

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION **PRESENTED:** September 5, 2012

TITLE: 145 Iota Court and 619 & 625 Henry Street
– PUD(SIP), Deconstruction of Three
Buildings for a New 8-Story Student-
Oriented Apartment Building and the
Addition of 2-Stories to an Existing
Building (Cliff Dwellers) at 140 Iota Court.
2nd Ald. Dist. (27553) **REFERRED:**
REREFERRED:
REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Alan J. Martin, Secretary **ADOPTED:** **POF:**

DATED: September 5, 2012 **ID NUMBER:**

Members present were: Richard Wagner, Chair; Marsha Rummel, Henry Lufner, Melissa Huggins, Richard Slayton, Dawn O’Kroy, Tom DeChant, John Harrington and Cliff Goodhart.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of September 5, 2012, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** for the deconstruction of three buildings and a new 8-story building located at 145 Iota Court and 619 & 625 Henry Street. Appearing on behalf of the project were J. Randy Bruce and Bill White, both representing Pallisades, LLC; and Bridget Maniaci, District 2 Alder. Bruce distributed photos of what buildings are currently on the site. Proposed are four building modules on the four corners of the site, with a taller element that connects them and extends up to the 7-stories, and a penthouse level. One and a half levels of parking is included, entered off of Henry Street spiraling downward. Housing would line Iota Court and the first floor along Henry Street would have housing across the first floor. On the fifth floor the stepback is increased to free up the corner and to get as much light and air as possible for the building on the corner. The footprint is condensed again at the 6th and 7th floors. A significant pedestrian connection is proposed, making this a multi-modal transportation surface. Plans are to work with the City for improvements along Iota Court as well as the private court. As far as the Downtown Design Zone requirements, Bruce highlighted exterior building design, massing, and quality. Orientation of the buildings create a public space, they have an identifiable cap, articulation, openings and treatment are all things he believes they will be able to meet as they get into the design phase. Terminal views and high visibility corners will be addressed, with Lakelawn needing extra attention. Bonus stories require a building to stepback from the street as this rendering does. The architectural aesthetics started off very traditional but is now clean and contemporary with the same opening rhythm and percentages of what exists there now. The feedback has been for something more in keeping with the neighborhood with more architectural detailing. Design Zone #4 is allowed 5 stories plus two bonus stories. Roof water will be cleaned and will be taken into the system without being sent to the surface first. The water that leaves the site now will be clean rather than dirty.

*Editor’s Note: The Downtown Design Zone 4 provisions only allows for five stories, a recent amendment to the Zoning Code provisions allows for consideration of additional stories if they satisfy the “Criteria for

Approval” for the Planned Unit Development District (PUD) in Downtown Design Zones. The Downtown Plan recommends a maximum of 5-stories plus the potential of two additional stories through the conditional use process.

Tim Parks of the Planning Division discussed the proposal. Staff’s opinion is that this new design must be exemplary because it is replacing three buildings that are on the National Historic Register, in order to support the removal of those contributing structures. This project does change the character of the area; there is nothing of this scale and mass in the area. There are some operational concerns at this early stage, including criteria to meet the PUD standards beyond design. It’s a concern at this stage with the fire access, both buildings (the renovated and expanded Cliffdwellers and the “tower”) will be highrises and will need to provide a 26-foot wide aerial access lane for the Fire Department. Initial discussions with the Fire Department flag this as a red letter item. Henry Street appears to be the access for the tower, and with the necessary spaces, onstreet parking could be a concern. The turnaround on Iota Court does not abut the Cliffdwellers building as it should. The ability to provide services is one of the criteria for a PUD.

Discussion by the Commission was as follows:

- What’s the balance between exemplary design and changing the character of the district? If the design is fabulous and we praise it, it’s still going to change the district.
 - That discussion will be held between this body and the Plan Commission, and to a lesser extent the Landmarks Commission. Because the Cliffdwellers is adjacent to a landmark this element of the project will be reviewed in terms of adjacency to a landmark building. The Landmarks Commission will also weigh in on the demolitions. The balance is going to be, is it still merit worthy enough to take out the three buildings that contribute to the National Register? The project really needs to take into consideration the totality of the recommendations in the recently adopted Downtown Plan. There needs to be a broad discussion by the applicants, as well as City staff, about all the recommendations in the Downtown Plan.
 - On the whole I think the direction they are taking in terms of breaking up the buildings is good. There are a number of standing issues with this site. Clearly there are issues with the current properties from safety and security standpoints; we need a better built environment. Fire and EMS need to have access to these buildings and right now the built environment is substandard. What is being proposed is really formalizing the grid. I would go as far as making this an actual City road. People I’ve talked to really appreciate the older character of this neighborhood.
 - Traditional architecture was never designed for this mass and scale.
 - Something that could be pretty exciting here would be a courtyard in the middle (think New York) with a four sided building. From the standpoint of exemplary architecture I really struggled with how many buildings I was looking at. I would rather see you do four separate buildings or one big building that speaks one language.
 - Ald. Maniaci: Staff directed them in the opposite direction. They wanted to see footprints similar to what is there now. There was a proposal for a more complete building.
- Staff and UDC don’t always have to agree. If you were to do a monolithic building, we’ve got a history on this street, I’m thinking quadrangle. You have buildings that surround an open area which would fit beautifully in here from a historic standpoint. It would be different. I struggle with the language of this. Staff noted that the building design as proposed was the applicant’s response to staff’s request to break up the mass of a previous version of the building’s design that featured a large monolithic mass as proposed.
- You may not get the density that you want, therein lies the issue. Other projects we’ve seen have been huge buildings and the response is “we need this to drive the project.” When you say the project is

driven by density you can only do so much with the mass, you have to break it up in some way. You may not get the density you desire in order to have a project that really comes up.

- The building by itself is not bad, but I look at it in this context and think what is that building doing there? It doesn't grab me as fitting into the context. I do like the idea of four separate buildings.
- Ald. Maniaci noted that part of the problem with this neighborhood on a security level is having all these people cutting through the yards. We don't want that happening here. Because you've got all these separate buildings not on a real grid you've got poor situations for people. I want to hear a discussion about how to minimize those security risks for people cutting through these properties if you're putting all the entrances not on the street but more in a courtyard setting.
- Look at some older large city apartment buildings in the way the façades are treated as a building, without trying to make it look like four buildings. With the materials, the proportions of openings, where you have large glass, where the balconies are located. You can get towards the exemplary design without compromising the density. It's really awful back there; this will be a huge improvement.
- The contributing historic fabric, removing that, you're really going to have to make a case for that, particularly that historic fabric that's viewed from primary public streets. The other fantastic challenge you have is resolving a non-contributing structure in the district and now maybe making a contributing structure. I would first look at that on a point-by-point basis; what makes that non-contributing? It's the grid of openings that has no articulation that in my mind makes it non-contributing. So make sure your new design approach doesn't follow that same pattern.

ACTION:

Since this was an **INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** no formal action was taken by the Commission.

After the Commission acts on an application, individual Commissioners rate the overall design on a scale of 1 to 10, including any changes required by the Commission. The ratings are for information only. They are not used to decide whether the project should be approved. The scale is 1 = complete failure; 2 = critically bad; 3 = very poor; 4 = poor; 5 = fair; 6 = good; 7 = very good; 8 = excellent; 9 = superior; and 10 = outstanding. The overall rating for this project is 6.

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION PROJECT RATING FOR: 145 Iota Court and 619 & 625 Henry Street

	Site Plan	Architecture	Landscape Plan	Site Amenities, Lighting, Etc.	Signs	Circulation (Pedestrian, Vehicular)	Urban Context	Overall Rating
Member Ratings	7	5	-	5	-	6	6	6
	4	4	-	-	-	-	-	-

General Comments:

- Exemplary design challenge will be difficult, but overall the project promises to be a great improvement for this site.
- Very large building mass for this site.
- Massing changes historic character and scale.