

February 13, 2017

TO: City of Madison Plan Commission Members and Tim Parks, City Planner

RE: Opposition to The Grove Apartments Proposal

I am writing today to express my objections to The Grove Apartments proposal. As a neighbor to the site of the proposed development, I believe that the complex will have a significant negative impact on the character of our neighborhood and our standard of living. I do not support the density or the design of this proposed complex. The conditional use requested for 204 Cottage Grove Road fails to meet many of the required approval standards for conditional use, including the following:

**Standard one**

The Grove Apartments proposal replaces a single-story building with two new buildings, at four stories, with a small section stepping down to three stories. These apartments will be significantly out of scale and proportion when compared to the surrounding neighborhood which is comprised of mostly single-story homes and businesses. Unlike many other housing developments in the city, there is no buffer between the three- and four-story structures and the family homes along Johns and Busse Streets. In addition, the north side of the north building is nearly three-quarters covered with windows and balconies which look onto the homes along Busse and Johns, suggesting a significant impact to their privacy. A section of the north side of the north building appears to have no windows at all, however. Here, Johns Street residents will enjoy the view of a three-story blank wall.

**Standard three**

Currently, it is very common for drivers on Cottage Grove Road to use Johns Street as a shortcut to Atwood Avenue. As the Royster Corners development, just two blocks away, continues to grow, there will be increased traffic in the area. Adding apartment residents, visitors, and commercial customers to this growing traffic challenge will have a significant impact on the residents of this short residential street. Bicyclists, who often use Johns Street because it is safer than Cottage Grove Road and Atwood Ave, and pedestrians are likely to experience an increase in safety concerns due to the increase in traffic and street parking. With only 77 surface parking spaces, which includes those shared with the new commercial space, the Grove will likely lead to increased parking along Johns Street, creating further public safety concerns for pedestrians and bicyclists.

**Standard nine**

The height and design of the proposed apartment buildings is out of character with the neighborhood. An informal inventory of apartment buildings the length of Atwood Avenue reveals few structures more than three stories tall, and nearly all of them have brick facades. With the recent widening of Cottage Grove Road, I expected that the City intended to create a

more aesthetically pleasing and welcoming entrance to the east side of Madison than the current strip of bars and gas stations. The new library will certainly be a step in the right direction. Yet The Grove, primarily four stories tall and sheathed in 'fiber cement' panels with minimal brick trim, does not appear to convey a sense of either permanence or stability, nor does it even attempt to blend in with the 1-2 story ranch and cape cod-style homes it butts against. According to the Cottage Grove Road Activity Plan, all new development must "incorporate traditional neighborhood design elements" and should "remain compatible with, and sensitive to, the existing form of the neighborhood." There is nothing compatible or traditional about these boxes that will loom over our neighborhood.

Yes, Madison needs more affordable housing, and I have no doubt that the neighbors would welcome new residential and commercial development in that soon-to-be-vacant property, but a 112-unit, four-story complex is completely out of proportion and would be a detriment to the character and quality of our neighborhood.

Sincerely,  
Romelle Witkins  
[REDACTED] Johns Street