

George Austin's Remarks to Madison Plan Commission

Edgewater Rezoning Public Hearing - February 8, 2010

Good Evening. I am a resident in the Fifth Aldermanic District and I have been following the deliberations on this project over the past year. I am here to tonight as an interested City of Madison citizen and taxpayer. I have been in this chamber very many times as Secretary to this Commission for 15 1/2 years, ending in 1998, and a fair number of times in the subsequent 11 ½ years but only to address planning and development issues involving the two civic projects I have had the privilege to lead the development of...the Wisconsin Institutes for Discovery and Overture Center for the Arts. This is the first time in the last 25+ years that I have come solely to speak in my own interest as a Madison resident.

I support the redevelopment of the Edgewater property and I hope that your deliberations will lead you to the same conclusion ... that the proposed redevelopment meets the goals of the City's Comprehensive Plan and the standards of the Planned Unit Development zoning. The Edgewater project will renew a tired but important property, add to the tax base, support the important meetings/tourism industry which is a vital element of our economy and our downtown and last but not least, reinforce the viability of the historic district adjacent to the hotel by adding to the vitality of this important neighborhood making it a more attractive place to own and restore the historic residences and properties. It is this broad view, through a balancing of all of these important and sometimes competing interests, that a truly remarkable project can emerge. It is through this lens that the Edgewater proposal, I believe, has earned and deserves your support.

In my brief comments this evening, there are two items I'd like to highlight. The first issue is the City's Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan is a large scale document and by its very nature, is not intended that a single project must meet every objective within the plan. It isn't a zoning map. For me, the key question is *"Does it generally meet the goals and objectives of the Plan when applied to this specific project?"* Through this lens, I believe the Commission can conclude the proposed project does generally meet the height recommendations for the Langdon Street Sub-District and that it will reinforce, as the Comprehensive Plan states in its vision section...*an urban environment characterized by a sensitive blending of carefully preserved older structures, high quality new construction, architectural gems, and engaging public spaces...*

The second item I want to address is the application of planned unit development zoning. I have heard from some of my neighbors in the University Heights Historic District near my home, that if the Edgewater project is approved, it will create a precedent and open the door to incompatible land uses popping up in historic districts throughout the City. I just don't believe this to be case. PUD zoning, by its very definition, is specific zoning for a specific parcel or parcels that must adhere to defined standards for approval. Projects requesting rezoning to a PUD zoning category are the most intensively vetted projects of any that are reviewed under the Madison Zoning Code, by design. Each PUD must stand on its own legs based on the specific set of facts and conditions involving the development and its relationship to the surrounding environment.

To conclude, I appreciate the care you are using to analyze the project before you. That is what is expected of you. Invariably, there are contradictions within a complex set of policies and standards that have to be carefully weighed when considering a project of this nature. In the end, however, I believe this project passes the many tests it has before it. I hope you will concur. In the future, if this project proceeds, I believe you will look back with considerable pride at what is being created here, and recognize that moving ahead with this project was the right thing to have done at the right time in our city's history.

Thank you.