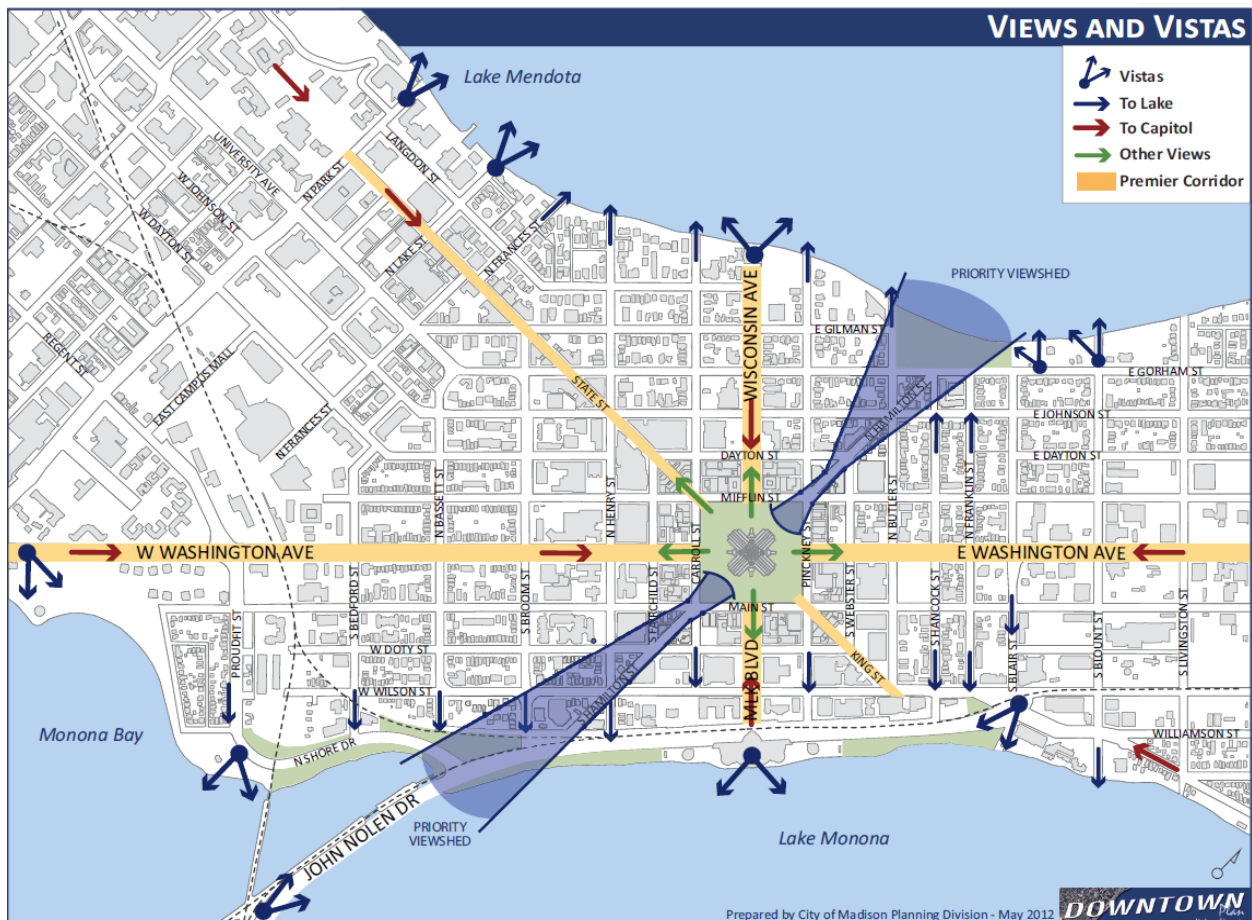


Capitol View

The ordinances require “due consideration of the recommendations in the City of Madison Comprehensive Plan and any applicable, neighborhood, neighborhood development, or special area plan ...” Standard #9 requires the project to create “an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with the existing or intended character of the area ...” This proposal impinges on the view of the Capitol.

The Culture and Character section of the Comprehensive Plan has 7 strategies. Strategy #5 is: “Preserve **defining views** of the lakes, downtown skyline, and Capitol from publicly accessible locations.” Action a. of strategy #5 is: “Adhere to the Maximum Building Heights Map and Views and Vistas Maps in the Downtown Plan.” The views and vistas map of the Downtown Plan is reproduced on page 83 of the Comprehensive Plan. The 700 block of Jenifer Street is a view towards the Capitol.



The map has six views to the Capitol, and the one from Jenifer is the only view which is not on a street that directly runs into the Capitol square. Jenifer is a street used by a lot of walkers, and it is part of the lake bike route and is a bus route.

The proposed building at 654 Williamson would block the view of the Capitol from Jenifer. The building is 3 stories, 40' at Williamson (the corner element is 44'). There is a 24' setback to the additional 2 stories. The height of the 5 story section is 63'8". The length of the building along Williamson is about 153'.

BUILD II, the neighborhood plan, states: "On the easterly 165 feet of the north side of the 600 block of Williamson Street, the height of new buildings shall be limited 3 stories in order to preserve the view of the capitol dome from the sidewalk at mid-700 block of Jenifer Street." (The Downtown Plan, adopted as a supplement to the Comprehensive Plan in 2011, expanded upon BUILD II's recommendation and included the entire 700 block of Jenifer.) BUILD II is specific about the entire easterly 165 feet, not just the Williamson frontage.

The easterly 165 feet of the north side of the 600 block of Williamson Street is outlined in red, the 654 lot is in purple.



The applicant's "massing view studies" are all from mid-block, which is specified in BUILD II, but the Downtown Plan, and consequently the Comprehensive Plan, address the entire block.

The massing view studies remark that the view is obscured by trees. In some locations the view is not obstructed when there is no foliage, or for about 6 months of the year. In other locations, the terrace trees are dense and essentially obstruct the view all year round. There is not any season in which bikers and bus riders cannot see the Capitol from the street.

I question whether the perspective may be a bit off in the applicant’s massing study. For example, the proposed building is 40’ along Williamson, yet the orthogonal line running along Willy, when extended to 706 Willy, falls below the corresponding 40’ mark.



When I drop the building in, I get:

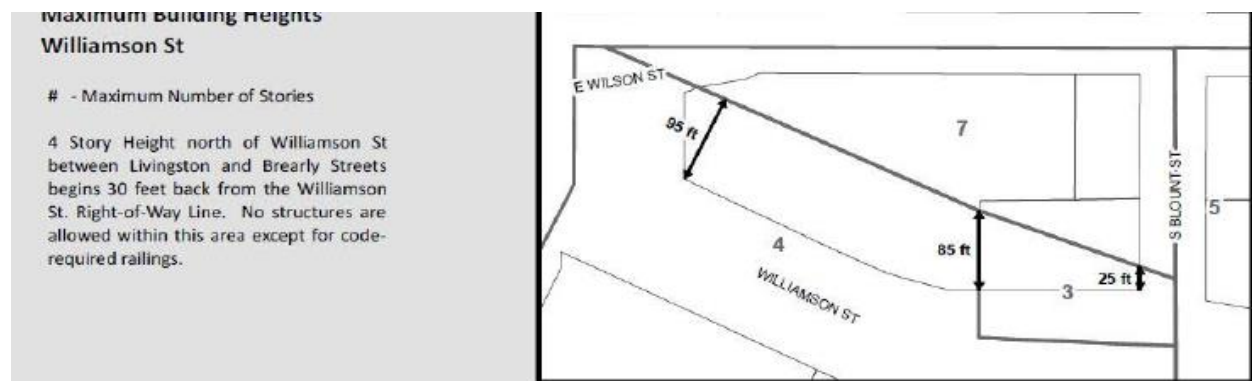


Small differences in the shift of perspective can create substantial changes.

Attached are photos with lines added to approximate the obstruction of the Capitol view. For reference, the building at 706 Williamson has height measurement added along the building edge (which I took from the approved conditional use plans). The lines are not exact, but they provide a sense of how much of the Capitol view could be obstructed. Even the applicant's massing photos show obstruction from both sidewalks, so the street view of the Capitol would also be obstructed.

If no obstruction is permissible, then the applicant's proposal should not be approved. The applicant could certainly build, without any City oversight, a 5-story office building on this site that would obstruct the Capitol view. But that is not what the applicant is proposing, so the conditional use standards apply to this project, including due consideration of the Comprehensive Plan's directive to "adhere" to the views and vistas map.

As a side note, the staff report mentions the proposed Williamson height map for the 600-1100 blocks. This was introduced in June 2021 with Alder Benford as the sponsor. After meeting with neighbors, Alder Benford withdrew his support for the height map. Neighbors expressed concerns, including: (1) the whole street should be addressed; (2) 3-story 40-foot buildings with a flat roof were not appropriate for all Williamson frontage on the 800-100 blocks (BUILD II generally calls for 2 ½ stories, or a 2-story building plus a pitched roof, along all but the 600 and north 700 blocks); (3) the 4th story stepback along Williamson was not enough of a stepback based on BUILD II; and, (4) the height map would have allowed 68' in height along the north 700 block while BUILD II called for a 54' maximum. Nor would that proposed height map have solved the issue of the Capitol view: the map would have allowed 7 stories on the back diagonal portion of the lot. And as can be seen on the applicant's massing studies, while the 5 stories blocks the Capitol view, 7 stories would be worse.

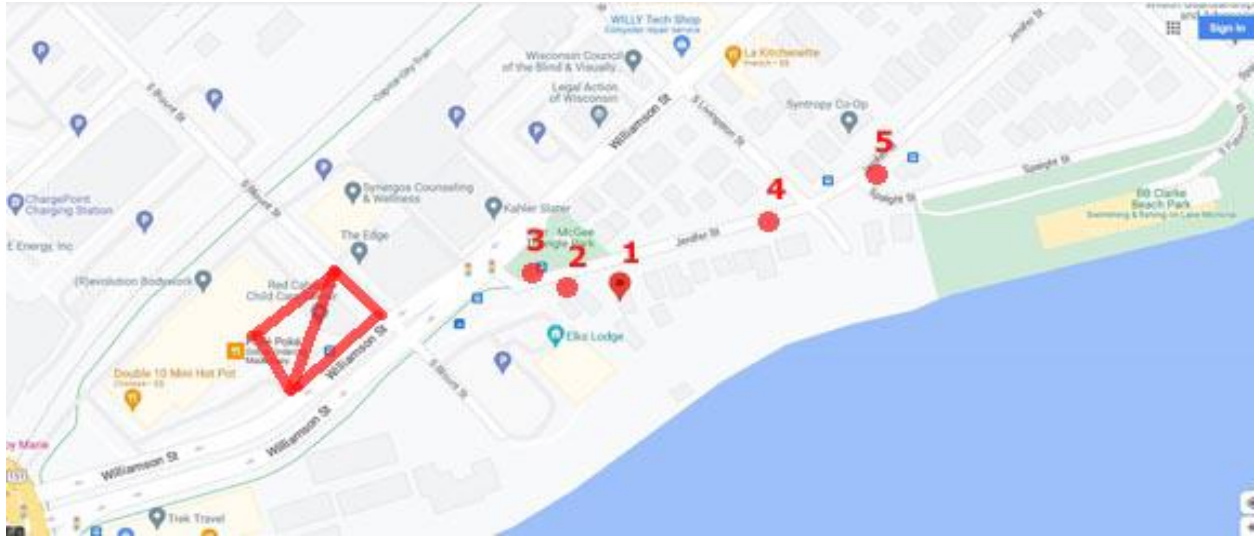


Purpose of the District

Standard #9 requires the project create "an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with ... the statement of purpose for the zoning district." The site is zoned Traditional Employment. The TE purpose is: "to encourage a broad range of employment activities, taking advantage of the varied transportation options and proximity to urban activities and cultural amenities found in many Traditional Employment locations. Residential uses are of secondary importance." Employment districts have the general purpose of: "to strengthen and diversify the local economy, expand the local tax base, cultivate an entrepreneurial culture and stimulate job creation."

This project would have 2,656 sq.ft. of commercial use, a relatively miniscule proportion of the space. Essentially, the applicant is asking Plan Commission to approve this building as though it were a mixed-use TSS building.

Respectfully submitted,
Linda Lehnertz



Location map



#1, 727 Jenifer



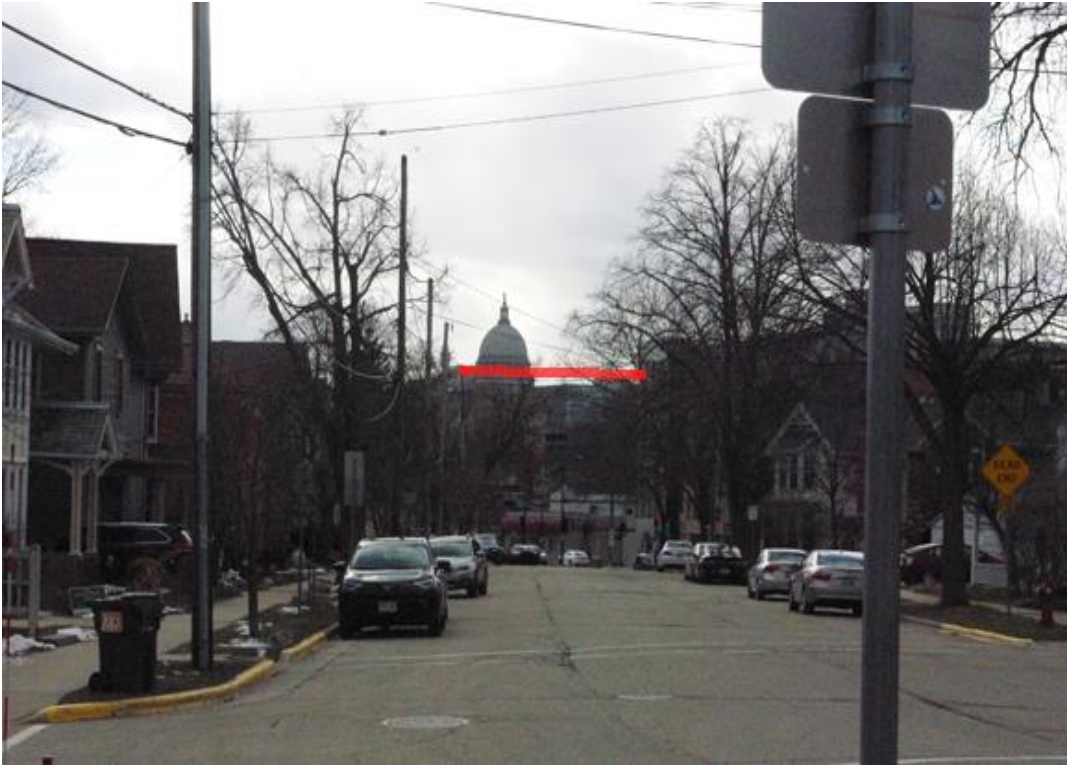
#2, 719 Jenifer



#3, R. Richard Wagner Park



#4, middle of the street, 754 Jenifer (63' line runs from 706 marker, so the 24' stepback might drop this line a bit)



#5, eastern corner of Jenifer/Spaight intersection (63' line runs from 706 marker, so the 24' stepback might drop this line a bit)