



Subject: Amendments to the *Report of the Lamp House Block Ad Hoc Plan Committee*

Legistar File ID # 86824

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Summary

The Robert M. Lamp House is a Frank Lloyd Wright designed structure located in the interior of the block bounded by East Mifflin St., North Butler St., East Washington Ave., and North Webster St. In 2013, recognizing that previous planning efforts in the area had not adequately considered the Lamp House as a historic and cultural community asset, the Mayor and the Common Council created the Lamp House Block Ad Hoc Plan Committee. The *Report* of that Committee was accepted and adopted by the Common Council in 2014 and has served to guide redevelopment in the vicinity.

Alder Bennett (Dist. 2) has requested that the *Report of the Lamp House Block Ad Hoc Plan Committee* be amended to remove or change recommendations related to maximum building heights and views to and from the Lamp House, and is sponsoring a resolution to make those changes. This staff report details amendments to the *Report* that would fulfill this request.

Background Information

The Robert M. Lamp House

The Robert M. Lamp House (the “Lamp House”) was constructed in 1903, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a locally designated landmark. As described in the *Report of the Lamp House Block Ad Hoc Plan Committee* (the “*Report*”), while the Lamp House is one of Wright’s most important surviving pre-WWI structures and is Wright’s earliest surviving work in Madison, it is also Wright’s most personal work in the city; Lamp and Wright were best friends from the time they met as children in the 1870s until Lamp’s death in 1916.

The building was sited and designed to optimize Lamp’s views of the capitol and Lakes Monona and Mendota and provide a suburban-like experience despite its placement mid-block and downtown. To achieve this goal, Wright added fill to increase the elevation of the highest point of the block which was already one of the highest points on the Isthmus, raised the basement well above grade level, and added a roof garden.

Although it was built in the middle of the block and surrounded by existing structures, many of which still exist (see the maps on page 5 of the *Report*), the relatively moderate size of the structures and spaces in between them provided public glimpses of the Lamp House from adjacent public streets – primarily from East Mifflin St. and North Butler St.

Report of the Lamp House Block Ad Hoc Plan Committee

The eight-member (including two alders) Lamp House Block Ad Hoc Plan Committee (the “Committee”) was established in 2013 (Legistar # 31386) “to advise the Plan Commission and the Common Council about an appropriate vision and special area plan for the Lamp House Block.” The Committee held seven public meetings

to inform their work, including a tour of the block and a public design workshop, which informed the *Report of the Lamp House Block Ad Hoc Plan Committee*.

The *Report* focused on elements of the surrounding built environment that were primary influences on Wright's design, and included recommendations regarding land use, preservation of historic resources, preserving views to the Lamp House, preserving views from the Lamp House towards Lake Mendota, and redevelopment goals for each block face.

The *Report* was referred to the Urban Design Commission, Landmarks Commission, and Plan Commission before being accepted by the Common Council on February 25, 2014 (Legistar file # 32645). The *Report* was subsequently adopted by the Common Council as a supplement to the *Downtown Plan* on March 4, 2014 (Legistar file # 33259). Implementation to date includes an effort to change the Downtown Height Map in the Zoning Code to reflect the recommendations in the *Report*. Although the Plan Commission recommended approval of these changes, on July 20, 2021, the Common Council considered, but did not approve, the proposed amendment to the Downtown Height Map in the Zoning Code (Legistar file #65918).

Proposed Amendments

The adopted *Report* can be found [here](#).

As indicated above, the Common Council did not approve changes to the Downtown Height Map as recommended in the *Report*, so that section is proposed to be amended to reflect that action.

Ald. Bennett has requested amendments to some of the *Report's* recommendations regarding preserving views from, and public views to, the Lamp House. These recommendations could present challenges for future redevelopment of adjacent parcels and providing some flexibility in these recommendations may support new construction while preserving the Lamp House site.

The proposed amendments would revise pages 15, 18, 21, and 22 of the *Report* as indicated in the as shown on the excerpted pages below.

C. Preserve Views to the Lamp House

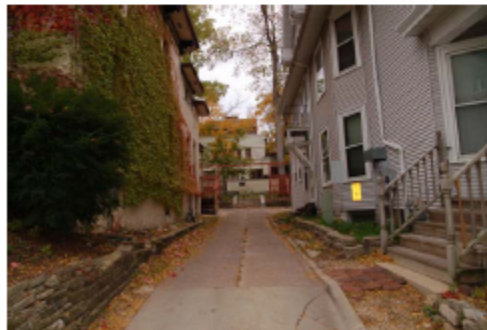
There are currently four direct views to the Lamp House from the street. These view corridors provide opportunities for the public to see the house and are important in helping visitors and passersby understand the Lamp House's unique context. These views have different priorities as described below. The yellow volume within the model of the block illustrates the existing view corridors into the Lamp House from the street.

View 1 should be preserved. Views 2 and 3 should be preserved if feasible. The feasibility of preserving Views 2 and 3 should be determined by the Plan Commission during the review of a development proposal, subject to Common Council approval in the case of a Planned Development. View 4 has been partially accommodated in a redevelopment project undertaken after the adoption of this report.



View 1: North Butler Street

The most important view to maintain is from North Butler Street. This view was created by the architect when he moved and altered the building at 18 North Butler to make room on the site for the Lamp House.



View 1: North Butler Street Lamp House Entrance

Recommended Maximum Height Map to Preserve Lake Mendota Views**Existing Maximum Heights****Recommended Maximum Heights****Maximum Building Heights**

- Maximum Number of Stories

CV - Capitol View Preservation Limit

The upper map to the left illustrates the recommended maximum building heights in the Downtown Plan as adopted in 2012, and subsequently incorporated into the Zoning Code. In 2021, the Common Council considered an amendment to change the existing Downtown Height Map in the Zoning Code which would have limited building heights to the north of the Lamp House to preserve views from it toward Lake Mendota as recommended in the original Report. That amendment was not approved. The lower map illustrates the recommended changes to the maximum building heights in this small area to preserve views of Lake Mendota from the Lamp House:

Recommended changes to allowed maximum heights:**Lamp House Block**

While protection of views could be addressed by a local historic district, any new development on the portion of the Lamp House block indicated with a 3* should be limited to a maximum of 3 stories not to exceed the height (in feet) of the peak of the existing structures.

Capitol North Parking Garage Block Redevelopment on the block located directly to the north of the Lamp House block has the potential for some of the greatest impacts on existing Lake Mendota views. Three changes have been proposed; the 8-story maximum has been limited to the western half of the block; the area indicated with a 3* should be limited to a maximum of 3 stories not to exceed the height (in feet) of the existing structure, and the northern portion has been reduced to 4** stories to match the rest of the James Madison Park Neighborhood.

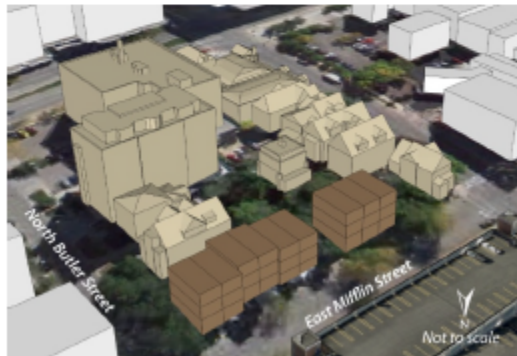
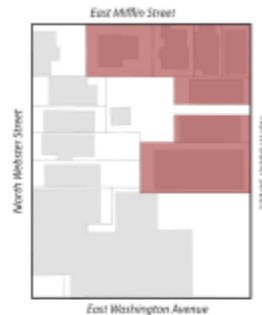
James Madison Park Neighborhood (4)**

Any proposals for buildings above 4 stories in the James Madison Park Neighborhood that lie within the Lamp House's Lake Mendota viewshed should be studied for their impact on the lake views from the house:

- F. Redevelopment alternative to preservation on East Mifflin and North Butler Street Block Faces** As described, the Committee's preferred recommendation is to explore eligibility for historic district designation on the northeastern quadrant of the block. However, to the extent that the preservation option is not realized, the following redevelopment recommendations seek to further the remaining priorities of the Committee.

East Mifflin Street and North Butler Street Block Faces

- No change in land use recommendations from Downtown Plan (Predominantly Residential).
- ~~Change in height recommendation: Peak roof heights should not exceed existing heights of buildings near the corner of East Mifflin and North Butler to preserve existing lake views.~~
- The front and rear walls of the existing buildings are generally acceptable as front and rear setbacks for redevelopment.
- ~~Street views into the interior of the block as identified along East Mifflin Street should remain, although not necessarily in their precise existing location.~~
- The North Butler Street entrance view of the Lamp House should be preserved.
- Redevelopment should enhance the character of the "outdoor room" in which the Lamp House sits by maintaining the setbacks currently established by the rear façades of the existing structures. Other measures to enhance the character of the "outdoor room" include using high quality architectural materials, darker tones to contrast with the lightness of the Lamp House, articulating façades that face the Lamp House, stepping down the mass of taller buildings toward the interior of the block, ~~providing gaps between buildings,~~ concealing mechanical equipment and utilities, and landscaping.
- Redevelopment proposals for this block face should be designed to reflect the historic scale and character of the street. Design approaches to achieve this could include, but are not limited to, façade articulation, high quality materials, front porches, balconies, individual and/or multiple street entrances, pitched roof forms, and other design techniques used to minimize the scale and massing of new buildings. **Massing diagrams are not approved as meeting design criteria, but are suggestions of a future outside range for potential development.*



This illustration shows the redevelopment potential of the northeastern portion of the Lamp House block while preserving the two houses that frame the Butler Street view of the Lamp House.

The following illustrations convey how potential redevelopment on the northeast corner of East Mifflin and North Butler Street should continue to respect the important Lake Mendota views from the Lamp House. The existing views are shown on the left and potential views, after redevelopment has occurred, are shown on the right:

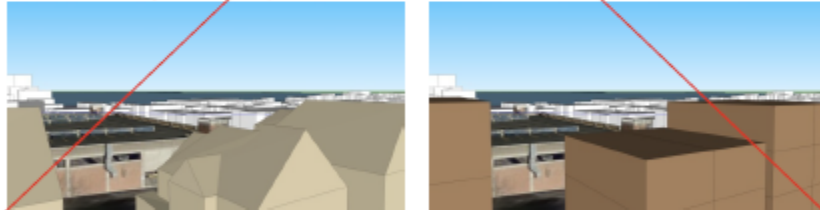
First Floor Views from the Lamp House toward Lake Mendota



Second Floor Views from the Lamp House toward Lake Mendota



Third Floor Views from the Lamp House toward Lake Mendota



Staff Comments

In response to the Alder's request, staff drafted the preceding amendments with the following intent:

Page 15 – The proposed changes are intended to prioritize the importance of View 1, while somewhat deprioritizing Views 2 and 3 and clarifying that the Plan Commission – and the Common Council in the case of a Planned Development – are responsible for considering the feasibility of maintaining views from East Mifflin St. when evaluating any future development proposal(s). The proposed changes also recognize that View 4 was impacted by the project on North Webster St. that was developed after the original *Report* was adopted.

Page 18 – In 2021, the Plan Commission and Common Council considered an amendment to the Zoning Code that would have changed the Downtown Height Map to reflect the recommendations in the original (2014) *Report*. Although the Plan Commission recommended approval of the amendment, the Common Council did not approve it (Legistar file #65918). The changes on page 18 reflect that history.

Page 21 – The changes proposed on page 21 are intended to reflect the changes described above on pages 15 and 18 as they pertain to the East Mifflin St. and N. Butler St. frontages.

Page 22 – The views on this page illustrate the potential impact of redevelopment on northerly views from the Lamp House towards Lake Mendota based on the maximum building heights recommended in the original *Report*. As described above, the Common Council did not approve changes to the Downtown Height Map therefore these illustrations will no longer reflect the *Report's* recommendations if the changes to page 18 are also adopted.

Recommendation

As described above, the recommendation in the *Report* related to maximum building heights was considered by the Common Council but was not approved. Given that action, staff agree that the *Report* should be revised to remove that recommendation and does not object to the proposed amendments that prioritize views from and into the Lamp House site. No other changes to the *Report* have been recommended, particularly as the *Downtown Plan* is slated to be updated within the next approximately two years, during which other issues related to this site can be considered.

If the Plan Commission believes that the proposed amendments are consistent with the overall goals and policies reflected in the *Downtown Plan* and *Comprehensive Plan*, staff recommend that Plan Commission recommend to the Common Council to adopt the resolution amending the *Report of the Lamp House Block Ad Hoc Plan Committee* as outlined herein.

If the Plan Commission does not believe that the proposed amendments are consistent with the overall goals and policies reflected in the *Downtown Plan* and *Comprehensive Plan*, staff recommends that Plan Commission recommend to the Common Council to place the resolution amending the *Report of the Lamp House Block Ad Hoc Plan Committee* on file, and request staff to consider this issue when the *Downtown Plan* is next updated.