

Note to Commission
229 W. Lakelawn Place
November 27, 2008

I have enclosed copies of the "Exterior... Design Criteria for Development Districts in the Downtown Design Zones." I have underlined passages in the criteria that pertain to the design proposed for the new apartment building. I recommend rejection of the project as proposed and encouraging a new design that addresses the concerns that follow.

Below is a staff report arranged by the sections in the Design Criteria.

Exterior Building Design.

1. Massing.

This criterion states, in part:

Larger buildings should have their mass broken up to avoid being "out of scale" with their surroundings....Stepping back the upper floors of the street facades a substantial distance... may be appropriate to achieve this quality. The shape of the building should not detract from or dominate the surrounding area.

It is my opinion that the project does not produce sufficient breaking up of the mass and is "out of scale" with the surroundings. The main reason this building is out-of-scale is that it is four stories tall, raised upon an elevated foundation and with a flat roof. Except for the back part of the Villa Maria building kitty-corner across the street, which is five-stories tall, the surrounding properties are mostly three-story buildings with gabled or hipped roofs. Across W. Lakelawn Place from this site is a long three-story building erected as an addition to the building on Langdon Street in 1973. As with our review of new buildings in historic districts, it doesn't make sense to include modern buildings in determining compatibility because it is exactly those oversized modern buildings that created the need for design criteria in the first place. The ground in this area also slopes toward the lake so that buildings to the north are no doubt lower in elevation. (Enclosed is a Sanborn map of the area. Please note that the 1973 addition to the building across the street is not shown on the map). A good way to see the character of the area is to Google the address (222 Langdon Street Madison Wisconsin). When you click on the map that comes up a photographic view will appear. Then click on "street view" and you can virtually walk up and down the street by clicking the arrows.

Articulation of the materials and the slight reveals between materials in the plan proposed does help reduce the apparent mass a bit, but not enough to make the

building read as being anything except a very large four-story rectangular box in a neighborhood of smaller buildings.

2. Orientation.

This criterion states, in part:

Any building façade adjacent to the street should be oriented toward and engage the street.

The entrance is set back from the street below street level. The proposed building does not engage the street very effectively.

3. Building Components.

This criterion states, in part:

The design and detailing of the base are critical to defining the public space, engaging the street, and creating an interesting pedestrian environment.

The revised design has a sufficient base to ground the building, and the windows shown in the revised design help to engage the street. However, a poured concrete base is too raw and unfinished a material to present an interesting pedestrian environment. I recommend a more traditional, more textural base material.

4. Articulation.

This criterion states, in part:

Well-articulated buildings add architectural interest and variety to the massing of a building and help break up long, monotonous facades. A variety of elements should be incorporated into the design of the buildings to provide sufficient articulation of the facades...

and goes on to list several ways of achieving articulation including

reveals, stepbacks, modulation, projections and three dimensional detail between surface planes to create shadow lines and break up flat surface areas.

The design as revised has not added sufficient elements to break up the long façade.

5. Openings.

This criterion states, in part:

Visibility should be provided to areas accessed when entering or exiting a building.

The proposed entrance is not visible enough.

Also,

If a design is proposed in which garage doors (or other service openings) are visible from the street, they should be sufficiently detailed and integrated into the building.

The garage door area is not detailed or integrated into the building.

6. Materials.

This criterion states, in part:

Colors and materials should be selected for compatibility with the site and neighboring area. All sides of a structure should exhibit design continuity and be finished with quality materials.

EIFS and exposed poured concrete are not quality materials.

7. Entry Treatment.

This criterion states, in part:

Buildings with obvious entrances contribute to the definition of the public way and promote a strong pedestrian feel along the street. The building should have at least one clearly-defined primary entrance oriented toward the street. Entrances should be sized and articulated in proportion to the scale of the building.

The entrance is not obvious enough. It is below grade and tucked into a side of the building.

Site Design/Function:

1. Semi-Public Spaces.

This criterion states, in part:

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The space between the front façade of the building and the public sidewalk can vary in size but should be thoughtfully considered with a variety of textures in the ground treatment.

And lists as ways to do this

raised planters... street furniture, lighting and landscape materials.

The revised design does not have sufficient variety of textures in the ground treatment.

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November 18, 2008