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**To:** [Plan Commission Comments](#)  
**Cc:** [All Alders](#)  
**Subject:** Oppose Item 13; Legistar 89917  
**Date:** Friday, October 3, 2025 2:51:06 PM

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Fri. Oct. 3, 2025

Madison Plan Commission members,

Please oppose Item 13, Legistar 89917, which would increase the minimum required heights of building setbacks in transition areas. [1] This change would turn Madison streets into areas of ugly, concrete canyons and is inconsistent with Madison's Comprehensive Plan, Amended December 5, 2023.

First, a note on terminology is needed. What the "Fall 2025 Housing Forward Proposals" web page calls a "step down" is what Madison's Comprehensive Plan, Amended December 5, 2023 [2] calls a "setback". This comment will use the word "setback".

The web page for "Fall 2025 Housing Forward Proposals" says,

"This [step down] requirement is called the "height transition area" and is intended to help transition the scale of buildings when moving from a more intense to a less intense zoning district." [3]

Aesthetic concerns about the scale of adjacent buildings are not the main purpose of setbacks. The Madison Comprehensive Plan, Amended December 5, 2023, calls for, "4. Building setbacks to lessen massing and shadow impacts;" [2; p. 43] The purpose of setbacks is avoid narrow concrete canyons between adjacent tall buildings and to admit light and air to the street level. Given this understanding of the purpose of setbacks, the presence of tall buildings adjacent to new buildings makes the lower, 25 foot standard for the start of setbacks even more imperative. Two adjacent tall buildings increase the importance of setbacks to "lessen massing and shadow impacts" as Madison's Comprehensive Plan requires.

Madison's zoning code must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. [4] Legistar 89917 is inconsistent with Madison's Comprehensive Plan and must be rejected.

The PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT on Legistar 89917, of October 6, 2025, admits that Legistar 89917, "allows for some additional building mass in the lowest stories of some buildings by-right". [5; p. 3] Legistar 89917 thus contradicts the Madison Comprehensive Plan, Amended December 5, 2023, which calls for, "4. Building setbacks to lessen massing and shadow impacts;" [2; p. 43] The contradiction is "**additional building mass** in the lowest stories" versus

"building setbacks to **lessen massing** and shadow impacts. [ Emphasis added ]

The web page for "Fall 2025 Housing Forward Proposals" offers an example which shows how the proposed increase in the height of the first setback would lead to adjacent buildings with flat facades that do not admit light and air to the street level.

"Here is another example: if a development was being proposed for a lot that was directly next to a Traditional Residential – Urban 2 (TR-U2) zoning district, which has a higher maximum height allowed due to its more urban setting, an increase from the current 25-foot maximum to the TR-U2 maximum of 52 feet could result in several additional full floors of homes on the sides and rear of the building that weren't possible under current requirements". [3]

Two building facades on adjacent buildings that rise 52 feet before the first setback do not "lessen massing and shadow impacts" as Madison's Comprehensive Plan requires. [2; p. 43]

Future generations will be condemned to live in a dark, claustrophobic environment. In their obsession with the quantity of housing units, City officials are ignoring the quality of life that future residents will experience.

Thank you for reading this comment.

Don Lindsay

## SOURCES

[1] Legistar 89917 web page

<https://madison.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7656025&GUID=8C69D5DE-950D-427F-8C7B-92B5A6EBC0E2&Options=ID|Text|Attachments|Other|&Search=>

Accessed 20250915

[2] Madison Comprehensive Plan, Amended December 5, 2023 Part 1:

[https://www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/planning/documents/2024\\_Comprehensive\\_Plan\\_Part1.pdf](https://www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/planning/documents/2024_Comprehensive_Plan_Part1.pdf)

Accessed 20250922

"4. Building setbacks to lessen massing and shadow impacts;" [p. 43]

[3] Housing Forward Fall 2025 web page

<https://www.cityofmadison.com/mayor/priorities/housing-forward/fall-2025-housing-forward-proposals>

Accessed 20250911

[4] [MGO] 28.003 Relationship to Comprehensive Plan.

[https://library.municode.com/wi/madison/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=COORMAWIVOIICH20--31\\_CH28ZOCOOR\\_SUBCHAPTER\\_28AINPR\\_28.003RECOPL](https://library.municode.com/wi/madison/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=COORMAWIVOIICH20--31_CH28ZOCOOR_SUBCHAPTER_28AINPR_28.003RECOPL)

Accessed 20250826

"[MGO] 28.003 Relationship to Comprehensive Plan.

"The Madison Comprehensive Plan establishes the goals, objectives and strategies that serve as a basis for this zoning code. All regulations or amendments adopted pursuant to this ordinance shall be generally consistent with the Comprehensive Plan as adopted and revised or updated."

[5] PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT of October 6, 2025

<https://madison.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=14818238&GUID=CA129F7F-578A-4DD6-ABDF-E2EDC270DFF0>

Accessed 20250925

"While this code change increases the height at which this transition is required to occur, and thus allows for some additional building mass in the lowest stories of some buildings by-right, a conditional use will still be required for any requested exceptions to these height transition rules."

p. 3