

## AGENDA # 4

City of Madison, Wisconsin

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REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

**PRESENTED:** March 9, 2016

**TITLE:** 400 West Washington Avenue –  
Redevelopment of Six Lots to a Four to  
Six-Story Building with 85 Residential  
Units in the Downtown Core District. 4<sup>th</sup>  
Ald. Dist. (41976)

**REFERRED:**

**REREFERRED:**

**REPORTED BACK:**

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

**ADOPTED:**

**POF:**

**DATED:** March 9, 2016

**ID NUMBER:**

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Members present were: Richard Wagner, Chair; Cliff Goodhart, Dawn O’Kroley, Tom DeChant, Lois Braun-Oddo and Michael Rosenblum.

### **SUMMARY:**

At its meeting of March 9, 2016, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** for the redevelopment of six lots to a four to six-story building with 85 residential units in the Downtown Core District. Appearing on behalf of the project were Zia Brucaya, Douglas Pahl, Linda B. Page and Stephen Bus. Registered and speaking in opposition was Dale Bruckner. Registered neither in support nor opposition and wishing to speak was Rick Broughman, representing CNI.

Transit oriented development on bus routes, close to downtown. Downtown Plan: high quality new construction, architectural gems and engaging public spaces. The building tries to focus on the corner of West Washington Avenue and Broom Street. The corner is activated with a 2,000 square foot lounge space for the residents. A fitness center is also proposed on the West Washington Avenue frontage. A fifth floor rooftop terrace is proposed. Locally sourced limestone panel is proposed as a building material, along with colored cement board panels. The lower level Broom Street entrance leads to space for 35 automobiles, 58 bicycles and 20 mopeds in this space. There is also surface bicycle parking included. The focus of this development is more for people using mass transit. The district requires a 5-foot setback; they are pushing the building back 12-15-feet. Approximately 1,100 square feet of greenspace is proposed. They noted the setbacks along the block.

Dale Bruckner spoke in opposition, relaying comments made at a community meeting regarding this project. Concerns ranged from building height, parking, student life, the lack of front porches on the design, and the broad boulevard concept and how it meshes with this design.

Given your concern for building height and the proximity with students, why did you move to Metropolitan Place?

Rick Broughman spoke in opposition and referenced the same community meeting. The Mifflin neighborhood crosses West Washington Avenue and the first thing you see there are wonderful homes with large front porches. This proposed building is out of context with the rest of the neighborhood. This is a historical neighborhood and that history needs to be maintained. This looks like a prison, does not engage the street and

does not have any porches. Building boxes like this proposal just enhances the bad practice of not engaging with your surroundings. He suggested looking at the “Sheelin” building next to the “Ambassador” as a good example (of what not to build.)

Jay Wendt noted the staff memo and the area plans regarding bonus stories. The exposed lower level needs clarification, how do the front steps relate to the West Washington Avenue frontage, how is this precedent-setting project along this frontage going to carry down the rest of the block, and the setback. Staff does have concerns with the upper treatments of the building, context, the historic nature of this area and how the fenestration and solidity of this building work. The upper level stepback along West Washington Avenue is pretty significant, but along Broom Street there is a 4-foot stepback that is mostly perceived.

Comments and questions from the Commission were as follows:

- We spent a lot of time talking about these two blocks in the Downtown Plan. One of our concerns was that the whole question of front porches also meant that the main mass of the buildings was further back than with the front porches. Our view was to have that huge open space work.
- This midblock alleyway was designed to be an important aspect of how this would change if you did add density to the block, so it wasn't only going to be so the cars could nip in, but also a way for pedestrians to walk up and down, and if you drew straight up massive buildings, you take away the sunlight in that space and make that not really a functional inter-block space. The massing of this in many ways doesn't merit much for the context as I understand it as we've discussed the Downtown Plan. I also think this “front porch” is not really a front porch.
- That fin kind of undercuts all the efforts on having the bigger setback.
- That midblock driveway – does that need dedication from these parcels?
  - Yes it does. Lot line to lot line there is no public in the back dedicated.

So they're not doing anything to implement this concept in the plan.

One of the recommendations in the Downtown Plan did speak to the desire for special area plan to be implemented in this area, which has not been undertaken.

But certainly the bonus stories were if you are doing things that are recommended in the plan. If you want the bonus stories, but you're not doing that...

The bonus stories are expressed in the Zoning Code.

Even so, as we put projects in and give them benefits like bonus stories, if we're not implementing those things that we want, it doesn't seem to me like we're doing good public policy.

- That insertion of the solid wall segments your attempt to communally engage with this idea of a broad terrace in front of the houses. The building across the street, the back face, the “built” face not the porch face, was the most appropriate setback based on studies of that block and the adjacent block. It's two blocks of West Washington Avenue that you'd be the first “head” piece of.
- When you see residential porches you do see stairs, but they're not always the entire width of the entire porch. The stairs like that you see on monuments. The design looks to me more like a hotel than an apartment building. It could be the fact that you're bringing all the studio units along Broom Street; maybe if you were to bring some of the larger units along the street that would give it a more residential character.
- The amenity, the fitness being right along Washington, that's a great place for an apartment I would think. The people who are working out, do they really need to be there versus having a really nice apartment you could walk up to with its own porch. There is some reworking, some rezoning of the design might give it a much more residential character. It's not a boutique hotel.
  - One of the comments from Alder Verveer and the neighborhood was to have that activity on the ground floor.

- West Washington is a residential street, is the presumption in the plan, so it's activation is as a residential street, not as a place for gym rats.
  - That makes the 425 building very curious.
- The retaining walls against the sidewalk instead of adding to the public greenspace is actually pushing away public interaction. Look at both the architecture and the landscape.
- The amenity fitness, for the most part that will be a dark empty space. If you have Epic people it will be activated in the morning and then empty. I do agree that if you want to rent a 2-bedroom, you don't want it in the back corner, and that fitness amenity is not activated all the time. It'll just look like an empty space for the most part.
- I react to the solidity issue in terms of the surface area. That could be nothing more than a glass to surface ratio, and given that those studios are rather small, could they add larger glazing areas and a little solid wall? That would be one thing to look at to lighten that up in terms of the style.
- Part of the trade-off for developing this as more dense was that you try and have more urban functional features like midblock passageways. If you're going to get bonus stories and really make this dense then you need some of the other trade-offs that this would make a good design.
- The height ask, there is a differentiation between the Downtown Plan and the codified height map.
- If you have something as your vision, then if you're giving benefits you want to have that benefit related to what the vision is. You're precipitating this issue by bringing this project and asking for the bonus stories. If this whole area redevelops, there's some other assumptions that were talked about for that redevelopment and density, and I don't see them in this project.
  - If the interstitial space that would be part of our property, which would be 5-feet by the zoning ordinance allowable was deemed an easement to future development, would that?

I don't have the technical expertise make that judgment, I would hope staff could help us on that. My concern is that if we're embarking on this new thing where we're going to wipe out Mifflin Street as we know it, the vision was a new Mifflin would have other new urban amenities, and I don't see those being brought forward the same time this massive new structure is being brought forward. And I have a concern from a public policy point of view, if you're going to take all the benefits but not give us as a public any of the benefits, that's not a good trade from a public policy point of view for a commission to approve.

What are some of the items that you're getting at that we're not doing?

- That sense of openness, the massing of Washington Avenue, this midblock passageway and what the light and access to that passageway would look like. This one massing drawing which you sort of point to saying "we can do a big thing because this thing was here," this thing also had stepbacks on the backs of the project so there would be light and access, air.
  - One solution would be to add a stepback on the north elevation?
- That would be one step in the right direction.
- Street entrances.
- True connections to the street, and a design that works with that landscape-wise. Instead of creating a barrier with planters that basically prevent physical connection to the street. Just looking in through glass doesn't do it.
- Go back and think about your reinterpretation of the front porch.
  - Our intent is to try and create something that isn't a copy or an enlargement of a house front porch but has the feature of people engaging on it and using it as a public space.
  - Being able to open that glass in the summer is a pretty cool idea.
- This isn't a grand hotel where there's a big veranda. Each individual who is on the street would want to have a front porch on the street.

**ACTION:**

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