


CITY OF MADISON  
**INTER-DEPARTMENTAL**  
CORRESPONDENCE

DATE: November 15, 2011

TO: Mayor Soglin and Members of the Common Council

FROM: Steven Cover, AICP, Director   
Department of Planning and Community and Economic Development

SUBJECT: Downtown Plan Letter of Transmittal

The Department of Planning and Community and Economic Development is pleased to submit the attached Downtown Plan for your consideration. The Downtown Plan presents a vision for the future and provides a comprehensive set of recommendations to guide decisions for the next twenty years. The vision and recommendations are organized around nine keys for the future, including:

- Key 1: Celebrate the Lakes
- Key 2: Strengthen the Region's Economic Engine
- Key 3: Ensure a Quality Urban Environment
- Key 4: Maintain Strong Neighborhoods and Districts
- Key 5: Enhance Livability
- Key 6: Increase Transportation Choices
- Key 7: Build on Historic Resources
- Key 8: Expand Recreational, Cultural, and Entertainment Offerings
- Key 9: Become a Model of Sustainability

The planning effort began in 2008 and relied heavily on a very inclusive public participation approach throughout. There were over 125 group meetings with property and business owners, neighborhood and community groups, City boards and commissions, and many others with an interest in the future of Downtown, representing well over 2,250 individual personal contacts. In addition, there were countless smaller meetings and contacts with individuals.

The future of the Mifflin neighborhood was a frequent topic of discussion throughout the planning process. Meetings on this topic were held with the Urban Design Commission, Plan Commission and others. The draft recommendations, released in September 2010, reflected the direction provided by the Plan Commission at that time and is unchanged in the attached plan. However, debate on this area has continued and several potentially viable alternatives have been suggested. Included below is one of those alternatives and is provided for comparison and to facilitate the discussions as the Downtown Plan is considered by City boards, commissions, committees, and the Common Council. The alternative is provided in its entirety, and if this (or another) alternative is chosen, the following material would replace the Mifflin section on pages 51-52 of the plan, and the Maximum Building Heights Map on page 42 would be revised as illustrated below to accommodate this alternative, as would the Maximum Building Heights – Bonus Story Criteria in Appendix C.

## Mifflin - ALTERNATIVE

The Mifflin district is known for its abundance of student rental housing, predominantly characterized by houses that were divided into apartments years ago. A majority of the existing structures in the Mifflin district, though structurally sound, are in need of significant cosmetic improvements as well as general upgrading and modernization. Many of the existing buildings are only marginally maintained and many have been altered extensively on the interior. As a consequence of decades of deferred maintenance, significant reinvestment would be required for most of this housing to become attractive to a wider range of residents. Most back yards are used for parking, with many rented out to downtown commuters. Overall, however, the Mifflin district still retains a physical sense of place, and a consistent scale and rhythm along the street is created by the regularity of building forms in these largely intact blocks. The area also retains a strong sense of identity within the community-- whether rooted in the area's historic ties to the 1960s counter culture and the anti-war movement, the annual block party, or its role in providing affordable housing opportunities for university students.

*Objective 4.3:* The Mifflin district should evolve into a neighborhood that is attractive to a wide range of residents. This could be accomplished through offering a wider variety of housing types that will be attractive to both owners and renters. The integration of new large and small scale residential projects should be intermingled with select groupings of restored older buildings to create a vibrant and varied urban neighborhood.

*Recommendation 66:* Develop a detailed comprehensive implementation strategy for this area.

*Recommendation 67:* Update the Downtown Design Zone standards for the Mifflin area to implement the concept plan and incorporate them into the Zoning Ordinance as appropriate.

*Recommendation 68:* Prioritize the redevelopment of 1960s era "zero lot line" residential sites.

Because the housing stock continues to slowly deteriorate with little incentive to invest in improvements, maintaining the status quo for this area is not considered a realistic or desirable long-term solution. Although there are several potentially viable approaches to enhancing the future of the Mifflin district, this Plan recommends an approach that will evolve a strong, but more-urban sense of place by introducing significant opportunities for new residential development that will provide a wide variety of housing options attractive to a broader mix of residents. This approach proposes that much of the area be redeveloped over time with a combination of larger footprint buildings of up to six stories in height, smaller multi-family buildings, townhouses, and two- and three-flat buildings. This new development should occur in concert with the conservation and rehabilitation of select groupings of older structures with architectural or historic interest to create an environment that is dense and dynamic while retaining some physical linkages with its historic past.

A central element of the recommended approach is incorporating many of the features of the house-like building forms that currently define the area into new developments. These could include generous front porches, providing multiple front entrances in multi-unit buildings, building form and articulation that reflects the rhythm of existing houses, and maintaining a consistent front yard setback. In general, it is not expected that the majority of the existing houses will be preserved over the longer-term (unless they are historically significant); however, rehabilitating the existing houses would be consistent with the concept, and preservation of select groupings of the better older buildings is an integral part of the recommendation.

For the recommended concept to be realized, a comprehensive and coordinated implementation plan will need to be developed to guide incremental development by multiple property owners over what may be an extended period of time. To create a truly engaging and attractive urban neighborhood, it is essential that means be created to encourage cooperation among owners and developers to create “whole block” or “half block” solutions that look at the Mifflin district as a whole, rather than depend upon *ad hoc* responses to piecemeal proposals that primarily reflect the vagaries of property assembly patterns.



*Mifflin Concept – plan view*



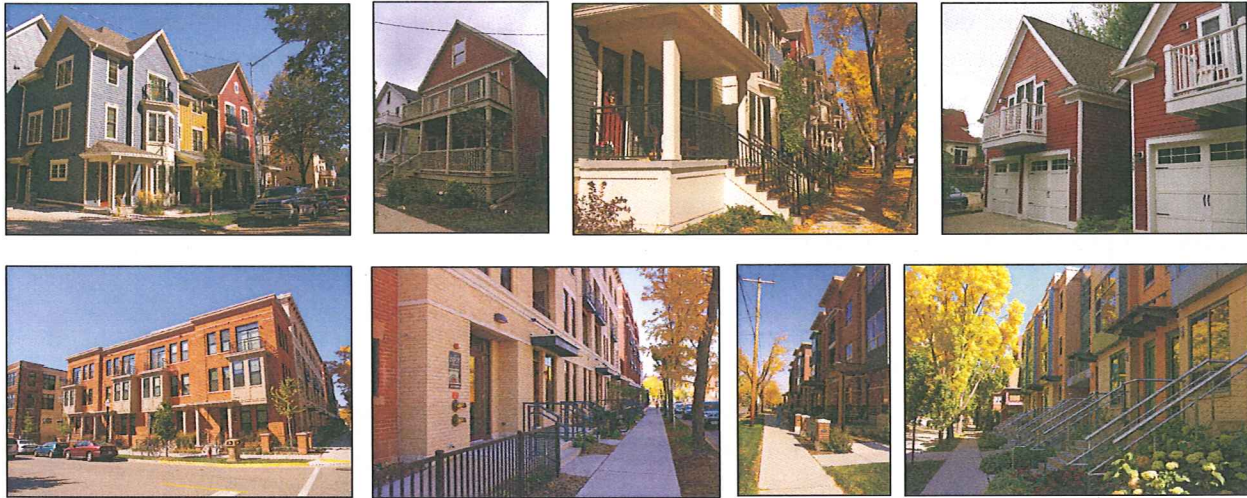
*Mifflin Concept – looking west*



*Mifflin Concept – bird's eye view*

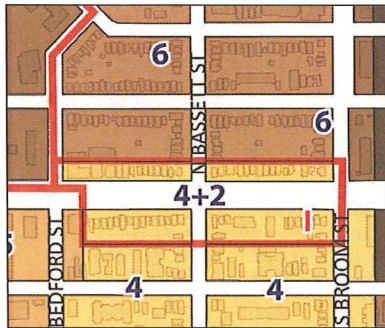


*Mifflin Concept – street view*



*Representative images illustrating important design principles of the Mifflin Concept, including front porches, varied rooflines (including gable roof forms), a consistent rhythm of building bays, multiple building entrances to individual units, and high-quality building materials.*

#### Appendix C: Maximum Building Heights – Bonus Story Criteria: Mifflin – ALTERNATIVE



#### Bonus Area I (West Washington)

These two blocks of the West Washington Avenue frontage are located between the Bassett District with a four story height limit on the south, and the Mifflin District with a six story height limit on the north. Portions of this frontage have identified development potential, and four-to-six store structures would be generally compatible along this relatively wide street characterized by wide terraces and canopy trees. However, these blocks also include many quality older buildings whose long-term preservation should be encouraged. To promote preservation of better older structures while allowing for increased development intensity along the Avenue, up to two bonus stories may be considered for projects within Bonus Area I that:

- 1) Incorporate the restoration of one or more older high-quality existing buildings into the project to ensure their preservation and restoration; and
- 2) Ensure that the scale, massing and design of new buildings creates a pleasing visual relationship with older structures preserved within the project or adjacent to it, and with buildings in the abutting neighborhoods to the north and south.

Note that the rear portions of lots fronting the north side of West Washington Avenue are in an area with a six story maximum height limit, and no additional bonus is available there.

We look forward to discussing this plan with you and the boards, commissions, and committees that will be reviewing it as it proceeds through the review and approval process in the coming weeks. Please feel free to contact me or my staff if you have any questions or if you would like additional information on the plan. Members of the Downtown Plan Staff Team are listed inside the front cover of the plan. Thank you.