

Date: July 12, 2021
To: City of Madison Plan Commission Members and Planning Staff
From: George Hall, past president and co-founder of Wright in Wisconsin, Inc.
Re: July 12 Plan Commission Agenda Item 3: Amending Section 28.071(2)(a) of the Madison General Ordinances to amend the Downtown Height Map

1. This is not my first encounter with the Robert Lamp House, as some 20 years ago the home was included in one of our “Wright and Like” architectural tours. More recently, in concert with fellow historic preservationists, I provided testimony in support of the Robert Lamp House at various Madison commission hearings that, after the 2014 Robert Lamp House Block Ad Hoc Committee Report (“Report”), preceded approvals enabling construction of the AC Hotel and Capitol’s Edge developments on East Washington Ave., and North Webster Street. Now, seven years later, much has changed since the 2014 “Report.”

2. I appreciate that the proposed amendment partially follows from the recommendations contained in the 2014 “Report.” Unfortunately, the limited scope of the “Report” does not consider the actual preservation of the house and what it will take to achieve a respectful and fungible outcome enabling restoration and sustaining the viability of this National Historic Landmark, an important early part of Frank Lloyd Wright’s long career. The Lamp House is Mr. Wright’s earliest remaining building in Madison, and exemplifies the decades-long friendship Mr. Wright shared with his boyhood friend, Robert Lamp, until Lamp’s death in 1916.

3. The view scape on which this ordinance amendment is based was already compromised in 1903 when Lamp was constructed, and again in 1913 when Robert Lamp enclosed the roof-top terrace to create a playroom for his adopted son. The views of Lake Monona were lost long ago. As for the Capitol building, this view is now gone as well. As we now can see from this private residence, with foreground roofs and trees visibly intruding, only a few horizon views of Lake Mendota are achieved. Three of the four buildings whose roofs intrude were erected prior to the construction of Lamp. Now, one of the most prominent visible features is the water tower behind the Dane County Health and Human Services building, located above Northport Drive. See attached photos, taken with permission this past May. The proposed ordinance change will not improve the limited lake view from this private residence.

5. Given existing parcelization (with several ~30x~70-foot lots), the Downtown Plan and associated codes, and the interplay of related city guidelines, goals, and objectives affecting Block 109 and the surrounding neighborhood to the north and west, I urge deferring adoption of this zoning amendment until a range of feasible options can be developed for all of the remaining 19th- and early 20th-century properties (albeit with only two owners involved) included in the “Report,” with every option including the restoration and long-term preservation of the Lamp House as one of the objectives. Perhaps due to lack of time, little consideration was given to this issue in the “Report,” and that’s what most concerns those of us interested in finding a long-term preservation solution for the Robert Lamp House. If necessary, consider setting a return date for placing this amendment before the Plan Commission.

6. If the amendment is adopted, at least consider including a footnote stating that adoption does not preclude future consideration of a planned development district. So much more needs to be known, and relevant stakeholders need to be involved.

7. Thank you very much for your consideration. I’m happy to cooperate and participate with all stakeholders in this endeavor.

Mansion Hill above rooftop at 209 Mifflin St.



First view of Lake Mendota above 215 Mifflin St.



Continuing northwest



Looking towards corner of E. Mifflin St. and N. Butler St.



TO: Members of the Plan Commission
FROM: Nan Fey, Chair, Lamp House Ad Hoc Committee
RE: Downtown Height Map Amendment, Legistar File #65918
DATE: July 12, 2021

I write as both former chair of the Plan Commission (2002-2012) and Chair of the Lamp House Block Ad Hoc Committee (2013-2014) in support of the “recommended maximum heights” diagram (found on page 18 of its [Final Report](#)) as the best guidance to preserve the Lake Mendota view from this historic landmark into the future. The diagram has been labeled the [Alternative Amendment](#) which is somewhat confusing because it was the committee’s proposal in the adopted report.

I am aware of the new remote sensing data, and the fact that the 209 E. Mifflin Street house was built (in 1899) just prior to the Lamp House (1903). With this map amendment, the City of Madison has an opportunity to enhance the context of this historic landmark and guarantee the only remaining lake view from a home that was designed with that purpose – especially now that all views of Lake Monona have been blocked – by setting some clear guidelines for development in the Lake Mendota view shed pictured on pages 11, 16-17 of the report.

While the decision before the Plan Commission this evening concerns only a Zoning Text Amendment to the Downtown Height Map, the following suggestions are worth noting to further protect the views and value of the Lamp House:

1. Consider deed restrictions on the city-owned parcel to ensure an aesthetic transition from the 8 stories allowed on the western half of the block to 3 stories on the east.
2. Set guidelines for how tall (measured from city datum) any building along East Mifflin Street, new or redeveloped, can be (including projections) in order to preserve the view from the Lamp House to Lake Mendota.
3. Set guidelines for maintaining “public views” of the Lamp House from East Mifflin Street in the event of redevelopment; the recent building on North Webster Street has already altered views 3 and 4 noted on pages 15-16.



FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT BUILDING CONSERVANCY

July 12, 2021

City of Madison, Planning Commission
pccomments@cityofmadison.com

Subject: July 12, 2021, Meeting Agenda Item regarding Amend Downtown Height Map

Dear Members of the Plan Commission:

The Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy is the only organization dedicated to facilitating the preservation and stewardship of the remaining built works of Frank Lloyd Wright worldwide. In the past, we have written to the City of Madison in support of the city's adoption of the 2014 Lamp House Block Ad Hoc Plan Committee Report, and expressed our concerns in 2015 about the height of the buildings surrounding Frank Lloyd Wright's Robert Lamp House.

We are writing to communicate our support of the proposed amendment to the downtown height map in the City of Madison's Zoning Ordinance, and ask the city to give future consideration of possible redevelopment schemes that could make the future of the Robert Lamp House more viable than how it currently sits landlocked in a well of higher buildings.

Over the last several months, we have been in communication with the owner of the Lamp House, as well as local preservation advocates, to discuss the future of this building and to understand a viable path towards its sustained use and preservation. We recently commissioned a condition assessment of the building done by Isthmus Architecture. This assessment shows that the building is in fair condition overall and is structurally sound despite recent development threats from adjacent properties. The house itself retains a large majority of its original character-defining features, both inside and outside.

The most significant loss to the integrity of this building is the long-ago obliteration of its original view shed, which was paramount to Wright's design, and the more recent loss of open space by new, taller structures to the south that now envelop and over-shadow the property. The ongoing preservation goal for this building will be finding a sustainable use that supports restoration and continued preservation in an area of ever-increasing density.

The future of the Lamp House and its preservation is an important task for the City of Madison, as so emphatically recognized in the Ad Hoc Plan Committee Report.

We would like to use this opportunity to urge the planning commission and the city of Madison to consider a larger, sustainable vision for the future of this important house that provides a holistic development scheme for all of the parcels in play, and considers sensitive and appropriate development on the block and in the surrounding area. This should balance the preservation and economic viability of the house and surrounding properties with desired development objectives for the area.

Keeping the house in its status quo as a student rental with no available parking, and sandwiched in the backyards of larger buildings will lead to its continued deterioration and decline. Allowing more density and insensitive development to continue to overwhelm the house in its current location would substantially diminish the significance and visibility of this historic landmark.

The Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy stands ready to work with the City of Madison and the owner to find a solution to the sustained future of this house. In keeping with the preservation and enhancement of the cultural and historical assets of Madison and its downtown area, we urge you to take additional action to safeguard this unusual work by America's most prominent architect.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Barbara H. Gordon". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Barbara Gordon
Executive Director