

DISCUSSION NOTES

DOWNTOWN PLAN

ALTERNATIVE PLAN DIRECTIONS FOR THE MIFFLIN DISTRICT AND WEST WASHINGTON AVENUE

DRAFT 2-12-10

During the Downtown planning process, a range of future possibilities for the Mifflin Street area has been discussed, and the public input to date indicates that large differences of opinion exist on this issue---with a notable lack of consensus. To help the Plan Commission reach a decision on the plan direction for this area, the information sheets and conceptual pattern of building heights map prepared for the Downtown Plan work sessions include three alternatives for the Mifflin District and the West Washington Avenue frontage. These discussion notes have been prepared to help define the alternatives and the differences between them, and to suggest some of the potential outcomes of a policy decision to choose each alternative and some of the important issues to consider in making that choice.

The notes expand upon the bullet points in the Mifflin/Bassett/South Hamilton information sheet, but are not intended to be a complete description of the alternatives or a rigorous analysis of the differences between them---additional or different objectives or potential outcomes might be attributed to each of them. Neither are the alternatives presented necessarily the only three possibilities. It is not intended that time be spent refining these discussion notes, but that they be used to help reach a decision on the planning direction for the Mifflin District and West Washington Avenue to include in the draft Downtown Plan.

Note that while plan directions for the Mifflin District and for the West Washington Avenue frontage are combined into three alternatives for presentation purposes, the choices for the two areas are not necessarily linked in this way. It would be possible to choose Alternative A for one of the areas and Alternative B for the other area, for example.

MIFFLIN DISTRICT - ALTERNATIVE A: PRESERVATION/CONSERVATION/REHABILITATION

Planning Objectives

- Preserve, conserve and rehabilitate the existing housing stock to the extent feasible
- Selective redevelopment of badly deteriorated houses with replacement buildings of essentially similar scale, mass and character
 - Maintain the predominant existing lot pattern of single-width lots and buildings separated by driveways and/or side yards
 - Scale, height and design of replacement housing similar to existing houses
 - 3 Story height limit
 - Gable roofs
 - Front porches including multi-story porches
 - Parking in rear
- Replace out-of-character buildings [1970's era zero-lot-line buildings, for example] with houses on individual lots similar to the predominant existing housing stock, or with rowhouses that maintain the single-lot façade rhythm
- Possible carriage house option for this alternative: Preserve existing housing stock along the street frontage, but also allow "carriage house" developments in rear yards
 - Carriage houses secondary to principal building in size and scale
 - Residential units located above a garage and/or in a stand-alone residential building [?]

Potential Outcomes

- Implements long-term preservation of the existing housing stock, with very limited infill
- General neighborhood character/street view essentially unchanged
- Significant improvement in the general condition and appearance of housing
- Residential population remains essentially unchanged or declines
 - Number of dwelling units may change if interiors are reconfigured and/or some replacement housing is built
 - Number of residents might decline somewhat if other types of households (with fewer average persons per dwelling unit) replaced some student rentals
- The predominant character of the neighborhood as a student rental area could change if housing is upgraded and prices and rents increase
 - Many UW students value this relatively affordable, neighborhood-scale housing as an alternative to student high rise housing and other newer developments.
 - Many others value the historical context of the area dating from the 1960's counterculture
- A more diverse, less student-dominated residential population might make the area more attractive to a wider variety of households

Issues and Questions

- How could the necessary significant investment in rehabilitation be encouraged?
- Is the underlying quality/character of the existing housing stock sufficient to engender that level of investment?
- Would rental housing investors be willing to make substantial investments in rehabilitation with little potential to increase occupancy?

MIFFLIN DISTRICT - ALTERNATIVE A

Issues and Questions (Cont.)

- Would certainty that there was little or no potential to redevelop the properties with higher-density housing encourage investment in improving the existing housing stock and/or in replacing the worst of it with new housing of generally similar size but much higher quality?
 - Even if costs just to maintain the current condition increased, the income potential from existing housing as high-occupancy student rentals would likely remain high
 - Would the income potential from rental to higher-income households (student or non-student) be sufficiently greater to encourage substantial investment in upgrading?
- How could undesirable types of redevelopment be prevented?
 - Zoning district regulations, including potential Conservation District designation
- Owner-residents who enjoy living in older-style houses might be willing to invest in rehabilitation, but
 - The neighborhood would also need to become attractive to that type of resident
 - What else might be required to attract them?
 - The costs of acquisition and rehabilitation might still be too high to be appealing
- How important is maintaining the neighborhood's character as a student rental area with a colorful role in Madison's recent history, and predominantly comprised of old-style houses?
 - Many UW students value this relatively affordable, neighborhood-scale housing as an alternative to student high rise housing and other newer developments
 - Many in the community value the historical context of the Miffland area dating from the 1960's counterculture
- What happens if reinvestment and rehabilitation doesn't occur, but in the future the area becomes less attractive to students---due to a continued decline the condition of the housing, the availability of less-expensive or more-attractive housing alternatives elsewhere, or changes in student lifestyles?

WEST WASHINGTON AVENUE - ALTERNATIVE A

Planning Objectives

- Generally similar to the Mifflin District, except
 - 4 Story height limit (both sides of street)

Potential Outcomes

- Generally similar to the Mifflin District, except
- May have greater potential to attract owner-residents and higher-income renters
 - Location on a broad gateway avenue to the Capitol
 - Larger houses on deeper lots
 - Less characterized as a student housing area despite significant student occupancy
- May have greater potential for significant investment in rehabilitation and upgrading due to higher potential for owner-occupants and/or higher potential for increased rents
- The "carriage house" option may have greater potential because the lots are deeper

Issues and Questions

- Generally similar to the Mifflin District, as modified by possible differences in potential outcomes
- Would a shift in to more owner-occupants and non-student renters on West Washington Avenue be incompatible with maintaining the historic context of the Mifflin Street frontages?

MIFFLIN DISTRICT ALTERNATIVE B: LIMITED REDEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION

Planning Objectives

- Increase residential density and housing opportunities over time, while maintaining general compatibility with the older housing stock
- Selective redevelopment with new housing that may be taller and larger than older housing but with scale and mass compatible with the established context and remaining older houses
 - 4 Story height limit
 - Maintain the existing street façade rhythm
- Retain better existing houses and encourage their rehabilitation and incorporation into larger projects that also include redevelopment
 - This could be a made a requirement in some redevelopments

Potential Outcomes

- Neighborhood character evolves as larger, newer buildings replace some of the older housing stock, but remaining older housing helps to retain some of the former sense of place
- General character of the street view could be maintained even with larger buildings
 - Design guidelines would need to be established
- Increase in the amount of more-modern, higher quality housing available
- Increase in the variety of types and sizes of housing units available
 - This could be made a requirement – might not occur otherwise
- Greater potential for underground parking
- Implements long-term preservation of some of the better older houses

- Residential population increases
- The predominant character of the neighborhood as a student rental area could change if redevelopments included housing attractive to other types of households and/or if older housing was replaced by newer, more expensive housing less attractive to student renters
- A significant proportion of student residents likely to continue due to proximity to the UW campus
 - Student residents add variety and interest to the neighborhood.
- A more diverse, less student-dominated residential population might make the area more attractive to a wider variety of households
- As some of the older housing stock was replaced with new, larger redevelopments, some of the historic Miffland context would be eroded, even if new development was physically compatible.

Issues and Questions

- How much redevelopment should occur and/or which existing houses should be preserved hasn't been identified
- Land assembly is difficult and a good, creative development project might require a larger site and/or key properties that cannot be acquired
- Property assembly could be *ad hoc* and project size and configuration could depend primarily on ownership patterns
- It's difficult to coordinate the redevelopment of multiple parcels in different assemblages over an extended time period
 - Coordinated developments increase opportunities to share parking, access, open space
 - City could play a role in facilitating/requiring coordinated project planning

MIFFLIN DISTRICT - ALTERNATIVE B

Issues and Questions (Cont.)

- There still could be substantial deterioration over time of older houses not rehabilitated as individual properties or included and preserved in a mixed-development project
- How important is maintaining neighborhood's character as a student rental area with a colorful role in Madison's recent history, and predominantly comprised of old-style houses?
 - Many UW students value this relatively affordable, neighborhood-scale housing as an alternative to student high rise housing and other newer developments
 - Many in the community value the historical context of the Miffland area dating from the 1960's Counterculture

WEST WASHINGTON AVENUE – ALTERNATIVE B

Planning Objectives

- Generally similar to the Mifflin District, except
 - 6 Story height limit (both sides of street)

Potential Outcomes

- Generally similar to the Mifflin District, except
- May have greater potential to attract owner-residents and higher-income renters
 - Location on a broad gateway avenue to the Capitol
 - larger houses on deeper lots
 - Less characterized as a student housing area despite significant student occupancy
- May have greater potential for significant investment in rehabilitation and upgrading due to higher potential for owner-occupants and/or potential rent increases
- Larger lots may have greater potential for redevelopment
- Greater allowed height might make redevelopment more likely

Issues and Questions

- Generally similar to the Mifflin District as modified by possible differences in potential outcomes
- Would some redevelopment to larger, taller housing forms and/or a shift to more higher-income and non-student households be incompatible with maintaining the historic context of the Mifflin Street frontages?

ALTERNATIVE C: SUBSTANTIAL REDEVELOPMENT [NEW URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD]

Planning Objectives

- Create a new higher-density neighborhood with a different, more-urban character
- Significant increase in residential density and housing opportunities over time.
- New development with buildings taller and larger than existing buildings in neighborhood
 - 6 Story height limit
- Projects could include retaining some existing houses to create interest and amenity, but this is not a specific objective
- Non-residential uses could be included, depending on policy goals
 - Limited to neighborhood-serving ground floor uses at selected locations
 - Flexible employment activities compatible with the desired building types and designs, such as lofts and galleries
 - Does not include general office or retail development
- Increased density close to potential rail transit stop and multi-modal transportation center (TOD)

Potential Outcomes

- Over time the character of the neighborhood would change completely
- Substantial increase in the amount of more-modern, higher quality housing available
- Increase in the variety of types and sizes of housing units available for a more diverse population
 - This could be made a requirement – might not occur otherwise
- Greater potential to include affordable housing in larger developments
- High potential for underground parking
- Greater potential density would make replacement of existing housing more financially feasible
- Number of residents increases significantly
- More types of housing attractive to a greater diversity of households
 - Not guaranteed unless variety was a development requirement
- Student housing likely to remain a part of the housing mix due to proximity to UW campus
- Complete change in the neighborhood character over time and loss of physical linkages with the historic Miffland context.

Issues and Questions

- Same land assembly and project coordination issues as Alternative B
- Even with good design coordination of new developments, there will be some incompatibility between old buildings and new development during the potentially long transition period
 - Consistent streetscape could help tie things together
- Design coordination more critical since larger-scale developments offer greater potential for buildings whose mass and design don't relate well to each other
- Potential for larger buildings requires more attention to maintaining a “street friendly” façade, high degree of pedestrian accessibility, etc.

WEST WASHINGTON AVENUE - ALTERNATIVE C

Planning Objectives

- Generally similar to the Mifflin District, except
8 Story height limit (both sides)

Potential Outcomes

- Generally similar to the Mifflin District, except
- Greater allowed height might make redevelopment more likely

Issues and Questions

- Generally similar to the Mifflin District

NULL ALTERNATIVE: DO NOTHING

Planning Objectives

- Defer decisions about the neighborhood's future to a later time
- Hope to maintain the existing character of the area without establishing a plan for doing this or necessarily precluding future changes
- Support a spirit of *laissez faire* by allowing proposed projects to be reviewed on an *ad hoc* basis, with limited policy guidance

Potential Outcomes

- Properties are not substantially rehabilitated and condition continues to slowly decline with relatively little maintenance intended primarily to keep them up to code
- Periodic requests for redevelopment of one property or aggregations of properties with higher-density development
 - No specific City policy that the area will be conserved essentially as it is today
 - No specific City policy or plan to guide future changes in use, density or design
 - Each request dealt with on an *ad hoc* basis
- Height, scale and design of new development determined on a project-by-project basis
- If any more-intensive developments are approved, additional proposals can be anticipated
 - Configuration of proposed developments likely to reflect parcel ownership patterns
 - Coordination of projects would be even more difficult than in other the alternatives due to lack of plan for higher density development
- Project reviews likely to be lengthy, more cumbersome, and more contentious in the absence of clear policy direction
- The character of area as predominantly a student rental neighborhood continues but physical character may be eroded by random redevelopments with different size and scale.
- Housing choices likely to remain limited and generally not attractive to most non-student households

Issues and Questions

- Significant investment in rehabilitation and preservation of existing housing unlikely
 - Substantial income potential currently without rehabilitation
 - Continued hope for future opportunity to increase density in absence of plan precluding this alternative
 - Too risky to rehabilitate a house a great expense when future of district is uncertain
- Difficult to apply zoning regulations without clear planning goals
 - Planned Development (PUD) or parcel-by-parcel basis

WEST WASHINGTON AVENUE

Planning Objectives

- Generally similar to the Mifflin District

Potential Outcomes

- Generally similar to the Mifflin District, except
- Likelihood that *ad hoc* redevelopment projects will be proposed may be greater due to larger lots and differences the character of the street.

Issues and Questions

- Generally similar to the Mifflin District