

AGENDA # 3

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

PRESENTED: July 23, 2014

TITLE: 1601 Wright Street (formerly 9 Straubel Court) – Public Project/Conditional Use for the Construction of 48 Apartment Units in 3 Buildings Including the Demolition of 4 Buildings with 7 Units. 15th Ald. Dist. (34223)

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

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ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: July 23, 2014

ID NUMBER:

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

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of July 23, 2014, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED FINAL APPROVAL** of a conditional use for the construction of 48 apartment units in 3 buildings, including the demolition of four buildings with 7-units located at 1601 Wright Street. Appearing on behalf of the project were Randy Bruce, Natalie Erdman, representing the CDA; and Ken Saiki, representing Ken Saiki Design. Registered and speaking in opposition were Ald. David Ahrens, District 15; Thau Lor, Kaying Xiong, Karen Oliver, Yimmuaj Yang, Touyeng Xiong and Pat Hadden.

After discussion with the residents, the preferred site plan option is the 16-unit pushed back to allow for more open space. Two access points are proposed with parking along the east side and underground parking, and individual entries to the lower level units and common area. An internal private street connection will be provided to the existing Straubel Court, tying in to the existing parking area. A 24-unit building will wrap around the corner. Exterior elevations show changes to exterior window placements, while the general shape, mass and architectural treatments are all the same as presented earlier. On the first floor of the 24-unit building they originally had a triple window shown on the first floor next to the entry door; now that is two double windows that all relates to the floor plans and where the bedrooms are located. In addition, The Porchlight building will offer one main entrance and be operated and managed by Porchlight. Saiki discussed the landscape plans for the three buildings; there are some HUD restrictions that really discourage foundation plantings, as well as how the site is maintained. As a result plantings have been pulled away from the buildings and placed to help differentiate public/private areas. They are also leaning towards edible landscaping. Shade trees will be provided along the southern elevation. The 8-unit building will be using existing materials. Each 3-bedroom unit is assigned one parking space, the 4 and 5-bedroom units each get two underground parking spots.

Thau Lor spoke in opposition. She questioned why the buildings do not have basements and worries that these large families will not have enough room for storage. Erdman responded some of the units that the 24-unit building is replacing do have basements, so they are townhomes or independent living units with private

entrances. However, the 3, 4 and 5-bedroom apartments that are being developed are all larger in size by at least 200 feet, than what exists in these units now. Lower level storage lockers are available for each of the residential units. Lor stated that a 10' x 10' storage space would not be big enough for the sizes of some of these families. Erdman noted that the building mechanicals are housed in the basements of these buildings, so the storage units don't have those things, making it more usable space. While they understand that some people prefer to park on the street, they made the decision to go with underground parking to avoid having large surface lots around the housing in this location.

Kaying Xiong spoke in opposition, stating they want a basement because of their family rituals. There have been complaints in the past because of noise, having a basement would give them their own space for their cultural rituals. Erdman noted that the East Madison Community Center is in the middle of this site and has space for larger gatherings. They also have community space (smaller) in another building that can be used. They are not in a position to be building multi-family housing with a basement underneath every unit. The master plan doesn't consider it and it forces all the parking to the surface. They are very conscious of sound, and the barriers of sound between the apartment units.

Karen Oliver spoke in opposition. In talking to area residents, she claims they wish for things to stay as they are and are not happy about the new apartments they have had to move into already. The elevators don't work half the time, the air conditioning doesn't work, people are sleeping in the basement. Why do people with several kids have to lock their bikes underground? Then an adult has to accompany them to retrieve their bicycle. People have been crying about their new place and having to move.

Yimmuj Yang spoke in opposition, having grown up in the Truax Apartments. Having a basement means low income tenants can have chest freezers to have access to more food. Even with locks, storage units are often broken into and not safe. People feel safer when they are out in the open, like a surface parking lot.

Touyeng Xiong spoke in opposition. He talked to the families that live in the buildings to be demolished and stated that they are supposed to move in 30 days but do not know where they are moving to. He is opposed to the demolition.

Pat Hadden spoke in opposition. There is concern about the gardens because some of them have been plotted for 20 years.

Chu spoke in opposition as a 16-year Truax resident. She feels that if there will not be a basement they do not want to move.

Ald. Ahrens spoke. There is a great community center here with different kinds of common rooms. The difficulty here is that the rituals have to occur in the family residences and cannot be outsourced to another building. In terms of the garden that also is a problem; a substantial portion will be removed. Erdman noted that they can expand the gardens, with their current intention is to go in with a bobcat to scoop soil that is already in use and transfer that to the new garden area. Ahrens also noted that under the current situation people live close to each other, not next to each other. This will have people living on both sides of each other. Erdman stated that their management staff is not comfortable with having a separation at this location for security reasons. Their intention is to have these treated more like two 12-unit buildings. They are not comfortable with there being a thru-space.

Comments and questions from the Commission were as follows:

- Did you study options that didn't affect the structures proposed to be demolished?

- We went through many options but we still would have needed to take down some of these units. In the end our goal was to bring these buildings into this location, all managed by CDA Management, and bring more condensed density into the lower part of the site. I don't think there's a way for us to put these buildings in a responsible manner on the site and not touch any of the existing structures. And still have a development that ultimately is woven together.
- Have alternate layouts been looked at for the drive that connects the circle to the street on the west? Even if that drive were configured differently the building could potentially nestle in closer and still maintain the concept you're looking for.
 - We have looked at alternatives. But I don't think it would give us the ability to get nestled in close enough to say these four buildings. This housing here is replacement public housing, so we have buildings that were built in the 1960s, they're inefficient to operate, they have very inefficient floor plans. I know that people are comfortable living there and they've lived there a long time and I am sympathetic to that. However, this housing needs to be replaced, and part of the Truax stance is replacing public housing in a manner that we can continue to operate it for the next 40 years with very slim funding from HUD. We don't get that much subsidy to operate these buildings. That master plan talks about redeveloping the existing structures and then replacing this housing. This is similar to that plan except that instead of building two rows of townhomes with surface garages, some on the street and some on back parking lots, we put those townhomes together and put the parking underneath. That answer is we have studied the cost of renovating these versus replacing them and we're much better off replacing this housing.
- Have you looked at the cost of demolition versus upgrading? Even if those upgrades are minimal.
 - We have looked at the cost of renovating and we don't feel like that's an economically viable long-term solution. The HUD subsidy we get to help operate this is moving from these buildings to these buildings.
- Generally speaking the layout seems to make sense, I'm just curious if there's some possibility for nestling that can maintain some things that are there.
- Is the housing type responsive to the tenant, or is it more they'll have to adapt?
 - We have large families that are housed on this site. We have so many resources that are getting smaller every day. We have a 1960s building, very low density surface parking, individual entrances. Comments from the neighbors of our first iteration led us to reconfigure the apartments for those people living in a smaller unit weren't being placed with large families. They want townhomes, the only difference is a common hallway on the first floor so you can access that unit if you have a mobility issue. The larger units will come with washers and dryers, storage units with electrical so they could get a storage freezer. I think it's a different type of housing unit than what people are used to.
- Surveillance cameras would give peace of mind. I don't know the culture in terms of how big a space they need or soundproofing. I understand the physical limitations of providing a basement in this type of a unit. I think there needs to be a dialogue; you're trying to do the best you can to accommodate as you can, without creating a very expensive development.
- How extensive is the soundproofing?
 - They would be built like a condominium inspection, double wall.
- The one mid-range building could be repositioned so the impact on the gardens might be less, it seems like it's lined up because we like parallel lines in our culture.
 - There are tons of utilities out there.

ACTION:

On a motion by Huggins, seconded by DeChant, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED FINAL APPROVAL**. The motion was passed on a vote of (4-2) with O’Kroley and Harrington voting no. The motion provided for consideration of moving the building out of the garden area as much as possible.

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 5.

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION PROJECT RATING FOR: 1601 Wright Street

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