

222 SOUTH BEDFORD STREET DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

Position Statement Bassett Neighborhood Steering Committee

Steering committee members: Jonathan Cooper, Tom Marmet, Samantha Negrin, Peter Ostlind, Jessica Stoddard Piatt, Bob Probst, Neil Richardson, and Ron Luskin, chair.

Background

We are a duly constituted steering committee of the Bassett Neighborhood District, Capitol Neighborhoods, Inc. (CNI).

We wish to acknowledge with gratitude and admiration Urban Land interests (ULI). For many, many years ULI has made significant investments in Downtown Madison and the downtown area. The renaissance in the downtown area can be attributed to a great extent to ULI and its many successful projects including Block 89, US Bank Building, and now the Anchor Bank project on the Capitol Square. In our immediate neighborhood, we are impressed by the renovation of the Tobacco Lofts and recent completion of SEVEN 27 and Nine Line Apartments.

For those of us living in the downtown area, we chose to do so because we are excited by the extraordinary opportunities of living in a dynamic and exciting urban environment in Madison. We are pleased to witness the many improvements made since the early 2000s and continue to proceed to the present day. We also recognize the inherent intent of the City of Madison Downtown Plan and realize high quality urban infill projects are necessary and important. Moreover, we understand, 222 South Bedford is a site that can be redeveloped to a “higher and better use.”

Over the past few months, ULI initiated communications about a pending project with Alder Verveer and the Bassett Neighborhood. We are pleased that two appearances have occurred with the Bassett Neighborhood at its monthly meetings. One meeting was held with the steering committee in January. And, mostly recently, Alder Mike Verveer hosted a neighborhood meeting at Findorff. Plus, numerous informal conversations may have taken place among residents of the area with members of the ULI development team. All interactions have been very cordial.

Project Considerations

With the recognition that a project on this site is emerging, residents of the Bassett Neighborhood are engaged. We are most interested in having this project make a contribution to enhancing the urban life experience for residents and visitors to our neighborhood.

Consequently, in thoughtful deliberations, the members of the steering committee wish to advise the ULI development team of the following critical issues for the neighborhood.

Ten foot setbacks and preservation of terrace trees is a major enhancement to the project – One matter consistent in prior communications we have had with the development team, and they seem to be inextricably linked, is the issue of setbacks and the preservation of terrace trees on both Bedford and Doty Streets. Many of us who have communicated with ULI have consistently advocated for setbacks sufficient to offer both a better streetscape and a greater opportunity for the trees to be preserved.

It is our understanding, the design proposal to go forward calls for seven-foot setbacks and the certain elimination of the terrace trees on Bedford Street. Further, with seven-foot setbacks, it is our understanding, the terrace trees on Doty Street are vulnerable and may need to be removed as well. A seven-foot setback and elimination of the trees, we believe, is a detriment to what can otherwise be an outstanding addition to our neighborhood's urban life experience.

Presently, the current building on site has an ten-foot setback. Not all, but many condominium and apartment buildings in the Bassett Neighborhood have similar setbacks. These buildings include, but are not limited to, City Place, City Gables, Domain, Renaissance, Bedford Court, and 4th Ward Lofts, the immediate across-the-street neighbor of this project. Most homes, nearby in the neighborhood, have a grassy front yard. A contextual, complementary design would be welcomed.

Ten-foot setbacks "activate" the street for residents and pedestrians alike. Residents of first floor apartments, on Bedford and Doty Streets, can enjoy the space and landscaping outdoors on their porch and street life around them. Such a design encourages interaction among neighbors to their side, across the street, and passersby in an inviting urban setting. It both promotes safety and builds community!

Preservation of the terrace trees is a key component to enhancing the urban experience. The eight or so trees in question are magnificent. They are each estimated to be more than thirty years old. They are strong and healthy Honey Locust trees, not otherwise susceptible to disease. From May to October, from spring to summer to fall, the canopy of the trees is amazingly beautiful and an enhancement to your site and the neighborhood.

There has been recent research conducted, and findings published, by Geoffrey H. Donovan (USDA Forest Service) and various colleagues, regarding the positive impact of urban trees. While the research was conducted in Portland, Oregon, we believe it is worth noting the following findings.

- "The effect of urban trees on the rental price of single-family homes in Portland," *Urban Forest and Urban Greening*, 2011

Key finding: An additional tree on a house's lot increased monthly rent by \$5.62, and a tree in the public right of way increased rent by \$21.00.

- "The Effect of Trees on Crime in Portland, Oregon," *Environment and Behavior*, 2012

Key finding: Trees in the public right of way are associated with lower crime rates.

- "Urban trees and the risk of poor birth outcomes," *Health and Place*, 2011

Key finding: There is increasing evidence that greenness can improve the health of urban residents. In particular, the incidence of pregnant women with proximity and exposure to tree-canopy cover can play a role in decreasing adverse birth outcomes.

We do acknowledge the circumstances pertaining to this research are not a one hundred percent correlation with the pending project, however, the fact remains, research findings substantiate the importance of preserving urban trees. After all, trees in the terrace are "public trees."

RECOMMENDATION—We respectfully request the development team further explore design options on the site that would allow for ten-foot setbacks with the possibility the terrace trees can be preserved. We further request the City of Madison, Parks Division, Forestry Section, be asked by the development team to provide consultation on a project that would include an ten-foot setback to determine the probability of preserving the terrace trees on both Bedford and Doty Streets. We request this information be shared with the Bassett Neighborhood Steering Committee and the Urban Design Commission.

Promoting bike riding and bicycle safety—Madison has distinguished itself as a premiere city for bicyclists, whether that be for pleasure or riding to work. With the proximity of the bike path to this development and the unofficial nature of Doty Street as a bicycle boulevard for riders to and from the Capitol, it is important the development team be proactive in providing amenities for bicyclists.

RECOMMENDATION—We request considerations be made, based on your knowledge of tenant preferences, regarding amenities to be provided to assist bikers and visitors for indoor and outdoor bike parking. Additionally, we request inquiries be made with City of Madison officials to determine how best to alert drivers, leaving 222 South Bedford and 4th Ward Lofts parking structures, they be aware of bike traffic. Lastly, consideration ought to be given to the slope of the driveway exit path.

Public access adjacent to railway corridor—We appreciate the developer's intent to allow public access along this pathway.

REQUEST—We seek a strong commitment from the development team, through the approval process, to this public path.

Camouflaging and shielding mechanical systems and elevator shaft from view—At a recent meeting of the neighborhood, questions were raised about the HVAC systems and their visibility on the rooftop.

REQUEST—As project design revisions are revealed, we wish to see how the rooftop design is being contemplated to shield unpleasant views from neighbors.

We truly thank you for your time and attention to these matters. We look forward to continuing our dialogue with the ULI development team to arrive at a mutually beneficial redevelopment project.

On behalf of the steering committee...

Respectfully submitted,

Ronald S. Luskin
Steering Committee Chair