

From: [Michael D. Barrett](#)
To: [Rummel, Marsha](#); davidwjmclean@gmail.com; stuartlevitan@sbcglobal.net; rtaylor@restainohomes.com; michaelrosenblum@yahoo.com; christina.slattery@meadhunt.com; efgmadison@gmail.com
Cc: [Scanlon, Amy](#); [Fruhling, William](#)
Subject: Downtown Plan Comment for Landmarks Commission
Date: Wednesday, December 07, 2011 7:57:46 PM

Dear Commissioners,

It is my understanding that the Downtown Plan is scheduled for your consideration on December 19, 2011. I have read the Downtown Plan (Legislative File ID 24670) in great detail; below are my comments. Thank you for considering them.

Sincerely,
Michael D. Barrett
2137 Sommers Avenue
Madison, WI 53704

Major Themes:

Return our Lakes to Pristine. Please, no fill of any body of water, at all, anywhere. None. If planners feel the need to expand Law Park, that would be fine, as long as the expansion is away from the existing shore. De-paving half of John Nolen Drive for a wider strip of park would be most welcome. Traffic--current & projected-- can be accommodated with a combination of efficient intersection engineering (roundabouts, etc.), reversible commuter lanes, aggressive TDM, as well as better use of more appropriate routes (e.g., Beltline).

Our lakes should not be sacrificed at the altar of a pompous architect, no matter how heavily marketed the resurrected legacy.

Reduce motor vehicles in the downtown area. You cannot simultaneously call for more cars *and* greater sustainability. You get one or the other. Not both.

No accommodation of motorized transportation along lakeshore. Parks should be places of relaxation, not speed & fumes. The ski teams, for example, create a lot of havoc across the bike/ped path making life difficult for non-motorized transportation. That must end.

100% on-site stormwater management for all new buildings. That means green roofs, on-site water collection (rooftop rain barrels & water towers/reservoirs, raingardens, drainage swales, structured soils, etc.).

Zero net energy, LEED Platinum, EnergyStar buildings for all new buildings. The technology is there for hyper-efficient "passiv" buildings. Let's do it.

Preserve our Architectural Heritage. No tear downs, no matter how old or what condition. It seems clear that one of the main goals of the plan is to drive a stake through the heart of Miffland and everything else that makes Madison cool. The planners & developers who cling to the idea of sanitized gentrification are the

inheritors of the same ideology that destroyed the Greenbush Neighborhood. *Enough with the 1950s Urban-Renewalism!*

Furthermore, we can't afford to waste the embedded energy in our classical structures. Re-invest in these old buildings for extreme energy efficiency. It can be done. It *has* been done. (I've done it.) And let's learn to enjoy and cherish the human-scale of these classic old buildings and their environs.

Specifics:

p. 22. Economics: The Plan states: "The future of retailing in the Downtown needs to effectively mix the local businesses that make it unique with some of the national chains that can add stability to the retail base and provide an additional degree of familiarity that many shoppers like. "

I disagree. **No more chains.** Shoppers who like national chains can get plenty of that back in Oshkosh or Fitchburg. Nobody comes to State Street to go to McDonalds. You see, they are all gone. How many corporate T-shirt shops have come & gone. Failed. Why? Because they couldn't compete with our cool, local enterprises. Chains suck.

On p 24. Recommendation 12: How can parking be a "recognized constraint" when there is plenty of parking according to the city's own data?

On p. 27, rec 20: I think I know what they mean, but the sentence is mangled.

Is this the page where green roofs should be discussed? If so, recommend all roofs in the entirety of downtown are GREEN--literally GREEN with vegetation.

Indeed, all buildings must be green, and certifiably so, with EnergyStar, LEED Platinum, net zero energy.

On p. 28, 2nd sentence missing something at end.

p 31, rec 27. Why more parking? Especially when there is already more than enough parking. And given trends (more below) that is likely to be the case for generations to come. Perhaps they mean more metering on-street, which could effectively create more parking? That would be good, because smart metering (yield management pricing, etc.) on *all* streets = good. For further information on how to better manage parking, in accordance with basic market principles, study **The High Cost of Free Parking** by Donald Shoup here (pdf): <http://www.uctc.net/papers/351.pdf>

p. 32, Why the focus on drive time? Does this mean that the greenbacks of downtown residents, bus riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians are worth less than those of suburbanites who drive? This will come as a big surprise to the Chamber of Commerce types, but a lot of us are living without the expense of a car so that we can enjoy *life* downtown.

P. 33, Visitor & Tourist Destination.

Add: Hippies-as-economic-engine.

Specifically: Recommend enhancing, expanding and vigorously marketing the Madison Hostel to put it on the map of world travelers. When Europeans travel, they often follow the Hostelling International map. Here it is, Madison on the world map of hostels:

<http://www.hihostels.com/dba/cmap-US.en.htm>

We should take full economic advantage. Here's why:

In the mind of a European, Australian or New Zealand tourist, the mere existence of a hostel in a city signifies that the city has something to offer of interest, no questions asked. Many Americans who traveled the world in their youth have picked up on the same idea.

Chicago's hostel is one of the Hostelling International-USA's premium, "gateway" hostels. It is a mandatory stop for international travelers. One of the missions of gateway hostels is to introduce international travelers to regional hostels. In the past, the Chicago Hostel has been open to displays from hostels throughout the midwest. This should be explored and paid for by the Madison Convention & Visitors Bureau. Hostels aren't just for stinky hippies anymore. Over the decades, a lot of those hippies took a shower, got a job, built up a retirement, and now travel the world--hostel to hostel. Why? Because they like to meet other people along the way. And no other lodging type better facilitates the instantaneous intercultural community that springs up every evening in the kitchen of a hostel.

To be sure, Chamber of Commerce-types in charge of this plan will look askance at the concept of budget travelers as an economic engine. I submit that they should expand their notion of tourism to include those who skimp on accommodations so that they can spend on, for instance, cultural experiences, nighttime entertainment and other experiential spending. Furthermore, if it weren't for the hostel, they wouldn't be here at all. Some spending is better than no spending, n'est-ce pas?

For more information about how hostelling is moving up in the world, check out this Wall Street Journal article, "In the U.S., Hostels With a Luxe Touch":

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203710704577054220884980872.html>

Hippies-as-economic-engine, what a concept!

[Disclosure: I was a founding member of the board of the non-profit Madison Hostel (served 2000-2006). I do not now, nor have I ever had, a personal financial interest in this or any other hostelling organization.]

[Update: A reliable source from 1960s Madison informs me that hippies are not now, nor have ever been, stinky. He adds that we should "keep on truckin'".]

Add: downtown historic preservation tour promotion, with special emphasis on the history of citizen action to fight back developer- and city engineering & planning departments' depredations upon the historic built environment of our beloved city.

Add: downtown urban bike experience promotion; highlight Madison as the

Upper Midwest's hub of human powered transportation and silent sports. Chamber of Commerce-types Nota Bene: Trek Corp--the second largest bicycle company in the world, based right here in S. Central WI--has already recognized this in their purchase of the Mansion Hill Inn as the center of their Trek Travel enterprise; witness also their significant investment in Madison B-Cycle. Trek has indicated that they want Madison to be *the* urban bicycling showcase of the world. Their model, showcase shop, which all of their retailers must visit for training, is right here in Madison. They have also indicated that they want Madison, the city, to be just such a showcase for all things bike on an urban level. A good thing, I might add.

Bicycling is a billion & a half dollar industry in Wisconsin. Madison is home to the lion's share of that industry. 20% of the nation's bike industry is located within a half-day's bike ride of the square. Not coincidentally, some of the very best bicycling--*in the world*--can be found in Madison's rural hinterlands (it is no accident that cross-country tour planners usually choose routes through this region). Our region is *the* choice of Olympic road race planners! Let's go with this major strength!

[Disclosure: I was on the board of the Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin from 1995-2000 and was instrumental in bringing about the organization's rapid growth: from all-volunteer to a half-dozen professional staffers; from a budget near zero to a quarter of a million dollars. I am currently no longer affiliated with the organization in any way.)

p. 34, "...improved transportation and destination accessibility" invariably means bigger roads and more parking, both of which militate against the stated ideas (in the same sentence) of, "environmental stewardship... increased lake and lakefront activity, increased emphasis on outdoor recreation, strong cultural tourism, creation of distinctive visitor districts..." You get one or the other: environmental sustainability or more cars. Not both.

Note also that, according to your own stats, the UW Memorial Union has the highest draw of any other attraction in Madison, and yet--*and yet*--it has virtually no parking available. What little parking exists nearby is minimal in relation to the scale of its attendance. Little parking, high attractiveness...coincidence? Me thinks not.

p. 39, rec 42. Look to Ann Arbor's Main Street for better building-street interactivity. Too many of our downtown streets choke pedestrian traffic while over-providing for the automobile. That needs to be reversed with lots of bulb-outs at crosswalks, an enhanced outdoor cafe experience (expanded & enhanced mid-block curb terrace areas), as well as for more street-side greenspace. This necessarily means roads that constrict car speeds. High speed car access is anathema to a lively urban street scene.

Add: On the necessity of awnings. Look at old photos of Madison. Note the extensive use of large, massively overhanging awnings (I'm not talking about those stunted little decorative awnings in current use). Quality awnings improve urban life and commerce in several ways. Awnings:

- Provide shade for the pedestrians in summer (commerce)

- Prevent overheating of interior spaces in summer (sustainability)
- Provide tasteful advertising (commerce)
- Shelter pedestrians during rain & snow (sustainability & commerce)
- Provide an overall feeling of pedestrian comfort & accommodation, encouraging, for instance more window shopping, and, eventually, actual expenditures (commerce)
- Better building-street connectivity (placemaking, historic preservation)
- Being retractable, are able to allow solar heat gain during winter months; something fancy window glazing can't accomplish (sustainability)
- Provide some measure of protection against thrown objects.

Awnings are a part of the lost art of urban placemaking. We need to bring them back.

Add: Look to State Street's late-19th & early-20th century storefronts to understand principles of building-sidewalk interplay. A major principle is that of the prototypical sidewalk-entry neutral zone; a.k.a., the window-shopping friendly entryway. The trapezoidal entryway is essentially a large indentation into the building that doesn't breach the actual building envelope. It acts as a transitional extension of the sidewalk into the adjacent storefront/building. The key function: to allow a pedestrian to shop, lingeringly, from outside, while not blocking the flow of pedestrian traffic on the sidewalk. This is important, since entering a store creates a sort of commitment. The sort of commitment that, in the mind of a good Midwesterner (i.e., constantly feeling obligated to everyone they come across, to a guilt-ridden fault), means purchase is mandatory. Thus, many a passersby won't stop to window shop when presented with a sheer, flat, storefront without a neutral zone. The best example of such terrible urban design is the entire frontage of the Overture Center. One doesn't even notice the museum gift shop while walking by its sheer glass frontage. Nothing draws one in. Nor is there an out-of-traffic spot to stop & view the wares from outside. The merchants of yore understood the conundrum of how best to get people to slow down & stop at their store even as things bustled around them. They thus built their shops to allow the neutral, no-obligation zone, typically the entryway. Unfortunately, this was not something taught in planner school or developer school of the mid-late 20th century. In fact, I can imagine the perplexed look on the face of any professional planner or developer who reads this now.

p. 45, Urban Forest: All new street reconstruct projects must use maximum on-site stormwater management that maximizes street tree health. Structured soils across & underneath large areas under sidewalk & streets, designed to collect and infiltrate stormwater for street tree health, must be standard. [See Madison resident expert, Anne Walker, for further technical details.] The perpetual sickly stick tree practices of Madison's forestry department should end. We must establish practices which bring about healthy, large and robust street trees. It is about creating an inviting pedestrian environment as well as reducing the urban heat island effect, and reducing emissions due to over-use of air conditioning. It is also about better management of stormwater for aquifer and lake health.

State Street needs pedestrian-scale signage to expand the "State

Street Experience" to off-State; e.g., down Gilman, up Henry, etc. This can be achieved with proper signage & wayfinding. For examples of successful ped-scaled signs, see State Street Brats's signs (in their beer garden) directing tourists to the Kohl Center. They get it. The city, meanwhile....Well, it is just silly to not take advantage of the walkability of the rest of downtown.

p. 51, Mifflin: I am against all tear downs. There is a lot of embedded energy in these classic old houses & buildings. Furthermore, the art of the human-scaled neighborhood has been lost in modern architecture and building practice. Anything that replaces them will be a downgrade from the perspective of the pedestrian. The City of Madison's Traffic Engineers and Fire Dept. will see to that. They will always demand maximal access standards for cars and gigantic firetrucks which inevitably militates against pedestrians.

Most importantly, we enjoy the connection with our past.

Boost building code enforcement to end the deterioration of Mifflin's classic houses. Use micro-TIF and other means to promote rehab of existing buildings.

I am against the "urban lane" thing; it is just a fancy term for ugly parking garage entrance. I guarantee that the traffic engineer will allow no "lane"-scaled anything. It will be required to be to full, fire-engine accessible widths (i.e., very wide) and huge turning radii. This means, pedestrian unfriendly. Please, if people want to live downtown, they live with fewer/no cars. Backyards should be returned to green.

General Comment:

The term "infill" has gotten severely bastardized. Its original meaning was exactly that: take an empty space and put something in it. Now, they've expanded it to mean tear down something cool (i.e., something old), and replace it with something new, ugly, car-friendly and obscenely tall. Our planners and local developers have usurped the goodwill that word used to have. I am against all infill that involves tearing down old buildings, no matter what shape they are in. As someone who has invested a lot of his family's financial resources into three 100-year old buildings very close to downtown, I believe that we've got to stop subsidizing the scumlords who are essentially strip mining their buildings by not keeping them up. Along those lines....

p. 59, recs 86-89 are awful. It is all about tearing down entire neighborhoods and plunking down Fitchburg. Hideous.

p. 71. Why is this being presented from the perspective of the well-wheeled suburbanite? Why not highlight the fact that, of residents who *live* in the downtown area from Blair Street to Highland Avenue, over 65% get to work by means other than driving alone?

p. 72, "An efficient network of arterial, collector and local streets"? Sounds like fast streets, something that militates against walking, biking, and most especially, old people and children; the very people the plan claimed it wanted to promote in the last chapter. Worst of all, it militates against our ENVIRONMENT; sustainability. Again, you get more cars or you get sustainability. Not both.

In fact, this plan does nothing to rein in the vast and excessive expanses of paving at key intersections and gateways to downtown. The John Nolen/Blair/E. Wilson/Williamson St. intersection is way over-built for current and projected traffic. It is extremely--and unnecessarily--dangerous for pedestrians & bicycles. Same for the major intersections the entire length of Broom from John Nolen to W. Gorham. Flying right/left turn lanes are always inappropriate in an urban environment. These and other giant intersections militate against the plan's pretensions to be elderly & child friendly, much less bike & ped friendly. And by promoting cars, it damages our air, promotes more water-destructive paving.

and,

"On street, structured, and underground parking facilities to meet anticipated needs...."

...More? Really? Why not promote downtown as the preferred place to live the car-free life? It is a strength now, and increasingly will be as fuel costs skyrocket (at least in relation to incomes). Don't undermine that strength with more, wasteful car facilities. Parking is already overprovided. Much of it has already become "stranded capital," so why not end the misallocation of public investment and instead invest in the future: pedestrians/transit/bicycles? How about investing in **Beautiful Places?! Plazas, expanded al fresco dining, rooftop nightlife? Places for people!**

p. 74, Transit,

"Park and ride lots strategically located throughout the region": P& R lots are an extreme waste of money; failed planning relics of the 1970s energy crisis that just won't leave the minds of planners. The money would be much better used to boost actual transit service. The assumption behind P&R is that everyone owns a car (or at least of the class sought by the creators of this document). That simply is not true any longer. The trends of car ownership are very much against the 1950s ideology that invented P&Rs. More here at *AdAge Digital*: "Is Digital Revolution Driving Decline in U.S. Car Culture?"

<http://adage.com/article/digital/digital-revolution-driving-decline-u-s-car-culture/144155/>

Time to catch up with the times.....!

p. 75, Bus Transit: As a growing city, and as a major medical center, Madison is increasingly a 24 hour city. As such, we need 24 hour bus service. A Skeletal system would be appropriate for late night hours, but at least that needs to get going.

78-79 Complete Streets: 2-way streets are the only kind of streets that are compatible with a truly urban environment.

p. 80 Parking:

"There is, however, at least the perception that there

continues to be a lack of sufficient parking for short term users and commuters in certain areas. "

...Why do the planners feel the need to repeat this old canard? Aside from Gov't East, there is no ramp that fills up during regular business hours. None. If you want to fix the "perception" why not just use the technology currently available to you and actually post a real time number, visible to the street, available on the 'net, showing the number of spaces available in each lot? Enough with the voodoo parking analysis.

[Update: It has come to my attention from a former Transit & Parking Commissioner that the Gov't East Ramp has not exceeded 90% capacity in over five years.]

p. 83 rec 142 B-Cycle: This is not the only bicycle sharing/rental arrangement available downtown. I don't think it is appropriate to promote one private company over another in a public plan. It would be more appropriate to keep it generic and say "promote and expand bike sharing, bike lending and bike rental programs in the downtown area." Budget Bicycles, Yellow Jersey and Machinery Row all rent bikes; Budget has a bike lending program. Point being, Trek Bicycles' B-Cycle should not be giving preferential positioning in this public document. Indeed, it appears to be the only private enterprise given mention in this document.

p. 85-6 Langdon Mid-block Path. Why are there cars illustrated on the rendering of this "path?" Giving it this name, but putting cars on it, is a bait-and-switch. Why not just call it what it is, a parking expansion zone? I mean, really, do you think the testosterone buzzed frat boys will be able to resist running all those strollers off the road? Really? Please....! I oppose any new motor vehicle routes in this area.

p. 89 TDM: "subsidies for transit riders," should include subsidies for biking, walking as well. There is so much more that could be done to monetize & incentivize getting downtown by other than a car, alone. Better yet, remove all subsidies to driving. Again, see Shoup.

Summary

The plan has a very long way to go. It contradicts itself throughout, especially in its insistence on more cars and more speed for cars while pretending to promote sustainability. There is little to nothing promoting truly sustainable buildings (net-zero energy, Platinum LEED), preserving historic buildings through energy efficiency retrofits, or 100% on-site stormwater management. The commerce promoted here reeks of mall planning ca. 1965. The two overriding goals seem to be, fill the lake and kill Miffland. In sum, it is vision-less planning rooted in the dogma of a half century ago.

I oppose the Downtown Plan as currently written. Please do not approve the Downtown Plan.