



Department of Planning & Community & Economic Development  
**Planning Division**

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**TO:** Mayor Soglin and Members of the Common Council

**FROM:** Planning Division Staff

**DATE:** July 17, 2012

**SUBJECT:** **A Resolution Adopting the Downtown Plan as a Supplement to the City of Madison Comprehensive Plan (Legistar # 24468).  
Plan Commission's Final Report and Recommendations**

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On June 18, 2012, the Plan Commission approved its final report and recommendations on the Downtown Plan. That report consists of the recommendations in staff Memorandum 6 to the Plan Commission (dated June 18, 2012) as well as actions taken at the June 18, 2012 Plan Commission meeting as described in this memorandum.

At that meeting, the Plan Commission also recommended a substitute resolution that would add the following clause: "BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the adopted Downtown Plan includes the Plan Commission's final report and recommendations, and that Planning Division staff is authorized to incorporate these changes and make non-substantive editorial changes to improve clarity, consistency, and readability, including the supporting graphics, in developing the final plan document."

Below are additional revisions to the Downtown Plan that reflect the Plan Commission's actions at its June 18, 2012 meeting. Note that since most of these revisions related to the Mifflin district, including separating out the 400-500 blocks of West Washington Avenue as a new district, those sections are included in their entirety with the substantive changes from Plan Commission Memorandum 6 highlighted.

**1. The revised Mifflin section below (to be inserted beginning on page 51 in the draft Downtown Plan) is included in its entirety. The changes noted (i.e. strikethroughs and underlines) highlight revisions from Memorandum 6.**

**Mifflin**

The Mifflin district is currently known for its abundance of student rental housing, predominantly characterized by older houses that were divided into apartments years ago. Many of the existing buildings are only marginally maintained and a majority, though structurally sound, are in need of significant cosmetic improvements as well as general upgrading and modernization. However, the district still retains a physical sense of place created by the consistent scale of the housing stock and the rhythm of building forms along these largely intact blocks. Mifflin also retains a strong sense of community identity---whether rooted in the area's historic ties to the 1960s counter culture and the anti-war movement, the annual block party, or its role in providing affordable housing opportunities for University of Wisconsin students.

~~However~~But, the housing stock continues to deteriorate, with little incentive to invest in substantial improvements; and maintaining the status quo for this area is not considered a realistic or desirable long-term solution. In addition, over the five decades since this neighborhood first became primarily a student rental area, both the University and Downtown Madison have continued to grow around it. Today, the Mifflin district is bounded on one side by the expanding UW campus, and on the other, by new, large scale developments extending west from the downtown core. South of West Washington Avenue, the Bassett Neighborhood has seen substantial redevelopment over the past 20 years, which has significantly increased the amount and quality of housing available to downtown owners and renters.

The Mifflin district retains understandable appeal as an enclave of surviving houses representative of a type once found throughout downtown neighborhoods---with a half-century of tradition as a predominantly student community; and the planning process considered several potentially viable approaches to enhancing the future of the district that would seek to preserve its essential function and character while still accommodating significant additional development. But its prime location between the expanded University campus, the downtown employment core, and the multiple attractions of State Street also creates the opportunity to consider alternative futures for the Mifflin district that could greatly expand its role and dramatically change its physical character. This Downtown Plan recommends an approach that will, over time, recreate the Mifflin district as a distinctive, relatively dense, urban mixed-use neighborhood that can build from and support activities occurring on the University campus and in the downtown core and provide significant new employment and residential options not widely available in either.

~~The Mifflin district as a whole is proposed for mixed-use development at relatively high densities, but the recommended development concept differentiates the West Washington Avenue corridor from the balance of the district extending north to Dayton Street.~~

~~North of West Washington Avenue,~~†The Mifflin district is recommended for redevelopment with a dynamic mix of employment and residential uses at relatively high densities, as well as specialized retail and service activities that can add interest and vitality to the district and serve its residents and workers. The downtown has a relatively limited supply of flexible business spaces that are adaptable to a wide range of employment activities--including office, research, studio, and production activities---particularly for small and start-up businesses. With its near-campus location, a re-imagined Mifflin district could become an attractive location for a variety of new businesses---including businesses growing out of work by University of Wisconsin students, graduates and faculty. But the specific businesses that might find Mifflin attractive are not presently known, and will change over time, so it is important that employment-oriented developments emphasize the creation of business spaces that can be combined, subdivided, and adapted to many different uses as demand evolves. The recommended redevelopment approach will also create significant opportunities for new residential development that will provide housing options attractive to a broader mix of residents in both residential and mixed-use buildings. Because of their added flexibility, building designs that can be adapted to both residential and non-residential uses---such as "loft" type buildings---should be seriously considered. While not intended as a general retail district such as State Street, neighborhood-serving uses, as well as specialty retail uses compatible with the mixed-use character and physical design of the district---art studios and galleries, for example---would be a good fit and add interest and vitality to the street. Typically, these uses would be on the ground floor of buildings, with employment or residential uses above. As the area redevelops, larger-footprint buildings located close to the street and up to six stories in height will replace the current building stock. Maintaining significant on-site open space is not a specific objective, but small, engaging courtyards and similar amenities are encouraged. Buildings should be strongly oriented to the street, and streetscape treatment should create an attractive pedestrian-scale environment. Large street trees should be provided, and the potential to widen the terraces on some interior streets should be evaluated.

[Narrative related to West Washington Avenue was moved to the new West Washington district]

The illustrations below show conceptually how the Mifflin district might appear after the area is substantially redeveloped to be a much more dense urban mixed use district, although the drawing is not site-specific and many other building arrangements are possible.

For the recommended concept to be realized, a comprehensive implementation plan will need to be developed to guide and coordinate the substantial, but incremental, redevelopment of the Mifflin district by multiple property owners over an extended period of time. To create a truly engaging and attractive urban mixed-use neighborhood, it is essential that a means be created to encourage cooperation among owners and developers and the City to create solutions that look at the Mifflin district as a whole, rather than depend on *ad hoc* responses to piecemeal proposals that primarily reflect the vagaries of property assembly patterns. ~~For the Mifflin district north of West Washington Avenue, the~~ This transition may be especially challenging because the goal is to create a completely new mixed-use district with a special, integrated character, and not just a random collection of residential, employment and commercial buildings scattered among each other with no discernable design vision or sense of place. Successful transformation of the Mifflin district into a truly engaging mixed-use neighborhood will depend heavily on the quality of design, and it is recommended that detailed planning, ~~including the development of specific form-based design standards,~~ for the future of this area include development of specific form-based design standards. It may be appropriate to consider creating an Urban Design District for this area as a means of implementing recommended standards that may not be included in the standard zoning districts.

Objective 4.3: Plan and implement the transformation of the Mifflin district ~~north of West Washington Avenue~~ into a distinctive, urban, mixed-use neighborhood that blends employment, research, residential, and compatible retail uses in an engaging, dynamic, pedestrian-oriented environment characterized by consistent form-based design.

Recommendation 72: Encourage the development of flexible building designs, such as loft buildings and first floor flex space, that can be adapted to different types of residential, employment and commercial uses as the Mifflin District evolves.

Recommendation 73: Establish a minimum two-story and maximum six-story building height for new construction in the Mifflin district, ~~except on the West Washington Avenue frontage.~~

Recommendation 74: Encourage cooperative solutions to vehicle access and parking, including underground and shared parking, to reduce driveway cuts and facilitate development of larger footprint buildings.

Recommendation 75: Evaluate the potential to create wider terraces with larger trees on interior streets, to the extent compatible with street parking and vehicle access and circulation requirements.

Recommendation 76: Prepare a detailed development concept plan, design standards, and a comprehensive implementation strategy to guide future redevelopment. Recommendations may include building form as well as streetscape design standards to help create a distinctive urban character and sense of place. This plan should be prepared as soon as possible and adopted prior to a comprehensive rezoning of the area to implement these recommendations.



Mifflin and West Washington Concepts - plan view



Mifflin Concept - bird's eye view



Mifflin Concept - bird's eye view looking west



Mifflin Concept - street level view

**2. The newly-created West Washington section below (to be inserted immediately following the Mifflin section) is included in its entirety. The changes noted (i.e. strikethroughs and underlines) highlight revisions from Memorandum 6.**

### West Washington

The 400 and 500 blocks of West Washington Avenue have a special character that is different from either the Mifflin district to the north or the Bassett district to the south, although it shares attributes with both and serves as the transition between them. Similar to the adjacent districts, the West Washington district is also currently characterized by significant amounts of older housing stock predominantly rented to university students--- although the houses tend to be larger and better-maintained, and the building types more varied. The predominant physical characteristic of the West Washington district, however, is created by the Avenue itself. The width of the street, the broad terraces, large canopy street trees and generally consistent building setbacks provide an engaging public realm and the opportunity to further enhance a truly engaging entryway to Downtown.

Both sides of the 400 and 500 blocks of The West Washington Avenue within the Mifflin (and Bassett) district are is proposed primarily for residential uses---especially on the upper floors. Neighborhood-serving mixed-use development should be located primarily at the ends of blocks, but West Washington is not intended to become an employment or large retail district. Substantial redevelopment with larger, taller buildings is anticipated over time, and long-term preservation of older structures is not a specific recommendation, except in the case of designated Landmarks. Selective conservation and rehabilitation of buildings with architectural or historic interest would be compatible with the development concept, however. Buildings up to four stories in height are recommended along both sides of West Washington Avenue, with the potential for two additional bonus-stories if stepped back. The design of new developments should engage the street and help maintain an active, pedestrian-scale environment through façade articulation and provision of multiple front entrances to larger buildings, porches and balconies, and other street-oriented features.

West Washington Avenue is also an important gateway to the Capitol and the downtown core, and design standards and streetscape improvements are recommended to maintain and enhance the special visual character of these blocks. Of particular importance to this character is the grand appearance created by the consistent building setbacks, wide terraces and large canopy trees, and these features should be maintained as public amenities and not allow private use as redevelopment occurs.

The illustrations below show conceptually how the West Washington district might appear after the area is substantially redeveloped, although the drawings are not site-specific and many other building arrangements are possible.

Objective 4.4: Enhance the distinctive physical character of West Washington Avenue as a gateway to the downtown, while providing opportunities for the development of additional high-quality housing and creation of an engaging transitional district linking the predominately residential Bassett district and an evolving mixed-use Mifflin district.

Recommendation 77: Maintain predominantly residential uses along West Washington Avenue, with neighborhood serving mixed-use development located primarily at the ends of blocks.

Recommendation 78: Establish a minimum two-story and maximum four-story building height on the West Washington Avenue frontage, with up to two additional stories allowed if stepped back.

**Recommendation 79:** Maintain and enhance West Washington Avenue as a “grand boulevard” entryway to the downtown, with wide terraces (but not a median); large canopy street trees; consistent building setbacks; and special lighting, signage and other streetscape improvements.

**Recommendation 80:** Restrict vehicle pull outs, wide driveways and street facing garages or parking areas on the West Washington frontage, and encourage cooperative solutions to vehicle access and parking, including underground parking and shared parking, to reduce driveway cuts and facilitate development of larger footprint buildings.

**Recommendation 81:** Prepare a detailed development concept plan, design standards, and a comprehensive implementation strategy to guide future redevelopment. Recommendations may include building form as well as streetscape design standards to help create a distinctive urban character and sense of place. This plan should be prepared as soon as possible and be adopted prior to a comprehensive rezoning of the area to implement these recommendations.



*West Washington Concept – bird's eye view looking east*

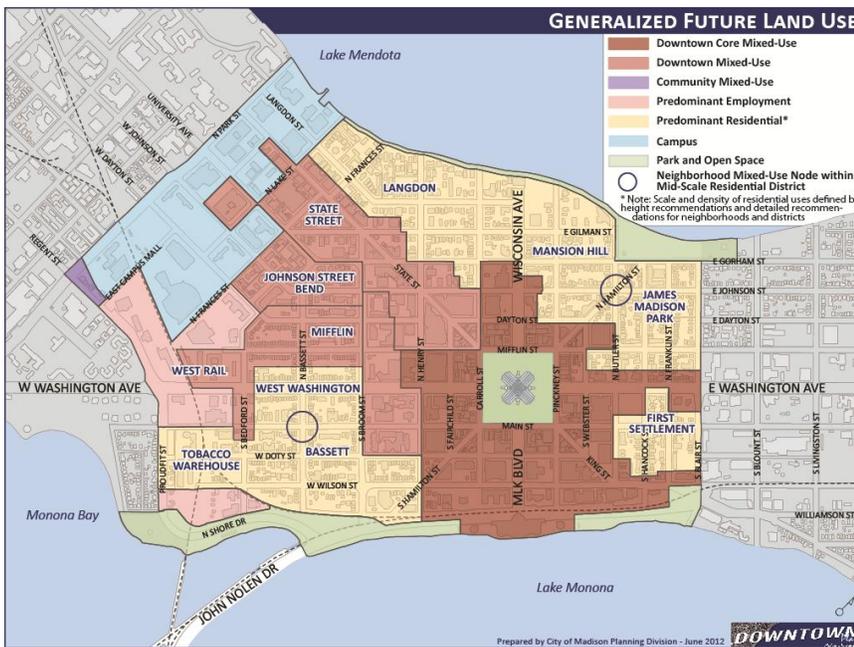


*West Washington Concept – bird's eye view looking west*



*West Washington Concept - street level view*

**3. The Neighborhoods & Districts Map and Generalized Future Land Use Map were revised to reflect the West Washington district.**



**4. The last sentence of the last paragraph on page 33 of memorandum 6 regarding the creation of a local and/or National Register historic district was revised to read: "However, in light of past efforts, this should only be considered if initiated and supported by a majority of property owners."**