

To the Members of the
Madison Landmarks Commission
City of Madison Planning Division
215 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Room LL.100
P.O. Box 2985
Madison, WI 53701-2985

January 20, 2011

Dear Members of the Landmarks Commission,

We are working with the Applicant, Matt and Julie Sager, on the design of a small residence for them and their two children, to be located on a vacant property on 209 N. Prospect Avenue in the University Heights neighborhood. This parcel was subdivided from the adjacent property, the Ely House, at 205 North Prospect. The parcel is Lot 2 on the Certified Survey Map dated May 30, 2008 (I.D.#09438). Matt and Julie Sager used to own a house in University Heights. After a year living abroad, they are now looking forward to returning to the neighborhood with their family and constructing a moderately sized, environmentally sustainable house – a high-quality contemporary home respectful and sensitive to the diverse architecture of the neighborhood that has evolved over more than a century.

General Description and Scope: The proposed house has a footprint of approximately 900 SF and will provide about 2,000 SF of living space, distributed on two levels. The building is a simple rectangular volume with a partially cantilevered second floor. A partially exposed lower level 2-car garage and basement is built into the existing slope of the site. On the south side, the building height is approximately 21', measured from the top of the slope where the main entry is located, and about 31' at the north elevation, where the lower level is fully exposed.

Siting and Trees: The 75' setback from the street places the house behind the neighboring homes on Prospect Avenue, avoiding a "crowded" street edge and minimizing the visual impact on the adjacent homes. The proposed setback maximizes the open green space along the street edge and buffers the effects of adding a new house to the block. The structure is carefully sited to avoid the removal of healthy, mature trees. An arborist retained by the Applicant has prepared a Tree Preservation Plan, which is included in the application package and indicates the three trees on the lot that the arborist designated for removal because of their conditions.

Materials: The exterior material palette consists of brick and horizontal wood siding. The proposed brick veneer, used on the first level and along the exposed walls of the basement, will be specified as "Norman", an elongated masonry format that accentuates horizontality (dimensions: 2-1/4"x 11-7/8"x3-5/8" (HxLxD), laid in a running bond. The mortar color will match the finish of the brick. The second story will be clad in 3 1/2" smooth horizontal T&G cedar boards, finished with a high-performance stain and sealer. The main exterior materials used in the Visually Related Area include brick, stucco, horizontal wood siding, and vertical wood siding; it is therefore our opinion that the proposed material palette is in conformance with Section 33.19 (12) (f) 1b.

Roof Shape: A flat roof, part of the contemporary architectural palette of the design, was chosen to reduce the profile and perceived height and lower the visual impact of the building. A thorough study of the houses on the block and along the adjacent streets shows the presence of eight distinguishable roof shapes, including flat roofs, gambrels, hip roofs, and steep and shallow gables. Likewise, there is no prevalent roof shape within the more narrowly defined Visually Related Area as determined by the Landmarks Commission. The twelve houses within the 200' radius of the VRA feature six different roof types, including hip roofs with no overhangs, a substantial flat roof addition on 1711 Kendall Ave, prairie hips, a Spanish-colonial roof, as well as steep gables that face either the street or the side yards. In addition, the 200' radius is just a few feet short of the flat-roof house on 1702 Summit Avenue, which shares its western lot line with the Applicant's property and is clearly visible from the site. It is our opinion that the proposed flat roof is meeting the intent of the Landmarks Ordinance section 33.19(5)(b) 4d., as it echoes one of the many roof forms found in the Visually Related Area and the neighborhood at large. We also believe that the proposed setback of 75' further mitigates potential concerns about the compatibility of the flat roof with the roof shapes of the immediately adjacent homes to the north and south (205 N. Prospect and 211 N. Prospect). By taking its place in the back, the house respectfully leaves the existing street elevation intact and avoids direct aesthetic competition with its older neighbors.

Neighborhood Feedback: The Applicant has been exemplary in engaging the neighbors and the district's Alderperson, Ms. Shiva Bidar-Silaf, at an early stage in the design process. On January 8, 2011, the Applicant invited the neighbors of the block and the Alderperson to an informal meeting to introduce them to their plans, get initial feedback on the design, and discuss any concerns. The turnout was very good, and no objections were raised to the idea of a flat-roof house on the site. The house's setback from the street, its modest size, and the fact that the flat roof will allow the house to keep a low profile was widely appreciated. The Applicant is organizing a follow-up neighborhood meeting, scheduled for February 5, 2011, to hear additional comments and to answer any other questions about their building plans.

Please consider the enclosed Letter of Support from the owners of the Ely House at 205 N. Prospect Avenue, Harvey and Trudy Barash, as a summary of the general sentiments voiced by many neighbors upon reviewing the proposed design. We would appreciate an equally favorable review of this application from the Landmarks Commission.

Sincerely,

Brian Johnsen, AIA
Johnsen Schmalting Architects