

# AGENDA # 1

City of Madison, Wisconsin

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REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

**PRESENTED:** March 5, 2014

**TITLE:** Adopting the University Avenue Corridor Plan and the goals, recommendations and implementation steps contained therein as a supplement to the City's Comprehensive Plan. (32635)

**REFERRED:**

**REREFERRED:**

**REPORTED BACK:**

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

**ADOPTED:**

**POF:**

**DATED:** March 5, 2014

**ID NUMBER:**

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Members present were: Richard Wagner, Chair; Dawn O'Kroley, John Harrington, Tom DeChant, Melissa Huggins, Lauren Cnare, Cliff Goodhart and Richard Slayton.

## **SUMMARY:**

At its meeting of March 5, 2014, the Urban Design Commission **RECOMMENDED ADOPTION** of the University Avenue Corridor Plan and the goals, recommendations and implementation steps contained therein as a supplement to the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Appearing on behalf of the project were John Schlaefer, representing the Regent Neighborhood Association; Gary Brown, representing the UW-Madison; Ald. Shiva Bidar-Sielaff, District 5; Jon Miskowski, Elizabeth Greene, Darsi Fos and Tom Hirsch. Registered in opposition was Patrick Corcoran. Schlaefer began the presentation for the revitalization of this corridor. The plan calls for improving pedestrian connections, preservation of the human scale with the remaining buildings, and promotion of sustainability through design. The Chair noted that the plan contains design guidelines, where a plan would normally contain design comments. Matt Tucker, Zoning Administrator noted that these design guidelines aren't in direct conflict with the current zoning and are more additive, with some of these guidelines actually being more restrictive than the Zoning Code. The Secretary stated that the Commission can use any adopted plan in regards to any approval on the table that is affected by it, and make a recommendation that either utilizes the plan or not. Ald. Cnare stated it is good practice that our plans are not wildly divergent from the other things already in place.

Tom Hirsch spoke as a resident of the neighborhood who is in favor of residential density. He is generally very supportive of the intensification of the commercial node. The historic district needs to be respectful and not compromise in any way, including paying attention to the spaces between buildings and increased (7-foot) setbacks along the street front to allow space for plantings. North of University Heights (not within the historic district) the plan calls for retaining several rental buildings, which he sees no value in retaining.

Darsi Fos spoke as an invested resident. She noted issues with traffic through the neighborhood, living near one of the largest employment centers in the area (University Hospitals), and 1,000 West High School students in the area every day. The plan contains a great balance in design and in some growth but not too much because of sensitivity to the neighborhood. She agrees that the corridor should be a great place for people to get out and

walk through, but projects built right to the sidewalk are not conducive to that. She's not quite there on the 8-foot buildings but there needs to be some setbacks there.

Gary Brown spoke as a representative of the UW-Madison. The UW has worked with the neighborhood for many years in construction of their new buildings. Looking at what is recommended for Area 6 (the University edge), the TR-U1 zoning means they would require a rezoning process and go through Urban Design Commission process, Plan Commission and Joint West Campus Area Committee. The JWCAC made a recommendation on specific height requirements, suggesting that the Plan Commission strike the height requirements in this plan and change that to requiring the heights to meet the underlying zoning, which is CI, Campus Institutional District. Those recommendations say that without a campus approved master plan the requirements then say 3-stories or 68-feet. The University can work with this. Further recommendations about this area become gray and hard to understand. What they negotiated with the neighborhood association is that Phase 2 of the Energy Institute shouldn't be any taller than the first phase, but they will be hard-pressed to meet any of these specific height guidelines. He suggested that the Urban Design Commission look strongly at that area, and perhaps agree with the Joint West Campus Area Committee's suggestion to use the underlying zoning.

Jon Miskowski spoke as a member of the neighborhood association. This is a positive plan and with few exceptions the neighborhood is happy with most aspects of it. The neighborhood believes in density and want a plan that supports a balance. The biggest concern is creating a canyon in this area that nobody would want to visit. There are important businesses in this plan that the neighborhood is trying to protect. Some of the design aspects of what they can bring to this space feels a little bit neglected and harsh; he sees more opportunity to make this a more attractive space.

Comments and questions from the Commission were as follows:

- I don't think it's so much the height as it is the mass and bulk.
- How do you think the neighborhood feels about the proposal that Gary Brown brought?
  - The neighborhood has a great relationship with the University and we trust them. I think that might be directed to John as the committee member who went through that in more detail. A lot of changes and corrections were made.
  - We've always had a good relationship with the University and have been able to negotiate things. This plan contains input from the neighborhood.
  - We're really concerned about the views and preserving that view of the church. That's what we were trying to reflect in that paragraph.
- I think there's pros and cons to bringing the buildings up. You need probably 10-foot setbacks to have landscaping that will make an impact.
- I notice there are empty spaces on the street and in the Mullins building. Why is that and do you think some of the efforts that will come forth in this plan will help to fill those empty spaces?
  - (Ald. Bidar-Sielaff) Yes, this is a corridor that has trouble to attract new businesses and to maintain some of the businesses that were there. That is part of the rezoning we're asking for. For those businesses, having that balance and being able to attract customers as a destination is difficult because there isn't enough parking. Barre 3 opened just a few months ago and I have been in email contact with the owner almost on a daily basis because the parking has been such a problem.
- I understand the cost of putting utilities underground but I still don't think we should shy away from that goal. We should be looking towards this, and I would hate to see this not put in the plan. We should put this in as a goal, at least it would be there as a statement.
- If it's an issue of how many bodies are residing on University Avenue versus height, have you considered expressing restrictions in terms of units per acre instead of height?

- We haven't really thought about it that way. Our issue with Mullins was that for their program to work they needed something sizable.
- We do ask in Area #4 we're asking for the Comprehensive Plan to be changed from high density residential to medium density residential. Hopefully that would limit the number of units per acre.
- (Tucker) An efficiency apartment counts the same as a 5-bedroom apartment when you're working with densities. The way we're going with the new Zoning Code is a more form-based approach, where you relate more to the size and scale of the buildings and how they relate to the street, the designs, etc. Heights not so much.

Ald. Bidar-Sielaff very much supports the work the neighborhood did. The key word for this presentation is balance, trying to balance the often conflicting needs of this busy corridor, maintaining the balance of livability, business to visit, while understanding this is a corridor that is highly used by a lot of people in the City. Looking at the design guidelines the neighborhood wanted to explore ways to make this corridor much more attractive than what it is. From a pedestrian perspective the Mullins project is what the neighborhood wants to see in this corridor. They want the setbacks while realizing the lot sizes will add some constraints. Some of the changes people want to see include improvement to the façade of the Casablanca (a blank façade that lines an entire block), and public artwork in underpasses. In terms of building heights, Bidar-Sielaff noted this would be debated at the Plan Commission level; she thinks what is being proposed is a very good balance. The plan does increase the density but there needs to be a balance. It is extremely congested not only with cars but also buses, bicycles and pedestrians. Even if we were to build high, people still need space at the street level.

**ACTION:**

On a motion by Cnare, seconded by Huggins, the Urban Design Commission **RECOMMENDED APPROVAL**. The motion was passed on a vote of (6-1) with Goodhart voting no. The motion provided for the following language:

- Amend the draft plan to strike the language in Table 1: Land Use, Building & Site Recommendations (page 45 of the draft plan) for Area 6 – University Edge, related to building heights and stepbacks, and to instead use the Campus-Institutional district height standards which is the recommended zoning for this area in the draft plan.
- Include language suggesting burying utilities whenever possible.
- Language suggesting a minimum setback of 5-feet, with 7-10-feet being ideal for landscaping.

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 8.

**URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION PROJECT RATING FOR: University Avenue Corridor Plan**

	Site Plan	Architecture	Landscape Plan	Site Amenities, Lighting, Etc.	Signs	Circulation (Pedestrian, Vehicular)	Urban Context	Overall Rating
<b>Member Ratings</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8

General Comments:

- Nice plan.