

ADVISORY STATEMENT

BASSETT DISTRICT STEERING COMMITTEE REVIEW OF 2 S. BEDFORD STREET (BADGER BUS STATION SITE) REDEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

Introduction. Below is a summary of the outcomes of the Bassett District steering committee meetings of February 9th, February 16th, and March 3rd, 2009, regarding the current site of the Badger Bus Station at 2 S. Bedford Street. The committee met with Knothe & Bruce Architects, represented by Mr. Randy Bruce for the development team. This statement is not an expression of outright support or opposition to the project, but rather a summary of significant neighborhood issues and concerns that need to be addressed by the developer, the neighborhood, and relevant city review authorities if and when this project is considered for approval.

The attached appendix includes written comments by individual steering committee members addressing matters they believe to be significant.

Summary of Major Concerns

Building Heights, Massing and Setbacks. The major concerns involve the dominating 5-story building height along W. Washington and portions of S. Bedford, and resulting size inconsistency with nearby structures. This is Bassett's first multi-building mixed use proposal to place a 5-story structure on the property line facing the two corners noted above. Typical building heights are two to four stories in the Bassett neighborhood. It was noted that the project at 538 W. Washington (diagonally across the street to the NE) placed its 5-story apartment well back, behind a historic row of low-rise shops. The developer has indicated that building placements on or near the property lines will be consistent with adjoining and nearby buildings, and will not further obstruct the Capitol viewscape. To address the committee's concerns, as of March 3rd the architect had amended his drawings in an attempt to reduce the project's bulk and size as noted below:

- Tapered the 1st floor corner at W. Washington/S. Bedford to allow better traffic visibility and more pedestrian space.

- Used a "shed roof" treatment along S. Bedford to give a lower silhouette adjoining the sidewalk, covering the commercial store frontages.

- Reduced the 10 ft. studs to 9 ft. in height for all floors in all three buildings, lowering the 5-story structure by about six (6) feet. An overlay of the existing 4th Ward Lofts on W. Main Street (4-stories) was superimposed by the architect to show the relative heights, with the proposed 5-story building about 7 feet taller than 4th Ward Lofts' parapet wall.

- Eliminated the NE corner unit on 5th floor to reduce the bulk and create a roof patio.

- Used multiple light brick/masonry treatments to break up the solid dark brick mass.

- Emphasized that the proposed apartments on W. Main St. will be only 3-stories tall.

- Increased planted areas in the surface parking lot.

Unit density of 82 apartments/acre (with 31 of these having 2 bedrooms) was a concern to some committee members. However, the BNP allows for very high density (60+u/a) in this area. Also, a number of Bassett projects have exceeded 100 units/acre in the last seven years.

Major remaining issues include the precedent that would be set for 5-story structures in a neighborhood with newer structures no taller than four stories. The BNP states (pg. 32) “Bedford Street is an important edge to these residential districts (Bedford to Broom) and commercial development on Bedford should be scaled to fit the edge, much like Meriter Terraces has been designed to compliment the residential uses on S. Broom Street and W. Doty Street.” Further, the current residences on W. Washington are predominantly 2 or 3 stories with yards, side setbacks, and porches.

Historic Concerns. There was concern by some committee members that approval of this 5-story project would signal open season for Bassett developments of over four stories in the near future. It was feared that such developments would effectively destroy the residential, welcoming character of W. Washington’s 400/500 blocks and their human scale and traditional architecture. The proposed project is across the street from the historic Doris House and the former “cream city brick” grocery (office conversion) on W. Main Street. It is visually close to the well preserved 538 W. Washington retail/apartment development whose owners took great pains to retain the scale and classic architecture of the facades. Mr. Bruce was commended for the choice of traditional materials and design themes reflecting the character of Bassett’s loft/warehouse structures and thereby supporting their historic influence.

Traffic, Parking and Safety. This is a high traffic area with numerous activities both morning and night to draw visitors. Parking for events at Kohl Center, Overture Center, etc. place a premium on safe ingress/egress for vehicles and the resulting heavy pedestrian flows. The committee suggested a careful parking management review for this site since retail parking could be overwhelmed by off-site user impacts. The efficient use of technology (RFD tags and key cards, etc.) may help. Also, shared parking with day users (employees) and night users (residents) could maximize the available 97 underground spaces. Bike parking should also be included for visitors and residents. The architect has assured the committee that the site will have the maximum amount of below grade parking the parcel permits. Left turn controls will need to be discussed for W. Washington ingress/egress. Three driveways, one each on the three street exposures, are planned. The current taxi stand spaces on S. Bedford are proposed as metered parking, subject to city approval.

Economics. Informal comments from the development team indicate the economy will have a direct impact on the feasibility and timing of this project. While the Madison apartment market is currently healthy in this area, commercial space demand is weakening. Without commitments to fill a majority of the retail space, this project might not commence. The committee recommends that no site work or demolition approvals be granted until financing for the development has been confirmed. Otherwise, a neighborhood eyesore could result for an indefinite period. (Ref. Hilldale project)

Signage. The committee recommended careful control of retail signage, in keeping with the architectural themes. The choice of fonts, colors, materials, and size will be crucial to avoid damaging an otherwise attractive appearance. Exterior warning and safety notice signs should also be designed early, rather than being purchased “over the counter”. UDC review of signage concepts, particularly any marquees, should occur early in the process, and not as an afterthought.

Public Areas and Amenities. The architect is using the connector/bridge between the four and the five story buildings (facing Bedford) for common area spaces. The multi-story space is roughly 24' x 30' long and might include a management office, a commons room, and an exercise room. A roof terrace is planned, and the committee strongly recommends security cameras to monitor activities and prevent alcohol related problems. The committee recommended adding a second elevator to the project, and the architect has done so. The S. Bedford driveway/pedestrian courtyard access will have colored pavers or similar materials rather than asphalt or concrete. The architect has added more esthetic screening of the parking lot from the first floor apartments on the west side of the project. The committee has encouraged the maximum number of street trees and preservation of the mature trees now on the site's perimeter. Parking lot plantings are planned.

Mechanicals and Lighting. The mezzanine level on the west side of the retail space is the proposed location for mechanical elements. Low noise units are to be used and "echo effects" to be considered, given the nearby properties. The basement garage will also contain mechanical spaces. Exterior lighting is to be designed for "dark sky" compatibility.

Energy and Ecology. No determination has been made whether to use individual HVAC units or a centralized system. Hot water will be centrally sourced. A "green roof" concept has not been studied by the architect to date.

Process. To date, the steering committee has received prompt and courteous attention from the architect. The level of responsiveness to suggestions and the rapid updating of the preliminary drawings have been most helpful to these deliberations. We look forward to this level of transparency and professionalism as the review process continues.

Summary. The steering committee supports the growth of higher density mixed use projects in the Bassett district. More retail services along W. Washington can help existing merchants sustain their businesses and create the critical mass needed for greater foot traffic. Adequate parking must accompany the new retail, while new residential parking demands must be met on site, rather than overwhelming the inadequate amount of street parking now available. The architectural effort is to be commended regarding the choice of loft/warehouse concepts common to the neighborhood. The use of traditional materials, textures, colors, fenestration, and signage would be very compatible with other high quality projects nearby.

The key issues of project height (5 stories) and mass have yet to be resolved. The outcome of this effort could well determine the sustainability of the Bassett District's character and livability for decades to come.

Appendix: 4 memos from S. Knuti, steering committee member