

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

PRESENTED: September 4, 2019

TITLE: Adopting the Mifflandia Neighborhood Plan as a Supplement to the Comprehensive Plan and the Downtown Plan and Directing Staff to Implement the Recommendations Contained in the Plan. (56838)

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Janine Glaeser, Secretary

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: September 4, 2019

ID NUMBER:

Members present were: Richard Wagner, Chair; Lois Braun-Oddo, Cliff Goodhart, Christian Harper, Jessica Klehr, Shane Bernau and Craig Weisensel.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of September 4, 2019, the Urban Design Commission **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL TO ADOPT** the Mifflandia Neighborhood Plan as a supplement to the Comprehensive Plan and the Downtown Plan.

Registered in support was Peter Ostlind. Glaeser gave a presentation on the six block area that the plan focuses on. The team consisted of Glaeser, Rebecca Cnare, Bill Fruhling, Jeff Greger, Ryan Jonely and Urvashi Martin who all worked together to prepare the document and hold public meetings. Ald. Verveer, District 4 also attended all the meetings and provided feedback. The Downtown Plan recommended a special area plan focused on land use, intensity and urban design details. Between the three neighborhood meetings, the online survey and individual contacts they tried a new approach to engaging this diverse neighborhood by using themes, food and art. They spent time studying terraces and public/private transition and how it relates back to the Comprehensive Plan. Maps were shared showing what the Urban Design Commission reviews in the downtown area; there isn't a lot of oversight in this neighborhood from this commission. It is also important to consider that West Washington Avenue is an important corridor to the City's downtown. They looked at the levels of density in this neighborhood and the possibilities of redevelopment. There is a very strong sense of maintaining the wide terrace areas and maintaining the residential scale; the Downtown Plan has recommended up to six stories in the Mifflin area and four stories on West Washington. There is also a very strong sustainability aspect to the plan recommendations with opportunities for green roofs and EV charging stations. Maps showed what this area could look like with varying building heights using stepbacks and setbacks. This plan is not making these changes adopted, it is recommending for possible future zoning changes. Diagrams showed what a commercial transition could look like, then scaling it down to the residential developments, thinking about articulation, transportation solutions, bike lanes, parking and multi-mode transportation. Art and affordable housing were key focuses and continuing to emphasize the creative nature of this area. Moving forward, this plan document this has been introduced to the Common Council and been to the Sustainability Committee,

Landmarks Commission, Downtown Coordinating Committee, Parks Commission, Transportation and Plan Commission. The UDC's role is to make a recommendation for approval as is, or approval with conditions, or refer the item.

Peter Ostlind spoke as a Bassett neighborhood resident and overall supports the plan put together. He acknowledged Planning staff's efforts to engage residents and the public in the process in a way he's never seen before. His interests are in preserving the unique character of West Washington Avenue. The terraces are largely ignored, poorly maintained, used for contractors/move-in/move-out, but not used in any active form. Imagine what it could be if we worked to improve it; public art, some sort of market, gathering spaces. The UDC's role is more intensive in talking about design guidelines which really need to be implemented, the stepbacks and setbacks are extremely important. Adopting these recommendations would ease neighborhood discussions and help developers moving forward. He encouraged the commission to recommend adoption to the Common Council.

The Commission discussed the following:

- In terms of adopting at the Council level, it would be as a neighborhood plan integrated into the Comprehensive Plan? Would another recommendation be to create an Urban Design District?
 - I would highly recommend that you give feedback on whether it be an Urban Design District or some other type of district.
- Its status would be much stronger as an Urban Design District.
- The issue of the backyard distances between buildings, are there guidelines about that?
 - We did make some recommendations for a way to develop through-block drives, like alleys. We scaled back specifics until which time we can make more detailed recommendations on specifics.
- Is there any future for the single-family house in that area? In some ways the plan says no. But I'm not sure if you wipe out the single-family houses that just regulating the shape of new stuff gives you any lingering Mifflin? There's a social character in that history as well as a physical character. The two obviously interacted in the past, I don't think it really gets yet to the problem of how future social construct could interact with a future physical construct, which is what made the old place sort of special.
- Even though some of these are decrepit they're affordable and there's air around them. We have no canopy trees in these new development areas.
- This is good but there are problems that aren't solved yet.
- Adopting it is trying to plan for the inevitable which is the demand of this location combined with the density.
- I wonder what the density is.
- I question the inner lane and what it does for greenspace, backyards and tree canopies.
- It might break up some of the big blocks, and if you put in conditions for having so much dirt/soil for trees...
- A lot of those blocks in the middle are just gravel parking lots in the middle.
- Right now it's a funky mixture of vinyl siding and wood decks. Do we become the design police every time a guy wants to replace his porch or do little things here and there?
- But if you bring in all this new construction they're not going to be priced for the people who are there now. It's totally going to displace the people who live there now.
- The transition is going to be difficult but you have to have something in place. You don't want it to be East Washington Avenue.
- This has something worth saving, physical and social.

- Has there been any conversation about that, current social, the affordability that drives it all eventually goes away, but is the physical equally important? These charming little streets remarkably close to downtown, high quality single-family homes. Has façade improvement grants ever been on the table here?
 - It could all be on the table.
- You outlined building heights. Was there any sort of density discussion?
- It's kind of like Jenifer Street, it's got its own little character.
- There's issues here still to be thought about.
- Particularly with establishing new lot sizes.
- We actually are talking about several different geographies or zones here. I think West Washington is more open to some of this development, but Mifflin not as much. Maybe we need a "nostalgia district."
- I was looking at some of the images of the funky boulevards, paintings on the side of a building, the garbage cans, things that I think are amenities not a building that start to drive some of the more organic development. This feels like you're trying to take all that and define where it goes but you have all these 4-6 story buildings and you won't get that. If you have a more organic development, and that takes time, but you start to plug in the City-provided amenities in some of the guidelines of development, but not necessarily "here's your 6 story or here's your 4 story," it's still going to feel artificial. When I see the plan of the allowed heights, that's what makes me think this won't be what they want it to be. It'll be all Epic kids wanting to be in the hip area but it's not Mifflandia anymore.
 - Are you recommending a change to the plan?
- I can see a lot of value and great ideas in here, but on Page 10 when I see the maximum building height, I just see developers coming in, buying up the old buildings and maximizing the profit by maximizing the density and minimizing the size of units, maximizing the footprint and not the greenspace. I think there are other things that have to go into this image that aren't shown.
- If you look at what the building footprint on a lot is now in that area, let's say it's 60-70%, if one of your guidelines is that no new buildings may have more than a 70% footprint, then you're reinforcing trying to preserve at least the arrangement of space to building that exists there.
- Even greenspace, not just footprint.
- Try and pull more out of what is there physically. Find something else that pulls out the character we want, and part of that is an urban forest.
- Why can't Madison say these six blocks do remain single-family?
- They can, they can.
- When you see other cities do that, it's mind blowing. Why are we already talking 4-6 stories if we'd like to maintain the character so much?
- That was the Downtown Plan. Willy Street has changed more but people seem to have accepted that. But it hasn't totally socially changed.
- But that's just a street.
- Can this plan limit the size of a lot? Do you limit the height as well as the size of the lot?
- You might want to do that. You could limit the amount of lots that could be combined. You could still have 4-stories but a different kind of footprint.
- I'm thinking along East Johnson where there's a lot of effort to make it look like single-family housing, but it's not. Is this the document where you're writing stuff like that or is that guidelines you're talking about later?
 - This is an effort to point towards that.
- We could recommend adoption with additional study of limiting lot sizes, how much of the lot may be covered and how much must remain green?
- I can see making a recommendation that this plan should move toward very seriously considering a special zoning district within the Zoning Code, that might even go block by block. As Janine mentioned

before it's now sort of a no-man's land, but it's not unique as DR-2 or PD. Does it become an urban design district or other entity or development that is then regulated? This isn't going to regulate. I think this deserves its own zoning designation.

- They talk about a pedestrian oriented environment. That means something completely different than how you design for a pedestrian.
- It's just a few blocks so you could almost tailor it by block.
- (Ostlind) The Downtown Plan actually called for two special area plans, West Washington and the Mifflin area. In this process they've been done at the same time and that distinction has been somewhat lost along the way, but the intent was clearly that West Washington had these unique features with the terraces and trees, and the Mifflin area, nobody could figure out what to do and the plan had to be finished. What's currently proposed height-wise is less than the Downtown Plan and the Mifflin area has been open to redevelopment this whole time, and there has been some but the 6-story construction is an outlier. There's a number of single-family homes that have been rehabbed, more particular to the Bassett area. Some of the houses on West Washington are being used commercially now and are likely to stay. I got a really bad reaction when I suggested to staff that they create a special zoning district. We did talk about the funkiness on Mifflin Street and how to you build new and keep or create funky...that's about as far as we got with that discussion.
- I think overall it's a complex issue and waiting for perfection to adopt something means it will never happen. If you go with this with recommendations, and you continue to refine and maybe implement as much as you can but moving forward with momentum.
- As a neighborhood plan?
- With recommendations to continue to study how to further implement this whether it's a special district or special zoning.
- Additional creativity required.
- If we accept this we are moving towards that. This isn't codifying anything.

ACTION:

On a motion by Weisensel, seconded by Braun-Oddo, the Urban Design Commission **RECOMMENDED ADOPTION** of the Mifflandia Plan while continuing to look at a special district tool for the area (whether a new zoning district or an Urban Design District). The motion was passed on a vote of (7-0).