

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT. □ WISCONSIN

City of Madison Plan Commission

Brad Murphy - Director, Planning Division, City of Madison DPCED

26 March 2012

Mr. Murphy and Plan Commissioners-

As the statewide organization dedicated to the protection and preservation of Frank Lloyd Wright's legacy in his native state of Wisconsin, we are very concerned about the implications of Madison's *Draft Downtown Plan* for the house Wright designed for Robert M. Lamp at 22 N. Butler St. in 1903.

The house's national and local significance has been conclusively documented. It is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places and as a City of Madison Landmark. It is the oldest Wright-designed structure in the city of Madison, and its floor plan served as a prototype for as many as twenty-five subsequent designs by Wright. The house's design – its vertical orientation with rooftop garden – is a response to its unique location at the center of an urban block, and to its physical context surrounded by traditional 3- and 4-storey residential buildings. It was designed to fit its tight lot, and to take maximum views to Lakes Monona and Mendota over surrounding houses and rooftops. To have such a unique and significant building in Madison, by our nation's most widely recognized architect is an enviable opportunity. Buffalo, NY and Oak Park, IL, for example, have used Frank Lloyd Wright architecture to brand their communities and attract a continuous stream of heritage tourism dollars through focused marketing.

The *Draft Downtown Plan* designates the block where the Lamp house is located as "*Bonus Area G*" wherein "*two bonus stories may be considered for projects that incorporate the restoration of [the Lamp House], and accentuate the Lamp House and enhance its setting...*" We understand that the intent of the *Bonus Area* designation is to incentivize the restoration of the Lamp House by allowing increased density (thus increased value) around it. However, this approach has the paradoxical effect of incentivizing the erosion of the very characteristics of the block that provide a great deal of interpretive value to the Lamp house itself. The extant residential buildings on the northwestern half of the block served a role in the design of the house. They contributed to the site considerations that Wright was responding to when he designed this house. Already, on the eastern side of the block – the Lake Monona side - the physical context has been dramatically rebuilt. If the western side of the block is similarly redeveloped, the Lamp House would be reduced to an architectural artifact – a 3-storey house buried within 8- and 10-storey development on all four sides.

In order to retain the interpretive value of this unique and important house in an appropriate context, we recommend that the *Draft Downtown Plan* be amended to incentivize or compel the preservation and rehabilitation of the existing residential buildings along Webster, Butler and Mifflin Sts., so they can continue to illuminate Wright's 1903 site considerations. Absent the option of property tax revisions, this could be done by designation of a local historic district and the development of financial incentives for historic districts to help offset the costs of repairs and maintenance. Other cities waive permit application fees and special assessments, offer flexible parking requirements, and reimburse a

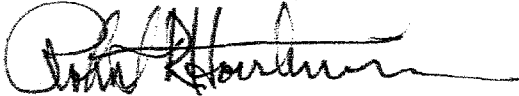
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percentage for materials for designated historic properties. Perhaps Madison's Façade Improvement Grant program could be extended to include this block. Ideally, the extant buildings that would be retained and rehabilitated, and their value maximized for owners.

If this approach is determined by Planning staff to be unrealistic given the location of the block so close to the center of Madison's downtown, we recommend eliminating the Bonus Story aspect of the *Plan*, and instead limiting development on this block to no more than four stories with very clear guidance for development that achieves the three goals articulated in *Appendix C* of the draft *Plan* (under *Bonus Area G*) are appropriate.

Respectfully submitted,



Robert Hartmann, President

cc: Alder Bridget Maniaci, District 2
Amy Scanlon, Preservation Planner

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The Frank Lloyd Wright® Wisconsin Heritage Tourism Program, Inc. is a not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization created with the assistance of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the State of Wisconsin Department of Tourism. Our mission is to promote, protect and preserve the heritage of Frank Lloyd Wright in his native state of Wisconsin.