



Department of Planning & Community & Economic Development

Steven R. Cover, Director

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November 10, 2011

Mr. George Austin
President, AVA Civic Enterprises, Inc.
2316 Chamberlain Avenue
Madison, WI 53726

RE: Proposal for the 100 Block of State Street

Dear Mr. Austin:

The purpose for this letter is to provide you with some initial comments on the concept plans you have recently presented regarding the redevelopment of six properties in the 100 block of State Street. Although no formal submittal has been made, due to the significant amount of public dialog that has already occurred, I wanted to provide you with our initial thoughts. Staff from my department recently met with Eric Lawson and Doug Hursh from your team and reviewed the proposal and the required steps in the development review process.

Based on that meeting, we understand that the project involves completely demolishing the buildings at 117-119, 121-123, 125 State Street, and rebuilding their State Street facades. The project also involves demolishing the building at 127-129 State Street and building a new structure in a style reminiscent of the original building. The project further involves demolishing the buildings at 120 and 122 West Mifflin Street. A new 2-4 story commercial building is proposed behind the State Street facades oriented towards a proposed private open space at the corner of West Mifflin and Fairchild Streets.

As you are aware, the buildings at 125 State Street (the Castle and Doyle Building) and 120 West Mifflin Street (the Schubert Building) are City of Madison historic landmarks. Buildings are designated as landmarks because their architectural/cultural contributions to the community are unique and should be preserved. Demolition of landmark buildings is something that the City takes very seriously and should only be considered in rare instances for truly extraordinary projects. In the case of 125 State Street, the deconstruction and reassembly of one building wall is not considered preservation as the entire building is designated as a landmark. However, there may be opportunities to adaptively reuse a more significant portion of that structure in a new project. Additionally, staff believes that there is also an opportunity to use all or a portion of the Shubert building at 120 West Mifflin Street as part of the larger project. The Department does not support the demolition of these landmark properties, and strongly suggests exploring ways to incorporate both buildings into the project.

The building at 122 West Mifflin Street, although not presently a landmark, is a classic limestone structure that staff believe is clearly eligible and worthy to be designated as such. The building appears to be in good condition and does not seem to be a candidate for demolition. It also holds the corner well and relates to the limestone façade of the historic Yost-Kessenich Building that was incorporated into the Overture Project. The Department does not support the demolition of this building.

In addition to the historic preservation issues, staff has a number of design-related concerns. Any new construction, addition, or major alteration in the C4 (Central Commercial District) shall conform to the Urban Design Guidelines for Downtown Madison. According to these Guidelines:

“While new buildings and major additions should possess their own character, design solutions that are obtrusive and present extreme contrasts with adjacent structures should be avoided. By respecting the proportion of window openings and doors of existing buildings, new structures and major additions will possess an appearance of ‘belonging’ rather than ‘intruding.’”

Our staff feels that the site plan, and the massing, scale, rhythm, and proportions of the proposed development disrupts the existing urban fabric along both its West Mifflin Street and Fairchild Street frontages. The structure’s design that is pulled away from the corner disrupts the pattern created by the surrounding buildings. Creating a private plaza at the corner also diminishes the sense of enclosure that is created by buildings that are close to, and oriented towards, the sidewalk.

The Urban Design Guidelines for downtown Madison and the C4 zoning recognize the special design challenges presented by the diagonal streets approaching the Capitol Square. These guidelines and the zoning on the property establish a four-story limitation for buildings along State Street but allow taller structures, up to eight-stories in the right angle portions of the blocks (i.e. the Fairchild/Mifflin Street corner) where no building is currently proposed. From a design perspective, if the desire is to create an open space for an outdoor eating area for a restaurant on the block, this could be achieved while still holding the corner of Fairchild and Mifflin Streets with the existing building. The guidelines recommend that new buildings should respect the existing scale, rhythm and proportions along State Street Mall.

Finally, the project is inconsistent with several recommendations in the draft Downtown Plan (scheduled to be introduced to the Common Council on November 15), such as:

- Establish building setback and/or build-to lines requirements that reflect the character of the areas in which the property is located...as a general rule...buildings in mixed use or non-residential areas should be setback between 0 and 10 feet from the front property lines (rec. 45);
- Preserve and rehabilitate significant older structures, including flat-iron buildings (in the State Street District) (rec. 65);
- Preserve and restore landmark buildings (rec. 161);
- Preserve triangle blocks and associated flatiron buildings and ensure that new development on parcels with acute angles follow that building form. (rec. 175).

In a previous meeting I have requested the floor plans of the existing buildings and elevations of the ground floor with notations noting the bearing walls within the structures. I would also like to know what other alternative design solutions you identified and evaluated which led you to arrive at the

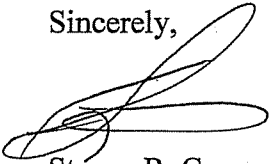
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proposed alternative. At this point, we are not convinced that you cannot utilize the existing buildings on the block to achieve a desirable project.

In conclusion, staff does not support the project in its current iteration. I strongly encourage you to reconsider your approach. We would be happy to discuss this project as the design evolves to arrive at a project that achieves your goals while addressing the concerns outlined in this letter.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this project further, please let me know.

Sincerely,



Steven R. Cover, *AICP*, Director
Department of Planning and Community and Economic Development

c: Mayor Paul. R. Soglin
Anne Monks, Assistant to the Mayor