



NORTHSIDE PLANNING COUNCIL & NORTHSIDE NEWS  
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July 15, 2010

Mr. Tim Cooley  
Director, City of Madison Economic Development Division  
Madison Municipal Building  
P.O. Box 2983  
Madison, WI 53701

Re: City Development Review and Approval Initiative

Dear Mr. Cooley:

The Northside Planning Council (NPC) has prepared the following recommendations for consideration by the City of Madison's Economic Development Committee (EDC) and staff, to aid in Mayor Cieslewicz's goal for improving the City's Development Review and Approval Process (DRAP).

These recommendations are made by Northside neighborhood leaders and economic development professionals who understand the complex issues surrounding the current DRAP. With that respect, please find these recommendations as an offer of our assistance to the City, in a partnership to help advance the DRAP toward a more efficient, predictable and respected process that will benefit the entire community.

In preparing these recommendations, NPC has carefully reviewed the existing materials already prepared by the City and other interested stakeholders. NPC believes it is foremost important to stress that the current DRAP is *not* a "broken" process. Development applications are still processed with relative timeliness in comparison to similar sized communities. Madison's tradition of a highly involved citizenry continues to aid in the production of quality, sustainable projects that benefit the entire neighborhood. And, Madison has a well trained professional staff, very capable of addressing the needs of any development application. The DRAP however, does lack simplicity, efficiency, and at times, can be highly unpredictable, especially for first time applicants or those with larger projects. Thus, improvements to the DRAP are without question necessary. We must however ensure, that any change, continues to respect the traditional community values that make Madison one of the finest cities in the nation.

The following comments, suggestions and recommendations are offered for your strong consideration:

### 1. Use Neighborhood Plans for Decision Making.

In stark contrast to recommendations that have been made by other stakeholders, NPC firmly believes that Neighborhood Plans should be utilized and implemented more aggressively throughout any development process, and without question, should always be adopted and considered as a subsection of the City's Smart Growth Comprehensive Plan.

The Northport-Warner Park-Sherman Neighborhood Plan (NWS), adopted in late 2009, was created over a two year participatory process by City officials, property owners and over 150 actively involved citizens. The Plan has all of the required elements of the Wisconsin Smart Growth Comprehensive Plan Legislation and was intentionally designed to guide and foster the development and redevelopment of the entire Northside Neighborhood. The City of Madison Comprehensive Plan is not specifically intended to address development design and community needs at the neighborhood level. The City is too large to accommodate neighborhood level discussions outside of a neighborhood planning process. Thus it is highly appropriate to subsection the Comprehensive Plan into neighborhood regions, while developing neighborhood plans like NWS that take into account all the Smart Growth needs that a community requires.

As such, we strongly recommend that all City of Madison Neighborhood Plans be updated to meet all state requirements so as to become complete subsections of the City's Comprehensive Plan. Thereafter, the developer will have a concise and clear Plan to follow, that has already been approved by the community. The public, therefore, would have already had two years of input in creating the Plan. Should the developer adhere to all of their Plan requirements, the public will have no grounds to object to the development proposal and the application process should be very predictable. Should the developer wish however, to propose a project in contrast with the Plan, obviously they should expect significant public involvement and a longer and more complex review and approval process.

### 2. Neighborhood Input Upfront is Critical.

Again, should a Smart Growth Neighborhood Plan be in place, the developer would already have a sound foundation on which to craft a proposal and share with the community. Regardless as to whether or not a Neighborhood Plan is in place however, the process should require that development proposals first seek neighborhood input, upfront, prior to preparing and especially finalizing a development proposal. Doing so will significantly increase opportunities for community awareness and support for the proposal, and even demonstrate potential Plan conformance. This allows for a more structured dialog with the neighborhood and helps limit misinformation. It further demonstrates a willing partnership between the developer and the neighborhood to improve the project together, making cost-appropriate enhancements that one or the other may not have considered or even understood.

Should the process be amended to seek public input upfront, many of the neighborhood concerns or issues should be addressed by the time the proposal proceeds to the appropriate committee/commission. It would therefore, no longer be necessary to repeat the public input process (with the same intensity) at the committee/commission level, and certainly would not be necessary when presented before the Common Council. Additional public input sessions or hearings would only be necessary when dealing with extremely complex projects that require a great deal of attention and creativity; projects that have a City-wide impact rather than just that of the local neighborhood.

### 3. Reorganization with the Creation of a Centralized Agency.

The City of Madison must unify its segmented divisions and create a one-stop-shop, a centralized development review agency. Without question, this is the single most significant improvement the City can make to improve the DRAP. A centralized agency that fosters a supportive attitude for development, utilizing all the resources of the City's current staff, would do wonders to improve the efficiency and reduce confusion and secure predictability for anyone participating in the DRAP.

### 4. Major Project Ombudsman.

Major projects require direct staff support and professional guidance to facilitate the applicant through the potentially complex process. An ombudsman or project facilitator should be assigned to advocate for and lead the development proposal through the DRAP. These individuals would be key members of the Centralized Agency team, coordinating on behalf of the applicant between other agency staff and acting as the key personnel to foster communication with committees/commissions and elected officials. This missing component of the current DRAP significantly hinders efficiency and leaves the applicant to muddle through a process "alone," giving off the incorrect perception that the City does not support its development community. Should the City choose not to invest in a complete reorganization to form a Centralized Agency, the creation of "Project Ombudsman Positions" becomes even more paramount should the City wish to create a DRAP that meets efficiency and predictability goals.

### 5. Consider Creating Community/Economic Development Zones.

It may be advisable to add a new component to the evolving DRAP that would allow for expedited development reviews in areas the City wishes to target Community/Economic Development activities. Low to moderate income areas of the City may benefit from a City-wide policy that creates "Development Review Zones," that would "fast-track" and provide "incentives" to promote development in those areas that would otherwise not likely attract proposals due to the areas' hardships. This recommendation would require more detailed discussion, far beyond that of improving the DRAP, but it is an essential consideration for attaining targeted economic development enhancements.

NPC is hopeful these recommendations will help the City make appropriate improvements to the DRAP. Please contact us anytime to address questions and continue a healthy dialog on how

best to approach implementing DRAP changes. We appreciate your consideration and value our partnership as we work together to enhance the City of Madison.

Sincerely,

*Scott Heinig*

Scott Heinig  
Executive Director  
Northside Planning Council

Cc: Mayor David Cieslewicz  
Alder Michael Schumacher  
Alder Satya Rhodes-Conway  
NPC Board of Directors  
East Isthmus Neighborhood Planning Council  
South Metropolitan Planning Council