

Memo

To: Economic Development Committee
From: Smart Growth Greater Madison
Date: February 14, 2012
Re: Downtown Plan Additional Recommendations

Downtown Plan

Smart Growth supports the recommendations made by the Economic Development Subcommittee on the Downtown Plan (the Plan), and feels that there is progress towards better incorporating Economic Development goals in to the Plan. There are a few additional changes that we respectfully request the EDC consider with its recommendations to the Plan Commission.

- I. **Planned Development District Language.** Whereas the EDC recommended allowing for flexible heights and conditional use as a method to exceed height limits where appropriate, we would ask that the EDC also recommend a separate amendment to the City of Madison Zoning Code text that would eliminate the restriction on using the PDD process to exceed height limits in the Downtown districts. Under currently adopted zoning code text, there would have to be an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan, the Downtown District map, and then a submission of the project for further scrutiny. It seems consistent with the desired ends of the Committee to allow for heights to be considered throughout any process that would change the existing allowable redevelopment. The current language is as follows and includes the language we would ask EDC to support removing:
 - a. **Zoning Code Text: Planned Development Districts (3) Relationship to Other Applicable Regulations.** (a) In General. A Planned Development shall comply with all standards, procedures, and regulations of this ordinance that are applicable to the individual uses within the development. (b) Subdivision Requirement. All land within a Planned Development District shall be platted into one or more lots in compliance with the requirements of the subdivision and platting regulations. The development plan for the Planned Development shall include the necessary information to serve as a preliminary plat. ~~(c) Downtown Height Regulations. All Planned Developments within the Downtown Districts shall comply with the height limits of those districts.~~
- II. **Non-conforming use building language.** There has been discussion about buildings that currently would not be allowed to be torn down and restored to their existing height. Creating non-conforming use is a burden to property owners, and

may seriously limit the ability of the owners or potential investors to redevelop the properties. We ask EDC to include a recommendation in the Plan to permit all buildings to be able to replace themselves at their existing height.

III. Market Madison language.

- a. **Page 22 “The City should seek to address any real or perceived disadvantages that may be associated with Downtown so that it remains a priority location for business development.”** This is a great line, and recommendation 7 addresses it, however it focuses mainly on the University, while “other partners” get lost in the mix. Consider an Object 2.1 broken in two parts: 7(a) Work with the University to maintain and strengthen the role of education and research as major drivers of downtown employment, including the formation of business incubators and maker/hackerspace adjacent to the UW campus to encourage student and faculty entrepreneurship. (b) Support the creation of partnerships and/or coalitions that include philanthropic foundations, the business community, local and national nonprofits with the purpose of identifying ways to promote and enhance Madison as a place to grow or locate jobs.
- b. **Page 41: Building Heights.** The regional economic development entity THRIVE recently employed a consultant who emphasized that the area of marketing ourselves and our assets in one where Madison (and the region) is not doing a good enough job. An outsider reading the building heights section may be put off by references to “frequent source of contention”. Eliminating the first line of this section would get rid of that language without taking away from the description of the section. The same would hold for the last line of the second paragraph under Building Heights beginning with “The proposed heights are significantly...” Whereas it may appear to be wordsmithing, the message we want to send to potential outside investors is not one of contention and defensiveness, but rather an inviting City with many opportunities.

IV. Elimination of Recommendation 89. Consider establishing a Neighborhood Conservation District as identified in the Downtown Historic Preservation Plan.

As is the case with the call for Neighborhood Conservation Districts in Bassett and Mifflin, it is our belief that this is a process that should not be directed by a Comprehensive Plan, but rather should be an organic process that begins in the neighborhood, as is intentioned by the ordinance.