverse population of different abilities.
- A.3.7 Enrich the space using special paving, plants, trellises and site structures.
- 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.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.6.2 Consider use of convenient bicycle racks, including proximity to building entries, weather protection and security when selecting a location for bicycle parking and storage.

Design Guidelines for Buildings

- B.1.1 Design a building to minimize its impact on adjacent lower-scale areas.
- 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.
- 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.
- B.1.4 If appropriate to the context, establish a design treatment that includes a differentiated building top.

Design Guidelines for Building Elements

- C.1.1 Use building elements to create a street edge that invites pedestrian activity.
- C.2.1 Clearly define a primary entrance and orient it toward the street.
- C.3.1 A high level of ground floor transparency is encouraged throughout downtown.
- C.4.1 Operable awnings could be considered at storefront and window locations.
- C.6.2. Locate and sufficiently screen mechanical systems to minimize or eliminate noise impacts on adjacent sites and buildings.

First Street Character District

“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’s urban landscape largely consists of tree lined streets with relatively consistent lot spacing, and an occasionally vacant parcel.”

Meeting Discussion Summary

Members Present: Tamara Burns (chair), Richard Mitchell, William Kinley, Paul Fontaine, Mary Jukuri.

Members Absent: Geoffrey Perkins, Chet Hill

Design Team: Mike Siegel, VOA Architects; Shannon Gibb-Randall, InSite Design; Bob Wanty, Washtenaw Engineering; Dan Ketelaar, Urban Group.

Design Guidelines for Context and Site Planning – First Street Character District

The Board noted the proposed design reinforced some of the positive characteristics on adjacent sites and attempted to enrich the pedestrian experience and felt both features could be further enhanced. The Board mentioned the setback and streetwall offset on South Main Street could be expanded to enhance the pedestrian experience. The Board discussed the importance of creating an architectural expression of the corner that creates a visual focal point and reinforces the corner as a gateway into downtown. The design team suggested that the project was still in development and they would consider addressing comments related to urban pattern, spatial relationships, and form more carefully.

A large part of the discussion focused on the pedestrian experience on the east side (South Main Street) of the site. The distance between the proposed streetwall and the edge of the street is quite narrow. The Board indicated a desire to create more space by moving the building further from the street to enhance the pedestrian experience. The Board suggested eliminating one level of underground parking in order to mitigate the tall garage wall along Main Street. The Board emphasized the need to devote great sensitivity in the design of this public space by incorporating landscaping elements, adding fenestration, create relief, and paying attention to design detail. It was also noted that creating some sort of transparency with the garage level of the building along South Main Street might add interest to the pedestrian experience.

The Board and design team discussed the interface between the plaza/courtyard on Ashley Street. The Board recommended that the design team encourage interaction between residents of 618 South Main and pedestrians on Ashley Street. The wall/fence along Ashley Street should not create a feeling of a gated community.

The Board asked about porous pavement and other elements of environmental sustainability. The design team said that they were designing for LEED Silver and explained their efforts to incorporate energy efficiencies such as solar water heaters, but indicated that the Brownfield on the site might limit some storm water systems.

In general, the Board felt the project would benefit from creating a stronger pedestrian experience along South Main Street, as well as reducing the visual impact of the massing on the east side of the site. The Board noted that more people will experience the project from South Main Street, whether

pedestrian or driver/passenger, and thus the design team should attempt to break up the massing and enhance the pedestrian experience. The Board also mentioned the desire to articulate the cornice so that the building has a clearly defined top.

Board members inquired about traffic safety issues for the proposed east entry (South Main Street). This issue will be analyzed by the City Transportation Engineer.

Design Guidelines for Buildings

Members of the Board felt that corner lots should include a focal point of some kind, particularly those sites that are highly visible, such as this site. The Board emphasized a desire for having the architectural design at the corner of Main Street and Mosley reinforce a sense of gateway to the site and downtown. Staff mentioned the potential to average the building offset to allow for portions of the building to remain flush. The Board expressed concern over the length of the building along South Main Street and recommended a number of ways that this massing could be broken up, including widening a proposed vertical gap near the pedestrian entrance in the middle of this façade, better articulating the building entrance, adding design elements such as awnings where appropriate, lighting portions of the façade at night, and dividing the structure into smaller modules. The Board also indicated that the top floors of the building looked “very office-like” and not residential in nature. A Board member indicated that the north side of Lorch Hall (University of Michigan Central Campus) provides an interesting treatment of upper floors. Exterior lighting along South Main Street should be kept away from residents and cast down to the sidewalk.

Design Guidelines for Building Elements

Projecting shade devices were specifically mentioned to enhance the south and east 2nd and 3rd levels. Members of the Board felt the building was too high along Mosley Street approaching Ashley Street in relation to the residents to the west. The Board thought the depth of the windows represented in the drawings is an important element that meets the design guidelines and is important to retain as the design is developed.

Summary

In summary, the Board believed the proposed design responded favorably to some aspects of the Downtown Design Guidelines. Stronger aspects of its design included an emphasis on the design elements of historic industrial building along the west side of downtown Ann Arbor, as well as keeping most of the building mass on the east side of the site, more distant from the Old West Side neighborhood. Areas for additional design consideration included developing a stronger architectural expression at the corner of Mosley and South Main Streets, breaking up the large massing along South Main Street, and improving the pedestrian experience along South Main Street.

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