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In advance of the Landmarks Commission's September 19 meeting, please see comments on agenda items from the *Madison Trust for Historic Preservation* below.

**Item 1 – 5117 University Avenue - Marshall Erdman & Associates Office and Shop Landmark Nomination**

We disagree that this complex meets all four criteria of the Landmarks Ordinance. We believe that it meets criterion 1 for association with the Erdman Company and its role in patterns of post-war development in Madison, and criterion 2 for its association with Marshall Erdman himself, significant for his role as a successful Madison builder, and for his collaboration linking prominent architects with prefabricated housing design and construction.

However, regarding criterion 3, the complex does not exemplify the principles of organic architecture or passive solar design in ways that inform the study of those design principles. It is actually a conglomeration of building segments, one of which was designed and built as a furniture showroom - wholly separate from the Erdman company's development. The complex illustrates Erdman's thrift more so than his expertise as a builder or the company's success in pre-fabrication, medical facilities, modular furniture, or New Urbanist neighborhoods

Regarding criterion 4, this complex is not a design that exemplifies the work of William Kaeser. There are Kaeser - designed buildings in Madison that are more clearly indicative of his work as influenced by Wright. We question whether Erdman himself can be considered a master builder. He mastered established methods of prefabrication as a system of building delivery, but he did not innovate building technologies or invent methods of pre-fabrication. He recognized the local need for housing and employed established prefabrication technology to meet the need. He then successfully applied his expertise in prefabrication to the rapidly expanding suburban market by developing a model for suburban pre-fabricated medical office buildings. As a young man and newly established building contractor he did build the FUS Meeting House designed by Wright, but the unique design and its innovations were exclusively Wright's.

A Landmark nomination should be held to a high standard when it comes to presenting the history and significance of a historic place. Much like a National Register nomination, it becomes the official history of the Landmark, or at least a key component of the official history. It becomes an important source for subsequent research on that property. We are not comfortable with this nomination becoming part of the official history of this building or the Erdman company.

Despite meeting two of the criteria, the conglomeration of building segments at 5117 University Ave. is not the place that best conveys the contributions of the Erdman Company to the urban landscape of Madison. Erdman built hundreds of homes in the Madison area, two in collaboration with Frank Lloyd Wright, and several others with William Kaeser, and Herb Fritz. He built a church, designed by Wright, that has significance to postwar ecclesiastical design nationwide. The prototype for his suburban medical clinic model still stands at 3414 Monroe St. The office and shop complex is the place where much of the work took place, but the accomplishments of the Erdman company are better exemplified by those buildings the company designed, fabricated, and built.

We've compared this building to other historic places: the Rennebohm Building on University Ave., the Woman's Building on Gilman St., and Aldo Leopold's converted chicken shack where he wrote *A Sand County Almanac*. The key difference between these examples and the Erdman office building is that these were the only physical places directly connected to the respective histories of the Rennebohm Drug Company, the Woman's Club of Madison, and Leopold's seminal work of ecological ethics and philosophy. It was important to retain these unique places because no other buildings existed to illuminate these aspects of Madison's history. The Erdman company, while operating in this complex, was producing other buildings in collaboration with prominent architects. They were constructing buildings that, of themselves, express the company's design and prefabrication achievements, and showcase Erdman's

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collaboration with Wright, Kaeser, Fritz and others. They were contributing to the evolution of Madison's urban landscape, and meeting demands for suburban housing as the city grew in the post-war decades. If the Erdman office and shop complex was an important example of Erdman's work, Kaeser's work, or Wright's influence then we would be more enthusiastic about this designation. We feel that there are other places in Madison that better exemplify the significance and influence of Marshall Erdman.

**Item 2 – 2101 Chamberlain Avenue**

No comments

**Item 3 – 1123 Jenifer Street**

The use of aluminum building materials on Victorian-era buildings in this, and our four other historic districts, despite the precedent for its use, is inappropriate. Aluminum was not available as a building material during the 1870s to the 1920s when most of the residences in the Third Lake Ridge Historic District were built, but it was common to post-war residential construction. Aesthetically, it is a poor substitute for wood, and because the visibility of the soffits from the public right-of-way it would detract from the historic character of the house and the district as a whole.

**Item 4 – 1112 Spaight Street**

Initially, we have serious concerns about allowing the demolition of a house that is a contributing element of a federal historic district and is within a local historic district that derives its significance in part from its architectural and cultural diversity. We encourage the Commission to request an on-site assessment of the house to determine if it is indeed beyond reasonable hope of retrieval. If it is not, a demolition permit should not be issued for this house.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Tish'.

Jason Tish  
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