Eye on Evanston: Thoughts on Design | Design Evanston reviews 2206 Maple Ave. apartment building

by David Galloway, Design Evanston and Jack Weiss, Design Evanston March 1st, 2025

Rendering of east facade at 2205 Maple Ave. Credit: Gregory Geslicki

Professional members of Design Evanston met with the developer Paul Harb and architect Gregory Geslicki on January 23 to review the proposed multifamily apartment building at 2206 Maple Ave.

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 communities.

The project replaces an underutilized parking lot with a multi-story apartment building, addressing the need for additional housing in this transit-oriented, mixed-use neighborhood. The area is well-served by the Noyes Street CTA station and offers a variety of amenities, including restaurants, a small grocery store, a coffee shop and other retail services, all of which could be well served by this project's additional residents.

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

The proposed building provides much-needed housing in a location that can accommodate it while also supporting local businesses and enhancing the vibrancy of the neighborhood.

3. The project should be of appropriate and complementary size, scale and proportion for its physical context.
The design complies with R5 zoning regulations, requiring minimal exceptions. Its scale, height and site positioning align well with adjacent and nearby apartment buildings, ensuring compatibility with the surrounding urban fabric.

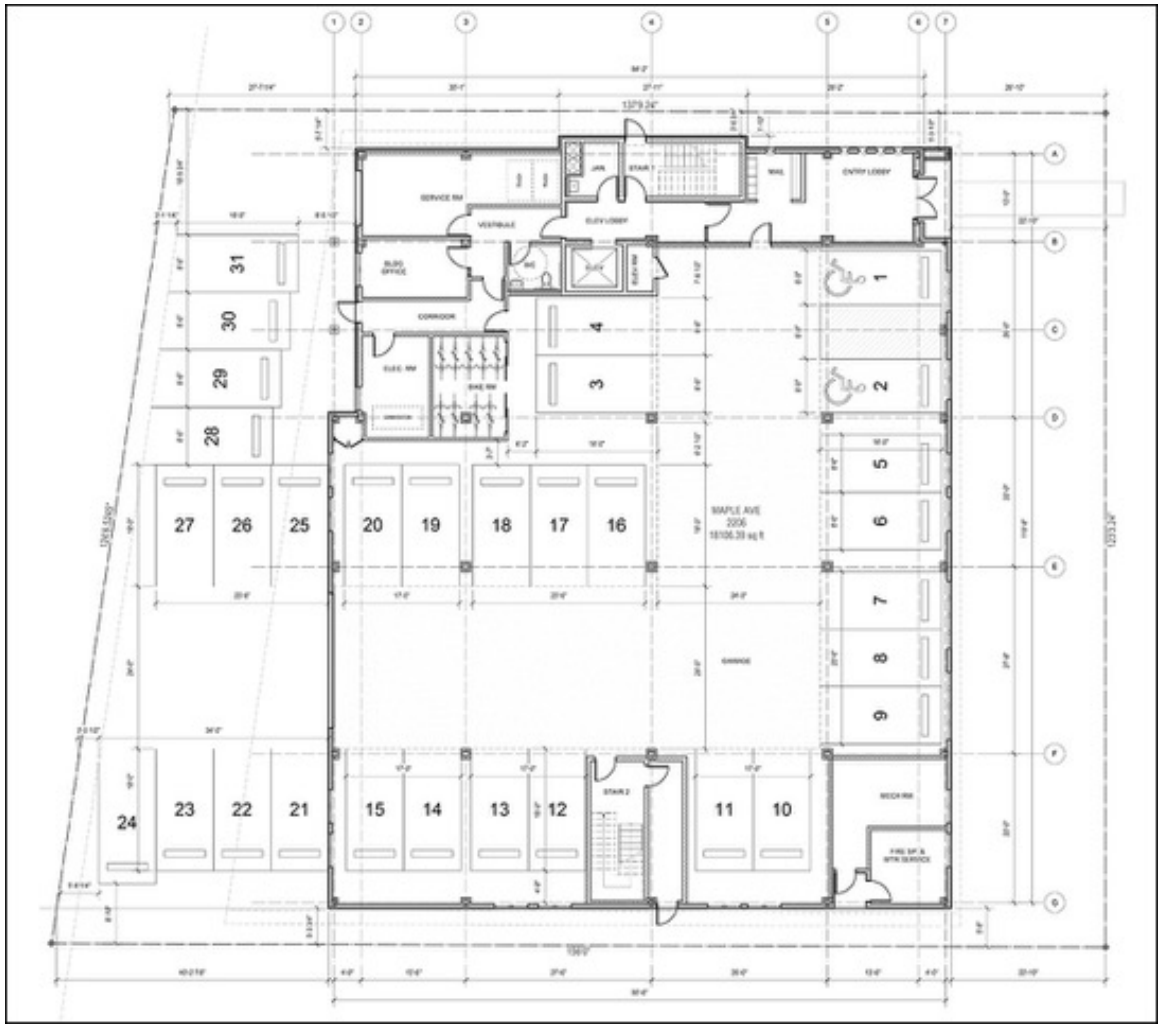
4. The project should reflect current progressive, creative and sustainable design goals and practices.
The building incorporates sustainable design strategies, including an all-electric energy system and a rooftop solar panel array for on-site energy generation. These measures contribute to Evanston's broader sustainability goals and reduce the project's overall carbon footprint.

5. The project should provide for current and future economic growth.
The development strengthens the mixed-use character of the area by increasing residential density, which in turn supports local businesses and generates additional tax revenue.

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

Aside from a modest increase in automobile traffic, the project is expected to have minimal impact on local infrastructure while contributing to city revenues through real estate and sales taxes.

7. The project should provide for a positive, engaging experience at street and pedestrian level.
The project engages the street and pedestrian way identical to adjacent multi-unit buildings. Its front yard is in alignment with adjacent properties. Proposed landscaping of indigenous plantings is expected to add to the building's curb appeal.
Currently, interior vehicle parking spaces are arranged behind the front first-floor elevation. If these spaces could be utilized for common tenant use or various beneficial amenities and made visually apparent from the outside, it would improve the facade's appearance from the pedestrian way and be more of an inviting and engaging experience and opportunity for passersby.



Ground floor plan at 2205 Maple Ave. Credit: Gregory Geslicki

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

The increased residential density in this transit-oriented, mixed-use neighborhood will contribute to greater foot traffic, public transit usage and bicycle activity in the area. The building includes accommodation for bicycle storage; though this could be increased. The proposed number of parking spaces for the property appears high compared to current, similar transit-oriented developments in Evanston. We recommend that the developer and architect reassess market demand and consult with local developers and city staff, who in our experience have been surprised by the low car-ownership rates among current and prospective tenants.

If some of the interior parking spaces at the front of the building were eliminated, as mentioned in Item 7 above, the freed-up space could be replaced with a variety of building amenities, such as a larger lobby, lounge area, conference/multi-purpose room, fitness room and additional bicycle storage (which we highly recommend), and result in an improved facade expression at the first floor. We understand, subsequent to our review, that the team has eliminated three interior parking spaces.

9. The project should be a contributor to the city of Evanston's goals to be energy self-sufficient.
The proposed design aligns with energy-efficiency goals through its all-electric utility system, high-performance windows, high R-value roof and wall insulation. The addition of rooftop solar panels further reduces the building's reliance on external energy sources.

10. The project should provide a tangible complement of public benefits.
By increasing the number of residents in a transit-oriented area, the project supports local commerce, encourages rail use and contributes to Evanston's broader efforts to promote sustainable urban development and provide much desired additional housing options.


Rendering of west facade at 2205 Maple Ave. Credit: Gregory Geslicki

Additional design comments

1. Architectural language
The front elevation of the building is its most prominent and important visual expression. We understand the front elevation is still under investigation and development. The current front elevation is a mix of traditional wide, vertical brick piers or wall planes and more contemporary horizontal balcony expressions with steel framing, all atop a relatively low height first floor contrasting masonry podium with different fenestration than the floors above. These three expressions, we believe, create a rather confusing composition that lacks coherence and intention that we believe is desired. We understand the project team is investigating some modifications to the facade expression.

The entry to the building is not as visually prominent as it could be.

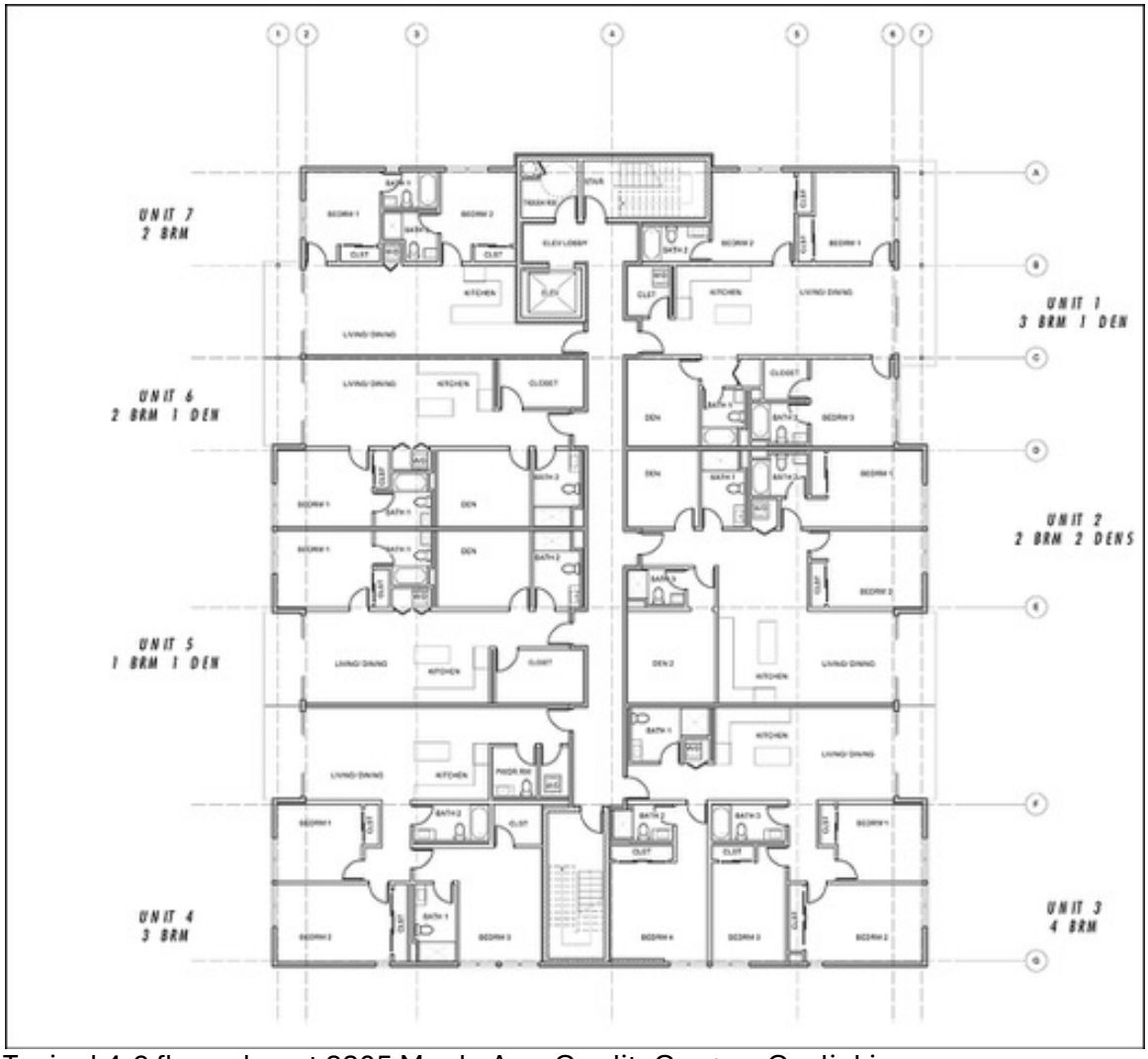
Painted metal flashings, cornices, steel framing and perforated metal railing panels add complexity to the facade expression. Metal balcony railing assemblies should be durable and best obscure tenants' balcony furniture, etc., from view.

2. Materiality and contextual multi-family
The use of brick masonry and fiber-cement panels, employed as part of a rain-barrier system, can be attractive materials appropriate for a building of this scale and purpose, in this context.

If, as indicated in the review session, the building is to have rain screen facades, the projection of slabs out on past the building wall on the front side of the building will be very difficult to drain. A change to a different slab arrangement on the front of the building should be considered so the rain screen will not be interrupted there. Additionally, the slab projected through the front wall will create conductive transfer of cold and heat under the exterior wall into the units on the front of the building.

3. Durability and longevity
Brick masonry, fiber-cement panels and aluminum-framed windows are durable elements with appropriate life spans for a multi-family building of this sort.

4. Miscellaneous
We noticed the employment of dens in a number of the typical units. These are located at unit corners with no fenestration and located adjacent to a bathroom. The following units include: Units 1, 5 and 6 (one den with an adjacent bathroom) and Unit 2 (two dens each with adjacent bathrooms). Is their use for sleeping purposes in accordance with current codes?



Typical 4-6 floor plan at 2205 Maple Ave. Credit: Gregory Geslicki

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Source: Evanston RoundTable 3.1.25