



**Agenda Item #:** 3

**Project Title:** 1601-1617 Sherman Avenue - Residential Building Complex. 12th Ald. Dist.

**Legistar File ID #:** [74227](#)

**Members Present:** Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Lois Braun-Oddo, Christian Harper, Russell Knudson, Amanda Arnold, Jessica Klehr, and Shane Bernau

**Prepared By:** Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

## Summary

At its meeting of October 26, 2022, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** for a Residential Building Complex located at 1601 - 1617 Sherman Avenue. Registered and speaking in support were Darrin Jolas, representing Vermilion Acquisitions, and Doug Hursh and Michael Powell of Potter Lawson, also representing Vermilion Acquisitions. Registered and speaking in opposition were Lisa Shapira, Timothy Jones, Mary Ellen Spoerke, and Judith Ela. Robert Johnson was also registered to speak in opposition, but technical difficulties prevented his testimony. Registered and speaking neither in support nor in opposition was Larry Nesper, representing the Sherman Terrace Neighborhood Association. Registered in opposition but not wishing to speak were Bill Parenteau, Richard Ela, Joan Johnson, Daniel Arndt, Jean Espenshade, Don Jones, and Nathan Brelsford.

Darrin Jolas from Vermilion and Doug Hursh and Michael Powell from Potter Lawson provided an overview of the project.

Lisa Shapira said they purchased their home on Sherman Avenue because they have children, and they appreciated the nearby park and greenspace for their family to enjoy. They said that the traffic in the area is disruptive, especially given the number of children running around. They said the proposal is obscene for the space, and to add 1000 additional residents across the street from single-family homes is doing a disservice to the city. They pointed out that this is a marsh, so there is a reason why there is no underground parking. They said that Vermilion has been sued by the City of Chicago, which should be considered. They said that this project is not a good fit for the neighborhood and asked what will happen to the animals and biodiversity of the area. They agreed the city needs housing, but this neighborhood doesn't need to accommodate all the new construction in the city.

Timothy Jones said that as an engineer, they think about the traffic and inconsistent level of density in the area. They were struck by the images presented by the project team that essentially erased all existing buildings other than those immediately adjacent. They pointed out that the single-family homes across the street from the development are not shown in the images, and the buildings across from Tenney Park are also minimized, which they saw as an attempt to reduce the fact that the proposed development is inconsistent with what is already present. They said the development is also inconsistent with the silence and peacefulness of the area. However, when it is rush hour, they said the neighborhood experiences a large traffic flow, which is only increasing with the amount of density outbound from the isthmus. They saw problems with the position and possibility of two entrances, noting that the bridge over the Yahara is already a dangerous spot for drivers and pedestrians.

Mary Ellen Spoerke said they were in shock about the development. They said there are already water problems in this area, and they can't imagine how a facility this large will impact water issues. They agreed with others about this development causing a nightmare for traffic. They said the most important issue is destroying the sky space and view

they have from Tenney Park and called it sacrilege. They said this is one of the prettiest areas in Madison that many people use, and she hoped they would go somewhere else with their monstrosity of a building.

Judith Ela said that the neighborhood wants Sherman Avenue to retain its present residential feel, which is traditional for this neighborhood. They said that a six-story building belongs elsewhere, not in a residential neighborhood where there is nothing of that size and scale. They understood the city is desperate for housing, but some areas are more fragile than others. They suggested consideration of the historic Yahara Parkway, as well as flooding that took place in 2018. They also brought up pedestrian and biker safety with the potential addition of 600 cars.

Larry Nesper spoke on behalf of the Sherman Terrace Neighborhood Association. They said they support the general idea of residential infill and some form of development on this property because the site has been underused and the parking lot onsite exceeds the needs of the existing office building. They asked if a historic building dedicated by President Truman should be demolished for this project and concluded that the current proposal does not meet this bar. They said the proposal is inconsistent with other buildings on Sherman Avenue and is simply too big. They also raised concerns about the number of private cars and delivery trucks in the neighborhood because traffic on the residential street is already busy, making it challenging for pedestrian and fishermen to cross. They were concerned about parking and the potential for residents to seek parking at Tenney Park or Sherman Terrace, creating problems for neighborhood residents and park users. They discussed the green roof area and noted there was little green space for pedestrians to see. They said that while Vermilion proposed to retain the maple trees, the required setbacks may compromise the root structures. They said that the needs for surface parking have diminished the value of adequate screening between the development and Sherman Terrace's southern property line. They said that residents currently enjoy lush green screening there, and they recommend that the issue of screening be more clearly engaged and plans revised in order to preserve a natural buffer for the benefit of both properties and other neighborhood residents.

The Commission discussed the following:

- I would like to see renderings that include the relationship to existing homes; I was struck by the public comment about those not being shown.
- Can the architect walk us through the interior space and space between the buildings?
  - Building A is U-shaped. There is a drive that goes in on the first floor for parking and a drive that goes down to the basement level. The green roof has amenities for residents like a pergola and outdoor kitchen. Buildings B1 and B2 are simpler with a small building for bike storage between them, outdoor space, and activity area with an outdoor kitchen. The space between B1 and B2 also contains stormwater management and gardens. The developer is looking into community gardens outside Building A shown in the grid area, as well as additional stormwater management and a dog run. For Building C, the ground slopes away toward the boat trailer parking lot. There is a ramp on the south side that gets you down into the parking structure below the building. There is also stormwater management between Building C and the Yahara River.
- Where are the single-family homes adjacent to this development that were referenced in public comment?
  - On the north side of the development on Sherman Ave.
- Sherman Avenue doesn't have the capacity to be enlarged, and it shouldn't be. This development will increase traffic to a capacity that the street is incapable of handling. I'm surprised a traffic study hasn't been done. Regarding water, I see retaining areas that are good to capture water in a rain event. What is not addressed is that all buildings and parking structures take up space that is currently an area where groundwater settles, so they are displacing the capacity for groundwater in an area susceptible to flooding. I was aghast at how dense this proposal is for a small, residential street that is mostly owner occupied, including Sherman Terrace. On a general level, the development is too large and over capacity of the ability for the neighborhood to absorb it, as well as for the park and natural areas to absorb it. The architecture is a little repetitive. If the development is downscaled, it should have more interest rather than rectilinear shapes with balconies. This is what one would see on a smaller site that aligns with a street, in a park-like setting. I was surprised the city was considering this

much density on such a small street and in such close proximity to a well-established and historically significant park. This is too dense, I want to see something more sensitive to the park-like area being built on.

- There is consistency in what we are hearing from the neighborhood, which should not be ignored. The development team should respond to that next time we see this project. What jumped out at me was the idea of parking and the water table—the relationship to the lake and groundwater as was previously mentioned. The parking ratio is too high, which reveals a lot about the density they are trying to fit in here and that they might have issues with stormwater and groundwater. There is too much happening on a site of this size with the neighborhood and street character that it has. The development seems very internally focused. The green roof and terrace interior to Building A seem lovely with nice amenities, but they should consider the borrowed scenery in terms of proximity to the lake, sunset views, and all the things that come with this specific site. Why close off so much of the west side of the site and views to the lake? There is potential for a really amazing place to live with views to Tenney Park and the lake. I'd like to be more strategic in how the buildings are positioned and orient the site to capture as many views as possible. Along with that, Building A is tight to the street and forms a barrier to lake views for the rest of the site; that could be opened up and more of the green roof plaza could become a void space with more views to the lake. I have concerns about the parking ratio and the amount of parking and off-street vehicular circulation is weaving between the buildings. Be more responsive to the park-like setting. In the northeast corner, is there potential for a connection? It appears to be a sidewalk or trail connection running parallel to the line of cars on the neighboring properties. Is there a master plan where greater connectivity for the neighborhood and residents can get to the lake, Yahara River, or Tenney Park? There are a lot of existing trees on the site, and I would like to know specifically what those trees are, if they are of value, and how the proposal is responding to that in terms of protection. If they plan to clear cut mature 100-year-old oak trees in the southern corner; that is an issue. Is there connectivity between the amenity spaces and Buildings B1, B2, and C—how are they getting to the roof deck terrace? It doesn't seem easy with all of the cars and grade change.
- If people think the traffic is bad now when most of the parking lot on this site is empty, it's not hard to see that if this were built as proposed with that number of cars how much worse the traffic would be on a daily basis. I was shocked at the size of this development and tried to wrap my head around how it would work on a two-lane street. There was talk in the staff memo about future connections, but looking at overheads and existing properties to the east, it's hard to see any future street that would take some of this traffic in and out. Looking at the sheer size and mass of the building, the six-story frontage on Sherman Avenue is in your face. Something that big being brought out to the street is a non-starter for me and the neighborhood. I could wrap my head around the idea of three stories along the front and possibly rising up to four or five stories as it goes back, but that would be a different-looking building than proposed. They have the right idea with the size and height of the other buildings. Who wouldn't want to live in the Sherman Avenue-facing apartments with sunsets across the lake? I don't think the city should be sacrificing the potential of this site for 50 or 60 people to have beautiful lake side sunset views; it is inappropriate. I share concerns about the existing greenery; the area where Building C is proposed is currently a wooded, jungle-like lot with a lot of large old trees that provide a lot to the ecosystem. This is a big ask for the sensitive nature of this property and where it is located along the river and park. I can picture a nice development going into this space that the neighborhood would embrace, but as proposed, this is not that. There is a lot of work to be done.
- It struck me in the presentation that the developer is excited to come to Madison and be part of the building up of Madison, so I encourage them to join us in our community and be aware that this is not only primo real estate, but also a very special part of Madison. This is one of few spots consistently used year-round, and one of the more equitable recreation spots. Families and people from all over the city come here, and it is a wonderful, very special place in Madison. Right now, this project is missing the mark on that; please consider it as you develop in the future. Year round, this neighborhood is buzzing. Even though there are private homes, the scale and interconnectivity makes the whole place feel accessible to enjoy. This project strikes me as turning its back on the neighborhood with having inclusive, private amenities inside the site, which goes against what the neighborhood around it is doing. Sherman Terrace condos are more open and engaging with the community

than what I'm seeing here. We welcome the developer to Madison with excitement, but this site is special enough to pay attention to the fabric of the city and what is happening in this neighborhood.

- Did you consider maintaining the existing building. If not, why not?
  - We did not. The existing building is a two-story office building, which is not sized well for residential or to be converted to residential by adding additional floors on top.
- There is history to consider on this. I've seen Potter Lawson do amazing things with existing structures and fitting into neighborhoods that are cohesive. You've already heard about massing and access to the site. Regarding the style, I appreciate this is not a building with a flat roof, so the reference to gable-like residences around it is positive. The scale needs to be reviewed, especially the open frames on the front and their white color. The identity in that style of architecture is not Madison or this neighborhood. Generally, the gable roof is positive, but I'd rethink how it's framed out in white. I look forward to the next iteration. Maybe it will have a street going through it from east to west as the plan wanted. Also, if there are larger units for families, I'm curious where the spill out space for children is on a site like this and how it connects to the public spaces around it.
- Regarding traffic and a potential through street between Fordem and Sherman, I think one issue is the assumption that most residents here would exit and enter off Fordem. It could also encourage residents from Fordem to cut through to Sherman, so it could potentially have an undesirable effect. The traffic study needs to be thorough and consider that.

## Action

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