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Alder, Dist. 3

Thank you for taking this important matter up today and carefully preparing a framework in which it can occur. As a past member of the Plan Commission, I have great confidence that between your experience as commissioners and staff expertise, and the rigorous process the Plan Commission uses for decisions, that the procedure you have adopted is exactly the right vehicle to initiate the exploration of revisions to the Comprehensive Plan.

While my comments may be generally applied to all the requests tonight, I want to address one in particular: the request to change a portion of Grandview Commons in the Sprecher Neighborhood from Neighborhood Mixed Use/Medium Density Residential to straight Community Mixed Use, and changing the now abandoned Doric Lodge site – yes, despite the fact that we approved its demolition years ago, it's still there – from low density residential to community mixed use.

Recognizing that this neighborhood plan and this area in particular embody the hopes and dreams for Madison's first "new urbanist" neighborhood, I want to remind us of the over-arching goals of the area: to provide a walkable neighborhood with every day services in easy reach to people living in a variety of housing types.

Variety in housing types has been achieved from the incredible full service senior living complex at the western edge of the neighborhood to the compact condos to tasteful apartments to large single family homes. But, we're still waiting for the nearby elementary school. And the library. And access to the everyday services. The neighborhood is still isolated by mediocre pedestrian and bicycle access over the highway on its southern edge. And there's nothing on the northern side. The only bus service is for school children. If there was ever a reason to place services in a community, this is it. Short of a friend's house, a beer, dinner or a dental appointment, there is nothing to walk to.

It's not for lack of trying – a restaurant building with the best view in Madison has opened three times and closed twice. The coffee shop survived for a couple years; the insurance office made a short go of it. Thankfully, the dentist has stayed and keeps us smiling. There have been sparks of that retail/commercial component, but there is still no flame.

It is time to review a delightful, yet otherwise isolated area that was promised its own town center or commons. That is the big picture I urge you to consider as you consider taking up this request.

Today, the heart of the issue is whether or not to EXPLORE amending the comprehensive plan to re-examine what's both desirable and possible for these parcels. It is clear that after 12 years, with one component of the neighborhood plan well on its way to success, that the other is simply not working. 12 years – and a list that includes sales efforts with 2 pages of prospects and nothing tangible.

Except a discussion of a grocery store that exceeds the 25,000 square foot size in a 12-year-old plan. It's not that 25,000 square foot grocery stores are undesirable – they are simply rare except in highly populated urban areas. Or places like Monroe St. where TIF dollars are available. You are not being asked to take up a specific proposal tonight, although the request indicates an anchor grocery store is a driver and we can be sure it's not 25,000 square feet. You are being asked to take up the amendment to help craft a plan that will yield something for this neighborhood in a way that involves all the neighbors in meetings focused together on a better plan.

All I ask is that you think critically about what planning can do to improve the odds of services coming to this neighborhood – as promised in the original plans. You are not "giving up" on new urbanism or walkable neighborhoods. You are giving them a chance by seeking, studying and recommending planning structure that can allow it to happen – finally.

You have heard tonight and over the past year significant disagreement about the suitability and desirability of a grocery store larger than 25,000 square feet. A proposal introduced to neighbors and you over a year ago has risen and fallen as a topic of conversation over the year. It's had its joyful and painful moments for everyone, because everyone cares deeply about their neighborhood. There is organized opposition and there is individual support. It's a 50-50 toss up – the hardest of all decisions to make.

It is precisely because there is no agreement that I request you should take up the matter. If you take it up, all parties will have ample opportunity in a structured way to share and learn others' opinions. Neighbors can sit down together under your greater auspices to form the new plan in a way that meets overarching goals and attends to details. The development team will have the assurance of a guided process. And it will be a fair hearing for everyone. I don't know where it will conclude and everyone in this room may have a preference, but unless you take up the amendment, nothing will happen.

In summation, please review this plan taking into account the now-resident neighbors' needs, new tenets of planning with some real world experience behind new urbanism, the harsh realities of today's market considerations and the next generation of residents' needs and desires. The plan we approved 12 years ago has been splendid for housing but a failure for neighborhood services. And, as you consider the request to change to community mixed use, I know you will use your experience to craft appropriate text to guide development under the heading of community mixed use.

No matter what the outcome of the final designation, please don't let this land continue to lie fallow as an unmown field featuring a broken tree any longer. This neighborhood deserves a better plan, and it's ready to get to work on it.