Date: December 10, 2014
To: Members of the Madison Plan Commission
From: R. Richard Wagner, Chair Urban Design Commission
Re: Project at 330 W. Wilson St.

I write to convey the views of the Urban Design Commission which I serve as chair. The Urban Design Commission had on its Dec. 3 agenda consideration of a re-design of this project following a Plan Commission action. At its meeting the Urban Design Commission unanimously reaffirmed their previous action supporting the project without the brick siding desired by staff.

Members of Urban Design recognize their actions are advisory to the Plan Commission, but wish to convince you of the wisdom of their original approval action and how it is important as part of the process of reviewing projects requesting approval.

History of Commission Actions:
The applicant came to Urban Design, at their choice, for two informational presentations on Feb. 19, 2014 and March 19, 2014. From the beginning the Commission received the advice from planning staff on their concerns. There were three primary ones: being the placement of the building's parking along Wilson Street, the lack of activation on the street façade, and the materials. Neighborhood concerns were expressed about the overall large massing and sight lines. Discussion from members concerned the tower element, landscaping, and the planes of the sides of the building.

On June 11, 2014 the applicant was back with a request for initial approval. The record shows staff was "recommending masonry or darker metal options." Additionally the record shows, "The staff perspective is that if metal is used, that it be in a warmer color rather than white." Discussion comments from UDC members included, "Architecturally metal panels help reinforce the idea of a more modern form." The applicant was open to explore other color. At this meeting the project was referred with several comments including, "We need to see the other metal color possibilities as well."

On July 9, 2014 the matter was back on the agenda and the Commission granted Initial Approval. An important part of this design as the record shows was the tower element had vision glass all the way up through the stairway, since the Commission's strong preference has always been the window openings should avoid spandrel panels, and natural light into stairways is good thing. Among the staff comments was "the light gray material color is better than the white previously proposed." Again the metal panels were discussed. Among the member's comments were "I like the building, it's coming along nicely," and "the building is playful enough that it's actually quite interesting."

On October 15, 2014 the Urban Design Commission reviewed the project and the parking and street activation issues had both been addressed. Applicant presented a warmer color for the metal panels. The record also shows that in granting final approval the Commission did explicitly deal with the materials issue. "Planning staff recommendations in favor of a masonry building were noted, where the Commission expressed support for the building material as proposed. "

<u>Work Thrown Away</u>

I have drawn extensively on the record to show that in a sequence of five public noticed meetings, the design issues of the building were fully weighed by the principal body charged by ordinance to review design. None of the issues raised were slighted. The professional architects, landscape architects, planners, and citizens who served weighed the issues with diligence and care and the full participation of city staff. To have such work seemingly easily set aside at such a late stage causes frustration over all the work members of our Commission had carefully and thoughtfully already done. And all the resources the applicant had put in to respond to the ordinance-established review process and the citizens who attended, thus appear to be for naught.

<u>The Wrong Outcome is not Better</u>

Equally as important as the process question is the fact that Urban Design Commission members believe it results in a worst building. We hope the Plan Commission members will use their minds to evaluate the

result of their directive. Two primary reasons for the Urban Design conclusions include the following.

1. Building Looks Heavier

The site is small and as the neighbors observed the six stories permitted here appears large. Changing the material to brick, as in the presentation given at Urban Design meeting on Dec. 3, 2014, showed a building with a much heavier presence on the small site emphasizing its mass more than the previously approved final design. A side note was the reworking of the tower portion brought spandrel panels to the tower.

2. Lack of Urban Visual Interest

Perhaps the most important consideration for Urban Design members was that we see a lot of the same, and quite frankly very ordinary things in terms of design, when projects come to us for review. We believe an urban landscape should be varied and provide visual interest. If we all wanted to live in and work in look-alike buildings we could move to 1950s Levittown. Therefore the staff argument that there was a lot of brick commonly used on East Wilson Street and thus this building should be brick, while fully considered as the record shows, did not persuade us. We believe Madison was, is, and should be an exciting place where many tastes and styles can fit.

Please the attached UDC report of Dec. 3, 2014 for the extended discussion. Note all quotes are from the public records of past UDC meetings.

I personally think, that when John Nolen, envisioned a model city, he had a better vision than commonalty or ordinariness. He illustrated his 1910 guide to the future of Madison with hundreds of illustrations from cities across a broad spectrum that showed diversity in how you could achieve a city beautiful. We should not abandon that quest.

cc: Urban Design Members

AGENDA # 4

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

PRESENTED: December 3, 2014

TITLE: 330 East Wilson Street – 6-Story, 30-Unit Residential Apartment with 1,907 Square Feet of Commercial Space in the UMX District. 6th Ald. Dist. (33110)

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Alan J. Martin, Secretary

ADOPTED: **POF:**

DATED: December 3, 2014

ID NUMBER:

Members present were: Richard Wagner, Chair; Melissa Huggins, Cliff Goodhart, Dawn O'Kroley, Richard Slayton, John Harrington and Lauren Cnare.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of December 3, 2014, the Urban Design Commission **REAFFIRMED THEIR PREVIOUS MOTION** to approve the earlier design of the project. Appearing on behalf of the project were Josh Wilcox, AJ Robitschek, John Kothe, Kevin Page and Jeff Vercauteren, all representing Palladia, LLC. Wilcox presented the revised plans and updated architecture. The development team received direction from the Plan Commission that they wanted a building that had more masonry on it with modern lines. Previously they were playing with massing in terms of large metal planes with different forms creating the massing of the building, at this point they tried to create a more veneer form where they took the framework of the metal panel that would come around and wrap the form. Essentially the bigger picture is the creation of two tubes with one tube continuing east-west that projects out so you will see it from the intersection of John Nolen Drive and Williamson Street, and the second tube coming out from the backside that you can see from the Square. The tube is broken up with masonry of more traditional brick with color and banding similar to the brick. The actual forms of the base haven't changed much except for the material change from cast stone to brick. Planning staff encouraged them to use one brick only. The elevator tower now contains spandrel glass and projects out. The metal panels will create a nice corner element. The gray brick on the ends helps to define the two different masses.

Comments and questions from the Commission were as follows:

- Do you have the old renderings that we approved?
  - No we did not bring those.
- One of the things that we've been complaining about, and I've specifically asked staff this, is about the color palette being the same all over town. What we have now has been directed by the Plan Commission and staff to do is the same color palette that's all over town. How are we going to introduce more color if we keep being directed back to this? This is one of the few times where we thought we had something new going on here, instead of the same old. From my perspective, the second recommendation of staff makes it even worse. I'm wondering what we do with this, because if staff is going to be doing so much design work behind the scenes and we're going to end up with the same old

stuff, then why are we here? Why are we here from a staff standpoint, why are we here from a Plan Commission standpoint if no one is going to take our recommendation? We are supposed to be helping to figure out how the City is going to look. Staff is not supposed to be doing that, that's the charge of this committee.

- By ordinance we're charged with making a recommendation.
- Our ordinance charges us to do that and we said you know what, this is new, this is exciting, we want something different. So I move we go back to the old design and that's what we send back to the Plan Commission. I understand that staff has a role, but they are not charged with the design of the City, we are.
- We are charged with making a recommendation on the project and findings on this meeting the Downtown Design Guidelines, by ordinance. So is the Plan Commission in making those findings.
- We understand we're advisory to the Plan Commission but this does cause a great deal of frustration because we spent hours and hours trying to work out a design which in the end we thought was rather good. And to have it sort of rejected because another Commission listens to the staff comments is really quite frustrating, and I'm sure it's frustrating for you guys as well. And if they want to sift through all the signage we looked at tonight because they think design work should be done there, they would be welcome to that. But I don't think they would like that. I don't want to be unfair to you guys either, because throwing you back and forth between two Commissions isn't a nice thing to do to you.
- What are our options? I fully recognize that the Plan Commission can say "thanks, but no thanks." If we don't approve this tonight, where does that leave them? We could refer back to the Plan Commission with the recommendation to approve the design that we sent to them?
    - Yes we can, but we can make changes to this design that are consistent with the Plan Commission's previous referral of the project.
- What I would recommend is that you have to give up your Monday night and go to Plan Commission and explain these issues and reinforce to them why we thought that initial design was so much better. I think you might sway some people at that point, and it would not be inappropriate of a committee or a commission that has an influence on the outcome of a project proposal, to do something like that.
- (Ald. Rummel) I understand your frustration. I actually think this design is better than what you saw before. Maybe they can add another color scheme for the brick. I like the tower, and there are certain things about it that are appreciated. I heard the team say they liked this better too. I think our underlying point about what your role is, I'm totally supportive of the fact that you're here and give of your time and expertise. Part of it is some of these things are conditional uses and it stops at the Plan Commission and they're not really the ones with the expertise to take in all the elements. That's more a policy issue than helping with this particular project.
    - The neighborhood did prefer this design to the original.
- There's always a compromise. Would anybody be comfortable here sending it back to the Plan Commission with approval of the darker one versus the more vanilla one?
- I'll be honest, this reminds me of buildings built in the 1970s. It reminds me of places I would have lived in in the 1970s. It's not going to age well.
- They put a lot of work into the last version. The massing of this building is not broken down to the scale and elements of the last version. This looks like a bulkier, heavier building than the last version that worked hard to bring down its scale. The ground floor plan has improved over the course of the process. But this is just a very heavy building with a very important focal feature projecting from the roof that is spandrel glass, so it's a false piece.
- In my mind this would have been presented with something maybe at an informational, a masonry building, we would work through a series of meetings like we did before and now I feel like we have to take this fully cooked thing that came from across the street and either approve it or why not just send back what we worked on with the design team and say that's our recommendation?

- There are some elements on the rendering with the inset balconies and other little elements that add some promise, but the shaft with the spandrel glass is a non-starter for me. It needs a lot of tweaking and refinement, and that means another meeting here and then going back there…When we already had something we liked.
- And I assume the design team liked too, because they started with metal panels to begin with. If they really wanted a masonry building they would have brought a masonry building to us in the beginning, I would have thought.
    - There's a lot of layers that went into why it was a metal building. We feel strongly about the design, obviously we worked really hard on the previous option and we felt very confident about that as well, and we felt confident going to the Plan Commission, it was a surprise. The design was something we felt comfortable with and would garner support. We feel this does do that, it still fits some of the modern forms, but due to the narrowness of the overall building and the views that it's presented with, it's always taken from this angle so you never really see it in its full form. The horizontal lines help accentuate the length as opposed to the height and that's the overall direction that we're going in.
- You were given a different palette. Your end elements are elegant.
- Making it all brick is just worse.
- If we walk through the scenario where we do not approve this particular version presented tonight, refer it back to the Plan Commission. You guys have nothing to lose because you're going to Plan Commission regardless, right? And at that point the Plan Commission either understands why the Urban Design Commission preferred the other design as a commission and says, "oh, you're right," or is the old design not even on the table again to be approved?
    - They didn't accept the old design, they were instructed to make changes, which they have, but the Plan Commission has yet to approve these changes, that's why it's going back with some recommendation from us. So theoretically what we should, since we can't support this, is repeat our support for the previous design, state why and make that recommendation and have representatives there to have an open discussion about the whys and what fors.
- And if the Plan Commission says yes to that then the old design gets forward, and if they reject it again?
    - Yes, then they have to vote on this one despite our recommendation not in favor of. We're giving the Plan Commission the ability to approve our recommendation or approve this as proposed with the staff comments. Those are their options, but then we need to send somebody and our discussion today hit on some of the major features.
- It would be really nice to provide that in memo form to the Plan Commission. I think a memorandum from the Urban Design Commission, bullet points, to the Plan Commission would be good.
- Where is the best forum to have that conversation about staff?
    - That's a different conversation. That's a conversation that the Commission has previously requested, to have a dialog with the Planning Directors about design, which has yet to be scheduled.

ACTION:

On a motion by Cnare, seconded by Huggins, the Urban Design Commission **REAFFIRMED THEIR PREVIOUS MOTION** to approve the earlier design of the project for reasons outlined within the report, along with the drafting of an accompanying memo regarding this project and design related issues to be approved by Chair Wagner. The motion was passed on a vote of (6-0).

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION PROJECT RATING FOR: 330 East Wilson Street

	Site Plan	Architecture	Landscape Plan	Site Amenities, Lighting, Etc.	Signs	Circulation (Pedestrian, Vehicular).	Urban Context	Overall Rating
Member Ratings	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-