

File No. 260030

**5825 W. Hope Av. (former Walmart)
Midtown Center DIZ Overlay
Project Narrative – Existing Building
4.13.2026 (Revised 5.4.2026)**

AFS Milwaukee, LLC acquired the approx. 15-acre site at 5825 W. Hope Ave. in June of 2022, which includes a currently vacant 160,000 sf building that was previously occupied by Walmart and a surface parking lot. The site is zoned Regional Business (RB2) and within the Midtown Center Development Incentive Zone (DIZ) Overlay. The DIZ Overlay was established in 2000 and entails performance standards including a permitted and prohibited use list as well as design standards. Projects within the DIZ Overlay are subject to the DIZ performance standards.

AFS Milwaukee, LLC has partnered with Gorman & Company and the City of Milwaukee to propose a dynamic development for the entire parcel that entails affordable housing, community-serving space, and self-service storage.

Development of the overall site will entail interior and exterior alterations to the existing building accommodate multiple uses and construction of new residential buildings on the surface parking lot to the north of the building. Site work is also proposed around the existing building. While the various components that constitute the redevelopment of this site are proposed by several applicants, the uses, changes to the existing building and site, and the new residential plans have been coordinated to ensure a cohesive, complementary and vibrant environment for future residents, commercial space occupants, and patrons.

The overall proposed development provides a positive solution to a large critical site within Midtown Center which has sat vacant since Walmart left in January 2016. The large building size and zoning has been a challenge to find a replacement tenant, but the team of Gorman & Company, the City of Milwaukee, and AFS Milwaukee, LLC has created vibrant development which will help energize the Midtown Center neighborhood.

Exhibits for the overall development of this site as it relates to the DIZ Overlay are provided separately for the existing building and the new development within the existing surface parking lot, including a project narrative, drawings, and zoning review matrix. This exhibit relates to the land south of W. Hope Ave., inclusive of the existing building and land adjacent to it.

1. Existing building (former Walmart) – subject of this project narrative:

- a. North portion – approx. 51,000 sf of the building will be occupied by community-serving uses anticipated to include a Milwaukee Public Library (approx. 17,000 sf) and adjacent City of Milwaukee tenant space (approx. 33,000 sf).
 - i. Façade alterations – to accommodate new tenant spaces and modernize the aesthetic of the building; subject to future tenant preferences/needs and approval by the City Plan Commission. This includes the removal of the existing greenhouse structures.
 - ii. Site work –

1. Buildout of a new accessory surface parking lot on currently vacant land located east of the building, subject to future tenant needs and future City Plan Commission approval. Parking lot will be designed per DIZ and City of Milwaukee zoning requirements.
 2. Site work along W Hope Ave will be revised to meet the proposed tenant needs (additional drop-off or parking) as part of a future file subject to City Plan Commission approval– one possible alteration, as drawn on attached site plan, could be the addition of a reading garden for the proposed library.
 - iii. Loading zone provided along the south edge of W. Hope Av. will remain as-is (approx. 50') but may be extended if additional parking or drop-off needs are required for proposed tenants.
- b. South portion – approx. 108,000 sf of the building will be occupied by a self-storage facility and Data Processing / Computer Services / Computer Research facility, specifically focused on High Performance Computing (HPC) (up to 19,000 sf).
- i. These uses require a deviation from the DIZ use list as it is currently prohibited. See deviation narrative for additional information specific to the deviation request.
 - ii. Façade alterations – to accommodate a new entrance on the west side of the building for the self-service storage office. Additional overhead doors may be added to the west façade – see elevations. Existing entrances on the south façade of the building will be utilized for the Data Processing / Computer Services / Computer Research facility.
 - iii. HVAC and emergency generator systems may be added to the south side of the building to support the new proposed functions; all new equipment would be screened from view. All noise is subject to the requirements of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.
 - iv. Site work – Landscaping along N 60th St. will be updated to meet Type A landscaping requirements per city of Milwaukee zoning code.
2. **(Separately Approved by CPC on 4/27/26 as File No. 252155) Multi-family development** on the existing surface parking lot north of the building – see documentation provided to the City Plan Commission.

The proposed Midtown Commons development will reshape the Midtown Center, positively influencing the neighborhood while providing critical access to affordable housing in the city of Milwaukee. The proposed development perfectly complements the City of Milwaukee Comprehensive Plan Housing Element by increasing housing choice and access to affordable housing, creating a walkable neighborhood, and increasing housing density and affordability within the Midtown Center.

- a. Phased development: (2) 100-unit multi-family residential buildings along W. Hope Av.

- b. Surface parking lot in the middle of the site, between the Phase 1 and Phase 2 buildings, for residents. Guest parking is being added along W Hope Ave.
- c. A proposed play area along W. Hope Ave. provides play space for children living in the development & neighborhood, a critical element for an urban in-fill project with a development with so many 2 & 3-bedroom units.
- d. Alterations to the north side of W. Hope Ave. to add loading zones adjacent to the Phase 1 and Phase 2 building's main entrances and angled parking for guests.

Existing Building - Overall:

- Landscaping:
 - Landscaping will be added along the new self-service storage office and Data Processing / Computer Services / Computer Research facility entrance.
 - Landscaping between N. 60th St. and the existing west parking lot will be updated to comply with the DIZ standards and landscaping zoning requirements, Type 'A'. The existing surface parking lot on the west side of the building will remain paved and designed as-is. Existing landscaping within the curbed islands will be cleaned up and dead plantings will be replaced. All landscaping will be regularly maintained.
 - Landscaping within the future new east parking lot will comply with the DIZ and zoning code landscaping standards.
 - Additional plantings will be added along the modified north building frontage; determined and coordinated by tenant's improvement design.

- Lighting:
 - Existing lighting for walkways and parking areas will remain in place and operational.
 - The new east parking lot will be illuminated in accordance with the DIZ standards and any applicable provisions of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances. Lighting poles will not exceed 25' in height. Cut-off fixtures will be utilized.
 - Additional wall-pack lighting will be installed on the building to illuminate green spaces and enhance safety.

- Waste Management:
 - Existing screened dumpster areas will remain as-is, located on the south side of the building
 - An additional trash enclosure is being proposed for the northern tenant spaces (proposed City of Milwaukee & Milwaukee Public Library tenants) at the proposed staff parking lot on the west side of the building. The enclosure will be designed with burnished CMU block that coordinates with the existing facility exterior materials.

- Signage:
 - No additional freestanding signage is anticipated. The existing Midtown signage to remain at site entry.
 - Building wall signs will be Type A and following the DIZ Overlay standards with respect to size. Compliant building signage may be approved administratively.

- Type B signage may be included if one of the northern tenants requires changeable messages, subject to approval of a deviation by the City Plan Commission for this sign type.
- All other sign types, including temporary signs, will follow the general provisions of the zoning code.
- Other:
 - No outdoor storage is allowed anywhere on the site.

North Portion – Community-Serving Spaces: The north approx. 51,000 sf of the building will be occupied by community-serving uses, anticipated to include a Milwaukee Public Library (approx. 17,000 sf) and adjacent (anticipated to be) City of Milwaukee tenant space (approx. 34,000 sf). Refer to Former Capitol Court Mall (aka Midtown Center) Development Incentive Zone Exhibit A, File No. 040068, for allowable uses. As currently proposed, libraries, community centers, and offices are allowed.

The uses within the approximately 51,000 sf will serve as a hub for community/retail activities, designed to foster engagement and connection. This element of the redevelopment will align with the DIZ's original intent to create vibrant, multi-use spaces that benefit the local community.

- Partnership Opportunities: The center will collaborate with various City of Milwaukee agencies, community organizations, and local stakeholders to determine the optimal use of the space.
- Flexible Functions: Potential uses include a city-run library, a community center, voting and polling location, police substation, and retail/event spaces.
- Accessible Design: Renovated storefront windows and entrances may create a welcoming and transparent facade. Flexible interior layouts will cater to diverse programming needs, including educational workshops, public meetings, and cultural events.
- Enhanced Services: The center will serve as a centralized location for vital community resources, bridging gaps in accessibility and promoting civic engagement.

The goal is to bridge the gap between the Midtown Shopping Center and surrounding neighborhoods by providing a central location for interaction, education, and shared experiences or extend supportive retail environments consistent with the DIZ standards and comprehensive plan.

- North façade of the building facing W. Hope Ave. will be modified to include additional entrances and windows, improving the existing condition and meeting the goals and standards of the DIZ relating to articulating building entrances and providing variety in building design. The proposed design shall enhance the existing façade and streetscape. Additional glazing and openings will be provided to support the proposed tenant experience and activate W. Hope Ave.
 - Final façade design modifications will be submitted for approval by the City Plan Commission.

- Pedestrian access along the north side of the building will be revised to enhance the proposed library and MKE space. A reading garden and library terrace are currently being suggested, but final design will be developed by the design team associated with these suites and part of a future City Plan Commission file. Additional plantings will be added along the modified north building frontage; determined and coordinated by tenant's improvement design.
- Vehicle parking for the proposed library will occur within an existing parking area along the west side of the building. See attached plans identifying parking lot layout and ADA parking locations.
- Parking for the remainder of the proposed community-serving space will be within a newly constructed parking lot on a vacant portion of the site to the east of the existing building. DIZ landscaping requirements, including providing 1 tree per 15 parking spaces, will be followed. Final design of proposed parking lot will be subject to city plan commission approval.
- Wall signage will comply with DIZ standards and be Type A. Final signs will be approved by DCD staff prior to permit issuance to ensure compliance with the DIZ.

South Portion – Self-Service Storage Facility and Data Processing / Computer Services / Computer Research facility:

The south approx. 108,000 sf of the former Walmart building will be repurposed into a state-of-the-art, secure, and climate-controlled indoor self-service storage facility and a Data Processing / Computer Services / Computer Research facility, specifically focused on High Performance Computing (HPC) (up to 19,000 sf of the 108,000 sf). See **zoning review matrix** for more detailed analysis of the proposed development alongside specific applicable DIZ overlay standards.

- These uses are prohibited by the DIZ overlay and require a deviation from the overlay use list. See deviation narrative for additional details specific to the deviation request, including limitations on permit issuance for the self-service storage facility, and responses to the 4 deviation criteria.
- Storage Access and layout:
 - Customers will access the site via the west parking lot off of N. 60th St.
 - Office is located on the west façade of the building. A new entrance and pedestrian walkway leading to it will be added under the existing canopy. New storefront & door will be added. See proposed plan.
 - Vehicle entrance for interior loading/unloading is adjacent to the office and will utilize existing overhead doors that had been used as automotive bays. Vehicles will not be allowed within the general storage bay areas.
 - Customers will utilize the indoor unloading zone located at the existing automotive bays or the existing access doors at the south of the building. No new doors will be added, but the single panel doors on the south may be enlarged to 40"-48" wide. Customers will be allowed to temporarily park outside these entrances.
 - Existing loading docks may be used for large truck access to storage units.

- Customer parking will occur in the existing parking lot to the west (see plan) and temporary unloading parking will occur at the south by building entrances. Employee parking is located at the south side of the building beside an existing entrance.
- Security Features:
 - 60+ high-definition cameras, tenant-specific access codes, and a staffed management office will ensure safety and peace of mind.
 - The facility will operate 7 days a week fully staffed, with tenant access from 6 am to 10 pm.
No outdoor storage will be permitted, maintaining a clean and organized appearance.
- Data Processing/Computer Services/Computer Research facility, specifically focused on High Performance Computing (HPC) (up to 19,000 sf within the 108,000sf)
 - Functioning similarly to a traditional office or business service use, with the primary difference being the presence of specialized computing equipment housed within the building. This use will consist of offices for engineers and technicians and then a lab that will house equipment that will run various research models. Simply put, it is a research lab using computers.
 - There is minimal on-site staffing, no regular customer traffic, and no outdoor activity associated with the use. Much of the operation occurs internally within secured areas of the building, with activity levels comparable to or quieter than a standard commercial office environment.
 - Equipment: The computing equipment is utilized as a tool to perform computational research and modeling, similar to how specialized equipment is used in a traditional laboratory setting. All equipment is contained within the building and does not involve industrial machinery, manufacturing processes. The equipment would be consistent with a computer service and research environment, including:
 - Workstations for engineers and analysts
 - Networking infrastructure (switches, routers, etc.)
 - Server racks and high-performance computing equipment used to support data analysis and research applications
 - Data storage systems supporting research datasets
 - Supporting electrical and cooling systems typical of a commercial office or laboratory environment
 - As part of this use, there will be additional air handling equipment associated with the cooling systems. These will operate at noise levels comparable to standard commercial HVAC units. All equipment will be located at the rear of the property, facing other commercial retail, and will be properly screened and secured. As a result, there should be little to no impact from a noise or visibility standpoint.
 - The mechanical systems are designed to be efficient and non-intrusive. The computing equipment is cooled a closed-loop glycol cooling system, which continuously circulates coolant to regulate temperatures. This system is fully contained and does not involve any discharge or external process beyond standard mechanical operation.
 - To support this system, air handling units will be installed at the rear of the building, oriented away from public-facing areas and adjacent properties. These units operate at

sound levels comparable to traditional commercial HVAC equipment and will be screened and secured in accordance with site design standards. Milwaukee Code of Ordinance standards with respect to noise level continue to apply.

- Backup generators, which would only be utilized in the event of a power outage, will be positioned in the same rear location and behind the same screening.
 - The Data Processing/Computer Services/Computer research facility will operate 24/7 with multiple shifts.
- Community Impact:
 - Providing secure, climate-controlled storage meets the needs of local residents, particularly those living in smaller housing units, while contributing to the overall revitalization of the area.
 - The Climate-controlled Storage and Data Processing / Computer Services / Computer Research facility provides employment opportunities to the community, both technical and service.
 - Additionally, it will illuminate the blight within this center and install a creative use for the remaining approx. 108,000 sq ft of vacancy.