

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

PRESENTED: April 8, 2015

TITLE: 5422 Portage Road – Multi-Family Apartment Development Including Three Multi-Family Apartment Buildings and One Tenant Use Pool/Clubhouse Building. 17<sup>th</sup> Ald. Dist. (37462)

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Alan J. Martin, Secretary

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: April 8, 2015

ID NUMBER:

Members present were: Richard Wagner, Chair; Cliff Goodhart, Melissa Huggins\*, Lauren Cnare, John Harrington, Dawn O’Kroley, Richard Slayton and Tom DeChant.

\*Huggins recused herself on this item.

**SUMMARY:**

At its meeting of April 8, 2015, the Urban Design Commission **REFERRED** consideration of a multi-family apartment development including three multi-family apartment buildings and one tenant use pool/clubhouse building located at 5422 Portage Road. Appearing on behalf of the project were Joseph Lee, representing 5422 Portage Road, LLC; and T. Wall. Appearing and speaking in opposition were Zach May, Debra Nelson and Sue Pastor. Lee addressed comments from the Commission’s previous review of the project. They looked at really “pushing the envelope” with the red color by including some red on the ends of the buildings and on the soffits. They also looked at more of that red accent color but they felt it got to be too much. The landscape plan was updated to address the Commission’s comments.

Zach May spoke in opposition. The project is too large for the site and is out of proportion. The color scheme don’t even match what is in and around the neighborhood. There are vacant apartment buildings next to this proposed development. He shared a petition signed by approximately 40 neighborhood residents who are against this proposed development until some changes have been made. He stated that his past Alder, Joe Clausius did not inform them of the public meetings on this item.

Sue Pastor spoke in opposition. The contrast in style is really quite jarring and is something that should be taken into consideration. She is looking for a development that immediate neighbors can support, adjacent neighbors can support, and to that end, she asks that this be referred to a later meeting. The immediate neighbors have had no opportunity to work with the developer to incorporate their concerns into the development. The development that this area is going to see in the near future needs to be a model of sustainability, eco-social equity, and the same services people have in other areas of Madison.

The Secretary read from an email from the new 17<sup>th</sup> District Alderperson, Samba Baldeh which stated “I am sorry I cannot attend tonight’s Urban Design Commission meeting but as Alder elect for this district I understand that neighbors have significant concerns and that there are also important issues raised in the staff

report. This development really represents a gateway to what will be increasing development in this area and it is very important to get it right. I therefore respectfully request that UDC refer this item to a later meeting so that I can work with the neighborhood and the developer, as well as staff to arrive at the best possible solution for our future.” In response to that email, the Secretary received an email from the District’s current Alder, Joe Clausius, which stated: “Al, please don’t defer T. Wall’s apartment project. The new UW Hospital is opening in August and we desperately need market-rate housing in that area. Plus FSC is on board with the project and T. Wall restoring the creek.”

Comments and questions from the Commission were as follows:

- The building is like a magnet for the plant material. I see individual pieces but what I’m looking for are massive areas of ground cover that bring nature into it. I would look at creating positive and negative space with the groupings. I’d encourage your landscape architect to take a walk along the creek, see how nature interacts with other areas. It needs to help us feel like it’s part of the creek rather than the start of suburbia.
- Going along with that I would make those infiltration ponds look like they’re natural and I would get rid of the vinyl edging. I really recommend not using large stone, that doesn’t help those plants grow one bit. Mulch is so much better.
- I went out there and looked at the area and it really is a natural, wild kind of area. It has a very lush character and that character ought to bleed into the development.
- Last meeting one of the comments was looking at this as a composition of three buildings rather than three repeating compositions. I don’t see any change in that. It doesn’t mean the material palette has to change, but that the buildings have a different dialogue. Maybe those corners near the clubhouse are different architecturally, even if they are in the same palette, as an example.
- (Ald. Cnare, to Zach May) In terms of a referral, the least amount of time would be 2 weeks. My question is how much time as a neighborhood do you think you need to have conversations with the Alder and the developer?
  - (Zach May) From the first distribution of the grassroots effort that we did, we distributed about 120 petitions to come to some kind of compromise, and we’ve gotten about 50 back and that has taken about 3 weeks. At least 3 or 4 days ago I received this letter from Terrence and the rest of the neighborhood that I live in received it also. I’m not trying to give people scare tactics or get people upset, I’m trying to go about this logically and humbly, and not say that...
- I just need to know how many weeks you might need. You’re starting to get organized now, so is a 4 week referral sufficient?
  - I think so.
- (T. Wall) In terms of referral, I understand there are concerns. At this point we’re at the end of the timeframe to start construction this summer, and a 4 week referral will delay this an entire year and we’ll have some big problems. I don’t think that’s really fair to us, we’ve been working on this for over a year, we have engaged the neighborhood, maybe not all the neighbors were involved. We did a massive mailing, reached out to Friends of Starkweather Creek. They’ll be working with us on a plan, maybe looking into grants, to improve that creek area. There is almost a mini-garbage area down there that needs so there is an opportunity to really improve this area. We have done the proper process. In terms of the architecture we’re very open, we’re not married to this design. This architecture was driven by City comments and we’re happy to incorporate other changes and ideas. This does comply with the City’s plans. Two blocks from here is the new hospital, this site looks at an embankment of the Interstate, and then it looks at a 5-story hospital. It is 1 ½ blocks from 2,000 apartment units, so this is a very large multi-family neighborhood. We’re also providing an easement for a bike path so there could be a bike overpass; it is served by bus service. We’re going to improve Portage Road with a new

sidewalk and widening the road. And more future multi-family development is planned for the area, we are doing what the City has directed us to do.

Debra Nelson spoke, stating that the District Alder does not live on Portage Road so he has no idea how bad the traffic is there, the speeding is terrible. Sandburg Elementary is over-capacity, where are all these new children going to go to school? We already have tons of apartments in our neighborhood, we don't need more. She now regrets buying her house there 12 years ago.

- (Cnare) For residents who are new to this, especially those of you who are just finding out about the project and how the process works, it can be really confusing. The Urban Design Commission deals with what the building looks like and what the landscaping looks like. This Commission is not going to worry about traffic, not even to some extent whether or not the building fits identified plans, etc. Your big opportunity for that is the Plan Commission. I'd like to make a motion to refer this for two weeks, that's two weeks to come back to us, and I've calculated that that would bring them to the Plan Commission on May 4<sup>th</sup>, so you have an opportunity in the next two weeks to become even more activated. Somebody can be calling a meeting and you should call the existing Alder and the new Alder and make sure everyone understands what the conversation looks like. If you do that, the product will come back here and some of the changes you're talking about, this Commission really cares about "what does it look like, what is the design feature, what is the landscape architecture?" You can focus your time on that. And then when you get to the Plan Commission you will bring up the subjects of traffic, whether or not these comply with the plans, other sort of concerns. You have more time to continue the conversation and have a meeting with the owner and developer. Then the following week would be the Common Council meeting, another opportunity to have more time to work on the project so it addresses some of the concerns you have as neighbors. This project will go to Traffic Engineering, City Engineering, all the City departments that care about the same issues you as neighbors care about. Bus service, parks, there will be other eyes and ears looking at the project and then you will be able to share your concerns with them.
- (Goodhart) Given your description of our purview and the things that we're concerned about, I don't see anything here so overwhelming that an initial approval couldn't go to the Plan Commission, with that formal action for them to use in their consideration and also necessitating it coming back to us in 2 or 4 weeks. I think a referral would indicate to the Plan Commission that there are problems larger than there really are from our perspective.
- I understand that but I think there is a bigger message to be delivered to the neighbors right now. I thank you all for your comments. This Committee is not concerned about some of the things, we're pretty comfortable with some of the things that are moving in the right direction. Cliff you're absolutely right, that could happen, but I think this will give the neighbors a bit more comfort, it will give the Alder some more time to get his feet wet and help bring this process along, so that's my rationale. When they come back they could request initial/final. The minutes can reflect that this is really done at the request of neighbors who are trying to catch up with the process.
- We have comments site plan-wise, landscape plan-wise, and architecturally that have not been addressed (staff).
- I could see this if it were granted initial it would still probably be back in 2 weeks for final. I would like to say that generally speaking the rooflines and the general massing all seem appropriate for a building of this scale.
- I would also encourage Commission members to go out and look around in that area, I think you'll find it useful, if you can.

**ACTION:**

On a motion by Cnare, seconded by Harrington, the Urban Design Commission **REFERRED** consideration of this item. The motion was passed on a vote of (5-1-1) with Huggins recused and Goodhart voting no.

After the Commission acts on an application, individual Commissioners rate the overall design on a scale of 1 to 10, including any changes required by the Commission. The ratings are for information only. They are not used to decide whether the project should be approved. The scale is 1 = complete failure; 2 = critically bad; 3 = very poor; 4 = poor; 5 = fair; 6 = good; 7 = very good; 8 = excellent; 9 = superior; and 10 = outstanding. The overall rating for this project is 7.

**URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION PROJECT RATING FOR: 5422 Portage Road**

	Site Plan	Architecture	Landscape Plan	Site Amenities, Lighting, Etc.	Signs	Circulation (Pedestrian, Vehicular)	Urban Context	Overall Rating
<b>Member Ratings</b>	7	7	5	6	-	7	8	7

General Comments:

- Work with landscape context.
- Variety of expression of materials and details needed from building to building. Bring natural area into landscape.