

*February 14, 2012*

*Urban Design Commission*

*City of Madison*

*Re: Blockk 100*

*Ladies and Gentlemen of the Commission,*

*Having studied the Downtown for 50 years and that block specifically, for the last 12 years; and now focusing on the current proposal, may I offer several observations and suggestions for your consideration.*

*It seems to me*

*three major issues arise from this proposal;*

- 1. What buildings if any, are of such historical importance that they should not be demolished or be subject to major alteration of their character.*
- 2. If a new structure is to be introduced into all or a portion of that block, what is the appropriate use or uses, size and design character of that new structure to be.*
- 3. Should the outside garden be included in the new development and should it be as proposed.*

*1. Regarding historic preservation; The demolition and reconstruction of a major portion of the 100 block should be accomplished. When considered in terms of what is really best for the City as a whole, the historic relevance, significance and contribution of those buildings to the evolution of this City are insignificant if not totally absent. The future is more important than the past, in my view. If demolished, what have we really lost? Those buildings when built, were of a stature and cultural value no greater than the structures that today are Westowne, Hilldale or those that surround the corner of University Ave. and Shorewood Blvd. In a hundred years are those commercial buildings worthy to be saved as irreplaceable symbols of our contemporary culture? If so, why is the University Catholic Center being destroyed without a whisper from those who at this end of State Street express such dedication to our historical heritage?*

*It is my impression that when objections are raised such as are now heard regarding the proposal for Block 100, the fear of what will newly take the place of the old, fuels most of these objections to change. Our focus I suggest, should be on the future prospects rather than on the relics of an undistinguished past.*

*1A. Suggestions have been offered that the facades of the 100 block should be saved. My views of "facadism" are clear and firmly negative. Retaining or recreating merely the shallow face of a building to assuage our historic sentimentalism, is to me an insult to collective intelligence, truth and reality; an unsavory reflection on the integrity of the City. Like humans, almost all buildings have or should have a measurable life span. Their term should be limited not just because of structural deterioration, but because of the societal, cultural, political and technological change that have occurred during its life. Changing generations each should have a chance to "show its stuff" on the character of a City. Embalming the past says little about prospects for future generations.*

*3.. With regard to the rebuilding of the State Street side; I would suggest a 4 to 5 story buildings of contemporary character, tempered in materials, scale and details to reflect the of the best of current architectural creativity giving life t but to build it with materials, scale and details that do reflect, comple-ment and relate to yet not copy, the existing buildings on the easterly side of the Street. One for City; .*

*3. With regard to the "garden"; here the Proposer departs from the prudent and visionary path followed to this point in their proposal. Here's why: The character of a city is to a great extent, created and defined by the "spaces in between," which also to an overwhelming measure are the streets. Yes, parks, plazas, and squares play an important part but in a degree much less that of the streets. Buildings become the walls, the elements that define these Spaces in between". Interestingly enough, the design of these buildings is only of minor importance. There are many really beautiful cities in which there are NO significant buildings. Streets control and influence the*

*flow and concentrations of people, physically, perceptively and aesthetically. Removing or blurring the street enclosure, confuses and discourages the presence of people, the life blood of urban vitality.*

*The "garden" proposed violates three major attributes that are almost always present in vital and beautiful cities.*

*First; it eliminates the walls that defines the existence and character that is FAIRCHILD and MIFFLIN Streets. It substitutes an amorphous, ill defined "street" enclosure that is the essence of the urban experience. The "tarden" destroys the corner, the major determinant of urban scale and pedestrian proportion. It is the measure of distance for the visitor.*

*Second: the "garden" creates a new "OPEN SPACE" draining away the impact of the SQUARE, the most attractive impressive urban open space in Wisconsin. An effective and compelling urban open space relies on clearly defined, properly scaled building "walls" to create its impact. The proposed 'garden" erodes and degrades a vital characteristic of this major symbol of our City.*

*THIRD; the proposed "garden" creates the 'MISSING TOOTH" syndrome; a breach in the continuity of the urban street facade. It denies to the viewer an expected result. Instead it offers a void. It is uncomfortable in its vacancy. It could be an indication of civic insufficiency. Unfortunately there are other disappointing examples of this "missing tooth " syndrome in our Downtown.*

*= Town and Campus Hotel parking lot, 600 block of State Street  
= Downtown MATC, Wisconsin Ave, parking lot  
= Methodist Church , Wisconsin Ave.@ Dayton St. corner parking lot  
= the Link Peace Park; this "missing tooth" is the most blatant and egregious example of this syndrome. It erases the continuity of the "street". It is a missing drum beat in the concerto of the street.  
The proposed 'garden" is Link's counterpart at the end of State St.*

*FOURTH; the scale of the proposed "garden" is embarrassingly modest, especially when juxtaposed to the massive Overture across the street. It is a backyard where a PLAZA is needed, If the intentions of the Proposers to create a spot to stand back and view their generous gift, were to be achieved. To the contrary it will be unused and*

*awkward except in the months of bad ice fishing. And, because of its location, when occupied it may well be subject to misuse and difficult to supervise. Proposers zero, City UDC 1 match to the City. 3 to 1; Trophy to the people of the City of Madison. And to the Proposers, a well deserved 'THANKS' for a contest well intended, hard fought on principles and well played.*

*But in my considered judgment, the design of the "garden" should be revised.*

*In the interest of losing the trophy, i.e. the redevelopment of the 100 BBlock, there is a reasonable compromise alternative solution that incorporates the best aspects of both sides to this issue. And, it will offer more universal and comprehensive appeal, function and use than that currently proposed.*

*To all of us spectators, will the combatants shake hands, call it a "tie" and be willing to share the trophy in the best interest of we the spectators. ?*