

Letter from Applicant – received by staff as an e-mail attachment, 10/31/13

To: Plan Commission of City of Madison

RE: 900 John Nolen Residences

We would like to ask Plan Commission and City Staff to consider the following factors in considering the approval of this proposed development.

- A. The neighbors support the project.
- B. The alder supports the project.
- C. The projects directly complies with and addresses the goal in Objective 65 of the Comp Plan.
- D. The Comp Plan allows the use as a conditional use.
- E. The 5500 square foot roof top green space and resident roof top garden plots will set a new standard for green development in Madison. The Bruce Company designed roof top will include entertainment zones (for birthday parties and informal get togethers), lawn games, gardening and vegetable growing, sunning, reading, and much more. The roof top terrace will be available to all residents of the building via two stairs and the elevator.

Factor #1: Demand.

- ***There is a sizeable demand for housing in this area.***
- ***This location provides easy access to the Beltline and is an ideal location for professionals who work on either side of the city.***
- ***This is a downtown location, albeit on the fringe of downtown, that accomplishes the city's goals of providing mixed-use, ped and bicycle oriented transit development.***
- ***We understand that the county is working on a ten year plan for re-development the Coliseum property to include a mix of uses and increased quality of development, and the enhancement of this neighborhood is part of that process to enhance the overall entrance to the city.***

Madison's low 1% to 2.5% multi-family vacancy rate along with the continued strong job creation and specifically, the 7.3% increase of number of workers in downtown indicate the need for more multi-family housing in greater Madison. (See Baker Tilly September 2013 market study.)

Our 30+ years of experience in the Dane County multi-family market combined with various market studies indicate that there is a sizable number of people looking for higher quality apartments in or near downtown, but which provide easy access to jobs on the east and west sides of town. For example, several of couples that have considered leasing at our other

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apartment buildings have jobs at the opposite side of the town and are looking for a central location to live.

The proposed development will be located right off the Beltline, giving our future residents easy access to either side of the city and the ability to get to their destination in under 15 minutes via the Beltline. There are also residents who have one partner working in the western suburbs of Milwaukee while the other works on the west side of Madison, and this in-between location offers the ideal solution to their needs.

Alternatively, this location offers the perfect location for those wishing to commute to a job in downtown by bicycle using the bike path (without having to ride on a high traffic volume collector road).

This location is also well served by the Metro Bus Route 13 and 4, which stop every 30 minutes or so throughout the day.

Factor #2: Ideal location for residential.

- ***Our future residents will have access to adjacent public amenities and a stunning view of the park, lake and the city skyline.***
- ***The proximity of the building to Capitol City Bike Trail and park, combined with various biking-related amenities in the building, will promote an active lifestyle among our future residents.***
- ***The proximity to nearby neighborhood shops provides easy access to daily services and products (banking, groceries, laundries, restaurants, etc).***

The location of this building contains some highly sought-after amenities and features that promise a high-quality living to our future residents. First, the proximity of the proposed building to the lakefront and Olin-Turvile park provides residents with immediate recreational opportunities and a stunning view of the lake, city skyline and the beautiful green spaces of the park in springtime and change of color in fall.

Second, the Capitol City Trail and the adjacent park give our future residents plenty of reason to stay active and encourage them to bike instead of driving to the city during weekends or after work. The bike trail provides access to the entire city via the bike trail system.

Third, the South Towne Mall and other businesses are only few minutes bike ride or drive from the building; a drive time far less than most suburbs in which residents have to drive some distance to access basic services. In fact, most suburbs don't offer the biking opportunity to local services like this location does. The residents can either bike just a few minutes through the Waunona neighborhood to get to shops, such as electronic shops, clothing stores, etc. and to various services or restaurants, or drive 5 minutes to the South Towne Mall to get everything that one needs including groceries. They offer an attractive location for Madisonians who want to avoid the congestion and traffic of driving a car everywhere.

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The combination of park, lakefront, bike trails, and views create a unique sense of place that is incomparable to most other locations in town.

Factor #3: Distance from adjacent neighborhood.

- ***The distance between the proposed building and adjacent Waunona neighborhood is ideal; distinct enough to preserve the identity of the neighborhood and close enough to connect residents to the Waunona neighborhood in the City of Madison.***

Neighbors who attended the neighborhood meeting stated their support for the project. 900 Nolen provides an opportunity to meet the multi-family demand of housing in the neighborhood while preserving the identity of the Waunona neighborhood. As one can see from the map, there are no sites available in the Waunona neighborhood for multi-family housing, and every neighborhood needs some multi-family housing to provide diversity and a mix of incomes. In addition, 900 Nolen is a mixed-use building that can serve as a buffer and transition zone between the traditional single-family neighborhood to the east and the commercialized area to the west of this site.

Factor #5: Intensity of uses of land.

- ***The proposed mixed-use building will promote all-day activity in that area and encourage “eyes on the street”, thereby increasing security for visitors staying at the local Sheraton Hotel and the new Holiday Inn Express.***

In our neighborhood meeting, we were told by local residents that crime in the area has been an issue lately and that local residents were glad to see new development activity, in particular a high end apartment building that would place residents in the area 24/7. By locating a mixed-use building that will be actively used both during daytime and nighttime, we believe the neighborhood’s concerns may be addressed, satisfying a concern the city would otherwise have to solve. Another office building on this site won't accomplish that. (Keep in mind that there are now three office buildings on this street that have significant vacancies. New development here is critically important to preventing the neighborhood from sliding further down.)

As stated in the Comprehensive Plan Objective 46, providing “eyes on the street” have been shown to be effective in discouraging or disrupting criminal activity. We believe our high-density development that promotes an active lifestyle and bring people together both during daytime and nighttime, can be a great help in addressing the safety issue in that area.

Factor #6: Comp Plan allows residential as Conditional Use.

- ***This mixed-use project will activate and bring more attention to this underdeveloped area.***

The Comprehensive Plan allows residential use on a conditional use basis. In fact, other similar zones in the Comp Plan actually encourage a mix of uses, and it has been suggested that this

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was simply an oversight in the Comp Plan not to treat this area the same. In fact, limiting this area as exclusively commercial could be challenging because this area does not have enough land for a cluster of businesses to locate and create synergies. Likewise, limiting the area to commercial would be a violation of Objective 65 of the Comp Plan.

Summary:

Objective 65 of the Comprehensive Plan best summarizes the intention of our proposal: "To transform.... existing conventional suburban-style commercial developments into more compact, mixed-used, pedestrian, bicycle and transit-oriented destinations that have a greater variety of activities, including retail, office, entertainment, civic, open space, and residential uses."

Clearly, adding to the residential element would directly comply with and address Objective 65 of the Comp Plan. An objective is a goal; the goal was to increase mixed-use, ped friendly, bicycle and transit-oriented development and increase the variety of activities. Now the city has the opportunity to accomplish that goal by approving the proposed conditional use.

In summary, the proposed development enhances the neighborhood. We see this development to be part of the City and neighborhood's effort to transform this area into a vibrant and active area of the City, especially its 'front door' status as a primary entrance to the city for visitors and tourists. A development with strong architecture will do that.

Given the high vacancy rate of buildings on this street, now is the time to kick start a new economic vitality in the area.