

*Note: At its February 29, 2012 meeting, the Urban Design Commission unanimously adopted this report (including John Harrington's attached memo), with specific recommendations shown in bold. The UDC also recommended adoption of version 3 for the Mifflin area that was presented at the meeting with the following changes: remove the urban lane and include the concept for the West Washington Avenue frontage shown in version 2 as described in the Letter of Transmittal (dated November 15, 2011).*

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### **Report of the Urban Design Commission on the draft of the Downtown Plan**

The Urban Design Commission has devoted more than four meetings to discussion of the draft Downtown Plan and members have drafted pages of comments. While the plan has many commendable aspects the UDC felt that key questions on urban design had not been fully resolved. Having spent many years reviewing urban projects the Commission knows that good design is key for a project's success. Thus, for the Downtown overall to succeed through the draft plan, the Commission believes its design issues need further resolution. Questions of height and density are too easily grasped as the primary tools to shape the future vision. As the plan notes these must be evaluated in context. The recommendations below are ways UDC believes the draft plan can be strengthened.

The UDC believes in the need to encourage good architecture for the best Downtown. At times, what seems to be arbitrarily applying limits can stifle the creativity needed for good design. While this does not mean we think the Downtown is a free fire zone for development we think a reasoned process for sifting and winnowing projects can be beneficial for the community. We formally adopted, unanimously, a motion that for **the new PPD (old PUD) in the proposed zoning code should allow for the modification of all bulk standards including heights.** We note a recent project on East Washington Avenue of good design that required a height modification, that we recommended, to permit an additional two stories.

The **UDC believes that a third alternative needs to be weighed for the Mifflin St. area** other than the first one in the draft plan and the second alternative offered in the letter of transmittal. **The UDC viewed that there were two parts to the area labeled Mifflin that needed separate consideration.** We recommend both areas have a third alternative but wish them viewed as distinct from a design point of view.

One area that is distinct from all others in the city is the present design character of West Washington Avenue as one of the Grand Boulevards with its rise from the old rail yards to the Capitol Building. **An additional design zone needs to be established for West Washington with criteria discussed as follow.** Maintaining a hierarchy of built spaces as the ground rises is a key ingredient of the present and future design for the street, but this may not mean one set height limit is the right or

sufficient tool for the West Washington Avenue. The set backs of buildings from their lot lines, with real soil and plant material maintains this area as a unique urban green space in an area where the plan correctly notes there is a park deficiency. Keeping this present green space ranks high on what UDC considers crucial. The additional setbacks of the majority of buildings main bulk along the street by the consistent use of front porches and balconies further ensures the street level green space is not overwhelmed by building mass. That said it may be possible on the north side of the avenue that greater height could occur with higher story setbacks. As noted elsewhere in the plan massing studies should be undertaken to set these heights in a total context. Thus heights for the north side should be listed as under further review. The four story level heights for the south side adjoining Basset seemed appropriate. Another issue for West Washington is the rhythm of the buildings. While UDC is not persuaded the house form is the only form that can be successful along West Washington, if there is any area in the "Mifflin" district where some of the existing buildings have more merit, the grander houses of West Washington would meet the qualification of extra efforts for public and private efforts in partnership. If buildings are replaced however, the rhythm should not be a large series of structures like the Metropolitan Place or of the old AAA building marching along the avenue. Structures of perhaps the width of twice or three times existing houses with articulation and porches and balconies could be considered.

**Mixed use which is the present pattern of the blocks on West Washington Avenue should continue.** The possible use of a mid-block alley to remove driveways from West Washington could also benefit the urban green space. The maintenance of the urban forest aspect of the Street is also crucial and the city forester should work with private land owners to coordinate large shade trees that help define the green aspect of the avenue.

The UDC believes regarding the rest of **the Mifflin District that mixed use is a better characterization of the future of the district.** While some housing stock may still have a useful life the UDC does not believe in the long run the maintenance of the house form in this district represents the best strategy for urban reinvestment that the area will require and thus urges the weighing of a third alternative for its future. It is noted there are multiple areas in the draft Downtown plan where the smaller residential forms are encouraged, perhaps with better prospects, like Mansion Hill, Bassett, First Settlement, and James Madison Park. Staff discussed **the warehouse/loft form as a concept to be incorporated into the third alternative** such form was used in the recent successful Depot project and that mixed use projects might be most successful at the cross streets. **Heights of 6-8 stories were discussed by UDC as suitable.** Another factor to be encouraged **in a redeveloped Mifflin is broadened terraces for more successful large shade trees. Making streets such as Basset more of a boulevard with wide terraces could increase the urban green space.** This could give a unique character to the area as it redevelops. **Mid-block alleys or urban lanes with pedestrian alternatives can also relocate driveways from street frontages increasing the urban green aspect of the area that redevelop in a greater density.** Physical redevelopment can permit the relocation of cars from the streets to underground or

on-site. The UDC believes that as urban life does become more dense the design and incorporation of urban amenities is a key to successful outcome. Some of this can be done thru private projects but some must be done as publicly lead efforts. The UW Madison campus developments have had a number of successful efforts in the pedestrian linkages and urban amenities now being developed as the campus has grown more dense. Since not all pedestrian links to campus can be done by the UW Madison, **the city should explore ways to have Bedford, Bassett, and Broom be enhance pedestrian linkages with urban amenities and green space. For the present plan this could be incorporated with a policy statement with further development in the transportation planning efforts.**

**Regarding bonus stories the UDC believes that more criteria for awarding them need to be developed than those presently in the plan. The quality of material and superior design should be included, as well as transportation contributions (not just parking, but also for example. TDM, Community Car, etc. though parking off urban lanes to eliminate driveways would be good ), added urban amenities, as well as preservation solutions for historic structures should all qualify for the decision on bonus stories, with a threshold of some number of the criteria achieved for awarding the bonus.**

The UDC believes that designation of certain streets as arterials may consign them to be blighted as primarily auto corridors with out offsetting design work. And some should be noted as major or minor thoroughfares to establish a proper hierarchy among them. The outer ring needs to be more than the backsides and forgotten sides of buildings. **The vibrancy of the Capitol Square needs to extend to the outer ring as well with attention to active uses and pedestrian amenities.**

The UDC believes it is premature to actually map new historic districts as done in the draft plan. Such districts depend on research to define what is their actual historic character as a district (that is not just old buildings) which then permits a review as to whether particular buildings are essential to the historic basis and finally permits a boundary to be drawn. Lacking such research, publicly presented for review it seems hard to say where a map should be drawn. **Listing possible areas for such historic district research may be fine but maps should not be assumed.**

Affordable housing should be encouraged not by retaining crumbling structures but by **encouraging section 42 housing and other programs.** Also design of smaller units to lower housing costs could be considered and mixing studio types with other sizes can encourage diversity.

**The UDC believes efforts on the Lake Monona shore will need careful design attention for future success.** A concern is that the Shore Drive concepts are not yet developed and that the land bridge issues also need further work rather than presuming the sketches are the desired design solution.

John Harrington's memo:

I support and appreciate the memo Dick has sent out. I would, however, like the commissioners to consider adding or strengthening two issues that are important to me: the urban forest and stormwater. The plan peripherally addresses the urban forest on p. 45 and stormwater on page 105, but in my opinion the text is quite general and inadequate.

There are numerous environmental benefits to developing a strong urban forest and one of the most significant is to mitigate the urban heat island effect (and the plan notes this). The urban forest is, however, an architectural component of the city as well and just as the plan provides general guidelines for architecture we need to do this for trees as well. Heights, spacing, etc. of trees are significant to space creation, developing edges, ceilings, etc. and guidelines to how this can be done would be helpful. **I would hope that the plan at minimum recommends that the City develop an urban forest plan for the downtown area including the square.** Such a plan would include the minimum sizes of street trees (preferably species that grow greater than 60'), maximum *average* spacing (I recommend 35'-45' to create a true canopy ceiling), planting area (we complain that many species won't grow in the city, when the real factor is don't grow because we don't provide adequate growing conditions- Dick memo alludes to this but I'd like to see this strengthened), and diversity (using a 5-10-20 rule of no more than 5% of one species, 10% of one genus and 20% of one family). To support diversity we should encourage that plant composition be viewed by neighborhood, not by the individual parcel. I look at the plantings on the outside of the square and along North Hamilton and know we can do much better, but we need guidelines to do so. I don't think the downtown plan as written provides the guidelines that would result in a different planting along these corridors, however.

Secondly, the downtown plan needs to consider stormwater issues. Within the downtown too many developments are still pushing stormwater to the sewers. High density development makes sense in our cities but one of its drawbacks is how to deal with stormwater when green space is inadequate. Where green space is available rain gardens *if correctly built and maintained* help, but there are too many situations where adequate green space is not available. **The plan needs to include stormwater guidelines and rewards that encourage solutions such as green roofs, permeable pavements, and recycling of grey water in situations where green space is inadequate for infiltration.** General guidelines are best done at the downtown plan level and not on a case-by-case basis. Berlin in its redevelopment of its eastern sector has said no development can contribute more than 10% additional stormwater offsite. This has resulted in all sorts of innovative ways to contain stormwater. A number of other cities in Germany require green roofs on all new developments unless financial hardships can be documented. I'm convinced these solutions are necessary if we want truly dense, but sustainable, development. I am hoping that Madison can look toward be a leader within the Midwest on sustainability issues that are important to creating a viable and rewarding city.