

Eye on Evanston: Design Evanston reviews 605 Davis Project

by David Galloway, Design Evanston and Jack Weiss, Design Evanston April 5th, 2025



Rendering of 605 Davis St. (center), looking northeast from Fountain Square. Credit: SCB Chicago

Design Evanston members participated in a presentation of the proposed 605 Davis St. project by Kerry Dickson and Richard Choi of Vermilion Development, Chris Dillion of Campbell Coyle, and James Michaels of Solomon Cordwell Buenz on Nov. 8, 2024.

Following is a summary of comments as they relate to Design Evanston Project Review Standards:

Specific criteria comments

1. The project should address a perceived need in the city and its respective community.

There is a need for more housing in the city, particularly in the downtown.

2. The project should be of an appropriate and beneficial use within the project's geographical context.

Residential use in the downtown is most appropriate.

3. The project should be of appropriate and complementary size, scale and proportion for its physical context.

The project takes advantage of its partnership with the University Building to increase its allowable FAR. The proposed tower is of a height that makes it the tallest building in Evanston — seven stories taller than the immediately adjacent Chase Tower. The design of the project creatively disguises the tower's size and height through lower scale articulations at the lower floors, offsets at the higher portions, recessed tower corners and recessed mid-height floors at amenity locations. This tower occupies an edge of the downtown district. Some members believed the height should be adjusted down in keeping

with the often-stated policy that tall buildings at the edge of downtown must be a transition down to the adjacent neighborhood height, aka the “wedding cake” model. Others believed that the proposed height was not objectionable.



Rendering of 605 Davis St. looking northwest from Chicago Avenue, with the University Building on the corner.
Credit: SCB Chicago

4. The project should reflect current progressive, creative and sustainable design goals and practices.

The design employs the latest technological advances in glass curtainwalls. The design is intended to qualify for LEED Gold status. Bird-friendly glass is a positive feature.

5. The project should provide for current and future economic growth.

The building will increase the residency downtown, which should be an economical benefit for downtown retail, entertainment and commercial businesses.

6. The project should provide for good city revenue generation with as low as feasible infrastructure burden to the city.

It will generate significant tax revenue with relatively very low burden on the city’s infrastructure given the few automobiles anticipated to be used by its residents and few children to burden the school system. The low number of automobile spaces provided in the project appears well substantiated by recent data from similar projects currently completed in the city.

7. The project should provide for a positive, engaging experience at street and pedestrian level.

The design sensitively reflects the varied lower heights of nearby downtown buildings with the building's articulated lower floors and setback upper floors. Further investigation of some lower floor glazed openings, parking floor details and materials is required.



Rendering of 605 Davis St. looking northwest at the residential entrance. Credit: SCB Chicago

8. The project should complement the practices and goals of “Complete Streets” and encourage multi-modal transportation use.

The project will provide many new residents in the downtown, the majority of whom will not regularly utilize an automobile. Ample bicycle provisions have been included in the design. Most residents are anticipated to utilize and encourage other means of circulation than automobiles provide.

9. The project should be a contributor to the city of Evanston’s goals to be energy self-sufficient.

The building will be an all-electric building, achieving Gold LEED status.

10. The project should provide a tangible complement of public benefits.

Providing needed residents in the downtown to support downtown businesses and activate public spaces and encouraging public transportation use, while not over burdening the existing infrastructure is a good benefit for the city.

Specific design comments

1. The overall design quality was considered very high. The articulation of the building mass, particularly at the lower floors that front Davis Street, and the corners of the taller

portions of the building, were very effective at making it a more friendly, contextual neighbor to the adjacent and opposite side of street buildings.

2. The scale and attention to detail of the lower floors that front the streetscape was appreciated; however, most felt that additional attention needed to be paid to the type of materials used at these locations, and the proportion and repetition of storefront openings did not need to be so specifically reflective of older storefronts across the street. Some felt that even a modern glass type facade at these locations could be successful, attractive, appropriate, and if scaled, detailed and articulated in a sensitive way, appropriate for streetside scale activities. Further study of the lower floors is recommended.

3. We realize that this iteration of the design is a very early one and we were not provided any residential floor plans to respond to. As floor plans are finalized, they may have some effect on the configuration of the exterior envelope.

4. The provision of amenities currently includes a rooftop landscaped deck atop lower floor areas at the streetside, middle floors at the tower and possibly a rooftop green deck at the adjacent University Building.



Rendering of 605 Davis St. looking northeast at the retail storefronts. Credit: SCB Chicago

5. Consideration should be given to lowering the height of the building to conform to the “wedding cake” model referenced above, and in anticipation of public dismay over another tall building in the downtown. Prior buildings proposed at this site were given favorable reviews and they were of 18 stories and 33 stories, respectively.

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Source: Evanston RoundTable 4.5.25