

AGENDA # 1

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION	PRESENTED: December 1, 2010
TITLE: Information and Discussion on the Draft Recommendations for the Downtown Plan. (20053)	REFERRED: REREFERRED: REPORTED BACK:
AUTHOR: Alan J. Martin, Secretary	ADOPTED: POF:
DATED: December 1, 2010	ID NUMBER:

Members present were: Marsha Rummel, Mark Smith, Dawn O’Kroley, Todd Barnett, Richard Slayton, John Harrington, R. Richard Wagner, Jay Handy and Henry Lufler, Jr.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of December 1, 2010, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED INFORMATION** and engaged in discussion regarding the Draft Downtown Plan. Appearing in opposition was Scott Kolar, representing CNI. Appearing neither in support nor opposition was Gary Peterson. Bill Fruhling, Principal Planner in the Planning Division reiterated the boundaries of the plan and the strong sense of place this area/neighborhood has to its residents, both current and past. He noted that after meetings with the neighborhood and sessions with the Plan Commission, modifications were made to try to be more articulate and create more of a vision using building footprints and images. Staff presented the Plan Commission with two alternatives. The first alternative follows-up on the direction that the Plan Commission gave at the time; West Washington Avenue would be largely redeveloped, with large houses that could be relocated to fill in gaps on West Mifflin Street. The center point of this is the depth of the blocks on West Washington, which are much deeper and contain mostly commuter parking in the backyards. Staff started looking at alleyways that would be pedestrian friendly with buildings fronting on it; this would contribute to the character of the neighborhood as well as provide for underground parking, in addition to keeping the core character of Mifflin Street while still allowing redevelopment. Alternative two, recommended by the Plan Commission to be included in the draft recommendations booklet is essentially the same as Alternative A, but it keeps the houses or house-like forms along West Washington Avenue. There would still be a fair amount of new buildings/new development but would increase the density by roughly 50 units per acre.

Gary Peterson spoke for the Downtown Design Professionals Workgroup, referencing its report (formed by Downtown Madison, Inc., “DMI”), “Design Visions for City of Madison Downtown Plan.” One of the things they feel is needed is to work together with the City and the University by bringing this area together. The Institutes for Discovery will be opening in a few days and that will create hundreds, if not thousands of data processing jobs, many of whom want to live downtown. In his opinion this neighborhood has become a slum; people mostly want to live in these conditions for nostalgic reasons. The landlords cannot take care of these properties and they will continue to deteriorate. The Design Professionals would not support any of the draft recommendations presented so far. They feel the need to get visionary, think big, in cooperation with the University to do something significant that will make a difference. Bringing high paying jobs downtown is of major importance. Questions for Peterson were as follows:

- What is the density you are looking for?

- 6 stories.

So this is more of an employment center?

Yes. Mixed-use.

- This is really a seismic shift from student housing to more young professionals.
 - Right. The housing there now, there are plenty of houses that are not occupied by students. There are people on their front porches and in their front yards with bottles in paper bags. To say we ought to preserve this slum for low density housing for nostalgia, I think is a real mistake.
- There was a social anchor that used to be there for many, many years. I don't want us to forget that past. How do you feel about the alleyway?
 - We didn't think it would work. We would be limited in the ability to park. The proposed houses wouldn't have any backyard and the office buildings wouldn't have any outdoor space. We go from having too much outdoor space to not having enough. To fix these buildings up is a huge amount of money.
- There seems to be a lot of competition to move people away from downtown. The University is spreading out, i.e. the new research center.
 - Jobs related to data processing should go downtown.Maybe that's where they should go, but it doesn't mean they will.
It takes effort on the part of the City to make it happen, and to a certain degree the University. I would agree with you that it is not going to happen by itself.

Scott Kolar spoke representing Capitol Neighborhoods, Inc. (CNI). The neighborhood association is evenly split on the opinion of density. They have looked at 3-4 proposals in the last year. Each of these developers have looked at student area as well as employment centers. Smaller units with more amenities that are geared towards employees, not students, is what these developers are aiming for. Speaking from a more personal standpoint, as well as a resident of the Mifflin neighborhood, Kolar agreed with Peterson in terms of the decline of this neighborhood.

Comments and questions from the Commission were as follows:

- Concern with the size of the buildings as they compete with the sizes on the north side of the street. It also produces a lot of shadow on the north side.
 - That's an existing building.How you treat that lane is going to be important.
- What kind of analysis was done for creating new housing that is not geared towards students?
 - We are showing a lot of different types of buildings here so it's not such a student oriented area. There are a lot of options that would attract a broad range of people.
- What mechanisms are in place, or could be created, to force property owners to maintain these buildings? Otherwise that pushes us towards something more substantial.

Ald. Verveer spoke briefly about his 15 years representing this neighborhood. He stated he was sorry to disagree with Kolar and Peterson and reiterated the Plan Commission's opinion and strong recommendations of staff's draft plans. The majority of the residents (neighborhood activists) like the plan that calls for lower density, keeping the housing stock and fixing it up, rather than demolishing the neighborhood for high rises. This is a student oriented neighborhood. It is not a transient, low income neighborhood. We have supported high rise student housing closer to campus.

ACTION:

Since this was an **INFORMATIONAL DISCUSSION** no formal action was taken by the Commission.

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION PROJECT RATING FOR: Draft Recommendations for the Downtown Plan

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

General Comments:

- West Washington – grand boulevard versus edge of Mifflin and Bassett. Worth rethinking who new users of this area will be per public testimony.
- I want to be around when this – whatever form – is realized. Zero lot lines? Support higher level of density on West Washington.