

Ledell Zellers
510 N. Carroll St.
Madison, WI 53703

Date: December 10, 2011
To: Landmarks Commission
Subject: Downtown Plan

Dear Landmarks Commissioners,

In general I think the Downtown Plan does a good job of balancing change in the downtown with protecting Madison's heritage and historic buildings and places. Planners were responsive to the strong sentiment expressed at many meetings that historic buildings are important to Madison residents, creating a sense of place and expressing an authenticity that is too often lacking in newer buildings.

However, I have some recommendations about some changes/additions I think should be made to strengthen the plan's protection of Madison's special places.

- The draft Mansion Hill Plan proposes to increase the footprint of the local Mansion Hill Historic District to include buildings that are in the Mansion Hill National Register Historic District (e.g. Masonic Center, Church of Christ Science on Wisconsin Avenue and additional homes on Gorham Street, Johnson Street, Carroll Street and Gilman Street). Inclusion of the Mansion Hill National Register District buildings in the Mansion Hill Local Historic District is consistent with the concept of making the Langdon National Register Historic District a local historic district. The proposed enlarged footprint also includes homes in an area roughly bounded by E. Johnson Street, E. Dayton Street and N. Hamilton Street (some of these buildings are in the National Register Historic District but not all). See attached map and selected photos. This expansion proposal was discussed with and supported by Kitty Rankin, former city preservation planner, prior to her retirement. These new boundaries for the Mansion Hill local historic district should be added as a recommendation in the Downtown Plan.
- There are two "bonus" story areas proposed for the Langdon National Register Historic District. While the underlying height maximum called for in the downtown plan is five stories the "bonus" stories allow an additional 2 stories. Problems or conflicts with the "bonus" story concept in this area include:
 - The defined "bonus" story areas are within the boundaries of the recommended *local* historic district (Recommendation # 168; map on page 94). On page 127 it says "The height districts where bonus stories are potentially available do not include areas within identified...local historic districts." The concept of including "bonus" stories at this location is at odds with the laudable goal of creating this local historic district.
 - On page 95 it says "Preserving the buildings within [National Register Districts] identified as contributing buildings is a goal of this plan." The "bonus" story areas called for in the Langdon National Register Historic District include a significant number of buildings identified as contributing to the National Register Historic District. The "bonus" story concept is at odds with the goal of preserving the contributing buildings within this historic district.

- There is already significant pressure to demolish these beautiful buildings (and pressure to allow them to deteriorate to make demolition more palatable to decision makers). A contributing building in the Langdon National Register Historic District was approved for demolition within the past 3-4 years. A 7 story height maximum will continue the pressure to demolish these Langdon National Register Historic District contributing buildings.
- This is an area of largely 3-storey buildings and while 5 stories is of a scale which can be compatible with these buildings (there is one contributing building which is 5 stories shown in the attached photos), a 7-story building would be out of scale with the historic buildings.
- Bonus stories have been shown in the past in Madison to be fundamentally automatic without the criteria for the bonus necessarily being met.

To protect the historic buildings in the Langdon National Register Historic District, the proposed “bonus” stories should be eliminated.

- The Lamp House is not only a local landmark, it is also appreciated nationally. The 19th/early 20th century buildings on Mifflin Street, N. Butler Street and South Webster Street which were there when the Lamp House was built and which surround the Lamp House should be protected. They provide an appropriate setting for the house. New construction that by its mass and height detracts from the Lamp House or which may block the character contributing lake views from the house should be discouraged, not encouraged. The proposed underlying maximum height is 6 stories with the potential for 2 bonus stories. Even a six story structure cannot fulfill the requirement stated on page 130 of the Downtown Plan that in order to get bonus stories, the project must “Maintain a rhythm, scale and massing of new buildings along East Mifflin Street and North Butler Street that reflects the character of the James Madison Park Neighborhood...” The scale and massing in the James Madison Park Neighborhood is primarily that of houses which are two to three stories built largely for single owner occupancy. The very large apartment building to the south on Butler Street already has a significant negative visual impact on the Lamp House. Additional such visual intrusions should be prevented. The “bonus” stories for this block should be eliminated to reduce the incentive to demolish the homes and to reduce the incentive to build something out of scale. (See attached photos.)
- Recommendation 186 of the Downtown Plan (p. 103) says: “Create a branding program for the cultural district that includes marketing, education, retail, entertainment, and wayfinding.” Madison’s historic districts and historic buildings are a big attraction for many Madison residents and visitors to our downtown. Unfortunately they are not promoted or identified nearly as well as they should be. A recommendation should be added that says something like: “Create a branding program for Madison’s heritage resources, and landmark districts and buildings to include education, promotion and wayfinding.”

Thank you for your work to protect our historic resources and for your consideration of the above recommendations to make the Downtown Plan stronger in supporting the city’s stated goals of “ensuring that Downtown possesses an authentic sense of place” and “elevating...historic resources and making them a more prominent part of the Downtown environment.”

Sincerely,

Ledell Zellers

**Houses which should be in the Mansion Hill Local Historic District
Which ARE in the
Mansion Hill National Register Historic District**



214 and 218 W. Gilman St.



308 N. Carroll St.



110 W. Johnson St. and 304 N. Carroll St.



100 block of E. Johnson. Blue house with red roof at the far right is in the MH Local Historic District



204 N. Pinckney

Houses which should be in the Mansion Hill Local Historic District which are not in the Mansion Hill National Historic District



152 E. Johnson (Corner of N. Butler). Large brick building in upper right is in the MH local historic district.



119 E. Johnson



123 and 127 E. Johnson



139 E. Johnson



116 E. Dayton

**Buildings in the Langdon Street National Historic District
which are subject to 5-story height PLUS additional 2-story bonus**



146 Iota Court



625-31 N. Henry & 150 Iota Court



622,616 Mendota Court 627 N. Lake St.



145 Iota Court

Setting of the Lamp House



Lamp house between homes on Butler Street



15, 17, 19 Webster Street



Lamp house between 214 & 213 W Mifflin Street

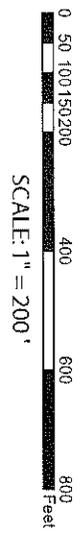


223, 219, 215 W. Mifflin

IIII Current MH National
 Historic District boundary beyond local district boundaries
 neither local or national
 district but historical
 worthy of protection
 LAKE MENDOTA

Mansion Hill
Local Historic District

City of Madison
 County of Dane, Wisconsin
 Department of Planning and Development
 Planning Unit - May 2004



 District Boundary

