

AGENDA # 7

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

PRESENTED: October 27, 2021

TITLE: 30 Ash Street/2300-2436 Regent
Street/105 Grand Avenue - Public
Building, Renovation and Additions to
West High School. 5th Ald. Dist. (66046)

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Kevin Firchow, Acting Secretary

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: October 27, 2021

ID NUMBER:

Members present were: Cliff Goodhart, Chair*; Lois Braun-Oddo, Craig Weisensel, Jessica Klehr, Christian Albouras, Christian Harper, Tom DeChant, Shane Bernau and Russell Knudson.

*Goodhart recused himself on this item, DeChant acted as Chair.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of October 27, 2021, the Urban Design Commission **DID NOT PASS A MOTION** on this item. Registered and speaking in support was Paul Raisleger. Registered in support and available to answer questions was Jackie Michaels, representing MMSD.

After final approval, City engineering staff sent correspondence noting the apparent poor condition of the retaining wall, which will at some point impact stormwater management on Van Hise Avenue. The applicant showed images of the existing wall which depicted issues including a bow to the wall with the low wall heaving and rotating toward the field and deterioration along that block. The applicant indicated they have considered different options that would fit within the UDC requirements of the previous approval.

It was noted that the wall does not have a structural base. The retaining wall would be sitting right on the property line. The applicant indicated that their contact from Findorff provided an inspection report that noted serious concerns about removing, cleaning, and reusing the existing stone. Per that report, many stones may be cracked and unusable, which would make a rebuilt wall look different. Structurally, it was indicated that a new concrete retaining wall would need to be constructed behind the stone.

The applicant is proposing a solution that is intended to meet the school district referendum requirements and UDC conditions, as well as have the support of the District Alder and surrounding neighbors. The proposal is to construct a pre-engineered concrete interlocking retaining wall. The applicant would remove the existing stone and reuse some in other places, including on-site at the corner of Regent and Highland landscape bed with ornamentals and grasses, and at the main entry on Ash Street with landscape beds as landscape features and integrating them with their bioswale. Some stone would also be reused at Southside Elementary and LaFollette High School as seating and landscape management features.

The Commission discussed the following:

- Empathize and don't disagree that the wall is failing. Like the proposals for reuse of large limestone blocks closer to the northwest corner and Ash Street and Regent and Highland intersection, that's wonderful. Still have trouble with the stacked stone masonry wall. I was particular in my previous comments because it is a signature visual aesthetic that has ties to other areas around Madison (Hoyt Park, Nakoma, Breese Stevens). Looked into its history without much success. Have deep reservations about removing this iconic front door to Madison West. Not to say the proposals aren't attractive and functional, but the loss of the natural stone wall is a real loss to the community.
 - We looked at every option to save that wall. There are safety concerns as well, we just aren't able from a safety standpoint able to reuse any of that stone.
 - There is some feedback from the contractor, they have very serious concerns about if the individual limestone block components can actually withstand coming down and being reused. Once the grout is knocked off the grout could disintegrate.
- I understand it definitely comes with a price tag, I'm sensitive to that as a public project. That all said I don't accept that this is mission impossible. The similar walls along the Arboretum have been repaired in recent years. Thoreau School also.
 - That's a very good point, it could be done but it would be an enormous price tag.
- Have you explored other options that don't disassemble but rather create a backing to a wall?
 - We do run into a space issue with WIAA space requirements around the field. We're still left with a wall that has no footing under it.
- I share the pain of the demise of this wall. While it appears the district has done some homework and made a good effort at finding a high quality structured replacement, I've never seen one of those that didn't look exactly like what it is. This looks better than most. I wish somebody would make one that would actually look like real stone. Cognizant of the cost. Was building a new wall with new stone looked at?
 - The retaining wall if it is a hand built stone wall is \$925,000. This proposal is around \$325,000.
- Unfortunately our hands or kind of tied on this. I'd encourage you to go to whatever lengths to find something that looks good, matches color and texture-wise. Kudos for finding places for reusing what you can.
- I see the position you're in. Unless you were required by a historic preservation consideration it's a stretch. These walls always look very suburban. Is there another option that gives a nod to this existing limestone and appropriate in the city? It might be worth looking into something that isn't going to look fake. This warrants something more special.
 - Those come in at an astronomical number.
- How much of it is the slope and terracing of the wall?
- I was treating them as two separate materials and areas I don't take issue with elimination of the terraced stone because they have a nice proposal for reusing that material. It's more the masonry wall that continues all along Highland Avenue almost to the Regent Street intersection.
 - We'd still have that break in the middle.
- Point of clarification: It's outside the jurisdiction of the UDC to approve anything in the City's right-of-way.
- One difference is the strong horizontal lines between layers where the older rock didn't have that. Can it be installed in a way that looks more natural or less structured?
 - This product actually interlocks together and have a definitive way they fit together.
- If there's any product or method of installation where the horizontal line isn't so clean and unnatural. It's a sad thing to lose the texture and character of that wall.

- Agree with the suburban appearance of these newer products. Is there an opportunity to rebuild just that corner with the true reclaimed facing and doing a simpler product on the two walls that go down Van Hise? Retain the most visible corner faced with the reclaimed stone.
 - There we are getting into mixing and matching construction system which can be more expensive. We'd recommend making it all one material, but the idea of stepping at the corner is an interesting one. We could look at terracing those down but mindful of the view triangle at the intersection.
- I think there's a design aspect of this that's critical and important, how it interfaces with the neighborhood and pedestrians. To lose it is a loss in the urban design to the community.

ACTION:

The Urban Design Commission **DID NOT PASS A MOTION** on this item.

An original motion was made by Bernau, seconded by Knudson to advise denial of the proposal. Firchow noted that the Commission is an advisory body on this request. The motion to deny failed on a roll call vote of (4-3) with Knudson, Bernau and Klehr voting to deny; Braun-Oddo, Albouras and Harper voting in opposition to denial, and DeChant voting to deny to break the tie. The motion of (4-3) failed for lack of five votes to pass.

Summary of discussion on first motion:

- Sympathies but feel the district is in a bad spot here. From a logistical and economical standpoint it looks like their position is the way it's probably going to go.

A subsequent motion was made by Braun-Oddo, seconded by Albouras to approve the concept but asking the design team to consider a different material for the wall that would be equitably priced for the district but be less suburban looking and more appropriate for a city school. The motion failed on a roll call vote of (1-5) with Braun-Oddo voting yes; Bernau, Knudson, Klehr, Albouras and Harper voting no.

Summary of discussion on second motion:

- The Urban Design Commission thinks it isn't acceptable to use Ready-Rock. Important to advance the context of our discussion.
- We're balancing what's the biggest benefit to the community? How the school interfaces with the neighborhood around it? This wall provides so much to the surrounding neighbors. We talked about a pretty aggressive programming of the football field inside that site and how tight that is. Now we're revisiting something we approved last time that is so tight, so much so that it's affecting the wall.
- I think that offers more ambiguity, not clarity, leaving it too wide open. It confirms we are OK with the existing wall coming down and in its essence that's the part I'm most disagreeable to. A certain amount of creativity is required. I don't think we've seen enough analysis in the data and presentation, my suspicion is it's more about the Van Hise portion pushing into the football field rather than this narrow wall along the property line on Highland Avenue. Sending the message we're OK with removing it is dangerous. It's a real loss for the neighborhood but I don't see a way for it to stay and if it can't, we should insist on a better material.
- I'm interpreting that City Engineering said it should be replaced but not that it has to be replaced. Are we concerned about public safety here, understanding it's not optimal for stormwater?
 - We interpreted it as something that City Engineering is looking to happen. The degradation of it will continue and it could affect the infrastructure.

- I imagine there are ways to slow down the degradation of this wall. Wondering if there is a path to saving the wall.
- In discussing seconding the motion, Ald. Albouras indicated that it's his philosophy to allow healthy dissent to occur. By granting a second it allows for a discussion. In his tenure here most things haven't been so controversial, he wanted to be clear on his voting.