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Members of the Madison Common Council,

Good evening. I supported this project when it was considered by the Landmarks Commission back in February. I want to take this opportunity to reinforce and clarify my position.

Without question the Mansion Hill Historic District is one of downtown's major assets.

Decisions about contextual infill design within the historic district must be made prudently, with careful thought, in consideration of the district as a whole and in relation to City wide objectives.

The Landmarks Commission's recent evaluation and decision was based upon criteria primarily related to the Visually Related Area. A small 200' circle. This is a very valid criterion, but in my opinion only one of three levels of contextual consideration that should be utilized given contemporary Preservation Planning methodologies.

Compatible design should follow the district wide vocabulary or pattern. In this case I believe it is as important as the context of the immediate area or surroundings. Compatible design should certainly be respectful of the historic resources within the district and must be in balance with contemporary needs of the greater community.

The Visually Related Area which looks at 200ft diameter area adjacent to the property is an excellent criteria for homogenous neighborhoods, where the neighborhood is defined by uniformity of building type, style or similar scale, as is the case with the Marquette Bungalows or Wingra Park National Historic District.

The Mansion Hill Historic District is drastically different. It is characterized by variety and diversity of building type, style, size and height. From single family residential properties like 123 W. Gilman, to small multifamily buildings like 141 W. Gilman. There are also large multifamily properties like Kennedy Manor, The Ambassador on Pinckney St. and apartments at 408 N. Henry. The district is a diverse collection of property types and sizes.

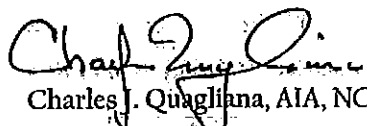
For a district like Mansion Hill it's not just about what is next door, it's about the broad pattern or overall character of the neighborhood, what makes it distinctive.

I suggest the two other levels of Context Consideration should be the sub area and the entire district.

The subarea focuses on the collection of buildings, sites and structures within the boundaries of a several block radius. In this context we would see other 3-4 story brick apartment buildings that the proposed building relates to in terms of materials, proportion, scale and volume.

The third level of context should be district wide. The proposed design works very well with the general character of the district, that is, a mix of small and medium and large buildings.

In closing, I believe it is important for new infill design to be evaluated by a broader set of criteria than is presently within the purview of the Landmarks Commission, Relating to the broader context of the historic district, to a two-three block subarea immediately adjacent and to the prescribed Visually Related Area.


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