



Date: January 17, 2012

To: Steven Cover, Director  
City of Madison Planning and Community and Economic Development

From: Susan Schmitz, President  
Downtown Madison, Inc. (DMI)

Subject: DMI Comments on the Downtown Plan

The most recent version of the Downtown Plan Final Draft (the plan) includes many improvements from the first draft, and DMI would like to complement and thank staff for their efforts to listen to constructive comments from many different parties.

We do, however, think there are areas for improvement that will not only set the stage for further downtown revitalization, but also provide the vision that will be needed in the next 20-25 years for downtown Madison to become the Region's Economic Engine. For this reason we are recommending the attached changes to the Plan.

In preparing comments on the plan, we found that in key areas the plan does not provide adequate detail or background analysis to understand the plan's impact or predict how redevelopment would fare under the plan. For example, in most of the Bonus Height areas, extra stories can be earned through "incorporating" one or more *potential* landmark buildings and (depending on the area) either restoring the exterior of such structures, sensitively developing near them or accentuating the landmark. While the intent of this language is somewhat clear, we do not think that fundamental questions are being addressed. What if research proves the potential landmarked building has an insufficient provenance to be landmarked? Does it need to be on a contiguous parcel? Does it even need to be in the same area? Similar comments can be made with respect to other functional aspects of the plan. For example:

- design guidelines are not clear;
- historic districts and conservation districts are called for but it does not appear that careful research and study per the Landmarks Ordinance has been completed;
- there seems to be a bias against considering projects on a stand alone basis in some areas but there is no guidance provided on what multi-parcel review would entail.

This critique is not meant to imply that the plan is woefully inadequate or that these planning concepts are wrong; some may prove to be quite appropriate. Furthermore, we realize that it is not uncommon for plans to be made final with the understanding that additional work, analysis, planning is needed. Rather, we make these points to highlight a more important critique; namely that without the ability to exceed the maximum building heights through a PDD process, and with insufficient detail on key design criteria, the plan (as written) lacks in both clarity and flexibility, and as a result, is unlikely to prove an *invitation for investment*.

Upon review, we hope you will see that we seek to increase the inherent flexibility of the plan and call for additional analysis and process definition. However, without knowing if the Council will, for example, reverse what we think is a rigid PDD policy, and in the absence of key design and review guidance, we have also included a revised maximum height map, a revised plan for the Mifflin District and other comments. We recognize that some of our recommendations may prove unnecessary if the plan further evolves and if flexibility is restored.

Thank you and your staff for your hard work and attention to this important document for the future of our downtown, city and region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Susan Schmitz".

Susan Schmitz



Date: January 17, 2012  
To: All Interested Parties  
From: Downtown Madison Inc. (DMI)  
Subject: Comments on "Downtown Plan Madison WI November 2011"

Maximum Building Heights: DMI has consistently advocated for a vision of the downtown which is more dense, vibrant and urban. The proposed plan and many others provide ample rationale for higher density, noting the many advantages that flow from increasing population and denser development: more residents to support downtown businesses, more students to support existing schools, increased property tax base, more ridership for public transport, improved sustainability, etc.

To support these goals, we recommend that the Maximum Building Heights map in the draft plan be replaced with the *attached map*, which allows for higher mapped maximums in certain areas. The most important of our proposed changes include the following:

- Mifflin District
- The south side of Wilson St. between Broom and Bedford Streets.
- In the Basset Area (some increase)

Generalized Future Land Use Map: Consistent with our recommendations for Mifflin, the Mifflin District should be mapped as Downtown Mixed use (see attached map)

Mifflin District: The Mifflin District plan, and the associated objective (4.3) and recommendations 66 – 69 should be replaced with the attached "Alternative Approach to the Mifflin District". The Mifflin District represents an incredible opportunity that is not fully captured by the current draft plan. The alternative vision for Mifflin as presented in the November 15, 2011 memo from Steven Cover to Mayor Soglin and the Common Council is an improvement, but it fails to capitalize on some of the important opportunities presented by the downtown's adjacency to one of the world's premier research institutions. An alternative vision for Mifflin taps the incredible energy and creativity of the UW-Madison to create a denser, urban, mixed use district where new forms of sustainable development, and mixes of new residential and business startups thrive. Like the current plan for Mifflin, DMI believes that additional planning and the development of implementation steps will be needed for the potential of this district to be realized. However, the first step *must be* to imagine Mifflin as more than an improved residential neighborhood, and to strike a bold vision for Mifflin as an important gateway to our City and important link to the UW-Madison.

Historic Districts and Conservation Districts: The downtown plan should not recommend adding new or expanding existing historic districts until careful study and research is completed as envisioned in the Landmark's Ordinance. Furthermore, such historic and conservation districts should only be contemplated after extensive involvement with the affected neighborhoods and landowners. Consistent with this, recommendations No. 70, 89 should be removed, as should references to creating additional conservation districts in the Basset discussion (page 53). *"The first step in implementing this recommendation for a neighborhood conservation district would be to undertake a study or plan to articulate those specific characteristics of the neighborhood that are sought to be preserved"*

Flexibility: The current draft plan is (on balance) unnecessarily rigid because under current ordinance, no PDD process can be used to exceed the mapped maximum height limits in the downtown. In addition, where bonus stories are available, the bonus height criteria are narrow (Key 7: Historic Resources) but fail to include other value sets such as sustainability (Key 9). Recommended changes to improve plan flexibility are presented below, for inclusion in the plan at a location deemed appropriate by staff.

Flexibility Recommendation No. 1: We recommend that the Common Council should revise the zoning code to allow for a PDD process to be used to approve building heights that exceed the mapped Maximum Building Heights throughout the downtown.

Flexibility Recommendation No. 2: Bonus criteria should be expanded to allow a richer set of civic values such as sustainability, great design, affordable housing, urban amenities, etc. to be considered when bonus stories are requested.

Downtown as the Economic Engine of the Region: The plan correctly describes the importance of the downtown to the economic health of the Madison region, and seems to place a priority on economic development. However, the importance of the downtown to the City's overall economic health is muted and diminished by other policies and objectives in the plan including an inadequate emphasis on higher density development. In addition, the plan presents inadequate (or missing) economic benchmarks against which success can be measured.

DMI recommends planning and economic development staff work jointly to revise the plan's benchmarks in Appendix D that relate to economic redevelopment including number of downtown workers, assessed value of downtown parcels, median household income, number of downtown residents.

Other Recommendations:

Preserving Viewsheds: The plan identifies "priority viewsheds" on page 36 and in Recommendation 35 recommends incorporating building height, setback and stepback requirements in the Zoning Code to improve and enhance the priority viewsheds.

DMI does not disagree with Objective 3.1 (preserve downtown views). However, we believe that a "protractor approach" to designating viewsheds fails to account for important differences between individual parcels. For example, there are parcels where existing buildings already block views of and to the downtown, making generic viewshed

limitations on building height, setback or stepbacks counterproductive and unnecessarily restrictive. In addition, as worded, Objective 3.1 could be interpreted to protect any view to or from the Capital or any skyline view, regardless of how trivial the degradation would be.

We believe a better approach is to maintain the objective to preserve views. At the same time, the height, setback and stepback requirements proposed for inclusion in the zoning code should not apply if viewshed studies show de minimus impacts. Last, we believe that when evaluating views from the Capital to the lakes, the correct standard should be to evaluate the view from the sidewalks at the corner of North and South Hamilton, and not from an advantaged position at the base of the Capital dome that is not commonly encountered by average citizens.

Additional Views Recommendation: "Viewshed studies may be used to demonstrate that a proposed development has minimal impact and therefore should not be restricted as to height, setbacks or stepbacks solely by its location within a priority viewshed or corridor."





## Alternative Approach to the Mifflin District

The Mifflin District is known for its abundance of student rental housing, predominantly characterized by houses that were divided into apartments decades ago. Many of the existing structures are only marginally maintained and many have been altered extensively on the interior. As a consequence of decades of deferred maintenance, significant reinvestment would be required for most of this housing stock to become attractive to a wider range of residents. The area is, however, an important location that provides opportunities. It is situated between the State Capital and the UW-Madison campus, close to major retail, entertainment and cultural resources that are key to attracting and retaining new residents and new businesses. Currently, Mifflin is greatly underutilized, but it holds potential for adding to downtown revitalization and sustainable redevelopment. Located on the very edge of the UW-Madison campus in close proximity to the Institute for Discovery & Morgridge Institute for Research, the Engineering Campus, and the UW Arts Campus, Mifflin offers an ideal opportunity to create the type of mixed-use vibrant urban center that captures new jobs and businesses that emerge from the billion-dollar research institution that is the University of Wisconsin.

Because the current housing stock continues to slowly deteriorate with little incentive to invest in improvements, and will not provide the opportunity for future density, maintaining the status quo for this area is not considered a realistic or desirable long-term solution. Although there are several potentially viable approaches to enhancing the future of the Mifflin District, we recommend an approach that reimagines Mifflin as a key district where “town and gown” meet and where the incredible energy and opportunity represented by the UW-Madison is captured and used to catalyze sustainable downtown redevelopment. More specifically, the guiding principles and features for the redevelopment of Mifflin include:

- Regional Transportation hub (Map #1)
- Intersection of the University, City and State Capital
- UW Arts Center (Map #2)
- Phil Lewis’ “Wisconsin Idea” center (Map #3)
- Urban Mixed Land Use – jobs, housing, education, retail, entertainment, arts/culture, public spaces
- A physical expression of the “Wisconsin Idea” – i.e. a district where residents (and resident businesses) take innovation arising from a great research institution and “land” those ideas in the community

A central feature of the recommended redevelopment concept is to allow the transition of the West Washington Corridor into a more dense, large-scale development consistent with the vision of that avenue as an important entrance to the City/downtown. Equally

important, the Mifflin District presents an opportunity to highly integrate housing-employment-retail and cultural/entertainment uses in order to create a district that is highly attractive to downtown residents (and employers) who want to locate close to the University and its top graduates. For that to happen, new approaches to form and function of the physical space will need to be developed in order for the desired “sense of place” in Mifflin to evolve beyond its historic ties to the 1960’s counter culture, the anti-war movement, and an annual block party to also embrace a new identity as a district where sustainability is *inherent by design* and where a more urban sense of place is created by introducing significant new residential and commercial uses. This approach proposes that much of the area be redeveloped over time with a combination of larger footprint buildings as well as smaller multi-family buildings, townhouses and commercial buildings. Select older structures with architectural or historic interest exist in the district, and the conservation and rehabilitation of these structures should not be discouraged where consistent with the overall goals to create a more dense and urban dynamic. Maintaining uniformity of building form, function and rhythm is less critical in Mifflin than the creation of a dynamic, sustainable, urban, multi-use and highly functional district that becomes as well-known as a destination for new residents and new employers as it is respected for its past contributions and former identity.

Several interesting concepts for redevelopment of the Mifflin District have emerged during preparation of the downtown plan (Appendix F) including the full-block redevelopment concepts, mid-block redevelopments, redevelopment of Mifflin Street as a mixed traffic street where pedestrians have priority (a “woonerf”), and the development of denser development along West Washington Avenue. Some of these ideas have been introduced by City staff and some have been suggested by others.

Several of these ideas will require further study. Some will require further transportation planning, or enhanced dialog with UW-Madison. The realization of the emergence of a new Mifflin District will also require a comprehensive and coordinated implementation plan, as redevelopment would occur over an extended period of time by multiple property owners. To create a truly engaging and attractive urban neighborhood, it is essential that means be created to encourage cooperation among owners and developers to create whole or half block solutions that look at the Mifflin District as a whole, rather than depend upon *ad hoc* responses to piecemeal proposals that primarily reflect the vagaries of property assembly patterns.

#### Mifflin Recommendations:

Objective 4.3: The Mifflin District should evolve into a multi-use district which takes full advantage of its close proximity to UW-Madison, government, and cultural amenities. Residential and commercial/employment uses are both accommodated, and a dense, dynamic urban rhythm emerges. A new West Washington Avenue is a key gateway to the City/downtown, full or half-block redevelopment is encouraged, and the existing dominant functionality of the district as student housing evolves to include a rich mix of residential housing types, commercial buildings that accommodate new startups, retail and entertainment uses, etc. As an employment center, the Mifflin District can allow for multiple possibilities ranging from start-up enterprises to a multi-building employment campus supported by housing, retail, entertainment and cultural uses.

*Recommendation 66:* Further planning of redevelopment concepts in Appendix F should be completed, and a detailed comprehensive implementation strategy for this area should be developed.

*Recommendation 67:* Update the Downtown Design Zone standards for the Mifflin area to implement the concept plan and incorporate them into the Zoning Ordinance as appropriate.

*Recommendation 68:* Prioritize the redevelopment of 1960s era “zero lot line” residential sites.



# MAXIMUM BUILDING HEIGHTS

- C - Capitol View Preservation Limit
- 12 Stories
- 10 Stories
- 8 Stories
- 6 Stories
- 5 Stories
- 4 Stories
- 3 Stories
- Height Bonus Areas + 2 Stories
- 15' Stepback Above 4 Stories
- Existing and Proposed Park and Open Space

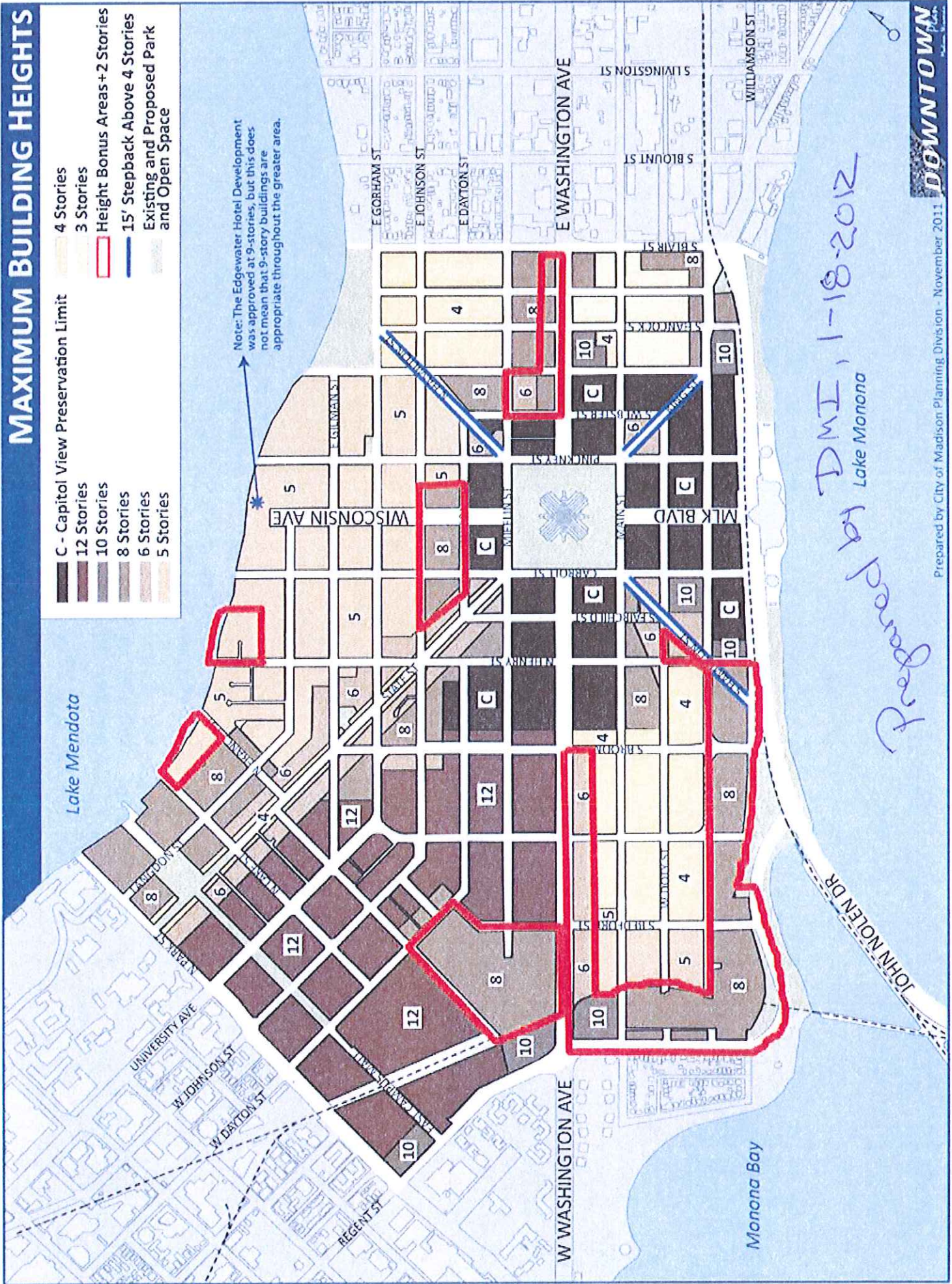
Note: The Edgewater Hotel Development was approved at 9-stories, but this does not mean that 9-story buildings are appropriate throughout the greater area.

Lake Mendota

Monona Bay

*Prepared by DMI, 1-18-2012  
Lake Monona*

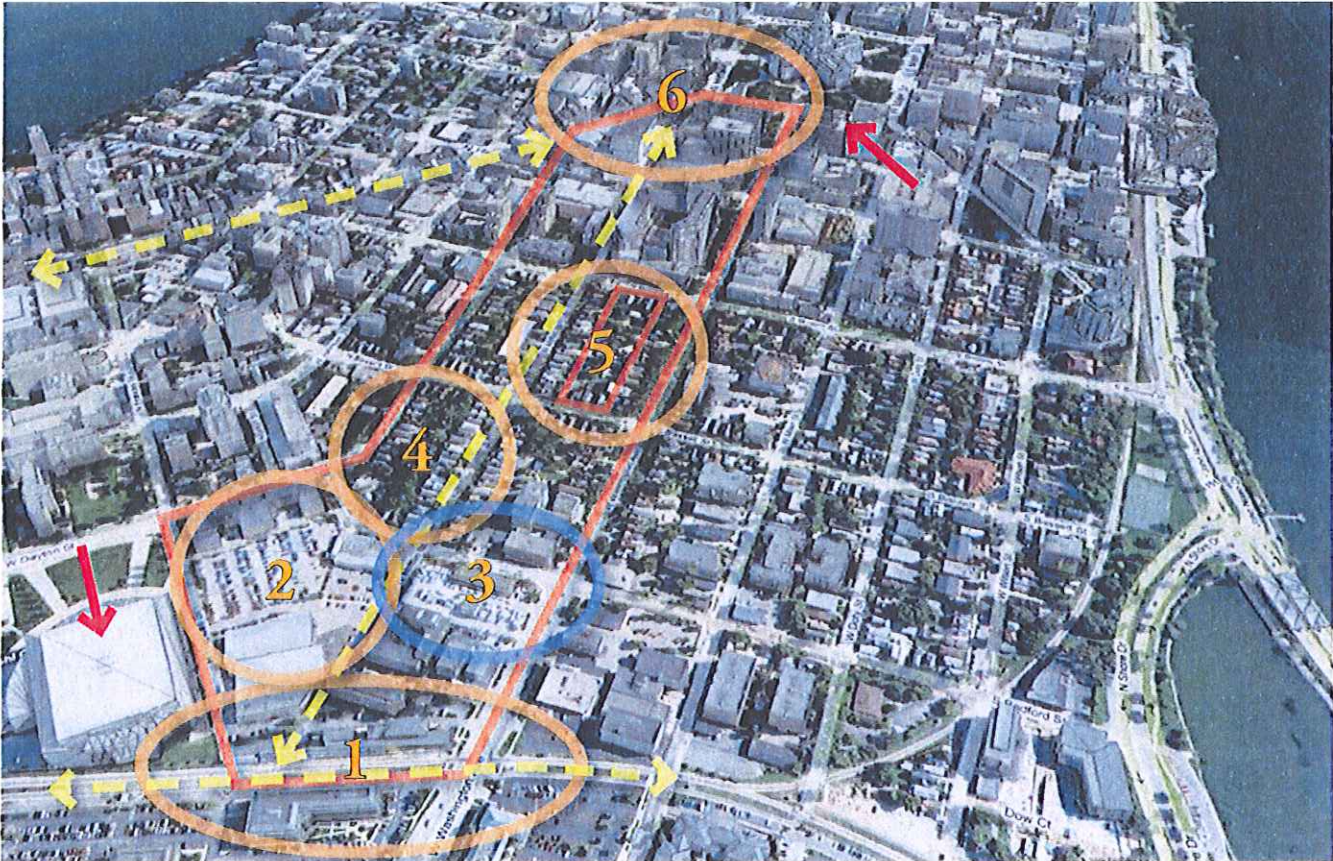
**DOWNTOWN**





## Area 2: Mifflin Street/ Wisconsin Idea District

- |                                  |                              |                                      |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 Inter Modal Transportation Hub | 3 Phil Lewis Wis Idea Center | 5 Mifflin Corridor - Mid Block Study |
| 2 UW Arts Center                 | 4 Full Block Redevelopment   | 6 Overture Triangle                  |



Mifflin Street and its adjacent neighborhood is an anomaly. We think of it as “the hole in the donut.” It is a neighborhood of small and medium-sized residential structures, formerly single family homes, now divided into multi-family units. For the past 50 years, the area primarily housed students, although permanent residents recently started moving in. Owners did little during that time to update the dwellings, leaving many in physical decline. The area is an anomaly: a very important location that is underutilized with great potential for adding to downtown revitalization and sustainable development. Situated between Downtown and the Capitol on one side, with the University on the other, it is the ideal location for a meeting of town and gown. As the University and Downtown expand, this is a great location for it to occur.

- Guiding principles and features for development of the area include:
- Regional transportation hub
- UW Arts Center
- Phil Lewis Wisconsin Idea Center
- An Urban - jobs, housing, education, retail, entertainment, arts/culture, public spaces
- An emerging market - new jobs and services related to the UW Institute for Discovery
- Intersection of the University, City and State Capitol
- A physical expression of the “Wisconsin Idea”

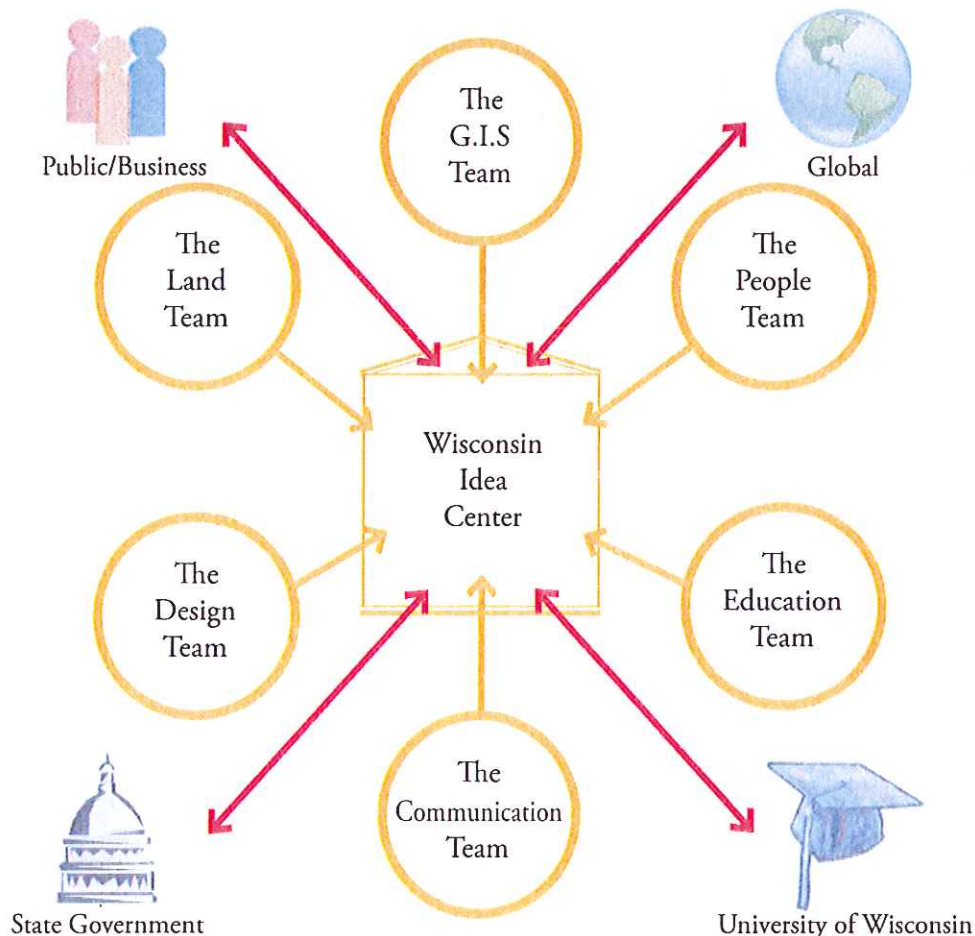


## Area 2: Mifflin Street/ Wisconsin Idea District - Phil Lewis Wisconsin Idea Center

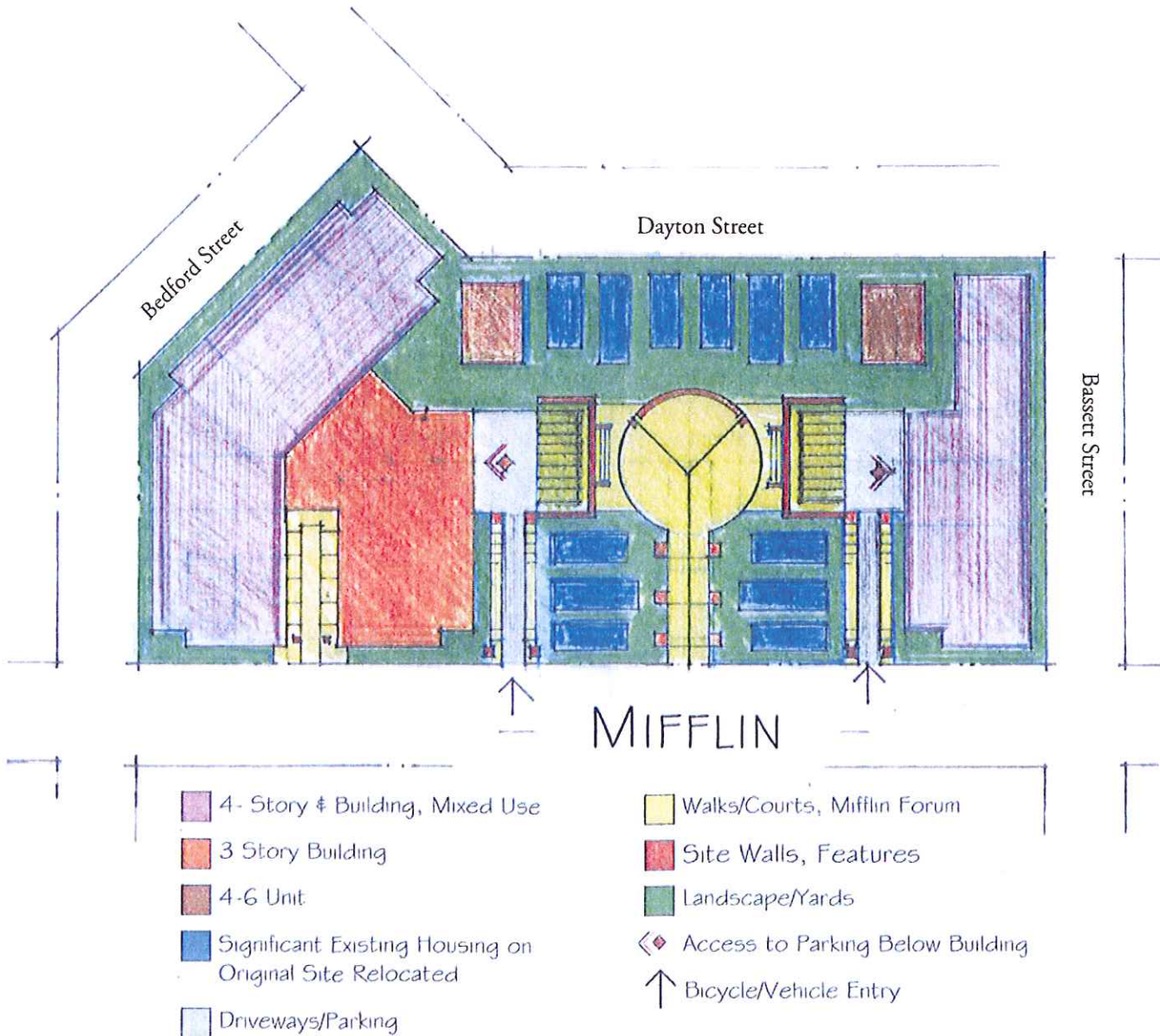
A key component of Phil Lewis' regional vision is the creation of a Wisconsin Idea Center, a place where the University of Wisconsin, State Government and citizens of the community and the state can come together to solve critical issues of our time. Phil Lewis' vision for the Wisconsin Idea Center is a place where the arts, humanities, design and public policy can be part of an interdisciplinary regional planning process that finds solutions for creating sustainable communities that minimize the human impact on the land.

The Wisconsin Idea Center is a building that will allow for the interdisciplinary talents of the University and State Government, which are currently separated, to be housed in a setting that fosters collaborative discovery. The Wisconsin Idea Center would also serve as a new public forum in which citizens can convene with academics, public officials, and most importantly, with one another to discuss and formulate collaborative solutions to statewide issues. Issues and solutions can be visually explored using UW technologies in satellite imaging, GIS, virtual reality simulations, computer assisted planning and design applications, and other emerging and new technologies. The outcome of this collaboration will not only identify planning solutions but also advance public policies that can be presented to citizens, businesses and lawmakers for adoption.

A potential site for the Wisconsin Idea Center is the U-Haul site on Bedford Street near the West Rail Corridor and a proposed inter-modal transportation hub. This location will allow an interface with communities and activity centers that are connected to this hub by the regional rail and bicycle network. This site is also strategically located near the proposed UW Arts Campus and the Mifflin corridor that links the UW with the State Capitol. The diagram below illustrates Phil's Wisconsin Idea Center concept.



Area 2: Mifflin Street/ Wisconsin Idea District - Full Block Redevelopment Concept



Historically, great cities are comprised of neighborhoods with distinct personalities. A natural reaction is to retain these personalities and to preserve the status quo or even to separate the neighborhood from the fabric of the community or region at large in order to maintain this uniqueness. Pride, nostalgia, and longing for the “good old days” reinforce this thinking. For an organism (in this case a city and region) to flourish, however, individual elements (in this case a neighborhood) need to be connected to the larger organic, each nurturing and receiving what the other requires to coexist and thrive. Like organisms, cities and their neighborhoods, grow, adapt and change in response to environmental demands.

**NEED/OPPORTUNITY:**

The diagram above illustrates a full block redevelopment strategy that recognizes the core values of Mifflin Street’s 50+ year history of progressive thought, human scale and social values.



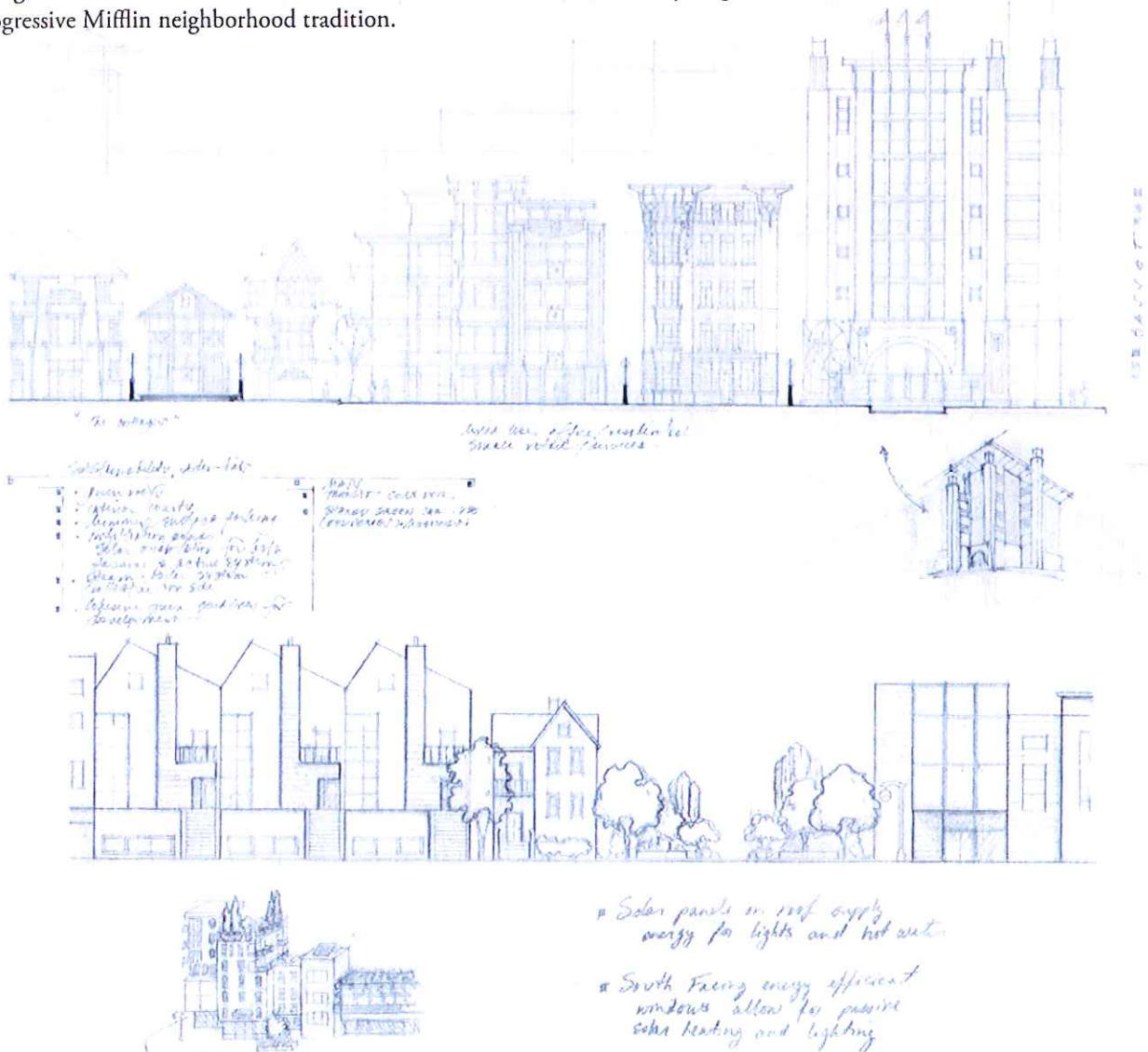
**CONCEPT:**

The concept for this full block redevelopment is to create a densely built mixed-use neighborhood that preserves and enhances the social fabric of "Miffland". The premise for this Mifflin block design is that there are many existing structures that contribute to the historical context and human scale of the street that should be preserved to create a core at the center of the block. These existing vernacular structures form a "nucleus for social interaction" identified as the Miffland Forum Park.

New housing is part of new infill buildings that gradually gain in size as they progress towards the perimeter streets, Bedford and Bassett. This organization avoids hemming in the smaller residential structures. The rooftops of these large buildings can include green plateaus, plazas and gardens to create architectural diversity and avoid the "flat-topping" effect that is prevalent today. Varying building setbacks can also create nodes and pocket parks for social interaction.

The block is served by two main auto access points, leading to lower level parking (with a plaza cover) and enclosed parking as part of the larger buildings. In this way, service access and driveways can be consolidated for collective efficiency and to create connective green space.

Sustainable design is a core value of the neighborhood and is manifested in a mix of carbon-neutral, single-family and multifamily buildings and landscaping that is part of individual buildings and public streetscaping. Green space, green roofs, rain gardens, solar access, and shared services all enhance the community, respect for our resources and spring from the progressive Mifflin neighborhood tradition.





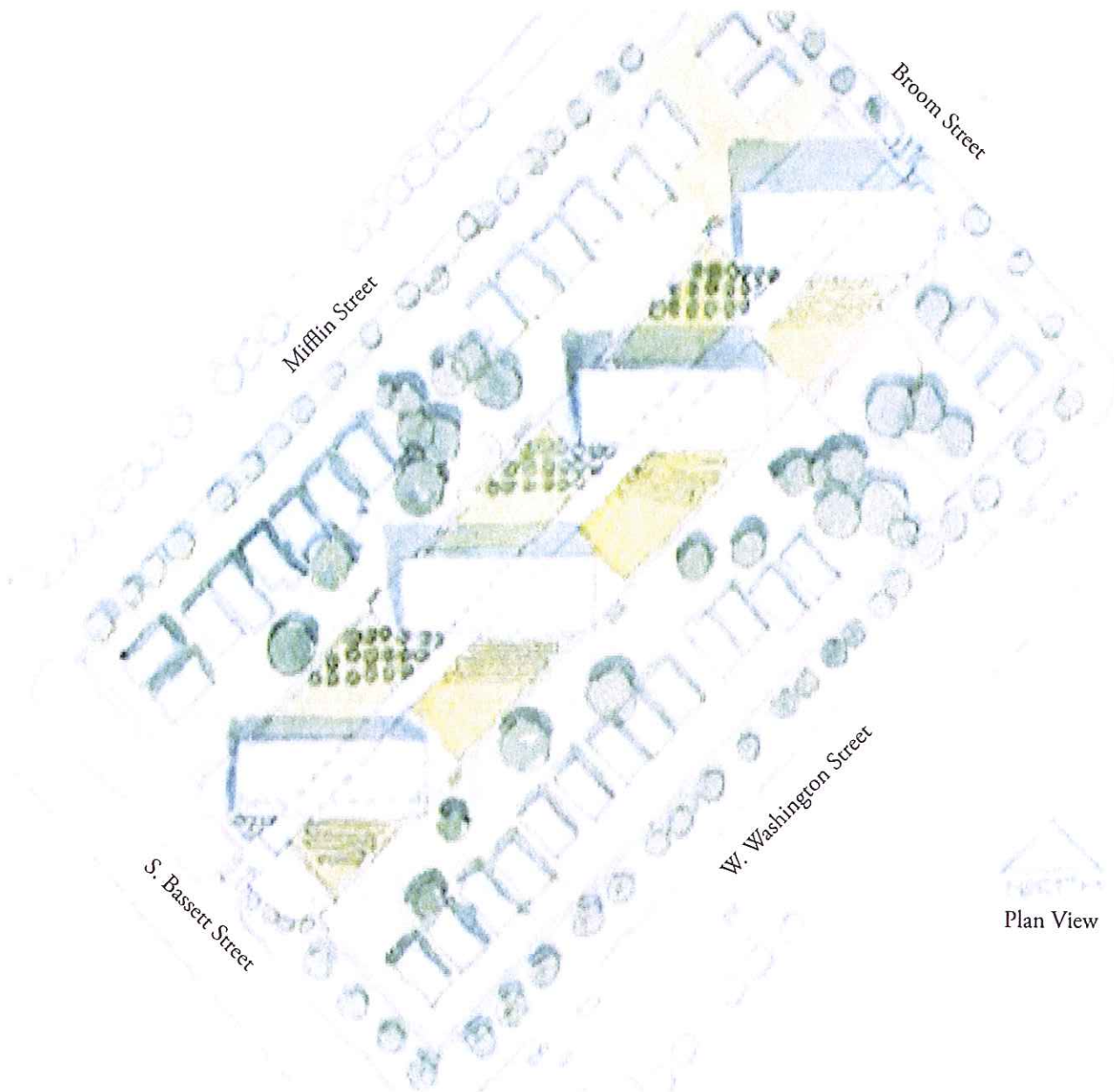
## **Area 2: Mifflin Street/ Wisconsin Idea District - *Mid-Block Study***

### **NEED/OPPORTUNITY:**

The housing stock in the Mifflin Street area is deteriorating; the sites are underutilized. The concept below illustrates a Mifflin Street mid-block redevelopment opportunity that makes use of the large spaces found behind the houses within the blocks between West Washington and Mifflin Street. Current use of this space is primarily surface parking. As part of the Wisconsin Idea for this area, this mid-block space could be developed in an environmentally sensitive manner, increasing density in the midst of the city where infrastructure and services already exist.

### **CONCEPT:**

The genesis of this idea is preservation of existing housing stock or replacement with buildings of similar scale, thereby preserving the village quality of the street. At the same time, the block is greatly increased in density from 20 units per acre to 90 units per acre by construction of the mid-block development. Shops, offices or shared community space could occupy spaces on the ground floors.



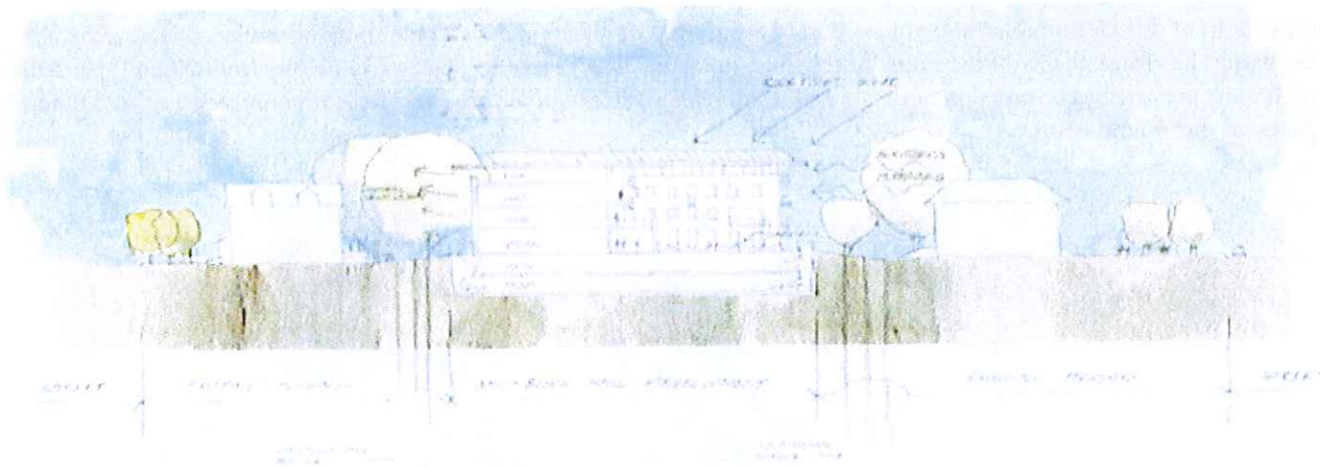
Plan View

## Design Visions for City of Madison Downtown Plan

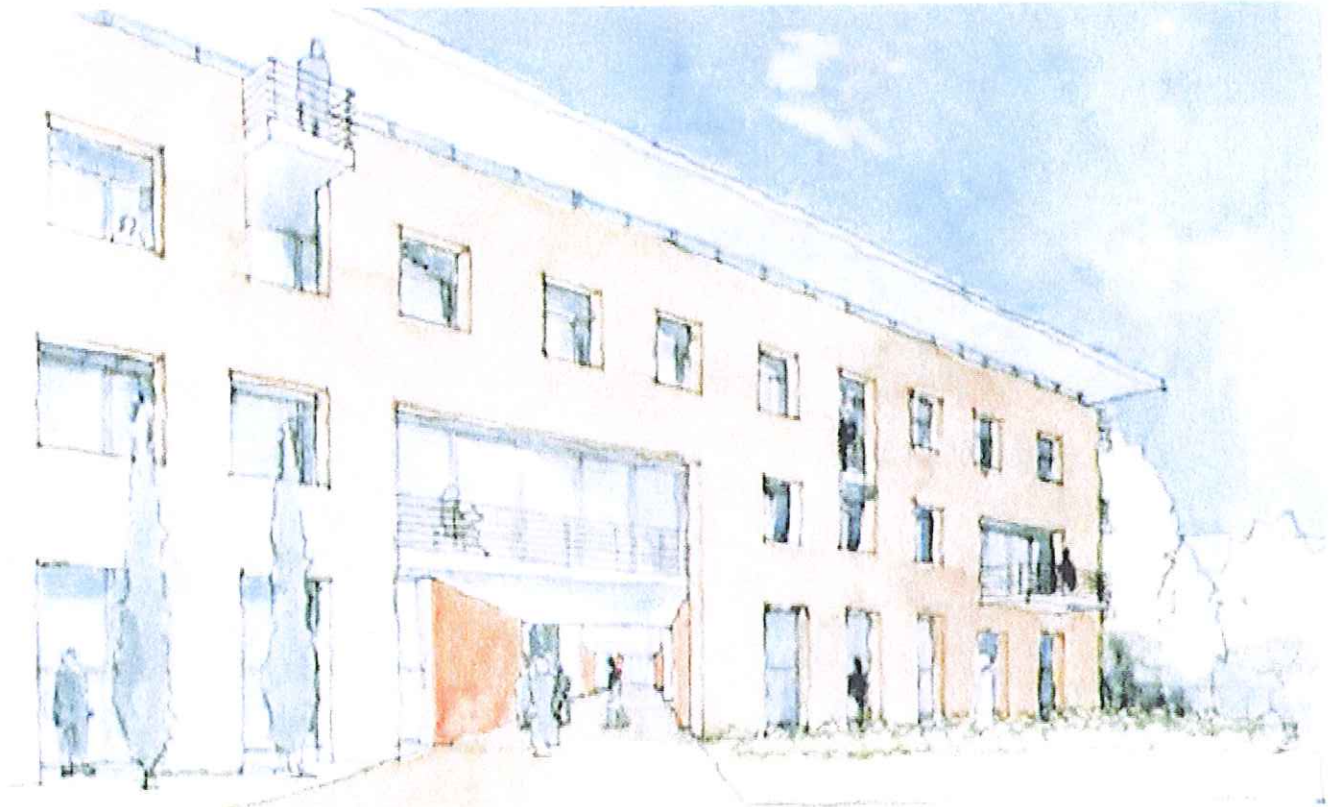
In this concept, parking is placed under a plinth that runs through the center of the block. Four loft type buildings, ranging in height from four to 10 stories would then be built upon the plinth. The buildings are rotated in plan for optimal exposure to the sun, thereby promoting natural heating and cooling. The sheltered corridors are single loaded and south facing, a passive intermediate zone between outside and inside. Solar collectors could cover the roofs. Vegetable gardens occupy spaces between the buildings.

### IMPLEMENTATION:

Land accumulation by either a public or private entity would enable this approach.



Mid-Block Cross-section



Ground Level View - Through Block Passage



Area 2: Mifflin Street/ Wisconsin Idea District - Mifflin Street “Woonerf”



**NEED/OPPORTUNITY:**

If the Mifflin Street area is increased in density (as described in Area Studies and Density section of this report) it will lack a pedestrian center. The neighborhood character and design must further encourage pedestrian activity, and link with the rest of the downtown.

**CONCEPT:**

If Mifflin Street is redeveloped as a woonerf (pronounced Voan-erf), a mixed traffic street where pedestrians have priority, it would create an exciting pedestrian center for the neighborhood that would link the Capitol with the Kohl Center. This pedestrian-centric street coupled with a higher density neighborhood, would bring new vibrancy to the downtown and campus. The woonerf will allow for micro-local traffic and won't have a significant effect on downtown traffic since Mifflin is not a "through" street (it is only four full blocks between two dead-ends). Visitors to the Kohl Center could have a pedestrian-centric tour loop through the Mifflin neighborhood to the Capitol, down State Street into campus, and down the East Campus Mall back to the Kohl Center. Future light/commuter rail will likely have a Kohl Center stop, which a Mifflin woonerf would help connect, possibly with in-street rail down the woonerf.

**IMPLEMENTATION:**

While not strictly necessary, making Bassett and Broom two-way traffic streets would further mitigate any negative impact on car traffic. Raise and redevelop the street and right-of-ways, post signs.





A sidewalk level street with pedestrian style paving, no traffic lines and pedestrian scale landscaping.



A dense Mifflin neighborhood with a woonerf connecting it to the campus and Capitol would make an active, beautiful urban space for people to live and play.



## Area 2: Mifflin Street/ Wisconsin Idea District - Overture Triangle

### NEED/OPPORTUNITY:

The triangular block across from the Overture Center is bordered by Fairchild Street, State Street and Mifflin Street. Fairchild Street, which faces Overture Hall, consists of building facades that lack character and street level uses that compliment Overture. Overture deserves better treatment than facing the backsides of underutilized buildings. When events are not scheduled at Overture, life drains out of the area.

### CONCEPT:

This would be a great place for a market. A redevelopment concept would preserve worthy architecture and selectively remove and replace undistinguished facades. The new facades should be authentic and complimentary but should not imitate the older structures. The interior spaces should be hollowed out to create a shopping arcade with natural lights from skylights to orient and illuminate the common interior areas. Entrances to the market should be provided from Fairchild Street, State Street and Mifflin Street. The sketches below illustrate this concept.

