



September 13, 2019

Re: Proposed Project – 117 N. Massachusetts Ave.

LDDA Directors,

This is probably the single most important development project in Downtown in decades because of its size and high profile location on prime real estate on Lake Mirror.

While the Lakeland Downtown Development Authority (LDDA) does not own the property, the public will get its first exposure to the project from our review process. Therefore, it's useful to refresh the public and our board on the nature of the relationship between the LDDA, the City of Lakeland, and the User – as design review agency, property owner, and project developer. It provides important context.

The LDDA has not been involved in the discussions or negotiations with this or any other potential user of this site. To date, we have had no role in the development agreement. We do not set the parcel price, financial incentives, or any legal provision in the agreement. LDDA and city officials understand this, of course. But the public may not.

The Lakeland city taxpayers own this site; and the Lakeland City Commission has the ultimate authority to act on their behalf and decide ultimately what is the appropriate use of their property. That is no different than any other private sector property owner. The LDDA has the authority and obligation to review the site plan, building elevations and construction materials for consistency with LDDA Design Guidelines and compatibility with the district.

Additionally, the LDDA is charged with advocating for and guiding the development of Downtown. That obligation requires you, as Directors, to provide feedback on this very important project.

Considerations

- This is a single-tenant building/parking structure, not a mixed-use development. This use appears inconsistent with the City Commission's recently adopted Downtown Vision Plan, which called for a mixed-use site that the public could interact with through commercial activity or other means.
- This prime piece of undeveloped lake front property has remained vacant for 30+ years. It is believed that the public's patience with this land would have led to a mixed-use project that dynamically linked the core downtown district to growing commercial activity along Lake Mirror beyond the workday and on weekends. This project will not provide that after-hours activity or public interaction.



- An owner-occupied user that will bring approximately 500 jobs to the central district within walking distance of practically every restaurant and merchant.
- The potential to increase after work hours spending in Downtown.
- Approximately 150 ground level covered parking spaces that may be available to the public on nights and weekends, which is great news for our growing events and expanding restaurant base.
- This project could provide residents for the existing residential and anticipated residential development at Mirrorton.

These are among the cost-benefit tradeoffs that the City Commission and leadership are considering. It is our sincere hope the project provides the return on investment for the city, the user and the public. We all benefit from intentional partnerships.

To secure the most public benefit for this project, it will be crucial for the City and LDDA to continue to collaborate closely in the future with an eye toward policies and targeted spending that maximize the return on the public's investment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julie Townsend". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J".

Julie Townsend
LDDA Executive Director





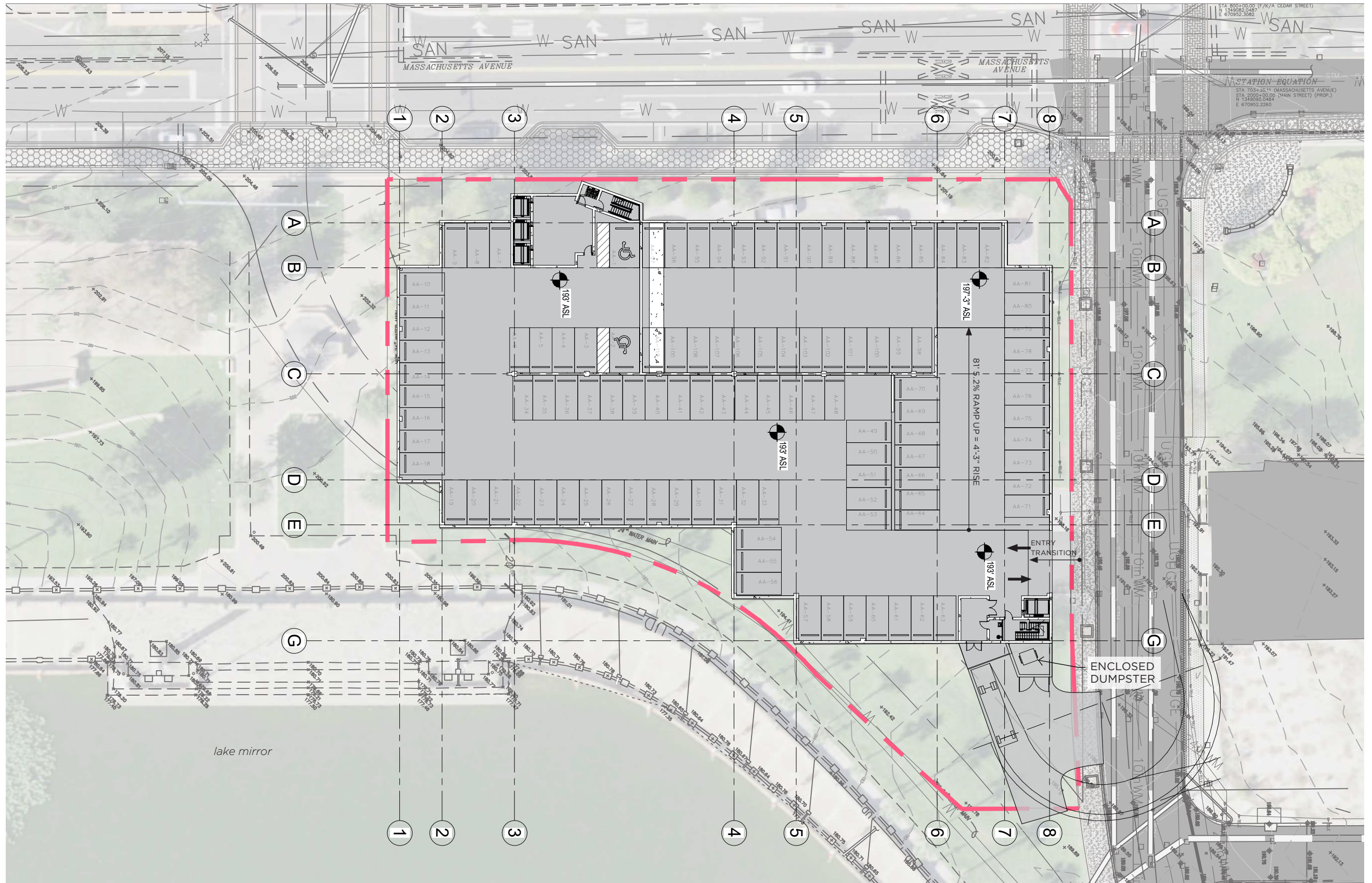
09.12.19

Downtown Lakeland Office

Conceptual Design Presentation

**Parking Garage -
Level 0
Cedar St Entry**

- 110 Parking Spaces
- Includes 2 HC Spaces

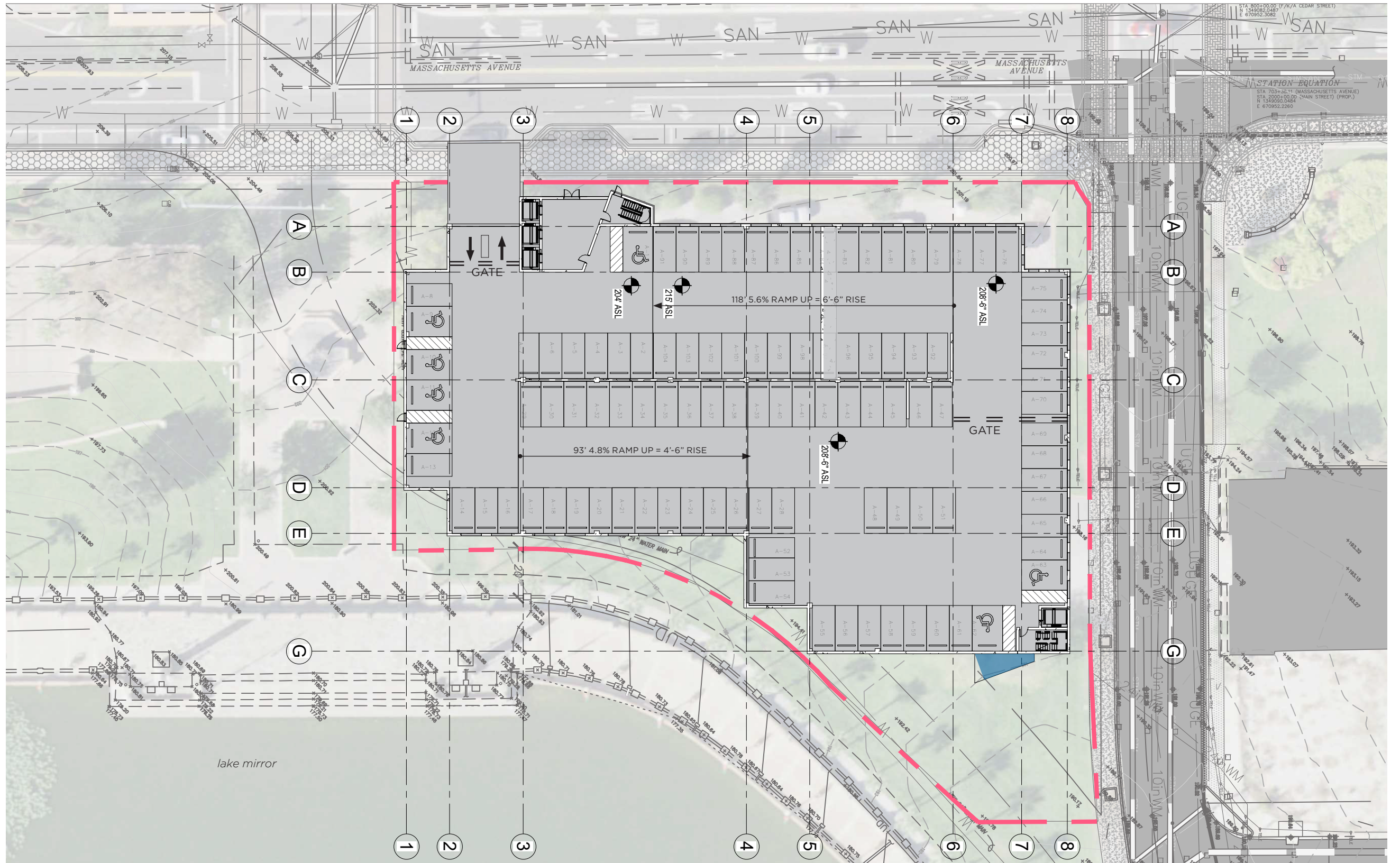


Parking Garage - Level 1 Mass. Ave. Entry

- 104 Parking Spaces
- Includes 7 HC Spaces
- Includes 69 Public Parking Spaces before security gate

Public Parking Spaces

- [Level 0] 110
- [Level 1] 69
- Total = 179 Public Parking Spaces
- Includes 9 HC Spaces
- Subject to adjustment with Final Plan.











Lakeland Downtown Development Authority

Design Review Staff Report

Submitted by: Julie Townsend, Executive Director

Friday, September 13, 2019

The Lakeland Downtown Development Authority (LDDA) is responsible for reviewing the design of new buildings and the alteration of existing buildings within the LDDA District but outside the Munn Park Historic District. These are properties zoned C-6 by the City of Lakeland. Properties zoned other than C-6 but inside the LDDA District are exempt from design review. Projects inside the Munn Park Historic District are reviewed by the City of Lakeland's Historic Preservation Board through the Department of Community Development.

The LDDA Design Guidelines exist to assist property owners, developers, and architects in the design of building improvements so that they enhance the existing urban character and pedestrian orientation of Downtown Lakeland. As a result, the downtown economy will continue to improve and private property becomes more valuable.

The Board of Directors of the LDDA uses the guidelines as just that: *guidelines*. The Board will make decisions based upon circumstances unique to each project and its context and neighborhood location within the downtown.

Project Overview

The proposed project location as identified by the Property Appraiser of Polk County is 117 N. Massachusetts Ave. It sits at the southeastern corner of the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Cedar Street/Main Street; otherwise know as the "Old Fire Station Lot."

The proposed project is an 8-story, 135,000 square feet class "A" office building with parking of approximately 450 parking spaces. The parking garage is integrated into the building, utilizing the first 4 floors of the structure. The User will be a single tenant consisting of approximately 500 employees, and the property will be owner occupied. The applicant is Timothy F. Campbell of 500 S. Florida Avenue, Lakeland, FL 33801, on behalf of the User.

The following staff review considers the submitted conceptual renderings and its application of the LDDA Guidelines to this project. The Design Guidelines were not written for strict compliance, but to communicate the goals and intent for the district. Staff comments highlight how the project design meets the spirit of the guidelines and areas where it does not.

ADDRESSING THE STREET - *The most fundamental requirement of good "downtown" design is building to the sidewalk and supporting the pedestrian experience. The buildings create those all-important*

“walls” for the street as well as transparent storefronts to bring pedestrian interest. Building facades can be broken down into human scaled sections, usually no more than 20 to 30 feet in width.

Technical compliance: The proposed building does not build to the sidewalk.

Staff Comment: This development has no adjacent buildings with which to align. The rendering shows the orientation of the building is to the primary road – Massachusetts Avenue with landscape buffering. However, the Design Guidelines state: *“If a gap exists between the property line and the existing streetscaped sidewalk, it should be filled with identical or compatible paving (not landscaping) essentially widening the sidewalk.”* The façade includes a distinctive glass feature with a formal pronounced entry that creates a pedestrian connection from the building to the road.

FILLING THE SITE - *Unlike suburban development, successful downtown development is oriented to people and not to automobiles. Together, the closely-knit buildings provide a walkable environment that is not interrupted with gaps such as surface parking lots or suburban setbacks. If there is parking on-site, it is located to the rear. The same is true of other necessary site features.*

Technical compliance: The proposed building does fill the site. The proposed project has no surface parking or suburban setbacks to interrupt the walkable environment.

Staff Comments: A challenge for the site is that it lacks a “rear”. All four elevations of the building are important pedestrian-addressing facades. The Massachusetts Avenue façade is depicted as the primary building façade. But because of its location on Lake Mirror the east and south elevations engage important parts of the public realm - Lake Mirror and Kryger Park. Of the four, the north elevation (Main Street) would be considered a secondary street where it would be appropriate to locate necessary site features such as dumpsters, loading docks, etc. The conceptual drawing shows screening of these elements. The final design of screening, materials and colors, shall be submitted to LDDA staff for final approval. The garage entry points on Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue are clearly defined.

ARTICULATING THE BUILDING FACADE - *Once a building properly fills a downtown site, its façade treatment determines how interesting it makes the pedestrian experience. Blank walls are deadly to pedestrian friendliness. They are the opposite of walkable, comfortable places. Similarly, plain facades do little to attract interest and ultimately do not generate the most income. Good downtown design recognizes that pedestrians move slowly and appreciate detail and a more human scale. Color is also important and will be reviewed by the LDDA Board.*

Technical compliance: The conceptual rendering depicts some elements of façade articulation, diminished massing, recessed corners, a decorative cornice, and changes in color and texture.

Staff Comments: This building provides visual interest on all four elevations. The Main Street side has the least visual interest, consisting of a large horizontal plane lacking variation other than color. A large portion of the primary façade (Massachusetts Avenue) also consists of a horizontal plane with little articulation other than color change. The roofline is minimally distinguished from the remainder of the façade. Introduction of awnings or canopies would significantly enhance the pedestrian’s experience and should strongly be considered.

CREATING TRANSPARENCY *Further emphasizing their aversion to blank walls, pedestrians also want to see into buildings as they pass. This is also good business, because it makes the passerby aware of the products and services contained inside the building. To make this possible, the ground floor must be transparent. Buildings should make at least 50% of street-facing façades transparent, beginning no more than 18 inches above the sidewalk – preferably 12 inches. Fifty percent transparency is a minimum as the more that is open to view, the better for the pedestrian (selling) environment. One need only look to suburban shopping centers to understand this. Ground floor office uses too should employ this design as they may evolve into retail or service uses in the future. Until then, window treatments can create office privacy.*

Technical compliance: The proposed building has neither ground floor retail nor office. The ground floor windows are not transparent.

Staff Comments: The LDDA guidelines do not address ground floor parking. Placemaking focuses on creating places where people can gather and interact. Numerous urban design elements have an impact on the quality of place and how welcoming it is to people. However, the most important element is transparency. To create a walkable mixed-use area, we should have between 50%-90% transparency on the front façade. This creates a sense of eyes on the street and perception of human activity. If blank walls or garages and parking front the street in these areas, the transparency is lost. While it may seem that transparency is not important because of the parking use, the blank walls further emphasize the lack of activity on this frontage.

Overall Staff Conclusions:

In 2016, the LDDA revised the Design Guidelines in the effort to be less regulatory and more development friendly. The intent is to give developers guidelines they should adhere to while still allowing for artistic freedom. The Design Guidelines were updated with the understanding that developers have to weigh construction costs with the financial feasibility of a well-designed project.

The Design Guidelines also state, *“The Board will make decisions based upon circumstances unique to each project and its context and neighborhood location within the downtown.”*

The uniqueness of this project is its key placement on Lake Mirror and its significance to the City’s downtown skyline. Conceptual renderings are not construction documents. As noted by the applicant, these are not final documents. That allows for additional input and negotiation before a final approval.

With that in mind, staff recommends conceptual approval specifically approving the building setback and lack of first floor transparency as shown on the site plan and building elevations. This conceptual approval should allow for the project to move forward.

Staff also encourages articulation of rooflines and additional articulation to the building façade through the introduction of canopies or awnings along the Massachusetts Avenue frontage. This is a highly trafficked thoroughfare and there should be more articulation to the façade other than color.

For final approval, the applicant must submit building elevations, materials, and paint colors to the LDDA Board for consideration.