

# Planning and Urban Development Department

## Planning Division

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**Subject:** IOZ Design Review – 222 St. John Street (Maine Medical)  
**Written by:** Caitlin Cameron, Urban Designer  
**Date of Review:** Monday, July 2 2018

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The proposed garage at 222 St. John Street for the Maine Medical Campus was reviewed for the Planning Board workshop by Caitlin Cameron, Urban Designer, Nell Donaldson, Senior Planner, Deb Andrews, Historic Preservation Program Manager, and Jean Fraser, Planner. This project is reviewed according to the adopted IOZ IDP and Regulatory Framework standards.

The new construction is a large garage with no other uses on-site and is set back from the street. Therefore, the design evaluation is focuses on the impact on the overall campus design, long views, safety and CPTED, and the St. John Streetscape.

**Design Review Comments:** *(Staff questions/comments and unmet guidelines in red for Planning Board consideration)*

### ***Historic Preservation Advisory Design Review:***

The Historic Preservation Board conducted an advisory review session on April 18th. The design presented to the HP Board in April differed considerably from that now before the Planning Board in that the building elevations exhibited greater variety and differentiation of materials and textures. The project architect noted that this was done in an effort to visually break up the large mass of the building and make some reference to the historic MCRR office building.

While HP Board members expressed appreciation for the effort made to visually break down the scale of the garage and relate the new building to its historic neighbor, they found the approach visually complicated and distracting rather than referential. They noted that given the very nature of the building type--the mass, form and program of which cannot be manipulated--it was not possible to effectively achieve an architectural relationship between the garage and the MCRR office building or to mask the scale of the structure through differentiation in facade treatment. They encouraged the project architect to consider a more homogeneous design approach that relied on quality materials and skillful mastery of a few key design details to provide visual interest. They argued that this would result in a more visually recessive building, but one which also had design integrity in its own right.

It should be noted that the Historic Preservation Board has not had an opportunity to see the current design iteration. In staff's view, however, the current design is largely responsive to the input of the Historic Preservation Board and quite successful architecturally. *The one aspect of the current proposal that HP staff suggests be given further consideration is the color/tonal palette. The current proposal features a high level of contrast, which is visually striking, but also demanding. In staff's view, were the colors warmer in tone and "knocked down" in terms of*

contrast, the building would likely achieve a greater level of compatibility with its surrounding context.

**Signage:**

The site plan application includes signage proposal which must be consistent with the existing MMC Sign Master Plan. A monument sign is proposed at the sidewalk; building signage is minimal with wayfinding signage only. Staff support the choice to not use upper story signage on this building. Upon review the branding is consistent with the MMC sign master plan – however, this sign deviates from the master plan in color and does not include the grid base. Staff are okay with these small deviations from the master plan given the St. John Street context is visually removed from Congress Street where the color and grid pattern are used as cohesive elements.

**IDP Design Guidelines**

*1. New buildings will be designed to contribute to the campus vision and organizational goals identified in the Master Facility Plan and the Transportation Plan, and best practice design standards for healthcare.*

The architectural character of the new garage is consistent with the campus vision as presented in the IDP and subsequent project proposals. In addition to furthering the transportation and campus design goals of the MMC master plan, the building architecture is intended to have a relationship with the main campus which is only really seen from long views. This is not intended to be a gateway building to the campus and MMC does not want to confuse visitors as to the orientation to the main campus. The City’s priority is the long views of this building, however, staff are also considering how this project contributes to the activity and streetscape of St. John Street as stated in the IDP design guidelines and principal statements.

*2. The overall composition and experience of the campus will be considered for cohesive identity from approaches along Congress Street and I-295.*

The proposed building is not immediately adjacent to the main campus and the new building is primarily seen in juxtaposition with the campus and with surrounding, existing buildings in context from long views. Some design elements that correspond to the campus vision include vertical articulation elements and white material palette.

- Staff recommend in order for the garage to be visually cohesive with the MMC campus and the surrounding context, **the material color palette should be coordinated to include warm tones of the grey and white.**
- **Consider whether the high level of contrast is appropriate** – though staff are supportive of the grey and white materials, **the level of contrast may bring too much attention to the garage that otherwise is intending to be recessive.**

*3. Building entrances will be oriented toward, located adjacent to, accessible from, a sidewalk in a public right-of-way to create a pedestrian-oriented environment.*

The building placement is set back from the street. There are two primary entrances into the garage – one on the side accessible from St. John Street via a path along the railroad building and the other oriented to St. John Street. The standard is met with the orientation and pathways leading to these entrances. The open space between the street and the building is designed to be a pedestrian-oriented environment and provide soft-scape amenity and

successfully creates a visually interesting but also safe environment. The central circulation tower further adds emphasis to the St. John Street entrance.

- **Staff suggest more emphasis can be brought to both entrances** – increase scale of entrances, canopies, lobby area, etc. to increase scale of these entrances in relationship with the scale of the building and the distance from the street.

*4. Building designs will relate to and be compatible with the existing, or – in areas of change – planned character of residential and commercial neighbors. Design elements and characteristics to consider include:*

*- Building placement and relationship to the street*

*- Overall massing and scale*

*- Roof forms*

*- Proportion, directional expression, and composition of facades*

*- Rhythm of solids to voids*

*- Rhythm and proportion of openings*

*- Rhythm of entries and projections*

*- Relationship of materials, texture, and color*

- The building use and placement away from the street do not further the vision of improving the activity and streetscape of St. John Street. However, given the scale of the building, setting it back from the street has advantages for mitigating the scale impacts of the building.
- The overall massing and scale are largely dictated by the functional needs of the garage and the capacity needs for growth of the hospital. As seen in the long views – the height is not overwhelming and being set back from the street, allows the older and smaller scale buildings to create the street wall relationship to the sidewalk.
- The material selection and placement relates to the function of the garage but is designed in a consistent and dynamic way to bring some visual interest and texture without having gimmicks.
- There is a frequent solid to void ratio given the need to have an open garage. The vertical fins provide rhythm and bring a finer grain to the large façade.
- The gap between floors has uneven spacing – would suggest that the spaces should be consistent with the spandrel modifying in height instead.
- As stated previously, staff would like to see further detail on the material color palette in relationship with the surrounding buildings which tend to have a warmer tone and less contrast.
- The roof is simple and where projections are needed, are glass and low in height.

To help understand the scale of this development, consider the following examples:

- Building Length – the Civic Center + city garage are of comparable scale and length to this building. The Union Station Plaza adjacent is slightly longer than this garage will be.

- Building Height – the USM garage is five stories, compared with the seven stories on this garage
- Open Space – The small park on Pleasant Street between the sidewalk and the playground is of comparable scale

*5. Façade materials of buildings will be of high quality, and contribute to an attractive public realm.*

The proposal uses a material palette of concrete, glass, metal screen, and aluminum fins. These materials meet the quality criteria, convey the garage use, and balance the desire to mitigate the scale of the long building while providing visual interest from the long views as one enters the city. The design of the central circulation tower contributes to the public realm using height and material changes to provide an accent point along the façade and indicate to the street where to enter the building. The design and material placement were simplified in response to the Historic Preservation Board and staff review – the general direction proposed is a consistent application of materials that provide visual interest and texture without calling attention to the building.

- **What is the material of the ramp roof? Is that depicted in the renderings?**

*6. The design process will **consider long views** of new buildings including roofs and associated structures to minimize visual impacts and **provide visual interest**. Rooftop appurtenances will be either screened from view or integrated into the building design, and will not be visible from adjacent streets, Western Promenade, or the Congress Street approach (helipad excluded).*

The project successfully balances the goals of being recessive while visually tying into the overall MMC campus and providing visual interest from views from I-295 and the Veterans Bridge. This is accomplished with the height being capped at seven stories and the consistent use of texture and articulation elements. **There are some outstanding questions regarding the roof level design in relation to long views:**

- **Are the ramp and circulation tower roofs adequately depicted in the renderings?** It is difficult to tell how visible these will be with the materials provided.
- **Concern about the visibility of the roof lighting poles and light levels, especially the impact on the Western Promenade.**
- The roofs at the top level are proposed to be glass to mitigate their visibility.

*7. Vibrant, contributing and sustainable active ground floors will be provided to add activity and a sense of place to the priority node identified in the City's Comprehensive Plan.*

**The project proposes limited activity at the ground floors – the building use is garage only and is set back from the street.** There is a garage entrance oriented to St. John and shuttle activity and an entrance facing the side surface parking.

- **Consider ways of introducing more “eyes on the street” facing St. John Street** whether that be more glass on the circulation tower, increasing the size of the entrance lobby, adding windows to the security/utility area of the façade (clerestory, 2<sup>nd</sup> level waiting lobby, etc.).

8. In areas where the occurrence of limited blank facades along public right-of-ways are unavoidable due to changes in topography or building use requirements, the following strategies will be used to mitigate visual impact:

- providing elements of visual interest along any blank walls facing public streets, and,
- working with the City of Portland to ensure adequate lighting of public sidewalks to create a safe pedestrian experience.

Not applicable. Landscape design addresses the standard adjacent to sidewalk.

9. Any parking structure within the IOZ will:

- screen views of cars from the public rights-of-way
- provide elements of architectural interest on upper floors to contribute positively to long views and gateway approaches
- for garage structures within 20' of the public right-of-way, meet street activation intent according to street type

- **Staff request more information regarding the screening of cars.** Screening methods include solid concrete spandrel wall with metal mesh railing on the ground floor. **It is not clear whether the spandrel panels will conceal the headlights of cars. Will cars be screened from view on the top floor, from the Western Prom?**
- Visual interest is provided by the textures and composition of the materials – the angled fins provide texture, shadow lines; the contrasting color materials break up the scale of the building.
- The building is not within 20' of a public right-of-way.

#### **Building Relationship to Public Street**

**Urban Commercial Arterial (St. John Street)** While it has some elements of a walkable street such as sidewalks and on-street parking, large stretches of the street prioritize the car with frequent curb-cuts, and street-facing parking lots. . . . To the extent possible, extend the character developed for the Congress Street frontage along St. John Street.

The building does not contribute directly to the St. John streetscape because it is setback from the street. The open space, paths, and building entrances will enhance the existing conditions but does not go as far as to establish a street wall or introduce active uses on St. John Street. The project will provide some streetscape improvements including sidewalks, lighting, and street trees/landscape.

#### **Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)**

MMC will incorporate the following design strategies that have been demonstrated to deter crime:

- Providing a clean and aesthetically pleasing campus environment that is designed with vandal-resistant materials
- Providing clear and properly-sized signs in safe locations to ensure safe wayfinding
- Ensuring that paths from transit stops, bike storage areas, and parking areas to main pedestrian entrances are well-lit, with clear sight lines
- Designing street-level elevations to minimize potential hideouts

- *To the extent possible, given clinical program demands, providing views in and out of building ground floors populated by users to serve as “eyes on the street”*
- *Generating foot traffic on public sidewalks with pedestrian entrances*

There are several areas around this building with potential safety concerns and the potential for hiding spaces. The project uses landscape plantings and fencing to limit access to areas between the building and the property lines. Site lighting is provided with wall packs on all sides of the building. The open space between the building and the street is open and has good visibility and includes site lighting along the pedestrian paths.

- **Staff suggest the lobby entrance facing St. John Street could increase in size, include more fenestration, and/or include additional lighting.**
- **Regarding “Eyes on the street” See Comment 7.**
- **Rather than extend a wood fence to the street between the Railroad Building and the residential building, staff recommend using landscape.**

### ***Mitigating Impacts Through Design***

*Minimizing Shadow Impacts* - Shadow impacts were evaluated as part of the IDP process. Refer to Plan 13 for shadow analysis of the approved IDP building heights. This project orients its long dimensions north/south meaning the broadest sides of the buildings are oriented to cast more shadow. However, the building position is only directly adjacent to three buildings where new shadow will have some impact. The neighboring properties are primarily commercial, railroad, and prison. The two residential properties and the Eagles property on St. John Street will experience shadow impact in the afternoon from this building.

*Context-Sensitive Lighting Design* – Lighting at the ground level is adequate per City of Portland Technical Standards.

- **Clarify whether there is building lighting above the ground level**
- **Concern about light trespass** on neighboring residential properties and level of light visible from the Western Promenade at night. **More information is requested regarding the impact of site lighting from the long views, especially light trespass and visibility of the lighting on the upper stories and roof from the Western Promenade.**
- Street lighting in this location is standard cobra head – there is not a special lighting district on St. John Street. However, the pedestrian lighting within the Western Promenade, a connection between the new garage and the main campus, will be replaced with LED fixtures to be recommended by staff and the Historic Preservation Board and approved by the Planning Board at a future time.

*Mitigating Wind Impact* – No information was provided to evaluate this item. Staff do not anticipate significant wind impacts from the building given its height and permeability.

*Preserving and Enhancing Viewsheds* – The building does appear within the Western Promenade viewsheds as demonstrated in the three renderings provided from vantage points within the prom. The height of the garage is such that the building is visible from the prom but does not negatively impact the views of the river, mountains, or scenery beyond the jetport.

The garage is also rendered from multiple long views including Veterans Bridge and I-295. The renderings from the long views reveal the general design and height fit well into the context and does not stand out as overly obtrusive.

- Staff comment that the material color palette causes the building to stand out or be less recessive than desired. Therefore, the suggestion is that the grey and white materials should have a warm tone to be cohesive not only with the existing MMC campus but also the surrounding context.
- The rooftop design including light poles, ramp and circulation tower roofs, and any mechanicals should be accurately demonstrated in these renderings. It appears in the materials given that these rooftop appurtenances have minimal visual impact and are integrated into the design but staff would like to clarify whether all these features have been included in the rendering images.

### **Regulatory Framework**

1. **Mixed Uses:** . . . healthcare facility development fronting onto Congress Street and St. John Street shall activate the public realm, to the extent able, with uses such as service and retail/restaurant, landscaping, active building entrances, pocket parks, etc., on the ground or other publicly accessible level, consistent with the design intent contained in the approved IDP. . . .

The project does not provide mixed-uses or active uses. The proposal uses landscape and building entrances to address this design guideline – an open, landscaped area transitions between the sidewalk and the building entrance with direct paths to the entrance emphasized by a canopy, glass, and circulation tower. Staff has two recommendations:

- Given the scale of the building and the set back from the street, the scale of the entrance lobby could increase to be more visible and provide a more “lively” space.
- Consider ways of introducing more “eyes on the street” facing St. John Street whether that be more glass on the circulation tower, increasing the size of the entrance lobby, adding windows to the security/utility area of the façade (clerestory, 2<sup>nd</sup> level waiting lobby, etc.).