

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

PRESENTED: May 11, 2016

TITLE: 400 West Washington Avenue –
Redevelopment of Six Lots to a Four to
Six-Story Building with 85 Residential
Units in the Downtown Core District. 4th
Ald. Dist. (41976)

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

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ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: May 11, 2016

ID NUMBER:

Members present were: Richard Wagner, Chair; Dawn O’Kroley, Tom DeChant, Cliff Goodhart, Richard Slayton, Lois Braun-Oddo and Sheri Carter.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of May 11, 2016, the Urban Design Commission made an **ADVISORY RECOMMENDATION** to the Plan Commission on the redevelopment of six lots to a four to six-story building with 85 residential units in the Downtown Core District located at 400 West Washington Avenue. Appearing on behalf of the project were Stephen Paul, Linda Page and Doug Paul, representing Up Urban Properties; and Shane Bernau, representing Ken Saiki Design. Registered and speaking in opposition were Dale Bruckner, Peggy LeMahieu and Larry Warman. Registered in opposition but not wishing to speak was Reginald Emshoff.

In address of the Commission’s previous review of the project, changes were presented dealing with the wide terrace and boulevard space and how to enhance it, how the project will fit into future neighborhood context, and how the height compares to the surroundings. Four-stories would not give as strong of a corner element. Six stories holds the corner well and blends in with the existing neighborhood, without giving an overwhelming presence. Modifications include a smaller path at 8-feet wide, single stairs and more ornamental trees. The entry stairs no longer go past a bedroom window. Additional lawn and low grow cover ornamentals have been added, with alternating different species on the north end. The limestone base and wood balcony accents were shown.

Dale Bruckner spoke to the “countless hours” of work that have gone into this project and the problems that have been noted. Many of the changes offered by the developer represented the least costly means to address the problems of landscaping, parking, building height, HVAC, etc. The project does not have a “wow” factor, and the majority of the neighborhood committee opposes a six-story structure at this location.

Peggy LeMahieu spoke in opposition. The project does not bring forth an exceptional design; the mass is too huge for this corner. From various sides of the building the mass does not disappear. They have not earned the two additional bonus stories. Whatever is done at this corner is going to be precedent-setting. We want to maintain a grand boulevard but this project does not hold that concept. The limestone on the bottom is the only

quality building material being used. She mentioned the rooftop and how it will be visible to neighboring properties.

Larry Warman spoke in opposition. It's a false argument to say people living down the street won't see this building because of the setbacks. In fact a consistent setback for West Washington Avenue is needed; both sides should be symmetrical. He also opposes a six-story building.

Kevin Firchow of the Planning Division noted the Commission's role in this review. The Zoning Code does not require the Commission make a recommendation to the Plan Commission, the applicant is asking for an advisory recommendation. Conditional Use Standard number 9 dealing with aesthetics, along with additional height are among the standards needed to be addressed. At this time the Planning Division does not believe the project meets the standards as noted in their report.

Comments and questions from the Commission were as follows:

- The grand boulevard setback needs to represent what's hoped for in the future, not the average of buildings now. That is probably the most critical aspect of this. If we don't do it here, we can forget about the grand boulevard.
- There's a lot of difference between a small 3-story house with a somewhat small footprint and how close it sits to the street versus a 6-story building that sits closer to the street. They're not in the same ballpark.
- This graphic was very useful, as you took the dimensions to the sidewalk-to-stairs, sidewalk-to-porch, sidewalk-to-envelope. That is kind of the most telling diagram, the historic center of the block with the most architectural integrity, the sidewalk to envelope dimension is a definite precedent to have the most forward, prominent built face of the building to be back in the 19, 20, 21-foot range.
- It's a very wide street with wide terraces and small buildings. I see the future of this grand boulevard having larger buildings. I think it could still go 12 or 15-feet and still be a grand boulevard with an edge there. It's almost suburban the way it is now with these huge setbacks and small buildings.
- At the further end closer to the Depot, those commercial storefronts come out to the street. If this was a commercial mixed-use project I could see making that argument, but in a truly residential program it needs to step back because it's not a public first floor.
- I agree that we need to look at having the setbacks more uniform. This block might be all apartments some day. This block is so unique and I would really like to see the setback at 20, that's what makes a grand boulevard.
- I agree in the sense that having that entryway is similar in size to the houses down the way, so the stepback for the upper stories kind of relieves that tunnel feeling. The trees really define the boulevard more than the houses. It seems to be setback appropriately to maintain a boulevard feeling.
- There's a difference between the existing houses in terms of the effect they have on that setback versus new buildings of this size and mass. Those houses also have openings in between them that is giving you a sense of space; what happens when you bring massive structures to replace them? I'm not convinced yet.
- There is some simplification that could be done on the architecture. Differential façade treatments should simplify the language, limit façade to make sense. There is a loss of base, middle and top, it needs order.
- Planning Division staff is recommending 15-feet based on the average setback from the property line to the building face. The closest the building faces here with the cantilevered section is 12-feet.
- Is this exceptional design to merit two bonus stories?
- The building does interesting things and has interesting architecture, but it doesn't hold together for me.
- The shared use of balconies is not functional for individual units.

- Not quite on integration between upper and lower. The sliding feature works on some elevations but not others; problem with four-sided architecture, the building architecture doesn't hold together and is not at a level of exceptional design.
- You have to screen the roof, that's not a choice. In the Downtown Core a parapet is not enough, you put a mechanical screen around the units themselves.
- I like the wood inside the balconies, it gives a nice warm contrast to the brick.
- I would caution us collectively to suggest to the Plan Commission that maybe the design be a bit more conventional. Their leanings are more conventional anyway. We don't recommend that the design gets more conservative.
- Generally speaking this could be an approvable project but somehow you have to transition from the high rise down to the smaller scale building. But to me it's that setback dimension, if that doesn't respect the fact that those 100 year old structures may stay and established that setback along West Washington, that loss of the setback would overpower what does exist in that fabric.
- Need a public discussion on what the setback should be, it needs to be looked at and decided.

ACTION:

On a motion by Slayton, seconded by DeChant, the Urban Design Commission made the following **ADVISORY RECOMMENDATION** to the Plan Commission:

It is the judgment of this Commission that this project does not yet meet the standard of exceptional design, there exists concern that the setback for the block is yet to be determined and that the precedent of this project appears to be closer than what might be desired setback. Staff has raised additional factors of design that should be weighed by the Plan Commission. The general composition and material selection does seem appropriate but should be more coherent on all four sides. Bonus stories are not recommended.

The motion was passed on a vote of (5-1) with Goodhart voting no.