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Jason Tish  
Executive Director

Ms. Katherine Cornwell  
Department of Planning & Development  
City of Madison  
215 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd  
Madison, Wisconsin 53701

10 January 2014

**RE: Steve Brown Apartments proposal for 100 block of W. Gilman St.**

Ms. Cornwell-

While the Madison Trust for Historic Preservation does not, on principle, oppose development projects in historic districts that respect the design guidelines established for those districts, and while the new construction being proposed by Steve Brown Apartments (SBA) appears to be designed with high degree of quality in terms of aesthetics and materials, the approval of the project as proposed would present a challenge to the integrity of the Landmarks ordinance, increase the value of Mansion Hill buildings as redevelopment sites, and provide more incentive for neglect of rental properties in the Mansion Hill district.

The project as proposed presents a conflict between the underlying zoning rules and the design guidelines intended to maintain the essential character of the streetscape in this area of the Mansion Hill district. While the zoning code allows 5-story, 60-foot-wide construction on these parcels, this scale of construction does not respect the “visually-related area” test for local historic districts prescribed in the Landmarks Ordinance. This provision is intended to compel consistency and compatibility of new construction with the buildings that contribute to the character of the district. The visually-related area here, allowing for the exclusion of the Highlander (outside the boundary of the historic district, and agreed to be an intrusion on the character of the block) is comprised of 2½- 3½-story buildings that are considerably narrower than the 60 feet of the masses proposed by SBA. *If the SBA proposal were to be built as designed it would raise the visually-related area on this block of Gilman St. and on the Gorham St. side of the block to 5 stories and 60-foot widths, raising the bounty on other contributing buildings on these blocks..*

If this proposal is ultimately approved over a denial of appropriateness by the Landmarks Commission it would represent an instance of the zoning code trumping the Landmarks Ordinance in a local historic district. While that may be by design, it

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would be a statement that the commitment we've made as a city to conserving the cultural heritage and identity embodied in our historic districts is weak.

There is an appropriate scale for new construction on this block, in Mansion Hill, and our other historic districts. In this case 5 stories and 60 feet wide pushes beyond the tolerance of visual relatability that we've established as the guidance for our historic districts. We'll be happy to provide examples of how design guidelines like ours result in appropriate new construction in historic districts in other cities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Tish', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jason Tish  
Executive Director, Madison Trust for Historic Preservation

cc: Amy Scanlon  
Stu Levitan  
Bill Fruhling  
Al Martin  
Ledell Zellers

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