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May 5, 2014
Stuart Levitan, Chair
City of Madison Landmarks Commission

Dear Mr. Levitan and Members of the Landmarks Commission, I am writing to you on behalf of the Marquette Neighborhood Association (MNA) Board to register our opposition to the application by Marty Rifken for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of 702-706 Williamson Street.

While MNA does not take issue with demolition of the current building itself, it does object to the design of the building that is proposed to replace it. Under the guidelines for new construction in the Third Lake Ridge Historic District, the "...rhythm of solids and voids in the street facade...of any new structure shall be compatible with those...within its visually related area (Section 33.19(11)(f))." The proposed building, on the corner of Williamson and Blount streets, is two stories higher and significantly taller at 72 feet than the immediately adjacent Olds Seed Building which, at 54 feet, is also the tallest building on Williamson Street. Additionally, the building immediately adjacent to the proposed 6-story project on Blount Street, the International Harvester Building (listed in the National Register of Historic Places), is only 3 stories high.

In an effort to protect the historic integrity of Williamson Street, the city-approved BUILD II plan for the 600-1100 blocks of the street limits the height of new construction on the site in question to 5 stories or 54 feet, whichever is lowest. These height standards for the lower part of Williamson Street were approved by Kitty RankIn, then city staff to the Landmarks Commission, who served as a member of the BUILD II committee.

The new zoning code assigns the category Traditional Shopping Street (TSS) to the 702-6 Williamson site. The stated height limit for this category is 3 stories, with the provision that Building height exceeding the maximum may be allowed with conditional use approval. (Section 28.065)

More generally, according to its statement of purpose, the TSS District is established to encourage and sustain the viability of Madison's mixed-use corridors, which sustain many of the City's traditional neighborhoods. The district is also intended to: "...(e) Facilitate preservation, development or redevelopment consistent with the adopted goals, objectives, policies, and recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan and of adopted neighborhood, corridor or special area plans." (Section 28.065)

Thus it seems clear that it is the intent of the zoning code that, in this case, conditional use deliberations should include such documents as the Third Lake Ridge Historic District ordinances and the provisions of the Williamson Street BUILD II plan.

Besides the above considerations, it is our impression that the proposed 6 story building may significantly interfere with the view of the Capitol Building from the 700 block of Jenifer Street.



MARQUETTE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION
A Place for All People - Established 1968
953 Jenifer Street
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Mr. Rifken has had a number of meetings with the neighborhood. Besides a reduction in height we have asked for setbacks and other design elements to mitigate the massiveness of the building. He and his team have followed some of these suggestions, but not, in our opinion, enough to meaningfully relieve the massiveness. Therefore, the MNA Board voted unanimously to oppose the current design at its meeting on April 28, and asks that you deny his request for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of 702-706 Williamson Street at this time.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael Jacob, President, Marquette Neighborhood Association