

AGENDA # 2

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

PRESENTED: September 29, 2010

TITLE: Information and Discussion on the Draft
Recommendations for the Downtown Plan.
(20053)

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

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ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: September 29, 2010

ID NUMBER:

Members present were: Marsha Rummel, Mark Smith, Dawn O’Kroley, Todd Barnett, Richard Slayton, John Harrington, R. Richard Wagner, Melissa Huggins and Jay Handy.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of September 29, 2010, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL DISCUSSION** on the draft recommendations for the Downtown Plan. Appearing in support and opposition was Jason Batton, representing Palisade Property. Bill Fruhling, Principal Planner presented details of where the process is now, reviewing future public sessions as well as committee sessions to review comments and ideas. Their goal is to have the plan ready for Common Council review and adoption by the end of the year; then it will be referred to a number of boards, commissions and committees. Fruhling referenced and distributed additional copies of the “Downtown Plan, Overview and Draft Recommendations,” as well as a summarized version within the September newsletter. He talked about the pamphlet’s “Big Ideas,” citing incorporating the lakes into our urban fabric as the number one issue for people. The first location he spoke about was the Lake Monona lakefront/John Nolen Drive causeway, and the dog park, which they discovered was a very popular and highly used park. By adding landscaping and three-dimensional structures to this dog park they feel they can liven up this corner. Law Park is an area that has had a lot of attention over the years. Expanding Law Park is a controversial aspect to the Downtown Plan, but it’s an opportunity to really make a signature City park and address how ratty the lakefront here appears, as well as making a “sense of arrival” for people coming in on the train. The Mendota Lakefront also received a lot of attention from the public comments. From Picnic Point to James Madison Park is about 3 miles, and they are proposing to connect these segments through campus. Over the years easements have been obtained, and the most important part that needs developing is the portion between Wisconsin Avenue and Lake Street. Maintaining the views of downtown are also of great importance. The biggest asset of our downtown is the Isthmus between the lakes, and the periodic glimpses of the water as you move around downtown is another way to connect you to the lake. Improved access to the lakes means visual connections as well as physical ones.

The proposed maximum building height map was also discussed. This plan will be used to draft the zoning districts for downtown. There will be more specificity about this in the new Zoning Code. They put the future train station in the plan as a sort of place holder, as well as the Government East parking ramp, with the goal to get people to start thinking of these projects comprehensively and holistically. The recommendations of the Downtown Plan suggest turning Wilson Street into a two-way street, even before the station location was

announced. Part of the focus was on how people move through/in/around downtown, and the linkages within this area that are broken. The plan proposes some bump-outs, lighting and colored flags for the outer loop of the Capitol Square. Another aspect of the Downtown Plan is to make downtown a model in sustainability. The plan is meant to really celebrate a lot of the different neighborhoods and districts within the downtown. For downtown to be more than a sum of its individual parts, the plan is trying to build on the uniqueness of these areas so it's more of a progression of places.

The plan also identifies larger potential redevelopment sites (at least ½ acre in size). If it's an underutilized site or an obsolete building or a public parking ramp they see that as a redevelopment possibility. DMI's Downtown Professionals Group has also been working on this project and helping to form discussions. Their criteria matched the City's criteria quite closely, and identified most of the same sites that the City did. Mifflin Street is one area that was more difficult to map out a future for.

Meetings with the Plan Commission, in an effort to have them engage in this process, did not yield the direction City Planning wanted. The one plan the Plan Commission wanted them to go forward with preserves the core, keeps the houses along West Washington Avenue, keeping that building form and incorporate a new urban lane through the wider blocks by providing opportunities for redevelopment in the middle of these blocks and add some density to an area that needs it; try to make it a real asset to the area. He discussed some well maintained, well defined open space for the residents of these higher density neighborhoods. He encouraged the Commission members to look at the entire booklet in its entirety.

Jason Batton commented on the overall plan as very comprehensive, but pointed out the need for flexibility with regards to height limitations. He feels this doesn't take on the architectural and contextual considerations of each individual site. Maximizing downtown living objectives but not taking sites on a case-by-case basis he feels runs counter to the objectives of the plan. Rummel asked if there were any areas in particular; Batton responded the East Washington Avenue area, as well as the Langdon area. Wagner responded that sometimes when things are done on a case-by-case basis you end up with something you don't really want; when you put all the cases together it doesn't work.

Comments and questions from the Commission were as follows:

- As you envision this, how do these paths relate to what's going to happen in this area?
- There should be some language (Zoning Code) that gives you a mean to a maximum height. If we don't get some of that language in there we will have a perfectly flat limit to the Capitol height limit.
- Has anybody looked at having a controlled intersection there at Pinckney and Wilson Streets?
 - It's been brought up in discussions, but I don't know how far or serious it's gone from there.
- A part that goes over John Nolen Drive would be idea.
- Study building up instead of out. Make the greenspace connect back to the City.
- The problem with the denser footprints is that there is no place for the stormwater to go. You should think about how you're going to get stormwater out of these denser footprints.
- From a logistics standpoint this is not a sustainable plan. We're setting up the development process for this, we're saying this isn't a preservation plan but it's going to act like one. But the economics of trying to redevelop West Washington are going to be pretty tight. I'd like to see something more dense and interesting on Mifflin.
- What are some of the zoning categories that are being looked at?
 - More of a downtown core mixed-use to reflect that this is one of the highest densities, mix of office/retail/residential.
 - State Street mixed-use district that embodies the design guidelines for State Street and the Downtown Design Zone.

- Two different downtown residential districts.
- Neighborhoods unique to downtown that should have their own zoning district.
- A height overlay; instead of the height being associated with a zoning district, there is a height overlay over the entire downtown.
- At Mifflin and Bassett (and maybe it cuts through Broom), there needs to be a zone here (separate district). It should be more like Park Avenue.
- Mifflin would be a place for innovation like community gardens; that's more in the spirit of Mifflin.
 - Some of those border areas have been called out; it's really about what's going on on either side of the street, it's not about the dividing line down the street. We're trying to identify a hierarchy of streets to reflect more of their importance in the community for streetscaping purposes. It needs to be a cohesive, well-designed more formal approach to the Capitol.
- A visitor who thinks our city is beautiful thinks the West Washington Avenue corridor is a dump. Maybe there should be special building codes for special zones? We need requirements for the building owners to maintain these residences.
- On the scale of older housing stock, it still has something to add to our city.
- We're not ever going to build single-family housing in the city again, and to the extent that we're just going to throw them away, I don't think so. Don't assume the high rise is better.
- Why doesn't the boulevard continue past Broom Street? If we could get a true, tree lined boulevard to Broom Street, take out some of that street width and find some way to get owners to care.
- Maybe there should be a revisit to the minimum housing code that applies updated standards to upkeeping properties in the City and downtown.

ACTION:

Since this was an **INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** no formal action was taken by the Commission.