



Madison's Central Business Improvement District (BID)

MEMO

Date: March 28, 2012

To: Plan Commission Downtown Plan Workgroup

From: Mary Carbine, Executive Director
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Re: Staff Recommendations for March 29 meeting

I'm writing on behalf of the BID Board regarding the staff recommendations on the Downtown Plan provided for the March 29 Plan Commission working session.

As an organization representing the downtown retail district, the BID will not support a Downtown Plan that does not include recommendations to:

- Support a flexible range of business sizes including larger commercial spaces;
- Support a mix of local, regional, national, and international businesses including destination retail;
- Position downtown as a quality retail environment with a standard of excellence for downtown cleanliness, maintenance and safety.
- Provide for enough density to significantly increase the number of downtown residents and workers.

The 18-member BID Board represents State Street and Capitol Square retailers, restaurant and hospitality and business owners, and commercial property owners. It should be noted that all of the retail and restaurant businesses represented on the BID Board are locally owned. Link to BID Board:

http://www.visitdowntownmadison.com/about/index.php?category_id=2493

The BID Board strongly stands behind its recommendations for the Downtown Plan Keys 3 and 4. The BID Board's recommendations are fact-based, and supported by findings and recommendations from nationally recognized retail experts and the International Downtown Association, as well as the expertise of downtown business owners and real estate professionals. BID Board recommendations:

<http://legistar.cityofmadison.com/attachments/659f543f-b5df-4ffa-91d0-3436d6033cd2.pdf>

Of the BID recommendations in Keys 3 and 4, the following are the most critical to ensuring a healthy and vital downtown retail district, and to ensuring the success and viability of downtown's locally owned businesses.

Objective 4.2: (p. 8 of staff memorandum) The staff recommendation of “no major changes” runs counter to State Street’s dynamic character which is always evolving along with its users and uses. Particularly damaging is the staff emphasis on retaining “narrow, small, first floor commercial spaces (p. 50).” This disproportionate number of very small commercial spaces is unhealthy (and does not reflect the historical character of State St. which had many larger retail spaces). The reality is that many small stores are not (or are just barely) economically viable. Small stores also cannot offer the breadth and depth of inventory to serve resident needs. Also, store size has nothing to do with whether the business or its products are unique, distinctive or local (p. 7 of the staff memorandum states “staff believe that the collection of smaller floor plates along State Street is a major contributor to its uniqueness and should be retained.”) The Plan needs to support a flexible range of business sizes and larger commercial spaces to help State Street and the Capitol Square retain their unique character (dynamic and evolving) and to support vibrant retail. BID supports either its own or the EDC’s recommended language.

Rec.64: (p. 8 of memorandum) In order to support local businesses, the Plan must support a mix of locally, regional, national, and international businesses with a flexible range of sizes including destination retail. To do otherwise will actually harm the prospects for locally owned businesses. National or regional stores sell things that people want, they have depth of inventory to serve customers, and they add marketing power and draw customer traffic, *acting as anchors to support the local, independent co-tenants*. Fostering this mix is what will support local businesses, rather than a stand-alone recommendation in the Plan.

P. 5 of memorandum, BID’s suggested recommendation on positioning downtown as a quality retail environment with a standard of excellence for downtown cleanliness, maintenance and safety. “Clean and safe” are internationally recognized as among the most important factors for success for downtown retail districts. The Downtown Plan is the right place to affirm the importance of cross-departmental functions such as cleaning, snow removal, safety and maintenance. The Plan should not sideline these crucial factors as “operational.”

Also of great concern is the staff statement on p. 7 of the memorandum “As the city’s premier street, its vibrancy depends on attracting users who are not Downtown residents or workers and its mix of smaller specialty establishments is an important part of State Street’s attractiveness to a wider market.”

Actually, downtown is overly dependent on the visitor and student markets (which are unstable). The vibrancy of State Street and the Capitol Square depends having a larger base of residents and workers with disposable income, so that it can develop into a healthy retail district instead of a continually shrinking pool of very small specialty stores struggling to succeed. The projected number of new dwelling units, residents, workers, and median income levels in the Plan are so modest as to barely support existing retail, much less provide for the next 25 years.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on this important Plan for the future of downtown Madison.