

Mansion Hill Neighborhood Association

c/o Eugene Devitt
28 East Gilman Street
Madison, WI 53703

June 11, 2012

Plan Commission Members & Staff
c/o Mr. William Fruhling, AICP
Department of Planning & Community
& Economic Development
P.O. Box 2985
Madison, WI 53701-2985

RE: Proposed Zoning Changes for Historic Districts

Dear Plan Commissioners:

As you know, infill development in historic districts is controlled in detail by each districts' design handbook. This is the document upon which owners in historic districts rely for their own ability to rebuild after a disaster, or in some cases, for additions. Owners and residents also rely on the design guidebook to provide limits on what can be built in the historic district. The purpose of a historic district is to give confidence to owners who will hopefully restore and maintain their properties in the district. Mansion Hill neighbors and historic preservationists believe that PDD should not be permitted in historic districts and that the established historic district guidelines should be the control. Specifically, our concern is that developers will go directly to PDD and totally ignore the Historic District's guidelines for infill.

Successful historic districts are built on confidence that infill will be appropriate for those districts that make up only a tiny percentage of Madison zoned real estate. Emphasis should be placed on creating an atmosphere of confidence that the City is behind the historic districts and will not be thrown off course by desire for additional tax base or density.

Sincerely,

Mansion Hill Neighborhood Association



Eugene Devitt
Representative

To: Madison Plan Commission
 From: Ledell Zellers
 Subject: Downtown Plan – Staff memo dated June 11, 2012.
 Date: June 11, 2012

Staff memo reference	Comment
Page 5, first and second items.	The PDD/PUD/conditional use processes for exceeding heights should be discouraged or prohibited in Historic Districts. Historic districts are valuable to the city and to our downtown and are irreplaceable. We need owner occupants in our downtown heritage homes who will commit to rehabilitating them. Many of the homes have taken a horrible beating from absentee landlords whose primary goal is making the most money possible without the necessary maintenance and repair. It is difficult to convince people to commit to living downtown and rehabbing these homes if there is the continuous threat of inappropriate development that will damage the fundamental meaning of the historic district. The initial cost of the home, plus the very high cost correcting the problems brought on by deferred maintenance plus the constant fight to even have a credible historic district are significant barriers. If we want credible historic districts which contribute so much to the ambience, architectural diversity and health of our downtown we need predictability in these districts.
Page 19; first item.	The Johnson-Gorham one-way pair is a significant piece of the downtown one-way transportation network. As a result, for a complete review of that one-way network, that pair should be included in any review that is undertaken.
Page 25, second item.	Recommendation 163 should be amended to read: “Nominate as local landmarks those buildings identified in Complete the Downtown Historic Preservation Plan (1998) to ensure that it is an effective tool for preserving Downtown’s heritage resources by following through on its recommendations, including determining if as potential landmarks are still valid and to identify whether previously unidentified buildings now warrant Landmarking.”
Page 25, fourth item.	The addition of the phrase “if initiated by a representative group of property owners” should be reconsidered. This is an area largely made up of homes owned by absentee landlords. Absentee owners in this area may have goals that vary from land use, character, and heritage goals of the larger city. The city should have the flexibility to pursue/approve this landmark district if it deems it is in the best interests of the downtown.
Page 41, Key 5	The first three bullets of the “Enhance Livability” benchmarks are quantity benchmarks that do not really assess fundamental livability. The number of residents, number of housing units and number of families are high in many places that we would not equate with “livability”. I think these three measures need to be reconsidered.
Page 41, Key 7	Change the second bullet to read: “Increase the frequency of inspections of landmarks and properties in local and national historic districts.”