



GEM Sugar House: Planned Development Narrative

2026.02.18

Project Description

1. *Description of your proposed use. If involving a residential development include number, size, and type of dwelling units in each building, and the overall dwelling unit density.*

GEM Sugar House is a new 16-story mixed-use multifamily development. The project is submitted under the MU-11 zoning district and assumes additional height permitted through the Affordable Housing Incentive.

The ground level will include a new commercial space for Zions Bank, which will be permitted under a separate tenant improvement (TI) permit. The bank will maintain drive-through access, as shown on the plans. Additional ground-floor program includes a small retail space at the southeast corner, a bike and gear amenity room, a residential lobby, loading and back-of-house functions, and parking.

Levels 2 through 4 consist of structured parking, with Level 4 stepping back along Parley's Trail at the south property line. Level 5 includes residential amenity spaces, a pool, spa, and pool deck, leasing offices, and residential units at the northwest corner.

Levels 6 through 15 are residential, comprising a mix of long-term and short-term rental units. Level 16 includes additional residential units, an amenity club room, and a TI-ready space intended for a future restaurant.

The project is anticipated to include approximately 195 residential units, consisting of a mix of studio units (30%), one-bedroom units (40%), two-bedroom units (25%), and three-bedroom units (5%). The average unit size across all unit types is approximately 800 square feet. This diverse unit mix supports the MU-11 zoning district's intent to provide a range of housing options that accommodate varied household sizes, lifestyles, and affordability levels while reinforcing a compact, walkable, mixed-use urban environment.

2. *A complete description of the proposed planned development including the zoning regulations being modified.*

The zoning envelope for GEM Sugar House is based on the long-term assumption that Sugarmont Drive will be converted to a public trail as part of the Parley's Trail extension, at which point it will no longer function as a public right-of-way. This condition is a primary factor influencing site access, circulation, and zoning compliance. Vehicular access is therefore limited to Highland Drive, as Wilmington Avenue is privately owned. The anticipated trail condition also affects zoning requirements related to enhanced active uses on street-facing façades associated with the project's height requests.

The proposed project includes a 10-foot setback from the southern property line adjacent to Parley's Trail beginning at the first full level above 30 feet, consistent with the project's massing strategy. An additional vehicular access point is requested along Highland Drive to



accommodate the bank drive-through use and to meet applicable zoning requirements given the site's constrained access.

GEM Sugar House requests additional height through two mechanisms, as outlined below:

1. Height up to 150 feet:
The project proposes height up to 150 feet with 10 percent ground-level open space and enhanced active use along street-facing façades. Due to site constraints, sidewalk widening, and land dedication to the City, the project proposes to include the dedicated land area as part of the required 10 percent open space calculation. In addition, enhanced active use is proposed along Highland Drive only, as the south side of the site is designed to function as a public trail rather than a street frontage.
2. Affordable Housing Incentive Height:
The Affordable Housing Incentive allows up to three additional stories above 150 feet, with a maximum height of 12 feet per story. The project proposes two additional stories above 150 feet, with floor-to-floor heights exceeding 12 feet to accommodate commercial space and penthouse units. The proposed top of roof structure is approximately 183 feet, which is below the presumed maximum allowable height of 186 feet.

During review of the adopted zoning code, a requirement for a Sugar House lower-level front setback at the first full level above 30 feet was identified. In lieu of this condition, the project proposes a substantial building setback from Level 6 through Level 16. This approach provides a more meaningful perceived reduction in building mass from primary vantage points while also allowing for the structured parking required for this development type.

3. *When the proposed planned development includes provisions for common open space or recreational facilities, a statement describing the provision to be made for the care and maintenance of such open space or recreational facilities.*

This information is still in development and will be provided with a future submittal.

4. *Describe the plan for long term maintenance of all private infrastructure as stated in 21A.55.110 of the Planned Development ordinance.*

This information is still in development and will be provided with a future submittal.

GEM Sugar House Planned Development Information

1. *Demonstrate how your project meets the purpose and at least one objective of a planned development as stated in 21A.55.010 of the planned development ordinance: Encourage creative and innovative site planning and building design that results in superior design quality and improved compatibility with surrounding uses.*

The GEM Sugar House project advances this objective through an integrated approach to site planning, building massing, and land use that responds to the Sugar House neighborhood



context and the intent of the MU-11 zoning district. The project combines a diverse residential program with neighborhood-serving ground-floor commercial uses organized to activate the public realm and support walkability and access to daily needs. Building massing and architectural articulation are designed to reduce perceived scale, provide transitions to adjacent properties, and relate to the surrounding urban context. Publicly oriented amenities and pedestrian connections, including direct adjacency to Parley's Trail, further support compatibility with surrounding uses.

2. Demonstrate how your project meets the Standards for Planned Developments as stated in 21A.55.050 of the Planned Development ordinance:

A. Planned Development Objectives

The proposed planned development meets the purpose of a Planned Development as stated in Section 21A.55.010 and achieves the objective of encouraging creative and innovative site planning and building design. The project incorporates coordinated massing, stepped building forms, integrated parking, and trail-oriented open space that respond to site-specific conditions, including adjacency to Parley's Trail and the Sugar House mixed-use context. The requested modifications to zoning regulations are limited and necessary to allow this coordinated design approach. Strict application of zoning standards would constrain building organization, pedestrian connectivity, and massing strategies that are central to the project's design intent. The proposed PD deviations directly support achieving a more cohesive and context-responsive development.

B. Master Plan Compatibility

The planned development is generally consistent with applicable Citywide, community, and small area Master Plan policies. The project supports adopted goals for compact, mixed-use development, increased housing opportunities, and pedestrian- and trail-oriented urban environments within the Sugar House area.

C. Design and Compatibility

The proposed planned development is compatible with the surrounding area and is designed to achieve an enhanced product relative to strict application of land use regulations, as further described in the Design Review narrative.

Building scale, massing, and intensity are consistent with the MU-11 zoning district and surrounding urban context, with step-backs above the podium and articulation at multiple levels to reduce perceived mass. Building orientation prioritizes streets and pedestrian connections, with active ground-floor uses and transparent façades. Setbacks along the site perimeter provide space for amenities, buffering, sightlines, and maintenance while maintaining neighborhood character. Any PD deviations related to setbacks or massing are necessary to implement these design strategies and do not create adverse impacts.



Ground-floor façades are designed to facilitate pedestrian interest and interaction. Service areas, loading, and utilities are fully screened and internalized. Parking areas are structured and buffered to minimize impacts on adjacent uses. Lighting and materials are selected to support pedestrian comfort and compatibility with the surrounding area.

D. Landscaping

Landscaping is designed at a scale appropriate to the development and to soften building edges, provide buffering, and enhance pedestrian spaces. Existing and proposed landscaping elements are coordinated with the site design to lessen potential impacts on adjacent properties.

E. Mobility

The planned development supports City transportation goals by promoting safe and efficient circulation for pedestrians, vehicles, and bicycles. Vehicular access is limited and designed to minimize impacts on surrounding streets. Pedestrian connectivity to sidewalks, Parley's Trail, and adjacent uses is emphasized. Emergency access and loading functions are accommodated internally and in a manner that minimizes conflicts with pedestrian movement. Any PD deviations related to circulation are intended to improve site function and safety.

F. Existing Site Features

The site plan and building design consider existing site conditions and surrounding development patterns and integrate features that contribute to neighborhood character where feasible.

G. Utilities

Existing and planned utilities are adequate to serve the development and will be reviewed and addressed through standard City permitting processes. The planned development will not have a detrimental effect on surrounding properties or infrastructure.

3. Demonstrate how the proposed planned development is compatible with other property in the neighborhood.

The proposed GEM Sugar House Planned Development is compatible with surrounding properties in use, scale, massing, and relationship to the public realm. Located within the MU-11 zoning district, the project's mixed-use program aligns with the existing and planned development pattern of the Sugar House neighborhood. Building massing reinforces the street edge along Highland Drive and Sugarmont Drive while incorporating podium and tower step-backs to reduce perceived height and provide appropriate transitions to adjacent properties. Ground-floor uses and building orientation prioritize pedestrian activity and connectivity to public sidewalks and Parley's Trail, while vehicular access and service functions are consolidated to minimize impacts on nearby properties and streets. Architectural articulation, landscaping, screening, and lighting further support compatibility and contribute positively to the neighborhood's evolving mixed-use character.



Conclusion

Gardner Group and Engine 8 Architecture, along with our respective capital and design partners intend to deliver a thoughtful, high-quality project that will contribute to the growing Sugar House neighborhood. The GEM Sugar House project will enhance the neighborhood with additional housing, much needed short term rentals, thoughtful food & beverage, and community supporting in-person banking. The project will also provide a significant outpost to Parley's Trail, helping to support and activate SLC's growing trail network. Lastly, we aim to add to the vibrant and interesting architectural context with a design informed and inspired by neighborhood's rich and interesting history.

If you have any questions, or concerns we welcome the opportunity to further explain and demonstrate our commitment to revitalizing this area and are eager to work with Salt Lake City in delivering this project and the surrounding neighborhood.