

Mr. Kevin Firchow,
Planning Department
City of Madison

Dear Kevin,

I have lived in Madison on the far west side most of my life. In 2006, when my husband passed away after retiring from the University, I made a decision to move to a condo. At first I wanted to move to the downtown area, but felt that, as a single woman, downtown I might not feel safe walking alone after dark.

My son-in-law Joe DiStefano, is an Urban Planner in the Berkeley, CA planning firm Calthorpe and Associates, one of the founders of the New Urbanism. He has educated me in the new way of thinking about living in our cities and when I eventually I made my way to Weston Place we both loved my choice. I moved here April 7th, 2007. Since then six or seven businesses have been welcomed into our 1st floor office area, and the Overlook apartments and Target have become good neighbors across Frey Street.

I love my neighborhood. Grocery stores, banks, pharmacies, places to eat, a wonderful movie theatre, the post office and good shopping in Hilldale mall are just some of the places that are in walking distance, and I have little fear at night alone because of all the activity in this area.

I ride the bus more, walk more and drive less. I want others to have what I have and I believe, as Joe has gotten me to see, that an apartment on the site next to us can be a nice addition to our neighborhood. However our site is not without its problems, and this apartment will make some of these problems worse if it goes in as proposed, a massive building with very high density squeezed onto a very small lot in a very busy area.

The first and most important problem is pedestrian safety. Our parking lot and driveway have understandably become a short cut for many people after they cross Segoe from the south side of Sheboygan. In our parking lot we have only a small sidewalk for our residents, guests and clients to use as they come and go from our lobby. Our narrow private driveway off of Frey Street where our garage traffic exits is dangerous because pedestrians compete with cars. The Princeton Club has as many as 200 members coming and going each day from our lot and underground parking. Joe has visited many times and in his opinion we have very poor traffic/pedestrian circulation safety around our building. A city of Madison traffic engineer, Bob Arseno, after examining our traffic flow, agreed that it is a dangerous area for bikers and walkers. 115 new apartments will add many more pedestrians to the area as well as more cars.

The second concern is about neighborliness and parking. Mr. Stopple has said many times that he wants his building to be a good neighbor to Weston Place. Because we are a new urbanism building, which Madison is promoting, we require a good, accessible parking lot for the clients of our businesses as well as guests of residents. Even though during certain hours, our underground parking is also available for our businesses, what we have now is barely adequate. At the same time, our condo still has almost fifty unsold units. We would like to see them purchased, bringing in the substantial tax dollars of a luxury new urbanism condominium. What is the problem? The residents of this new and very dense building are not required to rent parking spaces in the building, just as the residents of Overlook are not required to. Right now Overlook tenants and bus riders often fill up the north side of the street parking on Frey Street. This is not a problem for Weston Place at this time, but it makes me wonder about the parking consequences of the new development. Where will these residents park if they cannot afford or do not wish to pay for parking? Look at the streets surrounding our building, Segoe, Frey and Sawyer Terrace, each having limited and also distant parking from 617 Segoe. Finding a parking place will become a problem for many of the residents and the guests of this apartment. The simple answer for many of them will be to use our lot or Coventry's, making it more difficult for our businesses that depend on this parking, and could hurt the sale of new units.

Is this development going to be the good neighbor that Jim proposes, or is it the beginning of parking strife? Certainly the city knows about human nature and parking. A gate has been proposed, but people will quickly learn how to work around it, and unless you have monitored parking, it will be difficult to tell who is rightly parking in our small lot. In my opinion this development project as proposed is detrimental to the uses, values and enjoyment of the existing residents of our block and also endangers pedestrian safety. I would like to know what the city's plan is to solve the safety issue and potential harm to our valued business neighbors.

Thank you,

Catherine Buege
Weston Place Condominiums