

Tenney-Lapham Neighborhood Association

January 31, 2007

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Mayor Dave Cieslewicz
210 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
Room 403
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

Dear Mayor Cieslewicz,

The Tenney-Lapham Neighborhood Association (TLNA) is opposed to the maximum building heights proposed by the final report of East Washington Capitol Gateway BUILD Steering Committee for some of blocks in its study area. TLNA supports the four core principles identified by the BUILD committee, but we feel that the heights proposed in the final report fail to support the core principle of respecting and strengthening the adjoining neighborhoods.

Over the last 18 months, TLNA has been updating its Neighborhood Plan. Our association council has adopted the revised plan and City staff is presently reviewing it. The new Tenney-Lapham Neighborhood Plan looks forward to significant future development along the north side of East Washington Ave. from Blair to First Streets (our overlap with the BUILD). In many respects, our tandem visions for these blocks are compatible, including dramatic increases in height and density. East Washington Avenue has tremendous potential to become a grand boulevard approaching the State Capitol; and achieving that vision is something we strongly support.

However, in the matter of maximum heights, the BUILD report goes too far. The TLNA Plan calls for a maximum of 8 stories on many blocks, as does the East Rail Corridor Plan for the south side of the street. An 8-story building can be a substantial and elegant structure – consider the Risser Justice Center downtown as a good example. But the BUILD calls for 12 story heights on parts of the north side of East Washington and 15 stories on parts of the south side. We believe these heights are aesthetically out of proportion with the adjoining neighborhood, will physically overwhelm the transportation infrastructure, and will jeopardize other land use and street use goals of isthmus neighborhoods.

Last March, TLNA communicated this concern to the BUILD Committee and we are repeating it to you now. Our hope is that the final East Washington BUILD plan will support and enhance both the Tenney-Lapham Neighborhood Plan and East Rail Corridor Plan, knitting them together instead of undermining them. We urge you intercede in the next phase of the process to ensure that the BUILD plan is corrected in this regard.

Sincerely,

Patrick McDonnell
President
Tenney-Lapham Neighborhood Association

cc Madison Common Council
Mark Olinger

The EWCGC BUILD partially overlaps both the Tenney-Lapham (T-L) Neighborhood Plan and the East Rail Corridor (ERC) Plan. The BUILD was intended to be a supplement to the T-L and ERC plans to aesthetically unify them and give focus and identity to the seam between them.

The T-L Plan and the ERC Plan are both pro-development and pro-density with respect to the Corridor, each calling for substantially larger structures and more diverse uses than exist today.

The BUILD and the two underlying plans have much in common with respect to the vision and goals for development in the Corridor. Many of the same employment and economic development themes, multi-modal transportation themes, and family-friendly, live-work residential themes are evident in all three plans.

The Problem

The maximum building heights in the BUILD not only override those in the underlying plans, but they jeopardize the successful achievement of the vision and goals for the Corridor, including those set forth in the text of the BUILD report itself. This is a case of form *not* following function. Worse yet, this could be a case of form *defeating* function.

The heights are problematic not only for undermining the stated aims for the Corridor, but also for the impact they will have on the larger planning areas of Tenney-Lapham and the ERC. Multiple negative impacts will be felt in both cases.

Internal impacts to the BUILD planning area:

- Land Cost
- Parking
- Use of TIF
- Branding and marketing of the district

External impacts to the adjoining T-L and ERC areas:

- Imbalance of scale
- Traffic and transportation
- Live/Work family orientation
- Land Values/Uses - residential and commercial

Although the BUILD presents a block-by-block comparison of its height standards to the ERC standards (page 18), it does not present a rationale or impact analysis for overriding them. A comparison to the T-L Plan height standards is not presented. Following on the next pages are a more detailed analysis and discussion of the consequences of the proposed maximum building heights in the BUILD report.

Internal Consequences of Heights to the BUILD Planning Area

“Maximum building heights will have a more profound effect on the intensity of development and character of the Corridor than perhaps any other bulk standard.” (BUILD, page 17)

Consistent with ERC, the BUILD envisions an employment district with a character quite distinct from those found in outlying parts of the city and suburbs:

Key values for business and employment (BUILD page 6):

- Provide a vibrant mix of businesses
- Create a live-work environment
- Provide incubator and post-incubator space
- Attract light industrial and office businesses
- Focus business development on job creation, family-supporting wages, and neighborhood-based businesses
- Retain and attract high wage employment
- Retain and attract businesses that provide meaningful employment to Isthmus residents

Potential Employment Generating Uses (BUILD page 10):

“The Corridor’s urban location...makes it particularly well suited to innovative and creative industries, including the arts, as well as those businesses and non-profits needing proximity to the Capitol.”

- Urban start-ups/Accelerator Space
- Design/Creative Center and Related Uses
- Food-related businesses
- Wisconsin Gateway showcase

The BUILD identifies serious challenges to achieving this vision: “lack of land, high land cost, and lack of parking.” (page 9) And further, “...the City will need to make full and creative use of the newly established TIF District #36 to overcome some of the economic disadvantages faced by redevelopment within the Corridor.”

But the maximum heights will actually work against the achievement of the vision, goals, and key values for the Corridor in a number of ways:

- Higher Land Cost.** The maximum heights allowed by the plan will drive up the market valuation of the land in the Corridor. The higher land costs will cause developers to propose buildings be built as high as possible. The maximum height will become the norm, not a rarity.
- More Parking.** The projection for the amount parking that will be necessary to support the new commercial space in Corridor is lacking other than the statement that without reduction in automobile use “a colossal amount of land area and building ‘volume’ will have to be devoted to parking” (page 28). The likelihood that the proposed mitigation strategies (shared parking, parking cash out,

community car, live/work) will have a meaningful effect on the number of parking spaces needed is slim at best.

- c. **Use of TIF.** The higher land costs and parking costs will be borne by the City to a great extent. All of the Corridor is already in or is proposed to be included in TIF District #36 by amendment. The need for TIF to underwrite higher land costs and parking costs will be substantially increased by the maximum heights. This will divert TIF from anticipated uses identified in the ERC Plan and the TID #36 Resolution.

- d. **Branding and Marketing of the District.** High density, tall office buildings are less conducive to proactive stimulation of neighborhood-based and other small businesses, startups, incubators, non-profits, etc. Furthermore, a number of business ventures - light manufacturing, for example - are not well served by buildings over 6 stories. Because of their acquisition and construction costs, the tall buildings will more likely be rented or sold at the highest market rates. The kind of diverse uses and local economic development envisioned and valued by the ERC Plan will be priced out. The result, also contrary to the BUILD's vision, will be an economic monoculture - the commuter-based office park. This use is not only rejected by the ERC Plan, but is strongly opposed by the surrounding neighborhoods.

External Consequences to the Tenney-Lapham and ERC Planning Areas:

While E. Washington is a transportation corridor moving a high volume of automobile traffic, it is also a long, static border of the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood and the East Rail Corridor, accessed from both sides. The BUILD does not address the impact of its height standards on the adjoining areas, nor does it present a rationale for exceeding the height standards proposed in the draft Tenney-Lapham Neighborhood Plan or the adopted East Rail Corridor Plan. Given the geographic compression of the isthmus, the effects increased development are magnified more than in most other areas. It is essential that increased density and development be targeted a level that does not overwhelm the capacity of the surrounding transportation and residential infrastructure to expand to absorb and support it.

The community and economic impact of the BUILD's proposed heights will affect the adjoining areas in a number of ways:

- a. **Imbalance of Scale.** The Corridor is a flat plain, originally a marsh, between two ridges along each side of the isthmus. Both the T-L Plan and the ERC Plan envision a scaling up towards E. Washington from the north and south – essentially making the Corridor a “central ridge”. Both plans envision a variation of heights within an overall envelope of 8 stories on both sides. The BUILD heights double this envelope, making a central “spike” that is imbalanced on both sides of the Avenue and towers over the natural landscape and built

environment. (Note: The only building in the corridor over 3 stories in height was built in 1915 – the Kluetter Grocery Warehouse – at 901 E. Washington.)

- a. **Traffic and Transportation.** The vehicular transportation infrastructure of the isthmus is already stretched. The BUILD's transportation section (page 28) does not provide a transportation impact analysis. Instead it defers the question to other efforts that may or may not be fruitful. The draft Tenney-Lapham Plan advocates for development of a comprehensive transportation strategy to distribute trip demand across more modes in order to adequately support the increased densities called for by ERC and T-L Plans. But the densities that could result from the BUILD heights will result in overwhelming automobile commuting pressures on neighborhood streets and on arterials such as Johnson, Gorham and Williamson, even in the best-case transit scenario.
- b. **Live/Work Family Orientation.** The Tenney-Lapham and Marquette neighborhoods were built as live/work, family-oriented environments and want to maintain that status. More employment opportunities for pedestrian and transit-oriented live/work lifestyles for more residents of adjacent downtown and isthmus neighborhoods are major goals in both the East Rail Corridor and Tenney-Lapham plans. The BUILD heights will inevitably result in an office park district that will be predominately automobile commuter based. From previous experience in both Marquette and Tenney-Lapham neighborhoods, we know that high levels of commuter traffic incursion result in destabilization, decrease in home-ownership and housing quality, and reduction in families with school-age children.
- c. **Residential Land Values/Uses.** The proposed BUILD heights will also exert increased pressure for higher housing costs as well as tear down and construction of residential densities much higher than those reasonably envisioned by the existing plans, again challenging the retention and development of home ownership by families with children, age and income diversity, affordability, and traditional neighborhood scale.
- d. **Commercial Land Values/Uses.** The BUILD heights on the south side of East Washington and the north side of East Main far exceed the ERC Plan heights and will inevitably be used to justify similar overrides to the ERC height limits on the south side of East Main (and likely beyond to the rest of TID 36), driving up land values, as discussed above, and further undermining the adopted vision and goals for the East Rail Corridor.

Conclusion

While the core values and vision of the EWCSB BUILD are appropriate and consistent with other plans for the area, the bulk standards, particularly the heights, paint an altogether different picture. These standards should be revised before the plan is adopted and before Urban Design District #8 is created.

East Washington Capitol Gateway Corridor BUILD
Effects of Maximum Building Heights

2/28/07

By Patrick McDonnell, Marsha Rummel, and Peter Wolff

E. Washington BUILD, TLNA, ERC
Comparison of Maximum Building Height Standards

Block	North Side of E. Washington		South Side of E. Washington	
	BUILD	TLNA Plan	ERC Plan	BUILD
600	8	8	8	15
700	12	8	8	15
800	12	8	8	15
900	Breese Stevens Field		8	15
1000	12	8	8	12
1100	3	3	5	10
1200	3	3	5	10
1300	8	8	5	12
1400	8	8	5	12
Yahara River	-	-	-	-
1600-1800	8	Transit Hub	N/A	4

Maximums expressed as a range, for example 12 – 15, are shown here as the “maximum maximum”, i.e. 15.