

City of Madison, Wisconsin

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**REPORT OF:** URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION      **PRESENTED:** April 17, 2013

**TITLE:** 210 South Brooks Street – Amended PD  
for “Longfellow School” Adaptive Reuse  
and New Apartment Complex. 13<sup>th</sup> Ald.  
Dist. (29811)

**REFERRED:**  
**REREFERRED:**

**REPORTED BACK:**

**AUTHOR:** Jay Wendt, Acting Secretary      **ADOPTED:**      **POF:**

**DATED:** April 17, 2013      **ID NUMBER:**

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Members present were: Richard Wagner, Chair; Lauren Cnare, Tom DeChant, John Harrington, Richard Slayton, Dawn O’Kroy and Cliff Goodhart.

**SUMMARY:**

At its meeting of April 17, 2013, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** for an Amended PD located at 210 South Brooks Street for the adaptive reuse and new apartment complex for “Longfellow School.” Appearing on behalf of the project were Randall Alexander, Justin Lee Frahm, Jeremy Frommelt, John Seamon and Addison Lecy-Siewert, representing The Alexander Company. Registered and speaking in opposition was Zaccai Lewis. Registered neither in support nor opposition and wishing to speak was Cynthia Williams.

The plan calls for mostly interior renovations with the exception of removing a ramp in the back of the building, replacing a retaining wall and replacing all of the windows in the building, as well as removing all window air conditioning units. Every possible character features of the interior will be saved; the hallway configurations and stairwells will be left as is, transom windows and doors to the classrooms will be left as they were, lead based paint will be removed. The chalkboards will remain in the kitchens or living rooms, built-in bookshelves will remain, wood floors will be polished and refinished. The auditorium will be refinished and utilized as space for the tenants, and possibly for an education type lecture space for outside groups, as long as it doesn’t interfere with the residential occupancy. One gymnasium will be retained with its full height ceilings for loft apartments and will include the backboards and markings on the floors. It will have a common entrance with the new construction.

The design has evolved since the team made their submittal. The building will contain 88 units with parking for 166 sited under the four-stories. Every living room and bedroom has windows, and 9-foot ceilings. They have had two meetings with the neighborhood association with a third scheduled. They are also working with the Landmarks Commission and Department of Interior on the renovations. The Landmarks Commission does see historical façades in the building: viewed at 5-feet from the sidewalks, at the center of the building across the street looking directly at the historic building, and on the corner of Mound and South Brooks Streets. The first two stories of the building will not be extended past the primary façade; the four-story part of the building sits back further than that. The Landmarks Commission is strongly encouraging the developer to “warm up” the

construction; the massing, architecture, and articulation were positively received but the materiality is at issue. To have it be something that doesn't compete, that stands on its own, a "ghost" of a building.

Zaccai Lewis spoke as a neighborhood resident and sitting member of the Greenbush Neighborhood Board, representing himself. The message he gets from this proposal is that this building is at its best when it's obscured. He agreed with the Landmarks Commission's comments on materials, noting the red brick throughout the building is also part of several neighboring buildings. The neighborhood would want to see something a bit more consistent and reflective of the context of the neighborhood. The massing is also a problem.

Cynthia Williams spoke as a neighborhood resident and sitting member of the Greenbush Neighborhood Board, representing herself. She spoke to the amendment to the PD, wondering why this would not be subject to the normal zoning rules as a residential facility that is not in any way related to the purposes of Meriter Hospital. She feels strongly that this proposal is not harmonious either with the Longfellow School or with the neighborhood. It's a rather jarring building in terms of how it's designed, particularly the wall at the bottom because of the parking. It feels very walled off and not interactive with the neighborhood. On the end are two really big garage doors, a loading dock and an elevator tower that all face directly to the street which is very unattractive. The Chair noted that the zoning issue is something to be handled at the Plan Commission level.

Discussion by the Commission was as follows:

- It would be nice to be able to lower that wall. I think you could articulate or create a façade on that wall that's more attractive with the neighborhood. I would encourage you to explore that either by playing with how it's articulated, or what materials you use, even working with plantings to create a green wall.
- I'd be interested in the interplay with the daycare center.
- The renovation piece of this, I almost want to see the elevation of the new building nod or wink to that. Your building has equal stake in the renovation when at this point it almost looks like two separate ownerships. It just doesn't quite feel as one development yet. One piece that I feel kind of turns your back to the school is that large masonry stair tower. If I were on foot walking to the elevator corridor, that one story on parking is almost touching that building, they're so darn close they're almost touching. Part of me wonders...just let them touch, maybe? Or maybe I could access bike parking directly off that sidewalk if they're not touching, rather than having a very tense joining of the two buildings there.
- I think it's foreign for this particular neighborhood to have a building with such a large mass that also uses large masonry materials. The big challenge is this fortified appearance that the building has, except for the one corner on Mound Street. You've got big louvers and big garage doors, it's protecting itself from something. How are you going to open it up on these streets and make it look like you are walking into a residential building? Obviously it's not there yet but because these are residential streets to open it up somehow is really going to be a challenge.
  - We really want to see the historic school turned into an adaptive reuse project rather than Meriter not being able to use it. That becomes a driver. The only way the project really works is to have more units, which drives the number of parking stalls. That pushes us out to this edge, setback from the previously approved GDP (15-feet) and then the building itself above the parking structure steps back even more. From a landscape design perspective the school has a history to it, the lawn and trees. We've pretty much stayed within that with the exception of ivy growing up those walls. Are there any ideas about how one might do that?

It may be a matter of the way you develop that lawn and make it more activated itself instead of trying to poke holes in the building. Bring out some hardscape, kind of like what you're doing in between the buildings. It's hard to see from the informational stuff we have here. There's an opportunity at the stair tower to really open it up. There might be an opportunity to bring the front door to the street.

- We have an agreement with the daycare where we're providing them with some land that has to be developed on that corner with fencing and landscaping, etc. That will help activate that corner. It's not our responsibility to do that, it's Meriter's, but I think we can get together in advance of the next meeting and see how we can pull that corner into the neighborhood more. We don't want to feel that deep setback, we want it to feel like a big lawn, like the schoolhouse has.
- Who is the target for this building?
  - Leases will not coincide with the typical turnover of leases at the University; we do not want it to become student housing. We are setting it up so if the market comes to be it can be owner-occupied. This is kind of a testing neighborhood. Very good quality residences that are really going to contribute to the neighborhood.
- What is the green roof like?
  - We have first floor patios for every tenant, we're looking at architectural pavers and planters throughout. Whether or not we have a railing at the edge we're still working through that. It's an open outdoor space. We're still playing with this.

You could use plant material on that wall, that would soften the look to the neighborhood.

- There are a lot of options for the garage doors, glazing could soften that.
- The height of the wall around the parking is really an obstacle. Any foot lower you can go in that parking lot is a foot shorter that wall is. Look into green walls, maybe an opportunity for a ledge. Bringing that down really changes the aesthetic.
- The bike parking isn't going to look good. Parking there as a visitor I'm going to be concerned that my bike is secure. I'd like you to look at something more of a bike court that takes it back about 5-feet so there's a buffer, and makes it more of an amenity. In the landscaping of it, to the extent you can make it look like the period of the school do so, rather than making it try to look more contemporary with spaced trees "just so."
- We're trying to become more of an alternate transportation city. If you can cut down on the number of parking stalls and look for people that use mass transit and bicycles. Again this would never be a requirement but the City is going towards a more pedestrian/bicycle-friendly city; trying to make it hard to get cars on the Isthmus. If that forces more cars out onto the street that's bad. Parking is the big issue, then the aesthetics of the building, to make sure the neighbors are celebrating this with you rather than struggling to understand it.
  - We will have a transportation management plan but part of the parking on this site can be used by Meriter so we already are sharing about 1/3 of the stalls. Their concentration of use is during the weekday, our use during the evening and weekends, so we picked up about 30% of our total stalls.
- Look at the windows on the school, each bay space is very much its own individual window. They (the school) also had panels that in some way tied them together vertically by means of the material between them. So maybe there is a playfulness to start to bring some of the bigger proportional reads to the two buildings to have a dialogue between the two. I don't know that the columns are successful in doing that yet.

## **ACTION:**

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

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 ratings for this project are 5 and 6.

**URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION PROJECT RATING FOR: 210 South Brooks Street**

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

General Comments:

- Pedestrian experience at street level seems foreign to neighborhood. Compatible materials and scale are important.
- Needs work. Doesn't dialogue at all with old school.
- Interesting project-still needs a stronger neighborhood integration.
- Work toward the neighborhood becoming an ally...