



**STAFF REPORT**  
**PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION**  
For the March 25, 2015 meeting

**TO:** Planning and Zoning Commission members  
**FROM:** Sheena Danzer, Planning Director  
**SUBJECT:** Midtown Center Master Plan site plan review update

At the February 25<sup>th</sup> Planning and Zoning Commission meeting, action on the Midtown Center Master site plan was deferred. Included as an attachment is an updated site layout rendering of the Master Plan; additions included in the site layout plan are as follows:

- Moved the eastern most building to the west 18', removed the west drive thru and added an island in between the bank and eastern building to enhance safety and security due to the multi-directional traffic coming through the area.
- Added an additional landscape feature to the south end of the drive (at Hy-Vee traffic light) to block the view of the Sam's Club parking lot.
- Added additional landscaping features along the northern most parking rows (3 gray bump-outs).
- Added bike racks (dependent on TIF).
- Have shown the 8' wide sidewalk along University Avenue (dependent on TIF).

Outstanding items that were addressed to the applicant following the last Planning and Zoning meeting are as follows:

1. 8' wide sidewalks

**Staff comments:** The applicants' plans showed 8' wide sidewalks (confirmation that these were to be installed was asked); the Planning and Zoning Commission can recommend requiring.

**Applicant comments:** The applicant supports adding 8' wide sidewalks (if it does not require retaining walls), but the added cost is not a requirement of the Zoning Ordinance and the current sidewalks are consistent with the surrounding neighborhood. The applicant is only agreeing to add the 8' wide sidewalks if it can be included in the TIF for the project.

2. Soils report

**Staff comments:** The soil report was still missing as required in the original submittal.

**Applicant comments:** The applicant intends to submit a soils report with the construction drawings; staff as determined this requirement to be satisfied until construction plans are received.

3. Site fill

**Staff comments:** The applicant's engineer relayed to the City's engineer that the intent is to not remove or bring in any fill to the site, but instead it would be balanced. The City's engineer could see that as a possibility for most of the development, but not for the easternmost building based on slope.

**Applicant comments:** The goal will be the balance the site.

#### 4. Traffic study

**Staff comments:** The scope of the traffic study between the applicant's engineer and the City's engineer was agreed upon in that the City will be looking for a right-in, right-out for the easternmost access point. Staff has not yet received the traffic study.

**Applicant comments:** The traffic study is being prepared per the agreed scope and will provide a copy as soon as it is available.

#### 5. East island addition

**Staff comments:** The City's engineer recommended moving the easternmost building 6' to the west so that there would leave room for an island in between the two buildings which would enhance the safety and security due to the multi-directional traffic coming through the area.

**Applicant comments:** This outstanding element has been addressed by the applicant and is shown on the revised site layout rendering (The change will need to be shown in updated site plans drawings).

#### 6. Uninterrupted brick wall (anchor building)

**Staff comments:** Staff noted a large expanse of brick wall that was uninterrupted along the anchor building. The Planning and Zoning Commission can recommend additional elements to the wall if it is desired.

**Applicant comments:** The northern elevation does not show uninterrupted monotonous brick over a large section. The northern elevation has a wide variety of architectural elements from west to east on all buildings- to differentiate the multi-tenant nature of the buildings. The west building anchor tenant north elevation includes not only a large entry feature that addresses the 73<sup>rd</sup> and University corner, but three brick styles with water line and vertical architectural elements.

#### 7. Application of Town Center Guidelines

**Staff comments:** The Town Center Guidelines clearly state that they apply to the entire University Avenue corridor. In addition, all who participated in their coordination are still around or in other communities and have confirmed such. They are not codified, but that makes them no less a guiding document Planning and Zoning, along with City Council will rely upon.

**Applicant comments:** The Town Center Zoning does not apply to the property. The site plan includes many features that exceed the University Avenue corridor zoning and Town Center compatible elements such as street lights, streetscape features and site entry features. The costs for these features will be included in the TIF for the project.

Other comments relayed to the applicant after the February Planning and Zoning meeting:

#### 1. Building orientation

**Staff comments:** To address comments received from Commission members, staff recommended a compromise that the applicant use the easternmost building for the orientation of the entire project area and build off that line as opposed to building off the westernmost.

**Applicant comments:** Neighborhood retailers need:

- Highly visible buildings located on the "home-bound" side of the street;
- Convenient parking easily accessible to the front door and highly visible from the street. Parking is one of the most critical issues facing retailers. Shopping is an elective activity, people do not have to shop and will avoid commercial shopping centers if parking is difficult. When the front door is not visible from the parking, shoppers conclude the parking is difficult and inconvenient.
- Multi-tenant neighborhood retail centers require an anchor tenant the smaller business thrive from the traffic generated by the anchor.
- Flexible tenant spaces
- Clear front door and secure back door for deliveries and storage. Retailers do not want customers entering their shops from the rear storage areas.
- Convenience neighborhood retailing needs to be convenient.
- Retailers must sell merchandise and be profitable. If not, the center will experience high vacancy. Examples include:
  - 6500 University – this property has not been able to lease any retail as there is no on street parking, the rear parking is not convenient and the grade changes of the site make the building difficult to "shop" (this is a false statement- the commercial space of this building is currently full)

- West Glen – this project has been built in the New Urbanist style. It has gone bankrupt and currently experiences very high vacancy. The retailer have not been profitable.
- The proposed site plan solves many existing site retailing issues:
  - Each building/floor plate is designed to be on the same elevation. The stepped design of the current east building limits leasing size to suites that are on the same elevation.
  - The existing west building is double loaded and has struggled to maintain viability in the market. The proposed site plan has all suites will facing University Ave.
  - The western building parking has been limited to two rows per side. There have been parking shortage and conflicts over the years based on particular tenant mixes.
- Additionally, we have designed the replacement of our buildings to:
  - The site is located within the Urban Renewal Plan Area and meets the plans goals for revitalization and regeneration.
  - The property is zoned University Corridor.
  - The proposed site plan complies with all University Corridor zoning and includes many elements not required by the zoning such as:
    - Extensive streetscape landscaping, entrance features and lighting compatible with the street features at 66<sup>th</sup> and University.
    - 8” sidewalk along university Ave and sidewalk connections to the front of each building.
    - Additional landscaped islands.
    - Bike rack for each building and along the trail.
- The location has historically been used as a multi-tenant neighborhood retail center. Over 30 years of businesses have served the community and the region. The proposed multi-tenant retail center will continue to provide opportunity for businesses to serve the community and region.
- The location is part of a larger regional suburban auto oriented goods and services shopping destination.
- The existing and proposed uses are consistent and complimentary with the surrounding properties and uses.

## 2. Paver walks

**Staff comments:** Paver walks had been shown in the site layout rendering; staff recommended highlighting these walks as it shows pedestrian connectivity throughout the site.

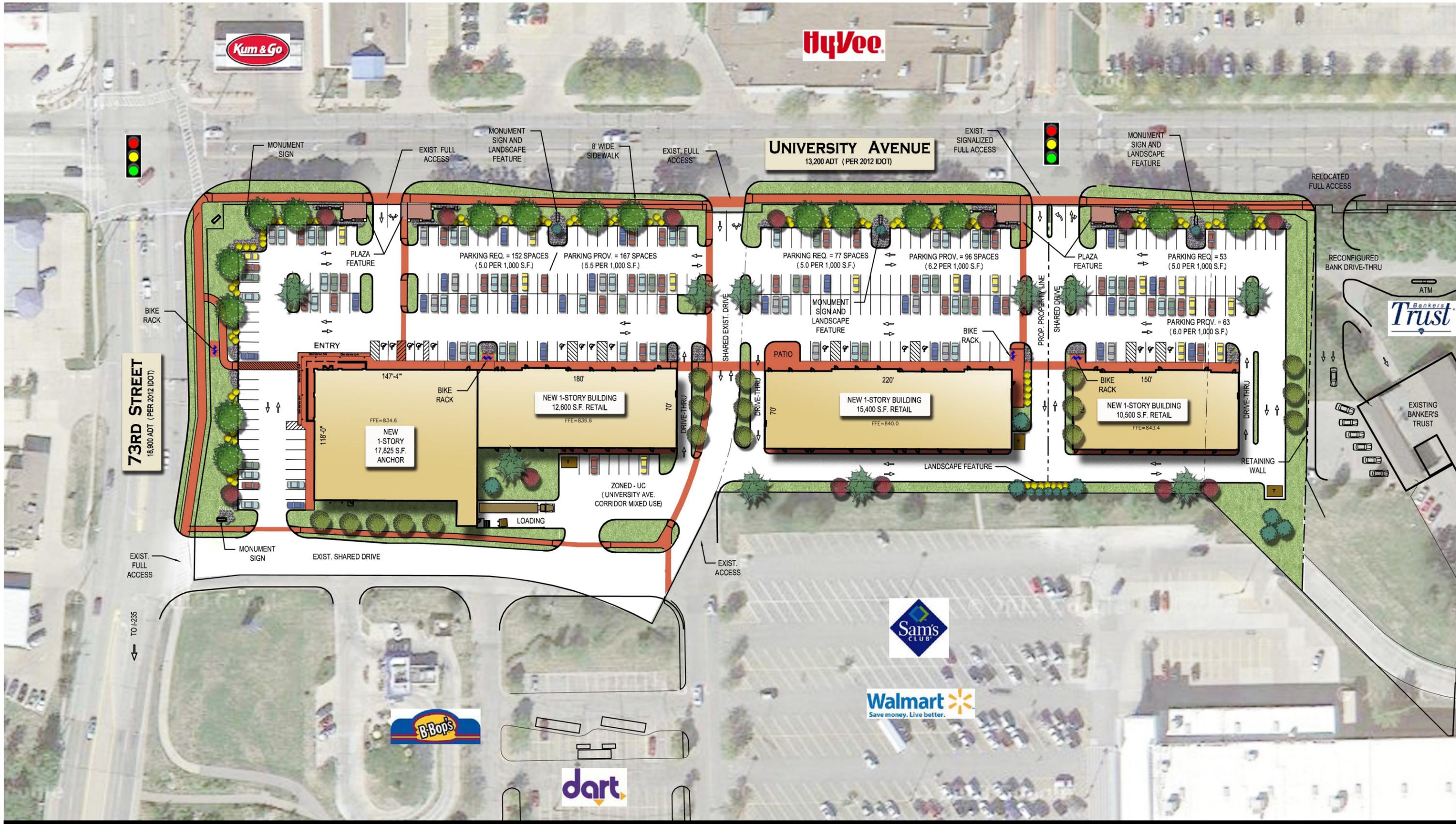
**Applicant comments:** The site included paver blocks as part of the two streetscape entry features. They are designed to be compatible with the streetscape features that exist at the intersection of 66<sup>th</sup> and University Avenue.

**Note: The paver walks throughout the site will not be highlighted as brick pavers; (the applicant is only showing that for the two entryway features) instead the applicant talked with staff about creating smaller cuts in the pavement to differentiate between parking lot and pedestrian walkways.**

### ACTION REQUESTED

The Planning and Zoning Commission can consider the following for action. Based on the information at hand, staff can support any of the three actions or possibly another alternative proposed by the Commission. Staff will continue to work with the developer regardless of the outcome to bring about a functional, aesthetically pleasing design that meets the long term vision of the City and the goals of the developer.

1. Recommend approval of the most recently revised Midtown Center Master Plan.
2. Recommend approval of the most recently revised Midtown Center Master plan with modifications to submit for City Council review.
3. Recommend denial of the most recently revised Midtown Center Master Plan.



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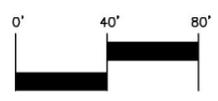
# MIDTOWN CENTER

## 73RD STREET & UNIVERSITY AVENUE

### WINDSOR HEIGHTS, IOWA

MARCH 19, 2015

NORTH  
  
 1" = 80'-0" @ 11"x17" Sheet  
 SAA# 12043  
 DRAWN BY: AVG



simonson & associates architects llc  
 1717 ingersoll avenue suite 117 des moines ia 50309  
 phn 515 440 5626 www.simonsonassoc.com