

Subject: Fwd: Urban Design Commission Public hearing item 02516 (Union Corners Redevelopment)

>>> "Chris Lukas" <clukas@epicsystems.com> 12/06/05 8:59 AM >>>

Urban Design Commission:

This letter is in reference to the public hearing item 02516 scheduled for Wednesday, December 7th (the Union Corners redevelopment).

As a nearby resident, I strongly support the recommendations about this project submitted by the Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara Neighborhood association. The recommendations such as connections to surrounding neighborhoods, a shorter maximum building height and reduced street widths are reasonable for the developer and critical for the neighborhood.

It is your responsibility to make our city a great place to live and one way to do that is to incorporate the well-written and sensible recommendations proposed by SASNYA.

Thank you,

Chris Lukas

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From:
Subject: Fwd: Union Corners: SASYNA response to GDP

>>> "Julie A. Melton" <jmelton@facstaff.wisc.edu> 12/05/05 4:21 PM >>>
Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara Neighborhood Association

Preliminary Response -- December 5, 2005

To: The City of Madison Urban Design Commission (UDC)

Re: Union Corners General Development Plan (GDP) Submittal

To be considered by the Urban Design Commission
Wednesday December 7, 2005

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Introduction

This preliminary report from the Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara Neighborhood Association (SASYNA) council responds to the Oct. 26, 2005 General Development Plan submitted to the City of Madison by McGrath and Associates. The SASYNA council's recommendations herein are based on input from neighborhood residents who attended more than two years of "planning studios" to explore options for the Union Corners site, many presentations Union Corners developer Todd McGrath made to the SASYNA council and to the public, networking by SASYNA council members with city officials and neighborhood residents, and the experiences of neighborhood residents and business owners living adjacent to the development site. For more on the context of public input into the development planning, please see Appendix A.

Neighbors welcome the applicant's intent to mix residential and commercial. We particularly welcome his efforts to locate a grocery store here.

We commend Mr. McGrath for his open approach to the planning process and for his willingness to meet with small and large neighborhood groups for more than two years to gather input from area residents and business owners.

Despite this, until now, organized response to the applicant's proposals has been difficult because many of the plans presented have been termed "conceptual." The constantly changing layout of the site as the applicant has assembled more parcels of land also has made coherent, proactive comment difficult. Multiple design concepts for facades and layout presented at public meetings create the atmosphere of choice among area residents at meetings, but neighbors - even those who have been involved in the process all along - seem surprised and perplexed by the ever-changing site plans. For example, some of the design possibilities presented at meetings Sept. 13 and Sept. 17 featured the December 2004 design that features carriage houses along the railroad/bike path corridor.*

What follows is a collection of hopes and dreams from neighborhood residents, people who spent more than two years as part of the Union Corners planning studio and members of the SASYNA council, all volunteers from different professional and socioeconomic backgrounds who have been vested in the history and nature of the broader area.

Summary description of development site

- 14.6 acres
- 450 residential units, about 70 people per acre without commercial or office space
- 238 surface parking spaces = 3,000-foot-long road with parallel parking on both sides of the street = 16 parking spaces per acre of lot
- The site is six-sided, bounded by:
 1. Sixth Street
 2. East Washington Avenue

3. East Washington Avenue at Milwaukee Street, where East Washington Avenue curves with the Isthmus
4. Milwaukee Street
5. Farwell Street and Anzinger Court
6. Railroad tracks

Gold stars and commendations

SASYNA would like to praise the applicant for various elements in the General Development Plan (GDP) as submitted, including (in no particular order):

- Commercial space suitable for a grocery store
- Green roofs and terraces
- Environmental benefits of infill development (added urban density)
- Generous amount of planned green space
- LEED certification
- Commercial space with residential above
- Diagonal and parallel parking
- Placing the tallest buildings along East Washington Avenue and buildings not as tall closer to single-family homes along southern and eastern edges of the site;
- Town square concept
- No large parking lots on railroad corridor, Anzinger Court or Farwell Street;
- Double row of trees along East Washington Avenue
- Underground parking
- Bike path along N side of RR right-of-way to cap remaining battery waste difficult to remove because of underground power line along RR tracks
- New bicycle-pedestrian path crossing the railroad tracks at Jackson Street

Concerns about the GDP -- and requests for improvement

We urge the Urban Design Commission to address the following concerns before you grant initial approval:

- 1) Rebuild the French Battery building in its current footprint
- 2) Improve connectivity to the surrounding neighborhoods for pedestrians and bicyclists
- 3) Set a maximum building height - and vary building heights
- 4) Reduce the width of streets -- and sq. ft. devoted to parking

A1. Rebuild the French Battery Building in its current historic location

If the applicant is going to tear down the French Battery Building and build a facsimile, we think it should be built in the exact footprint the

building is in now. We would reluctantly go along with a demolition request but only if a facsimile is built in the exact footprint, location and orientation - not at another location on the site.

Through much of the planning studio process, the applicant assured neighbors that the French Battery Building would not be torn down. A significant number of neighbors still feel strongly today that it should not be.

It's not just the familiar old building neighbors respond to -- neighbors also feel strongly about preserving the mature oak trees and significant, familiar green space that frames the French Battery Building. A majority of neighbors have said they want the entire setting -the oak trees, the green space and the building (or a facsimile) preserved.

Preservation of the building's location would honor the area's historic significance and the contributions of generations of employees, many of whom walked from the surrounding neighborhoods to work there, as recently as 2003. In this development plan, the French Battery Building and its placement comprise the only remaining historical reference to our important industrial heritage on this site. The building and its location are a gateway and marker where the isthmus turns. Retention of the structure's footprint enables designers to take advantage of the uniqueness (and challenges) of a development site with six sides.

In addition, the orientation of the building provides a visual link to the neighborhoods to the south and east of the development site. The French Battery Building is oriented to the existing street grid south of the RR tracks (Division Street, Dunning Street).

A2. Improve connectivity to the surrounding neighborhoods, especially for pedestrians and bicyclists

A second concern is connections to the existing neighborhoods -- and orientation of this most recent site plan solely to East Washington Avenue. Linkages between the Union Corners development and neighborhoods to the south and east are essential for preserving the long-term health of the area. The development site is naturally hemmed in on all but its east side, with East Washington Avenue, Milwaukee Street and the railroad tracks.

We should think ahead and try to avoid creating a situation where, years from now, investors may buy up then-'aging' properties and turn them into rental units. We need to avoid situations we've seen in other areas of the city where areas become isolated "islands," hemmed in by highways, waterways, and other barriers.

To improve neighborhood connections, we suggest that entry points (perhaps at Farwell, Jackson and vacated Division streets) from the new bicycle path on the development's south side be treated with the same thought and importance as entrances for motor vehicles. Entrance monuments (on the same scale as those marking the entry points for motorized traffic) on the bike path would help facilitate this goal.

A pedestrian-bicycle connection at South Court - Farwell Street was part of the Union Corners site plan through much of the planning studio

process. We suggest this Farwell Street ped-bike link be made part of the site plan once again. This path could connect to the 20-space parking lot, and easy, safe pedestrian access to the grocery store and other business should be included. Landscaping should make clear that this connection is not for motorized traffic, as should new landscaping at the south end of Farwell Street.

A third change involves reorienting Building G1 so that the Jackson Street pedestrian-bicycle path leads naturally into the core of the development, ideally to a pedestrian-friendly entrance to the grocery store. The submitted plan shows the path running into a back corner of residential Building G1 (see developer Exhibit 9). This path should lead somewhere other than into a rainwater infiltration space at the back of a building.

These changes will help the development take advantage of the surrounding "walking neighborhood" and better enable development residents to access by foot and bicycle the businesses, churches, residences and nonprofit agencies in the Atwood Avenue business district four blocks south. Residents of the surrounding areas similarly will be better able to access development businesses by foot and bicycle.

If this development is as successful as we all hope, people will create informal paths across the railroad tracks, such as the footpath across the RR tracks connecting Ohio Avenue with Farwell Street. Union Corners retail stores should be easily accessible by foot even if a new ped-bike RR crossing is not constructed at the foot of Jackson Street.

A3. Set a maximum building height -- and vary building heights

The GDP as submitted proposes seven-story buildings. That would create the tallest buildings outside the immediate downtown. This is out of scale with the rest of the city and grossly out of scale to the surrounding neighborhoods. (See developer's exhibit 16 for illustration of contrast.) We ask that you consider setting a maximum building height of five stories -- and that the tallest buildings be constructed along East Washington.

We also strongly urge architects to vary building heights, even along East Washington - including varying building heights within the same building.

A4. Reduce the width of streets -- and sq.ft. devoted to parking

The width of the streets should be reduced to the minimum allowed by law. The current plan positions the buildings too far apart. Internal streets are too wide. Streets should be narrower and more intimate. A standard roadway driving lane is 12 feet wide. For one lane in each direction, the roads should be no more than 24 feet wide.

A fire lane next to large buildings needs to be 26 feet wide to allow access to two fire trucks at the hydrants. No more than 20 feet is needed on each side of a hydrant.

Appendix B shows all the pavement cross sections can be reduced by 4 feet at almost every location without sacrificing fire access safety, vehicle safety, or ease of parking.

Narrower roads will improve street life and safety in a walking neighborhood.

In addition to: 1. Rebuilding the French Battery Building in its current location; 2. Improving connectivity with surrounding neighborhoods; 3. Setting a max. building height of five stories; and 4. Reducing width of streets -- and sq.ft. devoted to parking,

SASYNA also urges the Urban Design Commission to consider these additional factors before granting initial approval:

B1. Take better advantage of the site's unique location and shape

Rather than using only rectangles, the footprints of the Union Corners buildings should take advantage of the overall building site and its location at the point where the Isthmus ends. The site's six sides should be considered an asset that challenges designers to be creative. The current site plan appears to orient all buildings to East Washington Avenue and Sixth Street. The other edges (East Washington Avenue at Milwaukee Street, Farwell Street and the RR/bike path corridor) feature lost space around them so that the designers' rectangle can fit into the funny corners. All of this is made possible by relocating the French Battery Building. Designers should consider buildings with five or more sides in addition to non-rectangular, four-sided, structures.

Movement of the French Battery building allows designers to fall back on the simplicity of a grid oriented on East Washington Avenue, rather than the French Battery Building and the residential areas south and east of the development. This grid, as Exhibit 9 in the submitted plan shows, forces designers to ignore the curve of the railroad corridor and the curve of East Washington Avenue at Milwaukee Street. (Note that the building across East Washington Avenue, No. 2528, at North Street takes advantage of the curve of the isthmus.) This reduces the natural connections of the development to the surrounding areas and emphasizes the feel of an office park with a drive-through grocery store conveniently placed for commuters heading home after work. This design fails because of its reliance on rectangular shapes.

Union Corners is where people traveling west on East Washington Avenue turn the corner and look straight up at the Capitol. Prior to arriving at that intersection, people are looking pretty close to straight down Winnebago Street. With this site design, travelers would be looking into the face of a building and the grocery store sign. The boulevard of the town square opposite Seventh Street is not in line with that viewshed, so that inviting green space will not be highly visible from East Washington Avenue.

If the French Battery building remains in its original location, it would provide a view from East Washington Avenue prior to seeing the Capitol and enhance the gateway feeling the city is trying to create in this corridor.

As for the development's other buildings, because the views are oriented to be perpendicular to East Washington (after Milwaukee Street), the majority

of the buildings overlook residential neighborhoods. If the buildings were aligned or oriented at different angles, like the French Battery building, one side would look out over neighborhoods and the other face toward the downtown Madison skyline.

To better take advantage of the site, the buildings' alignments, shapes and footprints should be re-examined. We ask that the building designers look to earlier drafts of Union Corners plans that featured non-rectangular buildings. Keeping the rebuilt French Battery building in its original location and moving grocery store Building B right up to the Milwaukee Street sidewalk will prompt new ways of thinking about building shape and connections to established neighborhoods. Designers might consider swinging building G3 into the 20-space parking lot, for example, and moving buildings G1 and G2 to follow that shift to reorient the structures to respond to alignment of the single family homes along Farwell and street grid south of the railroad tracks.

B2. Place corner building flush with Milwaukee Street sidewalk

For much of the planning studio process, we saw site plans that placed the building at the corner of Milwaukee Street - East Wash flush up against the Milwaukee Street sidewalk edge - with parking 'behind' the building, on the site's interior -- not visible from East Washington Avenue. Now, suddenly, in the GDP as submitted we see 84 parking stalls in front of Building B (the proposed grocery store) - between the store and the Milwaukee Street sidewalk. This is exactly the kind of 'suburban' parking lot in front of the store that neighbors - and our city-approved neighborhood plan - say we don't want. The positions of Building B and the parking lot on this latest site plan should be reversed - as it was for much of the planning studio process. Building B should be constructed right up to the edge of the Milwaukee Street sidewalk. Landscaping and pedestrian paths should be used to integrate the parking lot visually with the proposed town square.

B3. Design Building "A" to follow the streetscape

Building A should be designed with a footprint that responds to the shape of the road and the corner created by the roadway. It should follow the curve of East Washington Avenue, perhaps going out to the corner with Milwaukee Street. Building A's design should acknowledge its importance as being the first building people see as the Isthmus curves -- as they travel inbound on East Washington Avenue into town.

B4. Designs should complement those of neighboring buildings

We'd like to see building designs complement those of nearby buildings such as Rebecca-Lynn Studio at 2632 Milwaukee Street, and the Victory Arms apartment building on East Washington Avenue. We recommend these buildings be looked to for inspiration and assistance in creating new buildings that fit in the neighborhood's history and character. When the Minneapolis-St. Paul consulting firm Biko & Associates was here, to help write an East Washington Avenue BUILD plan for the stretch of East Wash from Highway 30 to East High School, they specifically noted the Rebecca-Lynn Studio building, across Milwaukee Street from the Union Corners site, and the Victory Arms apartment building, across East Washington Avenue from the Union Corners site, as exemplary - and urged future developers to look to them for inspiration.

B5. Reject use of eminent domain

We ask that the city not use eminent domain or condemnation to acquire properties or to help a developer acquire properties. We do not support the use of eminent domain.

Even if negotiations may be protracted and difficult, we ask UDC to require the applicant to deal face-to-face with longtime local businesses owners, such as the owner of the radiator shop at 5th and Winnebago, to acquire properties in a fair and equitable manner.

B6. Include 'family-friendly' housing

We would like to see a percentage of Union Corners housing units be large enough to accommodate families. We wouldn't want to see predominantly one-bedroom units for childless young professionals and empty-nesters. The green space and roof terraces should be available for outdoor play by children. Units with three bedrooms should be distributed throughout the development, not segregated to one building or one floor or wing. We'd like to see families with children encouraged to rent or purchase units in this development -- to help provide employees for area businesses and to help support nearby elementary schools, which are under pressure due to demographic changes.

B7. Don't segregate affordable housing

The applicant should disperse affordable and low-income housing units equally throughout the site - rather than concentrate them in a single building or area.

B8. Include affordable office space -- to increase types of jobs available

In addition to retail space, we'd like to see the applicant include office space in his plans, especially affordable office space, that would help provide varied employment in the neighborhood and enhance opportunities to live, work and shop.

B9. Provide opportunity to move houses set to be demolished

We'd like to see the applicant provide opportunities to individuals or organizations who may be willing to move the single-family homes on Winnebago - between Fifth and Sixth Streets - rather than demolish them. These homes were not part of the planning studio discussions because the applicant did not purchase them - and include the land between East Wash and Winnebago in his site plan - until after the studio process had concluded.

B10. Community benefits in exchange for TIF assistance

The applicant will likely seek tax incremental financing (TIF) to assist with project costs. In exchange for TIF aid, we think specific, measurable benefits should be identified. For example, we'd like to see all contractors and subcontractors be required to pay a living wage for all aspects of project construction - on any project that receives city TIF assistance, and all contractors be required to hire members of disadvantaged groups and women in proportion to their representation in the

community.

Appendix A: Public input context

Since the summer of 2003, people living around the Rayovac site have been working with developer Todd McGrath to share their ideas and concerns about redevelopment of the site. This includes small-group meetings, ongoing direct contact via e-mail and telephone, meetings with the Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara Neighborhood Association (SASYNA) council, public meetings, several tours of the site and buildings, and a two-year "planning studio" process. While the studio provided an ongoing forum for discussion and brainstorming, it did not issue formal recommendations.

When city staff told SASYNA the applicant would be presenting his GDP to the Urban Design Commission (UDC) on Wednesday, December 7, SASYNA council designated a subcommittee to go over the GDP and make a recommendation to SASYNA council. To gather neighborhood input from area residents, the subcommittee announced its meetings on the neighborhood e-mail list and leafleted about 100 residences along Farwell Street, Milwaukee Street, Anzinger Court, the north side of La Follette Avenue, and the dead-ends of Dunning, Jackson and Talmadge streets and of Ohio Avenue. That leaflet included a map from Mr. McGrath's packet, a description of the short-term decision-making process and a request for input. One person who received that leaflet joined the SASYNA subcommittee. The subcommittee included people who live on La Follette and Ohio Avenues, and Marquette, Winnebago, Milwaukee and Division streets.

Appendix B: Analysis for reducing widths of streets and space devoted to parking

SASYNA asks the applicant to reduce street width to 24 feet, the minimum that the law allows. Fire lanes next to large buildings need to be no more than 26 feet wide to allow access to two fire trucks at the hydrants; no more than 20 feet are needed on each side of a hydrant. Reducing pavement widths will help the development achieve a LEED rating.

The current plan positions the buildings too far apart; the internal streets are too wide. Streets should be narrower and more intimate to encourage safe pedestrian and bicycle movement within and through the development area. This will help address a second major concern of the council, lack of connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods.

The analysis in this appendix shows that all the pavement cross sections can be reduced by 4 feet at almost every location without sacrificing fire access safety, vehicle safety, or ease of parking. Narrower road facilitate pedestrian and bicycle movement through and within the development and improve street life and safety in a walking neighborhood. Please consult developer exhibits 10 and 11 regarding the street and parking cross sections discussed below.

Cross section A-A1

On the plan, two-way with no parking is 32 feet of pavement width. This cross section should be standard 24 feet wide. If wider pavement is shown to enhance truck access, wider street should be allowed only if a truck-turning analysis demonstrates its need.

Cross section B-B1

On the plan, two-way with parallel parking on one side is 38 feet of pavement width. A parallel parking space for large vehicles is shown to be 9 by 25 feet and for small vehicles is 7.5 by 20 feet. An 8-foot wide parallel parking space provides enough space in the proposed semi-urban environment for a vehicle. This leaves a driving lane 30 feet wide (two 15-foot-wide lanes), which is significantly larger than the widest space needed for two fire trucks. This street should be reduced to no more than 24 to 26 feet wide, depending on the fire access needs.

Cross section C-C1

On the plan, two-way with parallel parking on both sides is 46 feet of pavement width. Two 8-foot-wide parallel parking lanes means the driving lane width is 30 feet (two 15-foot-wide lanes). This driving lane should be reduced to no more than 24 to 26 feet wide, depending on fire truck access needs.

Cross section E-E1

In the plan, the connection to Winnebago Street features parallel parking at both sides and is 44 feet wide. Two 8-foot-wide parallel parking lanes means the driving lane width is 28 feet (two 14-foot-wide lanes). This driving lane should be reduced to no more than 24 to 26 feet wide, depending on fire truck access needs. Note that the city has committed to narrow Winnebago Street to help calm traffic. This cross section (the smallest driving lane in the Union Corners development) connects to the extra wide street so it would current width of Winnebago Street, which the city is planning to shrink because it is too wide. We recommend that the developer and the city coordinate this connection and use the narrowest street widths that the law permits.

Cross section F-F1

In the plan, one-way with angled parking on both sides has a pavement width of 60 feet ($18+24+18=60$ feet). This area should be treated as a parking lot, not as some sort of a private street. A parking space on a 60-degree angle requires a length of 18 feet if a vehicle is allowed to hang over the sidewalk. This is possible with this design because of the extra wide sidewalks. Two 10-foot driving lanes in a parking lot are sufficient for allowing two vehicles to pass each other. A small vehicle only needs 16 feet for the parking area and a 16.5-foot pullout area. The driving lane must be limited to 20 feet wide and the parking sizes be held at 18 feet.

Footnote Bottom P.1 "Introduction": * A longtime resident on Division Street, near La Follette Avenue, told a member of the SASYNA council in early December that deletion of the carriage houses is regrettable. This neighbor attended many of the planning studio sessions in which members of the public shared their thoughts on the project with the developer. The

neighbor said he did not want to see the development become an "isolated," "walled-in city." That's his number one concern about the space. He said he'd like it to be "part of the neighborhood," "integrated" and "connected." The two-story carriage houses along the rail right-of-way helped create this feeling for him. Those carriage house units, like other aspects of earlier site plans that we liked, are no longer part of the plan.

>>> "Andrew Hanson" <drew@iceagetrail.org> 12/06/05 6:09 PM >>>
To those reviewing the Union Corners GDP,

I am a homeowner at 2702 Milwaukee St., a "stone's throw" from the proposed Union Corners development.

In general I am supportive of the Union Corners development, appreciative of the work done by McGrath & Associates, and anxious for the development to be complete so that I might take advantage of its potentially exciting commercial developments (especially a possible grocery store).

What follows are a few specific (though random) points that I would like to have considered regarding the GDP.

1. Greater effort should be made to preserve the area of large oak trees in front of the old French Battery Building. These trees add to the unique character of our neighborhood, which lacks small pockets of old-growth native vegetation like this.
2. Having some seven story buildings (or taller) as part of the development, especially along East Washington, is very important and should be encouraged. Madison needs "nodes" of higher density, such as this development should provide, near existing railroads and highways in order to facilitate successful future commuter rail or "street car" development. Building heights should vary on the site, but should include some buildings that are taller than anything currently in the neighborhood.
3. Street widths should be reduced. Narrower streets will improve street life and safety in a our neighborhood. We need our neighborhood to become more pedestrian-friendly, not less so.
4. Reduce the amount of parking, particularly along Milwaukee Street. The last site plans I saw had a building at the corner of Milwaukee Street -and East Washington. But the GDP as submitted shows 84 parking stalls along Milwaukee Street. This situation should be "re-reversed", so that there is a building along Milwaukee Street instead of a parking lot.

Thank you for reading and considering my comments.

Sincerely and respectfully,
Andrew Hanson III