

AGENDA # 2

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: LANDMARKS COMMISSION

PRESENTED: 7/13/20

TITLE: 817-821 Williamson St - Demolition of an existing commercial structure, construction of a new three-story mixed-use structure, and land combination in the Third Lake Ridge Hist. Dist.; 6th Ald. Dist.

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: 7/16/20

ID NUMBER: 59708

Members present were: Anna Andrzejewski, Richard Arnesen, Katie Kaliszewski, David McLean, and Maurice Taylor. Excused were: Betty Banks and Arvina Martin.

SUMMARY:

Kevin Burow, registering in support and wishing to speak
Linda Lehnertz, registering in opposition and wishing to speak
Steve Ohlson, registering in opposition and wishing to speak
Gary Tipler, registering in opposition and wishing to speak
Brandon Cook, registering in support and available to answer questions
Michael Engel, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak
Leslie Schroeder, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak
Jacob Harris, registering in support and not wishing to speak
Anne Walker, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak
Tracy Dietzel, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak
Pilar Gomez-Ibanez, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak
Maryline Beurg, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak
Peter Wolff, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak
Jeff Waldman, registering in support and not wishing to speak
John Coleman, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak
Leigh Mollenhoff, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak
Joy Newman, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak

Also present: Alder Marsha Rummel, District 6

Andrzejewski opened the public hearing.

Bailey said that the Landmarks Commission already approved Certificates of Appropriateness for the demolition and land combination at their June 1 meeting and referred the request for new construction, which they would be reviewing tonight. She discussed the standards, which consider historic resources within 200' to determine if the new construction is visually compatible. She showed the updated renderings from the applicant and pointed out changes made to the cornice of the central projecting bay, which is now located on the mass of the building behind it. She said that they slightly reduced the height of both portions of the building and changed the brick color from dark red to blonde. She said that at the last meeting, they discussed lot sizes

and the historic pattern of development. She showed maps of the nearby lot configurations from 1908 through today and pointed out that they have evolved over time. She said that staff believes the standards are met and recommends approval.

Alder Rummel said that this is a tricky project because it is on two lots that are now combined. She said she knows that a developer would want to use all the space they can, but that is where the problem comes in because the project would not meet the standards for gross volume and the rhythm of solids to voids. She said that she wasn't strongly against the change in brick color, but the question of materials would come back onto the table with that change. She said that she thinks there could be a project here, but she personally didn't think it was quite there yet because it is big for the two lots. She said that it should somehow be able to fit on two lots while not filling most of that space, and they should ask the applicants to keep working on it. She said that she knows they do good work in the neighborhood and she thinks they are capable of coming back with another version that might be a more appropriate scale. She said that a key point for her is that the south side of the street is a lot different from the north side, and this side is the residential side, not the industrial side facing the rail corridor. She said that the general pattern in the vicinity is smaller lots, which is the hard part about having a development here.

Kevin Burow, representing the project, said that the main issues brought to the table at the last Landmarks Commission meeting were with regard to the mass and scale of the building and whether it fits within the context of the neighborhood. He discussed the changes in design and said that the proposed redesign has lowered the overall mass of the main bay by 4', removed the cornice element and pushed it back to the building behind, which is also set back from the sidewalk an additional 9'. He said that the overall volume appeared reduced by changing the color of the materials from red brick, which tends to have a heavier feel, to a cream brick color. He said that there are other buildings within the area with lighter color brick on the main façade and the sides of nearby buildings are predominantly cream colored. He explained that their goal was to reduce the overall scale and feel of the mass of the building. He pointed out that in the upper floor, they eliminated transom windows above the upper windows in order to reduce the height of the building. He said that the entire mass of the building from front to back has been reduced. He said that at the last meeting, the applicants were asked to push the building back from the sidewalk if possible, but because the building is butting up against the rear yard setback, they cannot move it back any further. He said there is a 2' setback along the front of the lot, which is more than is required. He said that if they were to push the building back further, they would be forced to reduce the number of units and the density of 24 units being proposed is what they need to make the project feasible. Because they weren't able to push the building back any further, he explained that they instead made the changes and reductions in order to reduce the overall appearance and scale of the building. He said that the materials for the rear haven't changed because they were already beige and tan, which would blend with the cream brick. He showed renderings of the block and said the block is anchored at the end with a three-story building at 803 Williamson and across the street there is also a commercial building with a flat façade. He said that based on these changes, he hopes they have come within the context of being visually compatible with this section of Williamson Street.

McLean asked if the applicants had looked at splitting the building into two towers with the parking entrance in the middle, which would break up the mass along the street and put a void between the buildings. Burow said that early on they did, but it wouldn't work with the parking lot in the basement because they wouldn't be able to access it with a central drive aisle. He said that they need to have the width of the building as it sits along the side of the driveway in order to get a double load of parking in the basement.

Linda Lehnertz said that when she compared the previous plans to the current plans, the depth is the same. She said that the front roofline isn't 4' shorter, it is 1' shorter. She said that when looking at visual compatibility, it is important to look at what has been approved before, and mentioned that 739 Williamson was about 40' wide but the Landmarks Commission thought it was too wide for the south side of the street. She said that project was approved because of a living wall that would visually split the building into two 20' structures. She said that in contrast, this building has a 40' wide mass in the center with two wings that bring the total to 60'. She said that another difference is that at 739 Williamson, its neighbors sit close to the sidewalk, but at this

building the neighbors sit 24' back from the sidewalk. She said that visual compatibility should look at historic resources, not things built outside of the period of significance.

Steve Ohlson referenced the letter he submitted from Marquette Neighborhood residents. He said that the problem isn't whether the building is attractive, the problem is where it is located. He said that comments in opposition to the building have included how close it is to the sidewalk, total width, height, and lack of any setbacks at the front; he said the latest changes are laughably insignificant and offer no resolution to the concerns raised by neighborhood residents. He said that the building does not deserve to be here at its present size and urged the commission to reject the proposal.

Gary Tipler commented on the massing and said the scale is inappropriate according to the historic district guidelines. He suggested the idea of a double part building with an interior court should be investigated further. He said the drive aisle could be flexible as to where its located and accomplish the same thing, though they may lose some space. He expressed concern that the mass of the building could lead to more speculation in that people will buy properties with the idea of exceeding the zoning limits and historic district guidelines, which places a burden on those who have invested their lives in nearby buildings. He said that they should meet the standards as best as possible and try for a smaller building or the appearance of a smaller building. He said the differences between the north and south sides of the street need to be taken into consideration as well; as much as he likes the warehouse look of this building, it does not belong on this side of the street.

Bailey read the remaining list of registrants who did not wish to speak.

Andrzejewski closed the public hearing.

Taylor asked staff about the standards and whether they had looked at the buildings across the street that look similar to what is being proposed. Bailey said that the buildings across the street are not the historic resources that the proposed building needs to be compatible with. Though she said that it is helpful to look at more recent infill that the Landmarks Commission has approved as case studies in how those buildings went about meeting the same standards. Taylor asked staff for more detail on their recommendation. Bailey said that while this building is larger than the historic resources within 200', the standard says that it needs to be visually compatible, not identical to the historic resources. She said that the standards also refer to gross volume, height, and have an emphasis on the street façade. She said that while it is a larger building, it is designed in a way that presents a more reduced street presence than the previous proposal. She mentioned the reduced height of the center projecting bay, the cornice moved to the building behind it, the insets with balconies further back, and the rest of the mass of the building tucked into the hillside and oriented in a way that from the street will provide relief and read a little more like two separate buildings. She described some historic resources in the vicinity with the same configuration. She said that this is going to be one building, but she thinks it has a reference to the rhythm of mass and spaces one finds elsewhere on this block and within 200'.

McLean said that he thinks the gross volume is too large, particularly the way it reads on the street relative to the adjacent properties. He said that while it has a setback on the side, the main building is still larger than the two buildings across the street, which have a break in between them. He pointed out that they are on the other side of the street, and they've already spoken about the difference in the north vs. south sides of the street. He said that he would like to see something with a broken up mass, not necessarily vertically as much as horizontally, so they could have a mass, a void, and a mass on the site. He said that in this area, the adjacent properties are going to read smaller than this building with the way it's currently massed. He said that he appreciated the work the applicants did to try to bring it down, but he thinks they are stuck where they are with this design and need to look at something else. He suggested they could keep the garage entrance where it is and split the tower into two towers, pushing one over the garage entrance. He said they would lose first floor space, but they could reconfigure the lobby and commercial space to address that. He said that he thinks that would be a better solution for the neighborhood than what they have here. Andrzejewski asked which standards he was speaking to. McLean said 41.23(6)(a) regarding gross volume because it currently reads as one very large gross volume and if they were to break it up, the volume would remain the same but it would read as two different volumes. Andrzejewski asked if he was just referring to the large 41' center section, and

McLean confirmed he was and said that height, 41.23(6)(b), was also a concern. He said that if they thin it up, the height may not seem so tall if it's not so wide and referred to the perspectives and proportions of the buildings next to it. He pointed out that in some of the perspectives, one can see how it dwarfs the nearby houses, so height is a factor. He said that he doesn't think it meets standard 41.23(6)(f) regarding the rhythm of buildings masses and spaces either.

Kaliszewski agreed with McLean and said she is most concerned with gross volume and height. She said that she knows they aren't comparing it to what is across the street, but the building across the street has a little bit of a setback and is less pushed up to the street so it allows it to have a little more height without feeling the height. She said that currently the proposed volume and height are not visually compatible, but she wasn't sure how to fix that. She said that she understands they are moving a bunch of pieces around trying to get this to fit in an area that the applicants want to be the best place for it, but it might not be and the commission will need to determine that.

Arnesen said that he thinks they are at a point where the developer is at the limit of what they can do and still have a feasible project. He said that the changes are nice and he thought the lighter brick was effective, as well as the roof changes, and pointed out that they have a staff report that says the standards are met. He said that he is in favor of the project. He said that he doesn't think the suggested changes would make sense on this site and he suspected the applicants were at a point where this is the best they can do.

Andrzejewski said that she appreciated the changes the applicants made in terms of lowering the first and second floor units, as well as the cornice changes. She said that her sticking point is 41.23(6)(f), which has to do with rhythm and how it fits in with the street.

McLean asked if it would be reasonable to ask the applicant to consider looking at a different layout as discussed earlier, with side parking and a center courtyard. Burow said that they have looked at various massings of the building and it comes down to the number of units to make a project on this site feasible given the land that is available. He said they could create a courtyard element in the middle and reduce it into smaller masses but they would be removing a minimum of 3-6 units to accomplish that and truly break up the mass of the building. He said that he is not the owner of the project and can't speak to whether that would be entertained.

Andrzejewski said that she thinks they are really close but not quite there yet. She said that she appreciated the changes the applicant made, but she doesn't know what to do with the 41' behemoth at the center. She referenced Ald. Rummel's comments and agreed that they aren't quite there. She said that she thinks that a project can work here and would like to see a project work here, but she has an issue with 41.23(6)(f) and asked that the applicant try to work on it again. Kaliszewski said that she also agreed with Ald. Rummel's comments and there is potential for a project here but they aren't close enough that she would feel comfortable voting for it. Arnesen said that he is fine with having the applicants try again, but the commission should be prepared that they will likely not be able to make wholesale changes to address the concerns raised. He said that to the extent they can make changes, they will likely be relatively minor tweaks rather than major design changes.

ACTION:

A motion was made by Arnesen, seconded by Taylor, to approve the request for the Certificate of Appropriateness for new construction. The motion failed by the following vote:

Ayes: 2 - Richard B. Arnesen and Maurice D. Taylor

Noes: 3 - David W.J. McLean; Katherine N. Kaliszewski and Anna Andrzejewski

Excused: 2 - Elizabeth Banks and Arvina Martin

A motion was made by McLean, seconded by Kaliszewski, to refer the request for the Certificate of Appropriateness for new construction to the August 17, 2020 meeting to allow the applicant to explore a solution that reads more like two street façades as opposed to a singular street façade. The motion passed by the following vote:

Ayes: 4 - David W.J. McLean; Richard B. Arnesen; Katherine N. Kaliszewski; Anna Andrzejewski

Noes: 1 - Maurice D. Taylor

Excused: 2 - Elizabeth Banks and Arvina Martin