

July 1, 2013

Dear Members of the Planning Department and Plan Commission:

We are writing in regards to the Meriter-Alexander proposal for the high-density residential redevelopment of the historic Longfellow School parcel on the Meriter campus. The Greenbush Neighborhood Association strongly opposes the Longfellow School proposal for the following reasons:

I. Meriter's proposal to sell Longfellow School and adjacent property on the hospital campus to a private housing developer violates the terms of Meriter's General Development Plan (GDP).

The 2009 GDP, which guides Meriter's ten year development and was carefully crafted by all major stakeholders including the Greenbush Neighborhood Association and the City of Madison, designates these parcels for hospital facilities in support of Meriter's mission as a regional health care center. However, the current proposal converts nearly an entire block of the confined hospital campus from planned hospital use to *high-density* residential development, contrary to the entire purpose of the Meriter Hospital GDP and contrary to s. 28.098 of the Madison General Ordinances.

Meriter's unexpected change of course to sell the property for a purpose entirely unrelated to its institutional mission may not only seriously impair future hospital capacity, but is being proposed without the slightest planning basis or documentation. In fact, the proposal amounts to an illegal "bait and switch" tactic. If the City allows this plan change to prevail, the good faith negotiations that produced the GDP will be null and void.

More importantly, allowing this substitution would set a precedent that will threaten future prospects for rational land use planning throughout the city.

General Development Plans amend city zoning maps to create Planned Development Districts for major and unique developments. Once a GDP is granted, development details must be proposed to the City via Specific implementation Plans that conform clearly to the land uses and development guidelines delineated in the GDP.

Meriter's proposal for high density rental housing falls entirely outside the scope of land use allowed by its GDP. If the hospital wants to change its GDP, it must return to the table to negotiate a new or amended GDP; the hospital's GDP does not give Meriter a *carte blanche* to develop the campus as a general commercial, industrial, or high-density residential area.

Yet, at the essence of the Meriter-Alexander proposal is a misguided belief that building footprint and volume are the key determining factors of any structure to be built on the site, in which case, it doesn't matter if they put in a slaughterhouse, a metal-welding shop or a garment sweatshop.

The City cannot approve this project without sending the signal that all GDPs can be changed after-the-fact, even if they negatively impact the surrounding neighborhood.

If this GDP modification is allowed to prevail, it will be in the interest of all Neighborhood Associations to vigorously oppose any and all GDPs on grounds that GDPs are unenforceable and subject to change at

whim. There will be no incentive for compromise and consensus building. Creating this inherently adversarial relationship will thwart rational long term planning throughout the City.

II. Meriter's proposal for a "big box" high density apartment complex is inconsistent with underlying zoning and with the Greenbush Neighborhood Plan, a 2008 City of Madison planning document which states that the neighborhood's highest priority is to encourage the expansion of owner-occupied housing in this fragile area.

The Greenbush Neighborhood Plan emphasizes repeatedly that increased owner occupancy is key to creating a more stable and vibrant central city. The Plan recommends that the City discourage development which erodes the viability of owner occupancy.

This proposed project --with its "big box" design completely out of scale with surrounding single family homes, and its unit sizes aimed at students and transient 20-somethings --would make our neighborhood less attractive to home buyers or even to long-term renters, such as families.

In addition, this high density apartment complex is inconsistent with city land use plans and zoning. Prior to the approval of the 2009 Meriter GDP, much of the campus (including the site now proposed for high-density residential development) was zoned for low-density (0-15 units/acre) residential use, consistent with the current neighborhood zoning to the south and west of the campus.

All planning documents for the Greenbush Neighborhood have recognized Mound Street as the border between higher and lower density housing. The new zoning code and map classifies the area south of Mound Street as TR-C3, the zoning district dedicated to low density housing. The Longfellow School building is located south of Mound Street in this low density housing zone. However, Meriter's Longfellow redevelopment proposal calls for the addition of 104 units, a number which would place it squarely in the realm of *high-density* housing.

Furthermore, the proposed Longfellow redevelopment cannot be examined in isolation. Three other extremely large apartment developments, within a few blocks of the Longfellow building, have been proposed for our neighborhood. Construction is already underway on two of them: the Ideal with 57 units and Lane's with 40 units. The Mills Street project with 72 units is awaiting permitting approval. If the Longfellow proposal is added to these structures, we will have broken ground on 273 new rental units in little more than one year's time. The overall impact of these developments will certainly change the character of our neighborhood.

III. Meriter's proposal will increase traffic congestion and related problems in and around the Meriter Hospital campus, to the detriment of hospital users and neighborhood residents.

Entrances to the proposed development's parking garage will be from Chandler and Mound Streets, both of which are narrow, residential streets, not well-suited for high-volume traffic.

The intersection of Chandler and Brooks is especially difficult for pedestrians and motorists, due to high hospital traffic, ambiguous traffic flow from a 2-way stop, and impaired sight lines due to topography and parked cars on both sides of the street. The Meriter-Alexander proposal will make a bad situation

worse, by adding considerable residential traffic (for 104 new units!) and a busy parking garage entrance not contemplated by Meriter 's GDP.

Conclusion:

Meriter's proposal has gone before the Landmarks Commission and is slated to go before the Urban Design Commission. However, it is premature to discuss design details because the proposal is in violation of Meriter's GDP and incompatible with the Greenbush Neighborhood Plan.

The City should reject the Meriter-Alexander proposal, because it fundamentally contradicts current city plans and zoning. The proposal, made without any prior land-use rationale or analysis, makes a mockery of the city's planning and zoning process.

Sincerely,

Members of the Greenbush Neighborhood Association Council

John Perkins, President
Zaccai Lewis,
Duane Steinhauer
Cynthia Williams
Peter Williams
Andrea Levy
Karen Carlson
Nate Warnke
Cindy Koschmann

Members of the Longfellow Development Committee

Zaccai Lewis
Cynthia Williams
Leslie Fields
Cindy Koschmann
Emily Miller
Jim Matson
Karen Stevenson
Duane Steinhauer
Eric Shusta