

RE: Mullins development at 2508 University Avenue - File ID 20516

Dear Plan Commission:

Redevelopment of the Mullins' property at University Avenue and Highland will be a good thing. A higher density, mixed use development makes sense at this site and it's a good time to build. The photos accompanying the demolition application suggest that some investment in the property is long overdue.

But, because of its size and prominent location, the Mullins project will impact the surrounding neighborhood and set the tone for development in this end of the corridor for generations to come. It's important to strike the right balance between residential density, streetscape, and conditions that will allow small businesses to prosper.

### **Setback / Stepback**

I believe the overall project could be improved with modest increases in setback and/or stepback. While it makes sense for ground floor commercial storefront spaces to be close to the sidewalk, the 5 story wall on University (63' high) and 6 story wall on Highland (74' high) will loom over the sidewalk with only 11' of setback from the curb. The 3 story, 170 foot long flat-townhouse section along University Avenue (40' high - more like 4 stories) is just 12' of concrete away from the curb.

The attractive new Depot Apartments-CVS Pharmacy at West Washington and Bedford is on a site (1.0 acre) that's similar in size to Mullins' (1.08 acres). But unlike Mullins, the Depot has generous setbacks from the sidewalk and street which enhance the look of the building in its urban setting.

The CVS face of the Depot on West Washington is 5' from the sidewalk which allows space for plantings along the front. On the Bedford and W. Main sides, the Depot's buildings are set back from the property line 9 to 10 feet (except a one story extension of the CVS space which is set back 2'). The setback space between sidewalk and building is filled with entrance stoops, railings and plantings. Because of the setback, there's 16' to 18' between the building and the tree line on the grass terrace, which is plenty of room for mature trees to thrive. Street curbs are a full 19' to 20' from the building.

In contrast, the distance between the curb and Mullins' buildings is only 12' (11' in a couple of places). Mullins' is just 1' inside the property line along University Avenue even for the residential town-houses.

As a result, the center lines of existing terrace trees will be a mere 9' from Mullins' buildings (only 8' at West apartment entrance which is on the property line) even though the existing tree canopies extend 13' to 21' feet to the north.

Regardless of the architect's pretty renderings, there simply won't be room for medium to large sized trees to flourish. Views from GoogleEarth show a direct correlation between tree canopy size and setbacks along the north side of University Avenue.

That the Meier family built a high quality project like the Depot with significantly less density than Mullins' (83 vs. 120 units per acre) weakens the argument that it's not financially feasible to provide a little more setback or stepbacks. It's not like Mullins had to pay an inordinate amount for the property (see demolition application photos).

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The Mullins team has repeatedly told the neighborhood that an additional foot of setback from the property line and a minimum of 12' setback from back-of-curb will be provided all along University Avenue (the inside edge of sidewalk is currently about 10' 8" from back of curb on University). Mullins repeated orally and in their slides, the minimum of 12' setback claim at the November 8 neighborhood meeting attended by city Planning staff.

- See pdf pages 32 (site plan) and pdf page 37 (setback at 5 story west end) from November 8 Neighborhood Meeting. [http://2500block.com/files/powerpoint/NeighborhoodMeeting\\_5\\_Nov8\\_2010.pdf](http://2500block.com/files/powerpoint/NeighborhoodMeeting_5_Nov8_2010.pdf)

And yet, according to the city's staff report, "the (five story building) wall will abut the University Avenue property line. This would make the back-of-curb setback 11' or less.

At the absolute minimum, I ask that the Plan Commission require a minimum 12' setback along University Avenue as promised to the neighborhood.

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### **Lack of customer parking will hamper businesses**

The Mullins project does not provide any parking for commercial customers even though it has four commercial spaces totaling 8600 square feet.

The neighborhood already suffers from a parking shortage. A commercial space at GoldLeaf's Old University Place, 2355 University Avenue, has been vacant since the building opened six years ago and lack of customer parking has been cited as a major factor.



Sign hanging at Old University Place Apartments

A September 16, 2010 University Avenue Corridor planning document prepared by staff in the DPCED indicates that a location disadvantage for the area is;

*"A perceived and real lack of parking for customers"*

and

*"University Avenue Corridor Businesses serve not only neighborhood residents, but the broader Madison community."*

The Mullins' project will exacerbate the neighborhood's parking shortage, especially for commercial customers.

On the day the construction fences go up, 47 surface spaces on Mullins' property will permanently disappear. These spaces, which Mullins presumably rents out during the day, are used by local business customers (Lombardino's, Lulu's, Blue Moon, New Seoul, Sushi Box) in the evening. In the last month, I've counted anywhere from 31 to 38 spaces occupied during weekday evenings when Lombardino's is open. On Friday and Saturdays, customers typically have to park even farther away including the DOT lot at the west end of the 2500 block. When Mullins' begins, these customers will have to find parking that is much farther away (except Lulu's which on Mullins' property and will close).

All of the existing businesses around Highland and University provide some parking for their customers. Mullins should also have some spaces for its own commercial customers and so it doesn't unfairly impact existing businesses that do contribute to the mix. To do otherwise will set a bad precedent that is not sustainable for successful future commercial development in the corridor.

The customer parking remedies proposed by the city, such as some on-street spaces and the change to hourly use of the DOT lot will be inadequate to make up for the added burden of Mullins. The DOT lot is already being used during the day by businesses and residents and is also used after hours by restaurant customers - not much gain here.

At a minimum, I ask that the Plan Commission require the Mullins' project be required to contribute a significant portion of the cost to improve the DOT lot for hourly parking.

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Thank you for all the time and effort you spend assisting in the planning and development of our community.

John Jacobs  
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