

ZONING ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT
VARIANCE APPLICATION
2110 Bascom St

Zoning: TR-C2, HIS-UH

Owner: Heather and Julia Huang

Technical Information:

Applicant Lot Size: 66' wide x 110.4' deep

Minimum Lot Width: 40'

Applicant Lot Area: 7,286.4 sq. ft.

Minimum Lot Area: 4,000 sq. ft.

Madison General Ordinance Section Requiring Variance: 28.043 (2)

Project Description: Applicants request a maximum height variance to allow an addition to a single-family house. The existing house has a height of 36.9'. The proposed addition will result in a height of 37.1'.

For principal buildings, building height is the average height of all building facades. Façade height is measured from the existing grade at the midpoint of the building to the highest point on the roof of the building. The building addition on the house moves the midpoint of the side building facades to the north, where there is a drop in elevation. Due to how height is measured in the zoning code, this leads to a taller building and the need for a variance for maximum building height. Height is measured from the natural grade prior to development. From the zoning code:

For principal buildings and structures, height is the average of the height of all building facades. For each facade, height is measured from the midpoint of the existing grade to the highest point on the roof of the building or structure. No individual facade shall be more than fifteen percent (15%) higher than the maximum height of the zoning district. (MGO 28.134 (1)(b))

Maximum Height

Zoning Ordinance Maximum: 35'

Provided Setback: 37.1'

Requested Variance: 2.1'

Percentage an Individual Side Can Be Over Maximum

Zoning Ordinance Maximum: 15%

Provided Setback: 17.4%

Requested Variance: 2.14%

Comments Relative to Standards:

1. Conditions unique to the property:

The lot meets minimum lot width and area requirements and is an otherwise compliant lot in the TR-C2 zoning district. A unique condition for the property is that the existing historic house is over the maximum height and is located on a lot with a significant existing slope towards the rear where the addition is planned.

2. Zoning district's purpose and intent:

Maximum principal building height is intended to require a common maximum building height in similar areas. Measuring height using the average of all facades is intended to provide some flexibility for lots that have slope such as the subject property, allowing for walk out basements while not allowing any one façade to be more than 15% above the maximum allowable height.

However, in this case the existing house is already over the maximum height. With that existing highest point to remain and a midpoint that changes to be further down the slope on the sides of the building, the variance does not appear to be contrary to the purpose and intent, as the existing highest point and existing property grade will not change. The variance appears to be consistent with the purpose and intent of the maximum principal building height.

3. Aspects of the request making compliance with the zoning code burdensome:

Compliance with the strict letter of the ordinance would require that an addition to the house alter grade at the midpoint to change the lowest point for building height measurement or the highest point on the house would need to be decreased to change the high point of building height measurement. This seems to be unnecessarily burdensome.

4. Difficulty/hardship:

The house was originally constructed in 1924 and purchased by the current owners in 2024. See comment #1 and #3 above. The existing historic house is taller than would be allowed under today's code. The existing height combined with the existing grade create a hardship in essentially not allowing an addition without modifying the height of the existing house to make it shorter, which is unlikely to be allowed in a local historic district, and also creates significant practical difficulty. The grade is existing, but an addition changes where building is on the slope and changes where the midpoint of the building is on the side facades and therefore where the lowest point in grade must be measured from.

5. The proposed variance shall not create substantial detriment to adjacent property:

The existing house is taller than the adjacent houses on each side. However, it does not appear that the addition will significantly impact how the subject building's height interacts with adjacent properties. The property across the street is a fraternity house which is located on a significant hill and the rear of that building faces Bascom Street and the front of this property. It appears there will be no substantial detriment or loss of light and air at adjacent property.

6. Characteristics of the neighborhood:

The property is part of the University Heights Local Historic District. The project received a Certificate of Appropriateness for the addition and exterior alterations in May 2025 and appears to be consistent with the overall characteristics of the neighborhood.

Staff Recommendation:

It appears the standards have been met; therefore, staff recommends **approval** of the variance request, subject to further testimony and new information provided during the public hearing.