

From: [Bennett, Juliana](#)
To: [Plan Commission Comments](#); [Planning](#)
Cc: [Figueroa Cole, Yannette](#); [Field, Derek](#); [Duncan, John](#)
Subject: Re: District 2 Blog: 8/28 - 9/3 Updates
Date: Monday, August 28, 2023 5:02:03 PM

Hi all,

Below are my comments regarding the Wisconsin Historic Center. I urge your approval on items 2-4. I strongly encourage plan commissioners to review this project and demolition permits of the possibilities with this proposal, while placing emphasis on correcting pasts and including the permanent telling of native stories. After all, we occupy stolen land - Ho Chunk land.

After meetings with the 12 indigenous tribes across Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Historical Society decided to change the the word "museum" to "center". According to indigenous communities the work "museum" tends to look back to a singular story of the past - a past that portrays indigenous people as simplistic and primitive and not complex and culturally rich. Indigenous leaders gravitated towards the word "center" as the impetus is changing the narrative to become more inclusive. I find this nugget to be an important introduction to debate on approving plans for the new Wisconsin Historic Center.

Project managers for the Wisconsin Historical Society attended the last Downtown Coordinating Committee meeting and gave a full project overview and breakdown. I was thoroughly impressed with the Wisconsin Historical Society and their collaboration with indigenous groups to put together an intentional development that will serve as a much needed hub for culture and learning for the city and Wisconsin.

The current museum is in dire need of expansion to meet the demand and curiosity of the people of Wisconsin. Right now, the museum museum can serve 75,000 people on a good year due to limited size and space. The new center will be able to welcome 200,000 people and double the amount of students served to 60,000. **That is tens of thousands more people we can bring to Madison to engage with stories of the past.**

The floor plan on each floor is designed to equitably meet the diverse needs of visitors. "Visitors will enter a large, open lobby that will feature space for public programming, a retail storefront and dedicated areas to serve students and community groups," (Wisconsin Historical Society press release). The lobby will feature an expansive wooden staircase resembling the region's long history of water travel and recent recovery of two ancient canoes dugout from Lake Mendota. The second floor will host a rotating gallery for local groups and national sought-after traveling exhibits, such as the Van Gogh Exhibit (the current museum space could not hold such an exhibit). The third floor will house two permanent galleries, one of Wisconsin's identity in American culture and another of interactive exploration of American and regional Sovereign Nation experiences. The fourth floor will have an immersive gallery the provokes the feeling of being outdoors. The fifth floor will offer event spaces to host a variety of public and

private gathering spaces.

Just summarizing what we could/will have with approving these plans gives me chills. **It is very obvious that the Wisconsin Historical Society worked diligently to gain extensive feedback from tribal nations and put forth a development that centers our priority for diversity, equity, and inclusion.**

I understand that there are naysayers to this proposal. An idea propagated from a place that the current "historic" buildings have more importance the histories that could be shared with the new center. I find this dissent as ironic as it is misguided.

Preservation of historic buildings is often used to provide a sense of permanence and identity. The 2020 Historic Preservation Plan specifically states, "Today preservation contributes to neighborhood revitalization, sustainability, and awareness of historical and cultural events." This may be true in cases that attempts to completely wash away the building in lieu of a completely new development that does little to acknowledge the past. **Such reasoning in the case of the Wisconsin History Center is improper, because denying the development would serve as the antithesis of revitalization, sustainability, and sharing of history and culture.**

The Comprehensive Plan of 2018 further supports the Wisconsin Historic Center:

Strategy 7 under Land Use and Planning: Maintain downtown Madison as a major Activity Center for the region while improving access and inclusivity. This strategy calls to "Facilitate partnerships with community organizations to host more downtown events that attract a wider variety of demographic groups." I see this as clearly met by creating more spaces for collaborative engagement and community spaces.

Strategy 3 under Neighborhoods and Housing: Create safe and affirming community spaces that bring people together and provide social outlets for underrepresented groups. There is a clear argument here that entire floors dedicated to public gathering spaces that can host community events meets this guideline. Further, the intentional design of the building that promotes DEI concepts would provide a safe space for people of indigenous and underrepresented populations to gather.

Strategy 2 under Culture and Character: Preserve historic and special places that tell the story of Madison and reflect racially and ethnically diverse cultures and histories. More specifically it states, "Promoting Native peoples' history in the region...are a couple examples of opportunities to grow and enhance tourism." This standard is clearly met by extensive engagement with the 12 tribal nations of Wisconsin, alongside a permanent exhibit on native history and an overall design that incorporates the cultural significance of nature and water to indigenous populations. Claiming otherwise is a slap in the face to the tribal nations that engaged in this process.

"The Madison area is the Ho-Chunk Nation's ancestral home, a history not often included in Madison, which usually prioritizes references to people like John Nolen and Frank Lloyd Wright." Missy Tracy, Cap Times 2018.

Strategy 2 under Green and Resilient: Improve lake and stream water quality. The Wisconsin Historic Center would offer a sustainable building design that is far more energy and environmentally friendly than the current buildings. They will also incorporate native plants and existing plantings in the design.

Overall, my opinion is clear that we should approve plans for the Wisconsin Historical Center. But if my opinion is not enough, please refer to the staff memo or come to the meeting tonight. I hope that folx can share the enthusiasm for a quality center that will be a new home for our history. As always, you can reach out to me with questions, comments, or concerns.

Best,

Juliana Bennett

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