

November 16, 2011

I am writing in opposition of the 100 Block of Sate Street project currently before you because of the degree of damage I am certain will result if it goes forward as proposed. The project is answering a question no one is asking. "Wouldn't it be great to knock down over one hundred years of history to create a tiny and useless plaza on a dark car centric street".

A difficult bargain was made to demolish historic architecture to make space for the Overture Center. On balance that argument seems reasonable. When considering the 100 block of State Street no such argument can be made and is NOT being made. A society and culture of any worth and logic simply does not trade history and identity for a little restaurant and some office space.

While I agree that most to all of the buildings in question need to be fully rehabbed I disagree that none of them can be saved in a viable way for future use. They require and are worthy of a much greater degree of care and effort. Restoring architecture is the same as restoring a painting or sculpture of significance, all are important. We invest a great deal of time, effort and funding to maintain forests, landscapes, and waterways. Architecture is no different.

There are plenty of unused and underused sites in the downtown district. All of these sites should be considered first if the goal of this proposal is for restaurant and office space in the downtown district. If the goal of the proposal is for some other purpose then the developer should be honest about that purpose.

Most importantly in regards to the Urban Design commission ANY proposal that does not maintain the street wall on all sides of the 100 block of State Street should be rejected for that reason alone. A city consists of streets, sidewalks and buildings that clearly define space. Blocks are most successful when they are whole. We have learned the hard lesson of the failed Urban Renewal strategies of the 1960's, why would we want to repeat those failures here?

Street walls are made of facades, literally "faces", and when a face is missing it creates a severe and negative condition that adversely affects every adjacent block. Particularly on the corners of blocks the street wall must be maintained or we perceive the block to be disintegrating and in a state of decay.

A ready example exists today on King Street. Do you believe the 100 block of King Street is better with the corner missing? Do you see it and imagine all of the wonderful possibilities for restoration? In the case of the 100 block of State Street the current proposal is to create a void, a hole, a missing face. How could that possibly make Madison better?

Sincerely,

Mr. Mark M. Smith

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