



## FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT BUILDING CONSERVANCY

February 10, 2014

Plan Commission  
City of Madison  
ATTN: Tim Parks

[tparks@cityofmadison.com](mailto:tparks@cityofmadison.com)

To: Plan Commission, Ken Opin, Chair  
Commission Members

Subject: Robert Lamp House Agenda Item for Feb 10 meeting

Dear commission members:

The Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy is concerned about the future of the Robert Lamp House (1903). As an international preservation organization working to safeguard Wright's remaining built work, we applaud the thoughtful approach adopted by the City of Madison regarding the impact of development on this Madison cultural and historical asset.

Frank Lloyd Wright is widely considered to be America's greatest architect and one of its most significant artists. In a remarkable career spanning over seventy years, he created over 1,000 designs, 500 of which were realized. Sadly, nearly 20% of his executed works have been destroyed because of fire, neglect or development.

We have expressed our general view to other Madison civic commissions and committees but wish to share our views with your commission as well regarding the significance of the Lamp House to Madison, in the heartland of Wisconsin where Wright spent his formative years. It is a little known but significant work in the chronology of Wright's career, and is one of only two Prairie-style Wright houses in the state capital and an initial step in Wright's exploration of more a more abstract style.

Much care was invested in the siting of this house. Wright would later become famous for his audacious site plans on difficult lots for more famous works but the Lamp House is an early example of how central the site considerations and construction orientation are to Wright's designs. To elevate the house above its neighbors for the sake of the views, Wright raised it two or more feet off the ground, a strategy he rarely employed, and placed it at the rear and at the highest extremity of the east-and-north-sloping lot. Positioning it in the interior of the block, he reshaped the landscape with retaining walls and to elevate the dwelling even more. He also created an elaborate approach to the house, guaranteeing privacy. Navigating this pathway was an exploration and it was meant to be so as part of the character of this house.

The interior is also noteworthy as it exhibits many of the concepts that Wright was developing at the time and in particular the open floor plan for small houses as well as large homes; this was an important step in the evolution of housing designs in America. The full roof garden with pergola as originally designed and originally built is unique among all of Wright's designs.

The residential nature of the Lamp House block is central to this work and its historical context. Encircling this building with six and seven-story or higher construction on all sides would irretrievably alter the context and further obstruct the views to and from the house, thereby destroying Wright's design intention for the Lamp House.

It is with this background that we urge you to adopt the recommendations of the Lamp House Block Ad Hoc Plan Committee. We applaud and endorse the vision statement in the report. We believe this is an excellent summary of what should be the objectives in this case and the conclusions and recommendations, if implemented, will undoubtedly help achieve that vision. The recommendations regarding the establishment of local and national historic districts, the preservation of views to and from the house, and the maintenance of residential zoning in a critical portion of the block are all very important steps; in fact in our view they are essential.

The Lamp House, if properly preserved with its remaining site and restored, has the potential to become a significant architectural and cultural point of interest for downtown Madison. In the context of Wright's Madison area connection and combined with Monona Terrace and his built works in the region, the heritage tourism potential increases.

In keeping with the objectives of enhancing the cultural and historical assets of Madison within a master plan for the development of the downtown area, we urge you to take action to safeguard this unusual work by America's greatest architect and endorse the recommendations of the Lamp House Block Ad Hoc Plan Committee.

Sincerely,



Janet Halstead  
Executive Director

cc: Alder Ledell Zellers, City of Madison  
Jason Tish, Madison Trust for Historic Preservation  
Lois Berg, Wright in Wisconsin