



## City of Ann Arbor Design Review Board

### 624 Church Street Summary Report

September 18, 2013

The Design Review Board met on September 18, 2013 to review a new iteration of the **624 Church Street** proposal, which was previously considered by the DRB on October 17, 2012. The following report contains a summary of priority issues the Board would like the developer to consider in finalizing the design proposal.

#### Description of Revisions

A 14-story tower addition has been added to the previously approved site plan. It uses smooth-faced concrete masonry units and glazing on the lower two floors, and pre-cast concrete panels and glazing on the upper stories. The project architect explained the color difference in the rendering of the precast panels as smooth vertical and horizontal bands with an exposed aggregate texture in the larger areas. A notch in the building differentiates the new section from the previously reviewed section, and different colors will be used on each section. The new portion of the tower is light-colored, which contrasts with the red brick of the previous application. Five parking spaces will be located under the building. The tower will now be set back 10' from the west property line, in response to the abutting property owner's concerns.

#### Summary of Priority Issues

Per the DRB, the project as reviewed does not meet the *Downtown Design Guidelines* for pedestrian experience and building massing as found in Sections A, B and C.

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 South University Character Area guidelines also apply.

#### *Site Planning*

1. The stretch of Church Street between Willard and the Pizza House Restaurant will not be a positive pedestrian experience since it consists of lobby, driveway, and plaza areas – these areas should be active, year-round uses. (A.1.2, A.3.6, A.3.7)

2. The driveway should be examined to ensure that both drivers and pedestrians can see each other while entering and exiting. (A.4.1)
3. Public art, landscaping, awnings, and similar streetscape elements are requested to make the area interesting and pedestrian friendly. Consider using the area shown as parking spaces for a different, more active use. (A.1.2, A.3.6, A.3.7, A.5.3, A.5.4, C.1.1, C.2)
4. The covered plaza next to the restaurant is now boxed in by the additional tower, and needs to be a bright, lively space rather than a large cavernous void. Windows from the restaurant onto the plaza are strongly suggested. Lighting will be important to the plaza. (A.5.4, A.5.5)
5. The feasibility of a mid-block connection should be investigated. (A.5)

### *Building Design*

6. Design a greater step back of the stair tower facade in order to accentuate the separation of the base from the tower. (B.1.1, B.1.2, B.1.3)
7. The base of the building should be broken up and varied. The east and south side should have as much detail as the other sides of the building. (B.1.1, B.1.2, B.1.3)
8. The horizontal elements at the top of the second floor and top floor of the building are not visually strong enough. (B.1.4)
9. The location of bicycle parking should be reconsidered. Bicycle parking on residential floors instead of all on the first floor should be investigated. (A.6.2)

### **Additional General Discussion Points**

- Moving the residential entrance to the corner is appropriate.
- The stairways should be convenient and inviting to encourage their use instead of the elevator.
- Address pre-cast concrete's fading problem. Some DRB members prefer brick to pre-cast concrete panels, though the panels are acceptable.

### **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.1.5 If the street geometries are such that the mid-block is the termination of a perpendicular street view, consider a design with enough presence and detail to make that view noteworthy.

- 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.3.6 Provide dining opportunities, movable tables and chairs, public art, lighting, interpretive materials, historic markers, water features, and architectural details such as windows and storefront walls, to frame urban open space.
- 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.

#### *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.3.1 A high level of ground floor transparency is encouraged throughout downtown.

### *South University Character District*

...Current architectural character includes diverse styles ranging from older eclectic forms to new/contemporary ones, expressed through a wide variety of architectural materials including wood siding, brick, limestone, precast concrete, and various metals. Building heights range from one and two floor/low-rise to mid and hi-rise. Rooflines vary from two and three story frame houses to flat roofed contemporary expressions at various building heights and façade expressions.

This area is a mixed use district, largely consisting today of university population- focused restaurant and commercial services, and student housing. This district is busy and vibrant with automobile and pedestrian activity. Sidewalk level doorways provide access to upper floor offices and apartments.

The urban landscape includes sidewalk extensions (bump-outs) with circular tree sized planters; a well developed tree canopy over some sidewalks; and outdoor dining spaces at sidewalk and rooftop levels. First floor facades are more transparent with clear, large display windows, allowing inside first floor retail activities to be visible from, and contribute to, the district's active street life.

The cumulative character can be described as a busy and vibrant urban setting that encourages and accommodates a diverse range of downtown activities.