

**From:** Stouder, Heather

**Sent:** Friday, December 11, 2015 11:06 AM **To:** 'Vercauteren, Jeffrey L. JLV (6052)'

**Cc:** Rummel, Marsha; Erdman, Natalie; Cornwell, Katherine; Wendt, Jay; Martin, Alan; Scanlon, Amy; Fruhling, William

**Subject:** 1801 E Washington - Staff Comments

Good afternoon, Jeff-

Staff have had an opportunity for *initial* review of the plans submitted to the City on November 23 by your client for the redevelopment of 1801 East Washington Avenue, which will be reviewed by the Landmarks Commission, UDC, Plan Commission, and Common Council. While some progress is evident, it is disappointing to see that some of the most significant comments shared at Development Assistance Team meetings and other venues have not been addressed. In order for staff to support the requested rezoning, conditional use, and related amendment to the neighborhood plan to allow for community mixed-use at this site, significant changes to the proposal need to be made. We will continue to review the details as the proposal evolves over the course of the coming weeks, and will recommend that the proposal be referred if needed, to accommodate adequate time for design changes.

The following items are major issues staff has identified at this stage in the evolution of the design:

**1) Yahara River/East Washington Corner** – This area is critical to the long term success of the project, particularly for the commercial space, and needs to be completely reworked. Staff has recommended and continues to recommend significant filling of this portion of the site to raise this portion of the building by 4+ feet. With regard to visibility, the most important corner view of the building as proposed is currently in a hole, which cannot be good for the viability of the commercial space. In order to activate the interface between the river and the site, clear site lines of the commercial activity from the street and sidewalk are necessary. Filling this portion of the site will allow for the removal of existing railings along East Washington Avenue to increase visibility even more. It will also allow for positive drainage from the building to East Washington Avenue, which is important from a City Engineering perspective.

Short of a workable solution along these lines, it could be possible to achieve similar outcomes by setting this portion of the building back *much* further from the western property line, which may provide more visibility for the commercial space, and a more gradual transition in grade to the Yahara River Parkway.

As your team explores this issue, staff will continue to explore with other agencies the possibility for removal of the existing railings, and also the potential to replace the existing bike/ped ramp to E Washington Ave with a new connection to a sidewalk within a public easement on the western edge of the private property. This could significantly improve overall connectivity, and the interface between the site and the river.

**2) Main Street** – The proposed massing along Main Street is generally supported by staff. Based on ongoing conversations with Engineering and Forestry, the building may need to be set back further to support preservation of street trees and the grading parameters for the new public sidewalk. Also, steps leading up to some of the residential units along Main Street may need to be provided, based on Engineering parameters for sidewalk grading.

**3) Exterior Materials** – The proposed palette of materials is overly complex, and could quickly become dated. Please explore a simple four-story brick building, particularly along East Washington Avenue, rounding the corner to the Yahara. Instead of using frequent changes in materials to try to break down the massing, either separate the proposed building into two or more buildings, or utilize occasional modulation and architectural detailing on the brick facade.

**4) First Floor Commercial Space** – The first floor of the building along East Washington Avenue currently reads as two shorter stories, due to the transom windows and window divisions. The commitment to an 18' first floor along East Washington is appreciated, but the current design completely misses the opportunity for this to read as a strong first floor commercial space. In conjunction with the fill recommended above, revise the architecture on the first floor facing East Washington Avenue so that it reads as a strong first floor commercial space.

**5) Remnant Parcel** – As part of the conditional use review, the Plan Commission must consider whether proposals impede the normal and orderly development of surrounding properties. Staff is concerned with the future development prospects of the property at 1831 E Washington Avenue, particularly as this property is the only thing between East Washington Avenue and the proposed parking ramp associated with this proposal. Please share any considerations your team has regarding the potential for future redevelopment of this property.

Overall, the proposed program for the site is supported by staff, but the design needs to evolve significantly. We sincerely hope that revisions to the submittal can be made to address these comments, and will discuss with you the ramifications of the overall timeline based on an indication from the development team regarding how they plan to proceed.

Best-

Heather

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