

MADISON TRUST



for Historic Preservation

P.O. Box 296
Madison, WI 53701-0296
(608) 441-8864
info@madisonpreservation.org
www.madisonpreservation.org

VIA EMAIL

October 6, 2022

Heather Stouder
Planning Division Director, City of Madison

Re: Proposed development at 117-125 N. Butler St.

Dear Director Stouder:

The Madison Trust for Historic Preservation (Madison Trust) has recently become aware of a proposed development on North Butler Street in the James Madison Park (JMP) neighborhood that would require rezoning three lots from DR1 to DR2. We oppose the proposed rezoning which changes the balanced approach that has been agreed upon for this neighborhood.

This neighborhood is zoned almost exclusively DR1 and this designation was assigned purposefully, with the goal of preserving this downtown area neighborhood made up of predominately single-family residential structures. These vernacular buildings are representative of Madison's development in the late 19th to mid 20th century. Without them, we lose the context for important Madison landmarks like the Lamp House and neighboring historic districts including Mansion Hill, Fourth Lake Ridge, First Settlement and East Dayton Street.

Section 28.077 of the Madison General Ordinances states about the DR1 and DR2 districts:

These districts are intended to recognize historic Downtown neighborhoods comprised of predominantly residential uses with some non-residential uses. The districts are also intended to:

- (a) Facilitate the preservation, development or redevelopment goals of the comprehensive plan and of adopted neighborhood, corridor or special area plans.*
- (b) Promote the preservation and conservation of historic buildings and districts while allowing selective infill and redevelopment based on the recommendations of adopted City plans.*
- (c) Ensure that new buildings and additions to existing buildings are designed with sensitivity to their context in terms of scale and rhythm, building placement, facade width, height and proportions, garage and driveway placement, landscaping and similar design features.*

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While the DR1 zoning does allow for redevelopment and promotion of higher density, the assignment of the DR1 zoning district to James Madison Park was clearly done to promote preservation of the “scale and rhythm” of the existing neighborhood.

The City’s Downtown Plan also reinforces the ethic of preserving the “scale and rhythm” of the James Madison Park neighborhood. The six recommendations for JMP address how future development should occur here:

Recommendation 101: Promote the construction and rehabilitation of family-supportive housing and consider adopting an ordinance with standards for such development.

Recommendation 102 Require that new development provide ample on-site open space and play areas for use by young children, and do not waive usable open space requirements in the JMP District.

Recommendation 103: Encourage family-supportive workforce housing design in new multi-family developments, including more modern, larger units (2-3 bedrooms) and true usable on-site open space.

Recommendation 104: Allow relatively higher-density development that conforms to the Maximum Building Heights Map along North Hamilton, Butler and Gorham Streets.

Recommendation 105: Allow infill and redevelopment along Hancock, Franklin and Blair Streets generally compatible in scale and design with the predominantly “house like” neighborhood character.

Recommendation 106: Consider establishing a Neighborhood Conservation District as identified in the Downtown Historic Preservation Plan.

All of these recommendations define a development objective that promotes “family-supportive workforce housing” with “ample on-site open space.” While Recommendation 104 cites allowing higher-density development on North Butler Street, this recommendation needs to be kept in the perspective of a key part of Objective 4.11 “*The renovation of existing houses coupled with selective redevelopment that generally reflects the scale and rhythm of the existing structures should help reinvigorate the area. . . .*” Thus, the Downtown Plan promotes the redevelopment of individual lots in James Madison Park for three- or four-unit buildings, not the combination of almost four city lots to build a 115-foot-wide, 32-unit building.

The Madison Trust understands that the City needs to promote density on the Isthmus and more housing units overall. These goals can be met on the existing site with the existing DR1 zoning. For example, on this 115.5-feet-wide site, three comfortable three-unit buildings could be constructed, increasing density without rezoning.

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However, allowing the applicant to rezone from DR1 to DR2 sets a dangerous precedent for the preservation of the James Madison Park neighborhood. The DR2 zoning allows for a shallower front yard setback and 5 percent greater maximum lot coverage. Furthermore, the requested changes for these three lots along with the loss of side yard setbacks and the very disproportionate front façade do not respect MGO 28.077(c) and Recommendation 103 in the Downtown Plan.

The Madison Trust encourages the Planning Division to work with the applicant to pursue a development proposal that does not require rezoning, thus encouraging the preservation of the historic character and context of the James Madison Park neighborhood. Continued preservation will help maintain the vibrancy and eclectic nature of this important downtown neighborhood.
Sincerely

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynn Bjorkman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Lynn" on the top line and "Bjorkman" on the bottom line.

Lynn Bjorkman
President
Madison Trust for Historic Preservation