

AGENDA # 8

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION **PRESENTED:** May 6, 2015

TITLE: 4103-4119 (formerly 5422) Portage Road –
Multi-Family Apartment Dwelling
Including Three Multi-Family Apartment
Buildings and One Tenant Use
Pool/Clubhouse Building. 17th Ald. Dist.
(37462)

REFERRED:
REREFERRED:
REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Alan J. Martin, Secretary **ADOPTED:** **POF:**

DATED: May 6, 2015 **ID NUMBER:**

Members present were: Richard Wagner, Chair; Dawn O’Kroley, Melissa Huggins*, Cliff Goodhart, Tom DeChant, Richard Slayton and Sheri Carter.

*Huggins recused herself on this item.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of May 6, 2015, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL** of a multi-family apartment dwelling including three multi-family apartment buildings and one tenant use pool/clubhouse building located at 4103-4119 Portage Road. Appearing on behalf of the project were Joseph Lee, Rich Strohmenger, and T. Wall, representing 5422 Portage Road, LLC. Registered and speaking in opposition was Sue Pastor.

The master plan remains the same while the design of the building is now less contemporary. The aesthetic has been changed to a more traditional style, and the color scheme is more inviting in response to the neighbors. Entries at the public street are now more pronounced, and the scale of the mass on Portage Road has been brought down. The corner elements have been changed slightly to be more pronounced, with more of a materiality change. The landscape plan includes more shade trees to combat the heat island effect, elimination of some of the planting bed belt surrounding the buildings and replacement with clustering of ornamental trees and shrubberies, more clusters of landscaping trees to separate the building from the adjacent wooded area, the addition of center routes to connect the parking lot to the building for pedestrians, and the addition of user-friendly interactive areas for sitting or grilling, introduction of berming and heavily landscaped areas between the user spaces and the parking lot. They are working with the Friends of Starkweather Creek to clean up the area, and a bike path will be installed in this area.

Sue Pastor spoke on behalf of several neighbors. She thanked the development team for the changes; the neighborhood finds this iteration much better. There is some thought that it is out of scale and that the design does not really fit; she wonders if there is a way to preserve some continuity in neighborhoods or allow the neighborhood to have some say in what things look like. People feel that this is really out of scale with what’s already there and there continues to be a lot of concern about the size of this project. This gives the neighborhood a lot of traffic, a lot of vehicles and undermines their ability to grow their community.

T. Wall highlighted that this is a fairly low density project; they chose to preserve the majority of the site as greenspace. The City has a plan to install a bike path and they are cooperating with those easements. There will be a bicycle overpass over the Interstate to the American Center, and they are directly across the highway from a 5-story building. They are working with the Friends of Starkweather Creek to install walking paths with informative signage. This is an opportunity for nice quality residential units as an anchor to keep people in this area.

Jay Wendt, Principal Planner spoke of the City's plans north along Portage Road. As it is right now the neighborhood plan for the area does call for similar type uses as you go north, primarily medium density residential uses. In terms of layout of streets it does not get into that detail as an area plan would. This project is probably at the top end of what density would be allowed.

Comments and questions from the Commission were as follows:

- I don't see a lot of people playing croquet here (common green in front of clubhouse), so why not have this part be natural so you don't have to mow every week, and let the creek become more a part of your property. It's a demarcation but it feels like it's part of it. It's an aesthetic, it's a selection of native plant material that are part of that plant community, there's a transition. If you've got a program for that space that's a different story.
- Every 12 stalls you need another tree island.
- As much as possible I'd like to see native plant material from the plant community that surrounds the building. I don't quite understand the rhythm, it's more of a decorative area.
- The stairs at the bottom, are they single apartment entrances or entrances into the building?
 - These are all individual entries to single units.
- The neighbors are happy with the colors?
 - Yes, they would like more of the single-family colors worked into this development. We tried to promote a variety of more vibrant colors, if not necessarily the same colors.
- I'm torn because you say the neighborhood is happy with this, but I personally think it's a step backwards in design. I moved for initial approval last time because of the massing, but I think at this point it's go so much thrown at it that it doesn't have some of that nice compositional elements of the original design. I know that puts you in a tough spot being pushed back and forth, particularly things like the white bays...make all four windows a bay or lose the bay. Overall the original one had a lot more going for it and probably could have evolved with some brighter colors. But as a composition I think it was more successful.
- Absolutely. And with taking the input from the neighborhood, the images before us now seem chaotic. I don't know where to enter (building entries), I don't understand the hierarchy, when in the previous rendering there was a development of overall composition with hierarchy, but there could be a layer within that previous composition where we have subtleties within this general composition, but subtleties that give it variation and make individuals have more ownership of their unit, understanding of their space more in a subtle detailing.
- You've seen this building before, you'll see it again many times. Unfortunately it's what the neighborhoods have been somehow trained to think is what blends in. We hear this time and again, "we want something that blends in."
- Maybe fewer colors would make it less chaotic.
- I really think with some improved renderings it wouldn't seem so dark.
- In breaking down the scale you are probably most successful in that, looking at the overall composition and how these buildings relate to each other rather than directly repeat each other. At the corner bays,

starting to do something different at that main public space, I think that would have the greatest impact on the neighborhood.

- Less fussiness where you try to break up the mass would maybe be more successful.

ACTION:

On a motion by Slayton, seconded by DeChant, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED INITIAL APPROVAL**. The motion was passed on a vote of (5-0-1) with Huggins recused. The motion provided for:

- Elimination of the white projecting bays.
- Simplification of the material color palette for all the buildings.
- Landscaping adjustments relative to the Commission's current and previous comments associated with the two prior reviews of the project; in addition to reconfiguring the infiltration area in a less square fashion and informal fashion and create a line of trees around it.
- Resolving the two ends of the spectrum between the previous design of the building elevations and the most recent.

No rankings were provided for this project.