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Madison Plan Commission

Brad Murphy – Department of Planning and Community and Economic Development

23 August, 2012

Dear Mr. Murphy and Plan Commissioners-

Demolition permits requested for residential buildings at 145 Iota Court, 619 N. Henry St., and 625 N. Henry St. in the Langdon Street Historic District should be denied.

These demolitions are in direct conflict with the recommendations of the recently adopted Downtown Plan regarding the Langdon Street neighborhood. The Plan's recommendations are unanimously in favor of redevelopment and infill that is sensitive to and retains the historic character of the Historic District:

Objective 4.8: “[The Langdon neighborhood] should continue to accommodate a limited amount of higher density residential redevelopment on selected sites while preserving the historic and architectural heritage of the area.”

Recommendation 77: “Encourage preservation and rehabilitation of contributing historic buildings.”

Recommendation 78: “Encourage relatively higher-density infill and redevelopment that is compatible with historic context in scale and design on non-landmark locations and sites that are identified as contributing to the National Register Historic District.”

The Plan concludes that “a limited amount of new development to replace non-contributing blighted housing will benefit the area.”

All three buildings were determined to be contributing properties in the federal Langdon Street Historic District. They are clustered at the corner of Iota Ct. and N. Henry St. in the center of the District. Demolishing them would be a significant degradation of the integrity of the District, whose significance depends on the assemblage of post-1900 revival style buildings constructed for student housing and for Greek letter societies at the University of Wisconsin.

Dedicated to the Preservation of Madison's Historic Places

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Because this is a federal historic district, and these buildings are not included in a locally designated historic district, there is no legislative protection against deterioration or demolition. But the federal preservation program, in conjunction with a state tax credit for historic buildings, provides a significant financial incentive for restoration and rehabilitation of contributing buildings in federal historic districts. Other property owners in the Langdon St. district have taken advantage of this tax credit program to repair, maintain, and improve their properties. This program leverages hundreds of thousands of dollars of economic activity and reinvestment in Madison neighborhoods annually, a significant portion of that in the Langdon Street district. This program is a significant financial tool for the repair and upgrade of these three buildings.

The Langdon Street Historic District already has several non-contributing properties scattered evenly throughout the district. If the number of contributing properties in this district continues to decline the whole district may be de-listed from the National Register of Historic Places, revoking the federal and state tax credit programs as an option for other owners in the district, and taking off the table a major incentive for investment in the neighborhood's unique historic character.

While there are opportunities for increased density in the Langdon neighborhood, these three contributing buildings do not represent one of those opportunities. Please encourage the applicant to find other redevelopment opportunities and deny these demolition permits.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Tish', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jason Tish
Executive Director, Madison Trust for Historic Preservation

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