



City of Madison

City of Madison
Madison, WI 53703
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Meeting Minutes - Approved LANDMARKS COMMISSION

*Consider: Who benefits? Who is burdened?
Who does not have a voice at the table?
How can policymakers mitigate unintended consequences?*

Monday, May 18, 2026

5:00 PM

215 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
Room 206 (Madison Municipal Building)

Special Meeting of the Landmarks Commission

Call to Order/Roll Call

Arnesen served as chair.

Present: 6 - John W. Duncan; Jacob Morrison; Molly S. Harris; Maurice D. Taylor;
Edna Ely-Ledesma and Richard B. Arnesen

Excused: 1 - Katherine N. Kaliszewski

Public Comment

1. [60576](#) Landmarks Commission Public Comment Period

None

Disclosures and Recusals

None

2. [93158](#) Downtown Area Plan Historic Resources Discussion

*Robert Klebba, registering neither in support nor in opposition and wishing to speak
Jean Parks, registering neither in support nor in opposition and not wishing to speak*

Robert Klebba referenced the map on page 3 of the staff memo, which they said excludes many historic resources in the downtown area. They encouraged staff to consider other historic resources in the area and what should be done to preserve them.

Rebecca Cnare, Planning Division, presented on the Downtown Area Plan and historic resources. She said that the previous Downtown Plan (2012) recommended considering coterminous boundaries for local and National Register Historic Districts, and asked the commission for thoughts on this. Bailey suggested they look at the edges of the local historic districts to assess whether there are historic resources present and if not, then evaluate how being part of a historic district is bringing value to the area. She said that they should look at Mansion Hill in particular, which crosses into some of the Langdon National Register Historic District, but also include properties that are not in either national district. She added that there is no National Register Historic District that matches the First Settlement local historic district, so there is not an option for coterminous boundaries there. Arnesen said that someone would need to create a National Register nomination to match the local First Settlement district so those in the district could benefit from being part of a National Register Historic District. Bailey said that it could be explored but would be challenging. Ely-Ledesma asked how they would go about reviewing the district boundaries. Bailey said the area plan could recommend additional investigation into making the boundaries coterminous, then later staff can dig in and provide detailed analysis to the Landmarks Commission for discussion and potentially introduce an amendment to the historic district boundaries. Arnesen asked about the challenges of creating a First Settlement National Register Historic District. Bailey said that the National Register has a high standard for historic integrity, and she didn't think it would qualify at that level due to the amount of changes in First Settlement. She said that First Settlement has great historic resources and a lot of infill outside the period of significance for the historic district, which likely wouldn't

be approved at the federal level.

Cnare asked for ideas that would fall under their draft "big moves." Bailey said that the current maps in the presentation show properties with historic designations, but that doesn't mean there aren't other properties downtown for which they might want to move forward with a historic designation. She suggested they have that conversation now rather than when a development proposal comes in. She said the pressure for development is strongest in this area, but it also has the greatest concentration of historic and potentially historic resources, so they should ask property owners if they want to move forward with a historic designation for properties of historic interest.

Duncan asked if the City and private partner DMI are on the same path or if they are creating competing big moves. Cnare said they are trying to have a joint vision and big moves as part of their partnership on this planning process. Their outreach and primary goals are aligned, so if they were to want to elevate a big move, they can ask what both the private and public sector can do to help.

Cnare asked what role historic preservation should play in the future of downtown Madison. Ely-Ledesma said that the State Capitol is an incredible asset, and they could look at it as an anchor with significant programming. She said that property owners or hotels can think about historic preservation as it overlays with cultural and arts programming. Cnare said that it is an important cultural district and shopping/tourism area, including the Farmer's Market. She asked how we can support those things and if there were public policies or projects they could look at, similar to the State Street pedestrian mall experiment.

Morrison said the area around Monona Terrace will need to expand soon with the recent sale of 1 W Wilson Street and future Amtrak station. There will be a huge demand on that space, so it will be important to encourage what they can to move into that area and also allow Monona Terrace room to grow in any way it can.

Arnesen asked if there were still historic walking tours. Cnare said the Madison Trust for Historic Preservation runs tours, and Bailey said that the Wisconsin Historical Society does as well, along with some private companies. Taylor asked if there was a book of local and National Register listings. Bailey said they are posted on the City's website, and the City also started a new historic markers program. Cnare suggested that maybe the private sector could create an online map for people to see where historic resources are as they walk around.

Cnare asked about the role of historic preservation in the future. Harris spoke about big move #8 and said that history is intertwined with culture, and this goal will require partnerships with private businesses downtown and those that have resources and funding to hold events. She suggested they look at what people are already doing and ask how history can be part of that, or to think about what parts of history they want to promote and what private groups are most compatible with that. Regarding big move #7, she said that part of a diverse and complete neighborhood is understanding the history of the place, but more housing is often in direct tension with public comment that the commission hears. On an isthmus, there is only one direction you can go, and when one thinks about places to access the lake, she pointed out that one way is seeing it from higher up.

Cnare referenced Harris' comments about highlighting a sense of place. She said that they have looked at which local landmarks are publicly accessible, and a lot of them are. She suggested they could try to tell more stories to promote those historic resources, giving an example from a different city where they spoke to tenants about the history of their building and put up signs and photos that told those stories. Harris said one sees that at restaurants, and it is a good way to make connections between people and places.

Harris said that a self-guided tour is appealing, and connecting to big idea #10, it could get kids and families engaged if they could walk through, learn, and get a reward for completing it. There could also be themes for the tours; for big idea #9, there could be information on the relationship between Madison and nature throughout history or for big idea #8, it could tie in to arts and culture.

Taylor said that he liked the idea of the local and National Register boundaries becoming coterminous if buildings currently in the historic district but are not historically significant could then avoid needing to get Landmarks Commission approval for their projects. Harris said that she falls on the other side and thinks there is a reason to preserve something as a historic district. Even if a home is not a defining landmark or historic home, there are reasons to consider something as a full neighborhood, not just individual properties. She would want to deeply consider where the boundaries are and why, especially the reasoning for the boundaries when they were originally created.

Duncan said that of the area plans, downtown is going to be the most difficult. Historic preservation plays a part, but when looking to the future, we have to envision what something could be, understanding that we can maintain that historic preservation in certain areas but also asking what we are valuing-- is it truly something that provides a history of Madison or is it something people want to protect for other reasons? Cnare agreed that there should be an intention of the City and of the Landmarks Commission to preserve

things that are important or provide a sense of place and make downtown special. She asked the commission to consider what those places are, and outlined their goals to think about the future, strengthen and promote what we have, and look at the edges.

Taylor asked how many years the plan will last. Cnare said it is approximately a 10-year plan, but it is short sighted to only look ten years out and it needs to have a vision further out.

Regarding the district boundaries, Morrison said that the commission often thinks about maintaining consistency of scale and purpose within historic districts when reviewing projects, which is a tension point. He said that if they end up shrinking a historic district, that is a way to encourage growth, which they need to do in the downtown area to be more responsible because that is where people can access transportation and other services. As long as it is clear to people that adjusting the districts goes beyond whether a building is historic, then they can look at what is no longer part of a district and could purposefully become a different, potentially more dense use.

Harris spoke about resources that are available in Madison, pointing out that UW students, faculty, and staff have immense knowledge on areas that could be influential for development. Students are transient, but in their coursework they are learning about history and are interested in arts, culture, and sustainability. Students care, even if we only see a sliver of their lives, so perhaps there are ways to partner with student groups or courses on research and storytelling. Cnare said they partnered with a landscape architecture class to look at the potential of specific sites and are trying to find an engineering group for a project as well. Bailey said she was aware of UW students doing research on properties in downtown neighborhoods, like W Mifflin Street, and they were looking for new ideas. Morrison suggested Wilson Street.

Duncan said that it's great that staff is mindful that they are not just hearing from the loudest voices and are making sure to get students involved and collect public comment in atypical ways to capture those other voices.

Taylor asked about the slide on page 22 of the presentation regarding potential redevelopment. Cnare said they noted areas they know will be developments, and they are meeting with property owners who own assemblages to see their plans for the future.

Morrison said the best way to preserve things is to create active neighborhoods around them.

Arnesen asked about upcoming public meetings. Cnare said they are doing a lot of engagement at various events, holding some topic-based meetings, and then having larger events in early September and sometime in 2027 to present draft plan recommendations.

3. [93132](#)

Historic Preservation Ordinance Review

Bailey asked commission members for any suggested changes to the Additions or New Structures sections of the ordinance. She also showed commission members an optional application template for window replacements that will make it easier for applicants to submit complete information. The form will primarily be used for projects reviewed administratively, but commissioners agreed that it could be helpful to all applicants. Ely-Ledesma said that another challenge is an interpretation of the code that identifies items over which the commission has purview. She suggested creating a diagram or workflow showing what the Landmarks Commission can make recommendations on. Bailey said she would like to create short videos or one-pagers on topics such as how a meeting works, what the commission reviews, or how public comment can make an impact. Harris brought up an additional challenge in that the standards make project review seem objective, but commission members often have differing opinions on whether the standards are met. Morrison said that there are certain areas that can't be answered, and that is why the Landmarks Commission reviews and discusses these projects. Bailey thanked commission members for the difficult work they do.

Adjournment

**A motion was made by Taylor, seconded by Duncan, to Adjourn at 6:32 pm.
The motion passed by voice vote/other.**