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Subject: PC agenda item #13 demolition 924 E Main St

Greetings Plan Commission members-

I don't support the demolition of 924 E Main. This is one of several character defining commercial buildings in the Cap East district that should be preserved and re-used if possible. The city's preservation file indicates the building was constructed in 1928 as the National Biscuit Company Warehouse and was designed by Edward Tough and built by George Cnare and Sons. In my opinion, the applicant has not made a case that 924 E Main could not be incorporated into the redevelopment of the Mautz block or that the building is in such poor repair it is not financially feasible to rehab. Besides the construction of a hotel at the Kleuter warehouse corner at Paterson and E Wash, there is no proposed use for the rest of the site at this time.

The applicant proposes to demolish the building and use the space for a surface parking which is in violation of city policy and does not meet the intent of 28.155(2)(b) " An application for a permit also shall include plans for any proposed future use, including site, grading and landscaping plans, floor plans, building elevations and materials, the length of the current ownership, and photographs of the interior and exterior of the building(s). A written report of a licensed architect or engineer describing the condition of the building(s) may be submitted to substantiate the request". None of the required documentation has been provided.

The proposal to install a parking lot also violates the spirit and intent of the Capital Gateway Corridor Plan regarding E Main St which states: "Blair to Ingersoll Streets - This is a working street dominated by utilities, industrial functions, and parking lots while being the entry and access to many small and established businesses. However, the Corridor should become more pedestrian friendly as a strong link to downtown and retain its cluster of historic industrial brick buildings. East Main Street facades should include pedestrian entries, but large, intensive parking and loading areas should

be concealed with access directed to the north-south side streets, where possible."

http://www.cityofmadison.com/planning/pdf/Capitol_Gateway_Corridor_Plan.pdf (page 29).

I hope to see a commitment by the owner to retain the character of this section of E Main St. and retain its pedestrian scale as recommended in the adopted Capitol Gateway Corridor Plan. I understand the current UDD 8 guidelines call for 15' setbacks and this building is built to the sidewalk but I think it's ok because it is as built! Please do not support demolition until you have received a submitted proposal for how the owner plans to redevelop the E Main St portion of the site. Without further information, the location of the underground stormwater tank or the cost of shoring up the building should not be the decisive factor in this decision.

Jane Jacobs, in the *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, talks about the importance of old buildings. The following quote has been formative for me, as a former bookseller and alder of a district with three historic districts and many character defining commercial buildings that are not in a landmark district.

"Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them. By old buildings I mean not museum-piece old buildings, not old buildings in an excellent and expensive state of rehabilitation—although these make fine ingredients—but also a good lot of plain, ordinary, low-value old buildings, including some rundown old buildings.

If a city area has only new buildings, the enterprises that can exist there are automatically limited to those that can support the high costs of new construction. These high costs of occupying new buildings may be levied in the form of an owner's interest and amortization payments on the capital costs of the construction. However the costs are paid off, they have to be paid off. And for this reason, enterprises that support the cost of new construction must be capable of paying a relatively high overhead—high in

comparison to that necessarily required by old buildings. To support such high overheads, the enterprises must be either (a) high profit or (b) well subsidized.

If you look about, you will see that only operations that are well established, high-turnover, standardized or heavily subsidized can afford, commonly, to carry the costs of new construction. Chain stores, chain restaurants and banks go into new construction. But neighborhood bars, foreign restaurants and pawn shops go into older buildings. . . . Well-subsidized opera and art museums often go into new buildings. But the unformalized feeders of the arts—studios, galleries, stores for musical instruments and art supplies, backrooms where the low earning power of a seat and a table can absorb uneconomic discussions—these go into old buildings. Perhaps more significant, hundreds of ordinary enterprises, necessary to the safety and public life of streets and neighborhoods, and appreciated for their convenience and personal quality, can make out successfully in old buildings, but are inexorably slain by the high overhead of new construction.

As for really new ideas of any kind—no matter how ultimately profitable or otherwise successful some of them might prove to be—there is no leeway for such chancy trial, error and experimentation in the high-overhead economy of new construction. Old ideas can sometimes use new buildings. New ideas must use old buildings."

The ideas for this building could include artist/studio space, food production (there is an interior loading dock), office space, and more. It is not a utility storage or repair type of building, this building has potential to enliven the street.

I agree with the staff report which identifies the inconsistencies of the request to demolish 924 and construct a parking lot on E Main. Like staff, I support the redevelopment of the Kleuter warehouse into a hotel use, it fits the recommendations of East Rail Corridor Plan, East Washington Avenue Capitol Gateway Corridor Plan, and Comprehensive Plan, and I am convinced it will become a really cool space and have been an enthusiastic supporter of the owners seeking National Register nomination

and tax credits. While I am sympathetic to the issues of environmental remediation, I am not convinced that the applicant has fully evaluated the opportunities to incorporate this original commercial building as part of new construction. I hope the Plan Commission follows our policies and asks the applicant to show us plans for future phases.

I understand "the Planning Division believes that the Plan Commission may find the demolition permit standards met to allow demolition of the 924 E. Main Street building" but I hope you don't agree to demolition that without further vetting of the future phases for redevelopment and ask that the owners study re-using both the Wisconsin Telephone building and the National Biscuit building as part of their due diligence for the E Main St piece of the block.

Thank you for considering my request to oppose the application for demolition of 924 E Main St-

Marsha