

March 7, 2024

City of Madison Planning Commission
201 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. Madison, WI 53703

Re: Agenda # 81560 for Planning Commission Meeting on March 11, 2024

Land Division Proposal at 1908 Arlington Place, University Heights

To the Members of the Planning Commission, City of Madison:

My name is Monica Messina, and I am a resident of 1917 Kendall Ave in University Heights.

My husband, Ernesto Livorni, and I signed the “Petition for Appeal” (“Petition) of the Landmarks Commission’s recommendation February 12, 2024 filed by Lester Pines.

Just as I wrote to the Landmarks Commission for the February 12 hearing, I am writing to the Planning Commission to express concerns about a new homeowner’s proposed reshaping of lot lines in the University Heights historic district. The new configuration will have an impact on the historic character of the neighborhood, as outlined in the 41.18 ordinance regarding land divisions (“Standards for granting a certificate of appropriateness”). The proposal harms the historic character because it

- 1) disregards that 1908 and 1902 Arlington Place were the first homes built in Block 9
- 2) disregards the architect’s siting of 1908’s front porch and front lawn
- 3) is inconsistent with the comparable Arlington Place homes’ lot sizes.

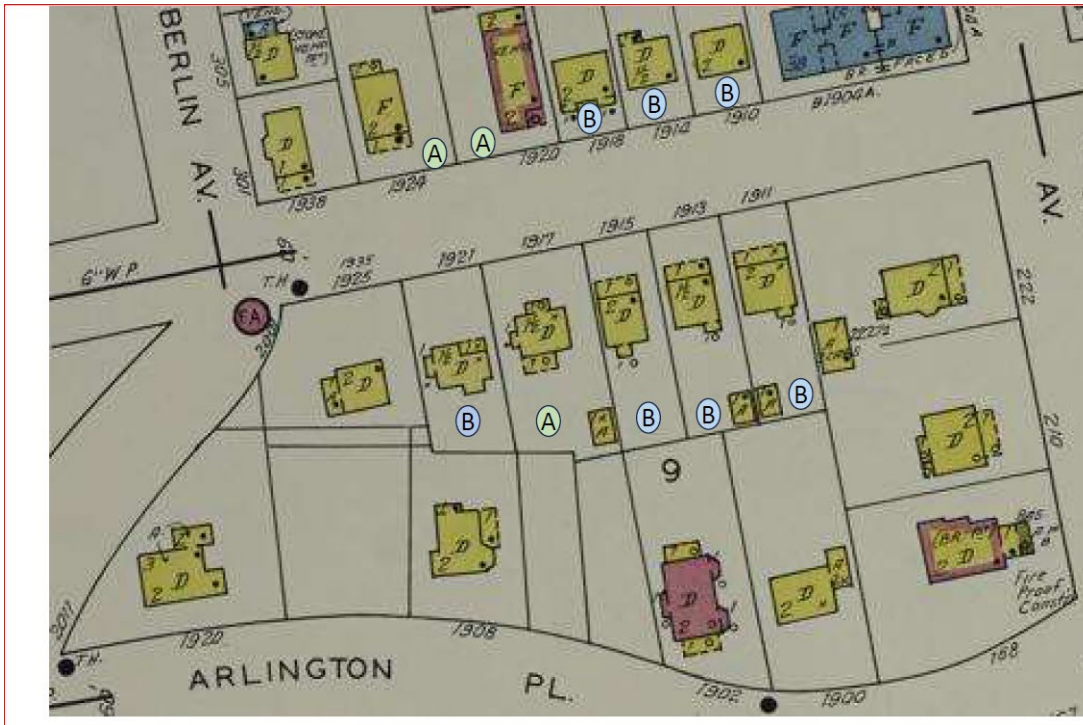
Moreover, there is an important concern, noted by Lester Pines and the Petition, that the Landmarks Commission has failed to carry out its charge. More specifically, I wish to note that the Landmarks’ Staff Report to the Commission Members reflects an alarming readiness simply to accept the new owner’s interpretation of “appropriateness” and comparability. The Landmarks staff appears not to have gone further than to review the materials (maps, drawings) submitted by the new owner. In other words, there was no evidence of an assessment of the area’s development and platting history. I strive to provide some of that evidence here through a consideration of

- 1) Map Selection
- 2) Block 9’s Historic Development (especially its first 2 decades)
- 3) Inconsistent lot sizing proposal

1) Map Selection

The new buyers of 1908 Arlington Place arbitrarily reference **1942 Sanborn Fire** Insurance maps (https://tile.loc.gov/image-services/iiif/service:gmd:gmd412m:g4124m:g4124mm:g09603194202:09603_02_1942-0322/full/pct:25/0/default.jpg) to make the claim that the divided area between 1908 and 1902 is “consistent with the historic platting of the district.” See **Figure 1**. However, the Sanborn maps are **not** land surveying maps, were often revised, and may not accurately reflect the historic platting recorded with the city.

Figure 1. 1942 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map submitted by Bryan Rieber, new owner of 1908 Arlington Place.



In direct contrast, please see the Lot lines in **Figure 2**, which is an image from the **2017 City of Madison CSM Platting** (<https://data-cityofmadison.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/cityofmadison::plat-csm-lot-lines/explore?location=43.072149%2C-89.418698%2C17.00>). These lines show 6 drawn lots on Arlington Place with a full-sized lot between 1908 and 1902 Arlington Place which has remained unoccupied by any structure.

Figure 2. 2017 City of Madison Open Data showing Plat CSM Lot Lines on Block 9, University Heights.



Figure 3. 1954 Derr Map Studio. Lot 9=1908 Arlington Place; Lot 11=1902 Arlington Place; Lot 10 (green arrow)=shared empty lot.



ITEM #US64833
 Page 076 - Sec 22 - Madison City, University of Wisconsin, University Heights, Kendall Terrace, Randall Park
 From Dane County 1954, Wisconsin
 Published by Derr Map Studio in 1954
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As another example, there are 1954 historical maps (by Derr Map Studio - <https://historicmapworks.com/Map/US/64833/Page+076+++Sec+22+++Madison+City++University+of+Wisconsin++University+Heights++Kendall+Terrace++Randall+Park/Dane+County+1954/Wisconsin/>) that show a **single Lot 10** between 1908 and 1902 Arlington Place with a dotted line presumably indicating shared ownership of this lot. Note: Lot 10 on this map is consistent in size with the other lots on Arlington Place. See **Figure 3** (green arrow added):

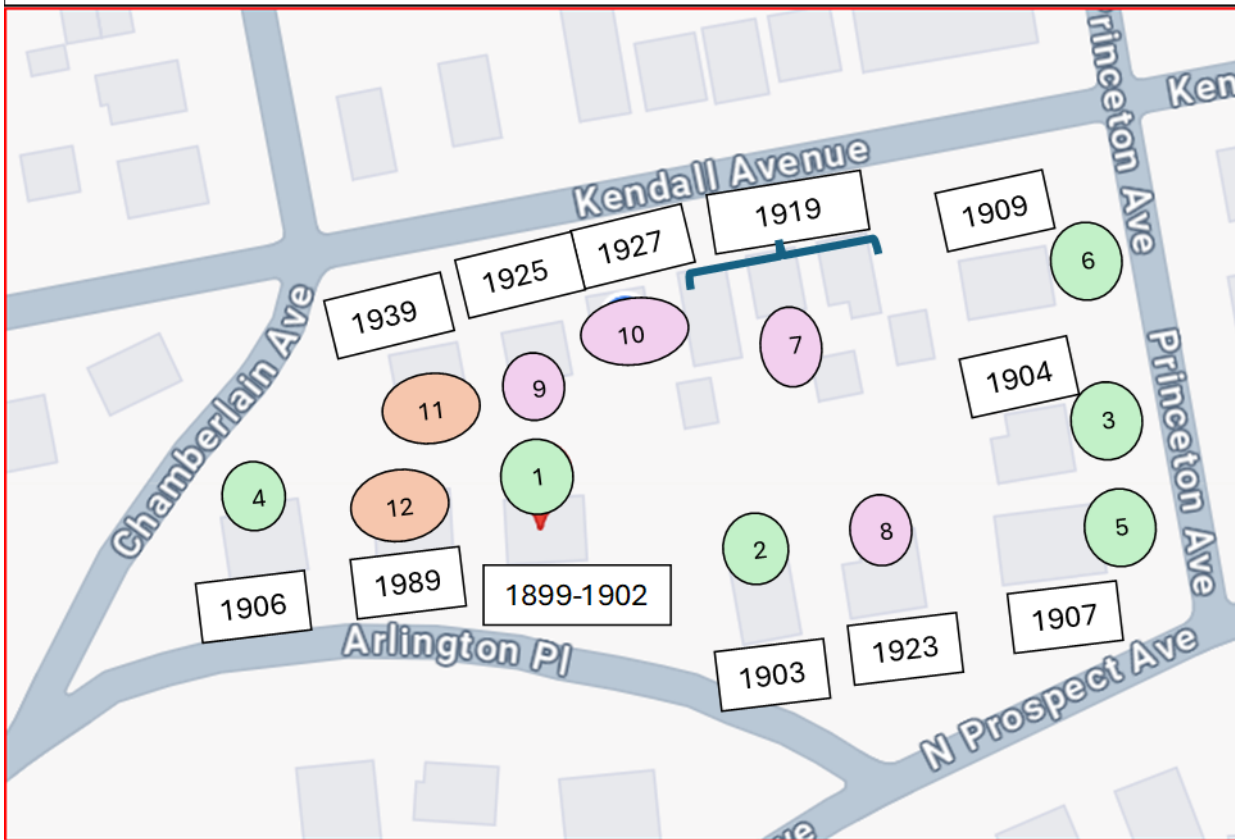
Of significance in the 1954 map (Figure 3) is the section of Block 9 along Princeton Ave that is marked as “**Replat of lots 1, 2, 13 & 14,**” which consolidated 4 lots down to 2. As a result, only 3 (rather than 5) homes were sited on this side of Block 9. Arguably, this replatting occurred as a result of the precedent established by the spacious siting of 1908 and 1902 Arlington Place, the **first homes** built in Block 9.

2) Block 9’s Historical Development

The area’s development history is integral to the character of the district; here is text from the National Register (<https://wisconsinhistory.org/Records/NationalRegister/NR1963>; emphasis added): “Construction on this hilltop neighborhood began in **1894**. Large, impressive homes were clustered just below the summit, while **smaller houses** were built in the **north portion** of the development.”

The University Heights subdivision was born in 1894, and the first homes on Block 9 were 1908 Arlington Place (construction date listed as either 1899 or 1902) and 1902 Arlington place (construction date 1903). These first two homes on Block 9 are indeed “large, impressive homes” that were sited leaving the open lot 10 between them. Each home’s front entrance faces east (looking towards/having a view of campus and not the street). The siting makes it clear that the owners of these homes had established that they would share the lot (lot 10) between them (a front lawn for 1908; a back yard for 1902) that is proportional to the sizes of these inaugural homes in Block 9. Please see **Figure 4** to grasp the siting history of Block 9’s development.

Figure 4: Construction dates of homes in Block 9 of University Heights. #1 is 1908 Arlington Place and #2 is 1902 Arlington Place.



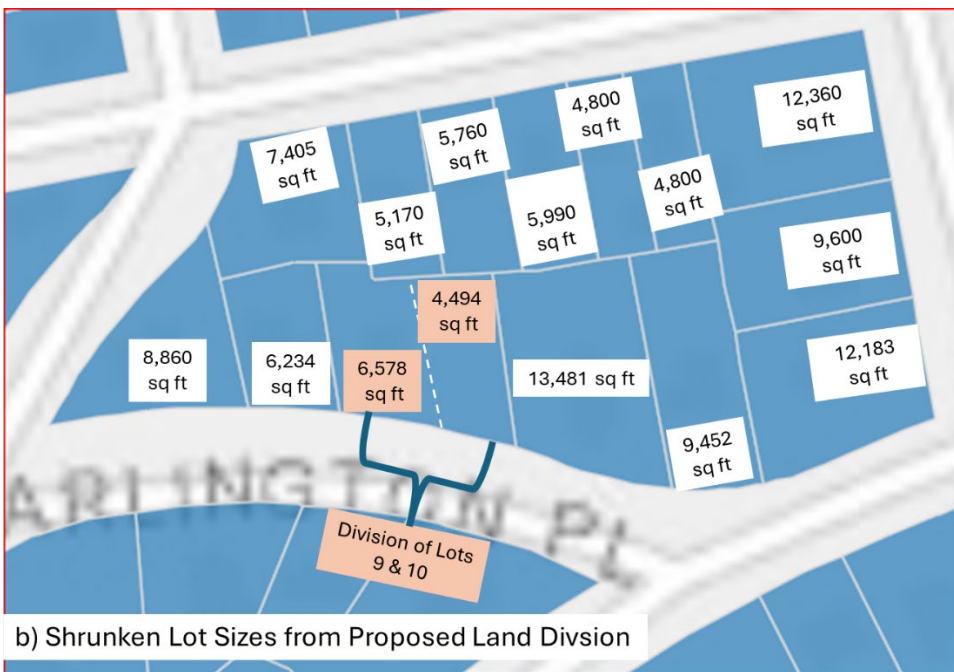
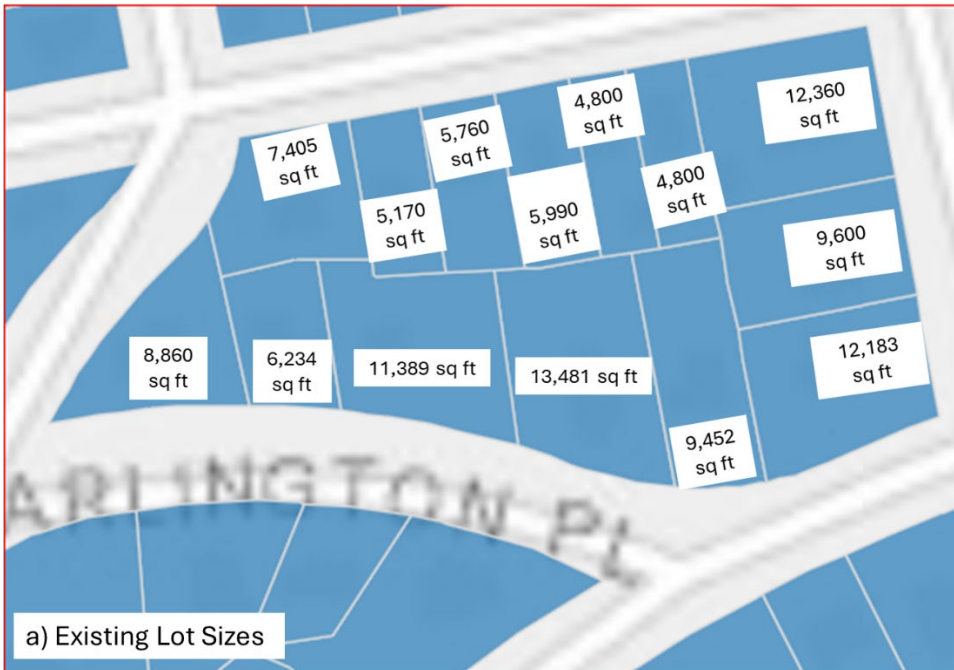
Looking at Figure 4, we see that 1908 and 1902 Arlington Place set a precedent for the next 4 homes built between 1903-1909, which are large and spaced out. In fact, 3 of the 4 occupy the larger replatted lots on Princeton St (#3, 5, 6 in green). The next 3 homes were built in 1919 (#7 in Figure 4) on Kendall Ave. These homes are smaller and occupy smaller lots as described by the National Register (“**smaller houses** were built in the **north portion** of the development”).

3) Inconsistent Proposed New Lot Size

The current buyers of 1908 Arlington Place have made the claim that their proposed new lot is consistent with the district because the size of those lots are comparable to the smaller lots on the Kendall Ave side of Block 9. This is false: the **new lot will be the smallest area in Block 9 at only 4,494 sq feet in Block 9**. The next smallest lots are not on Arlington Place but at 1911 and 1913 Kendall Ave and measure **4,800 sq feet each**.

Please see **Figure 5** (<https://data-cityofmadison.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/0338b0638e4749c395f8d38b39a5c466/explore?location=43.071472%2C-89.417648%2C17.80>) taken from the city’s current tax parcel map showing a) current lot square footage and b) proposed new lot’s square footage.

Figure 5. Square Footage of Block 9 Lots from City Tax Parcel Maps



Conclusion

In summary, the new owner of 1908 Arlington Place has made a false comparison and used maps of convenience as a means to circumvent or disregard the actual historic development and character of Block 9 in University Heights. Likewise, the Landmarks Staff's recommendation that the proposed land division meets a "Certificate of Appropriateness" would appear to neglect the office's charge of historic preservation.

Please note: when I attended the Landmarks Commission hearing on February 12, it was unclear if the Members of that Commission had reviewed the statements submitted by myself and other neighbors. Since I do not know if Planning Members will have reviewed all submitted comments, I will register to speak at the meeting so that I can verbally submit my concerns.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Monica Messina
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nikmess@hotmail.com