



February 21, 2024

To: City of Madison Plan Commission

Re: Hovde Properties Requests for Demolition
Plan Commission Meeting Feb. 26, 2024, Legistar File No. 81556

Dear Commissioners,

Hovde Properties has filed a request to demolish the structures on six parcels near the corner of North Fairchild Street and West Mifflin Street.

In their land use application for Wisconsin Historical Society History Center the developer received permission from the City to use Mifflin Plaza as a construction staging area. Also, Hovde Properties agreed to provide access to the shared private alley behind the future History Center. Now Hovde Properties state they are concerned that the construction will impact the access to their properties. Their solution is to demolish the adjacent historic buildings so that their access is unimpeded.

The Madison Trust for Historic Preservation, an organization with more than 500 members, opposes the demolitions under the current circumstances and asks the Plan Commission to reject Hovde Properties' demolition application for all of these six structures.

Mifflin Arcade

All five of the buildings with addresses on West Mifflin Street were identified as contributing structures within a proposed and eligible State Street National Register Historic District approximately 20 years ago. The carefully prepared nomination document provides a clear context for their inclusion in a highly intact collection of commercial buildings constructed over the course of nearly 150 years.

Their decorative facades of terra cotta are excellent examples from a relatively brief period of American architecture when this material was often featured. Madison's surviving examples of this construction material are few. These five buildings were designed and built as a single project, the Mifflin Arcade, Madison's first ever "shopping center", tied to the rise in popularity of the automobile. Former Landmarks Commission chair, Anna Andrzejewski, identified the buildings as a product of an architect of note, Philip Homer. The Mifflin Arcade continues to tell the story of the intersection of retail and early car culture.

Union Bus Station

At its December 4, 2023, meeting, the Landmarks Commission reached the conclusion that the 15 N. Fairchild St. structure has "no historic value." However, in doing so, the Commission was relying on inaccurate information provided by both Landmarks Commission staff and by one of the commissioners. Had the commissioners relied on accurate information, they would have reached a very different conclusion.

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In the report prepared for the December 4 meeting, the staff said the following about 15 N. Fairchild St.

- Commercial building constructed in 1928 and remodeled in 1979.
- Preservation file identifies this wing as the mailroom for Wisconsin Power & Light Building [now Hovde Building].
- Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends a finding the building itself is not historically, architecturally, or culturally significant.

The presentation incorrectly identified the building as a “wing” and “mailroom” for the Wisconsin Power & Light Building at 122 W. Washington Ave. In fact, the Madison Trust had previously informed Commission staff, this “wing” had functioned for decades as the Union Bus Station. Once the function of the structure is correctly understood, the design and purpose of the structure makes complete sense.



The Union Bus Station fronting North Fairchild Street could accommodate twelve buses at a time. WHS Image ID 121195



View across street towards the Union Bus Station. WHS Image ID 58785

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View of Union Bus Station today. Photo by Bob Klebba.

Because of the lack of correct, complete and very significant information about this building, Landmarks Commission members concluded, that 15 N. Fairchild St. has no known historic value due to a dramatic loss of historic integrity. Plan Commissioners can see from these photos that the existing structure served as a vital transportation hub for decades, used by Badger Bus, Greyhound and other companies. This building was the gateway to Madison for thousands of visitors, Madisonians, and students for decades.

The Union Bus Station was designed in the late 1920s by Law, Law & Potter, an architectural firm of note. The Union Bus Station and the WP&L Building (now the Hovde Building) are intact and in the Art Deco style, a style that has relatively few remaining examples in Madison. The structure also qualifies as a “culturally significant” structure because, according to the preservation file not made available to the Landmarks Commission, it is the only building left in Madison connected with this form of transportation.

The Madison Trust requests that Plan Commission reject the Landmarks Commission’s findings that the building at 15 N. Fairchild St. has no known historic value due to a dramatic loss of historic integrity.

Request for Demolition

This is the third time in the last 25 years that Hovde Properties has sought to demolish buildings occupying much of block 75. In no instance has there been any articulation of a compelling rationale.

In its 2000 proposal, Hovde Properties wanted to demolish four of the five buildings along West Mifflin Street to create surface parking. That proposal was rejected. With respect to the current demolition application, Hovde President, Randy Guenther, stated, “*We have determined that without the demolition of the collection of properties referenced in our notice there will be significant issues that cannot be adequately mitigated otherwise. . . . The timeframe of our requested demolition next year is primarily being driven by the museum’s*

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[History Center's] *timeline for their project and the impacts that it creates.*" The owner is requesting, once again, to demolish these historically and culturally significant buildings for a parking lot. That is, a paved surface to allow access for the its neighbor's new construction.

There have been many recent downtown construction projects significantly larger than the Wisconsin Historical Society's History Center that have not required the demolition of adjacent properties, a good example being the Oliv at State Street between West Gorham and West Johnson Streets. At this location, a bike lane was closed on West Johnson Street, but for more than 6 months, 25,000 vehicles per day were able to drive by unimpeded.

Hovde Properties has set forth an inadequate and unsubstantiated excuse for demolition. We have not heard from the History Center developer that this space is needed. Without a doubt, the construction company can build the History Center using existing approved staging areas. Regardless, the neighbor's construction is a flimsy excuse to demolish these resources important to our shared cultural history.

The Madison Trust is opposed to the demolition of these historically significant buildings. This is especially the case when there is no proposed development for the properties. We encourage the Plan Commission to deny the demolition applications.

Sincerely,

Robert Klebba

Kurt Stege

Robert Klebba

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Madison Trust for Historic Preservation
Advocacy Committee Co-chairs