

***Mansion Hill Historic District
Statement Regarding
Block 115 Development Proposal
June 2019***

Protect the integrity of the First Settlement Historic District

Our message is that it is imperative that the integrity of the First Settlement Historic District be protected. The project as currently proposed compromises the integrity of this historic district. Points of concern include but are not limited to:

- *Predictability.* As a city we should encourage people to invest their time, energy and money to restore structures within the historic districts of our city. To make the kind of emotional and monetary investment which rehabilitating a historic home in the downtown requires, there must be an ability to rely on the city to honor and protect the letter and intent of historic district ordinances. The current Block 115 proposal, if approved, would break that trust.
- *Approval of only appropriately scaled buildings.* Madison has five designated local historic districts comprising less than 1% of the city's land mass. There is a reason for requiring that new buildings be "of a height compatible with the structures within 200 feet of the proposed structure" (41.26(4)). To retain the overall integrity of the First Settlement Historic District adhering to this height requirement is critical. Contorting the ordinance to accommodate buildings of 5 stories when the buildings within 200 feet are predominantly two to three stories high, would show disdain for the intent and purpose of a historic district. The current block 115 proposal, if approved, would make a mockery of the phrase "of a height compatible".
- *Land Combinations.* MGO 41.18(4) states "The commission shall approve a certificate of appropriateness for land divisions, combinations, and subdivision plats of landmark sites and properties in historic districts, unless it finds that the proposed lot sizes adversely impact the historic character or significance of a landmark, are incompatible with adjacent lot sizes, or fail to maintain the general lot size pattern of the historic district." Given the small size of lots in the First Settlement Historic District, it appears that the combination of the lots as being requested for this development proposal would not be permitted under this ordinance.
- *Precedent.* Law is built upon precedent. To think that simply by declaring that the decision on construction, demolition and building heights in this local and national historic district would not have an impact on future decisions in other historic districts would be naïve and dangerous. The current block 115 proposal, if approved, would be looked on as a precedent, justifying inappropriate destruction of contributing properties and the construction of inappropriately sized buildings to the extreme detriment of historic districts and to the detriment of the look, feel, beauty, quality and interest of our city as a whole.
- *Protect contributing buildings in National Register districts.* The Downtown Plan notes on page 89: "Although National Register districts are not locally regulated, preserving the buildings within them identified as contributing buildings is a goal of this plan." 518 E. Wilson St. is a contributing building in the East Wilson Street National Historic District. This block 115 development proposal includes demolition of this contributing

building. The development proposal should comply with the Downtown Plan and retain this building which contributes to the unique character of this corridor.

- *Protection of existing structures.* Homes that contribute to the look and feel of the historic district should be maintained and protected. While this proposal does not include demolition of the homes on S Blair Street, it does not commit to rehabilitating the homes and the specter of another development proposal which would include demolition looms large. The Downtown Plan includes on page 57 for “First Settlement Recommendations” under “Recommendation 109”: “Rehabilitate existing housing...” A complete proposal for the property owned by the developer would include rehabilitation and protection of the houses.

In summary approval of the Block 115 proposal as currently constituted would harm not only the First Settlement Historic District but would also pave the way for the desecration of other Madison historic districts. Once damaged or destroyed there is no cure. We strongly urge you to protect the integrity of our historic districts.