

July 7, 2011

Honorable Paul Soglin

City-County Building, Madison,Wi.

Dear Mayor Soglin:

We are writing to introduce ourselves as residents of the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood in conjunction with community artists, educators and friends who are in collective support of what we believe to be an innovative idea.

In the past decade Madison has realized and witnessed new beginnings as a progressive Midwest city and a bastion of intellectual, creative and forward thinking. As the recent celebration of its sesquicentennial exemplified, our city has grown in diversity and cultural strata and has come to relish its richness as a vital element to community life.

In our observation of the city's efforts to address and celebrate its growing diversity, it is clear that ideas and input to the Madison Cultural Plan could give more consideration to the city's already existing but presently dormant facilities. We value the city's open dialogue policy regarding the Cultural Plan as it serves to foster a partnership model with the community. However it is our collective opinion that an active partnership engaging both creative and resource-based planning may work to serve the aspirations of both the arts and business.

In 2003 our organization, Kuumba Renaissance, successfully launched the Madison Center for Creative and Cultural Arts, a community-friendly visual and performing arts facility which was open seven days each week for three and a half years, located at 306 West Dayton, operating in the shadow of the Overture Center. Through the acquisition of funds generated by grants, donations and earned income the MCCA provided a supplement to the efforts of community artists, organizations and educators. Kuumba Renaissance was adept at forging partnerships since its beginnings in 2003, starting with the Madison Metropolitan School District and the Mayor's Office in early 2004, with its arts program in Allied Drive and at the downtown MCCA site. Other partnerships included the Madison School Recreation Program; East High School, the Madison Public Library—South Madison Branch, Johnny Winston's StreetBall Block Party; the Madison Police Department—South Neighborhood Office, UW—PEOPLE Program; Neighborhood House, Bayview, Madison Parks Department, Park Street Partners, Madison Media Institute and St. Mary's Hospital most recently for the First Annual Father's Day Fest.

The demise of the Garver Feed Mill project this past Spring, though unfortunate, brings to light two clear realities about the arts community in Madison, Wisconsin; a) that the need for 'live-work-showcase' space is crucial to the productivity of the arts and b) that such space(s) must be accessible to the city proper. It should also be noted that such space(s) should not only harbor cultural and creative programming, but also establish outreach initiatives that partner with schools, neighborhood centers and area parks.

We are not completely clear as to how or why the Garver Feed Mill Project was abandoned, however we all share a vision of how and why it could have been a great space. Such models of successful cooperation in collective planning, business and operations are abundant in this community (Madison Cooperative Centers, Willy Street Co-op etc;). Coupled to the partnership of a city-owned space, maintained by the arts organization and its affiliates, Garver would have offered a new dimension to the landscape of many artists as well as consumers of 'art'.

Madison has what many urbanists would consider to be a 'good problem'. As we have seen so many cities in America do so much with, arguably, so fewer physical resources, begs the question as to how we (Madison) utilize, maintain and share our centrally located surplus properties with the community-at-large. Moreover, when those properties have been deemed with 'city-landmark' status, the issue of how the community-at-large is best served raises a larger question.

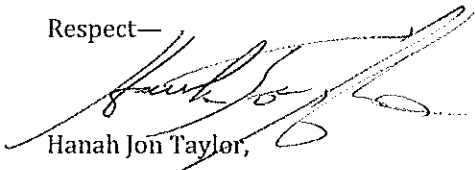
The Common Council's decision to accept proposals to sell the Collins, Connors and Warden Houses on the 600 and 700 blocks of East Gorham has focused our interest in preserving all of the houses for an alternative purpose. We believe that the decision to sell these properties stemmed from a lack of vision of the previous city administration, before factoring the potential of these properties as a functional and prolific live-work environment for its community and visiting artists.

In our review of the Tenney-Lapham Neighborhood Association's recommendations to the city regarding sale of the houses, we believe that a comprehensive alternative to restore and reactivate the houses could merit strong community support.

Acknowledging today as the final day in which RFPs will be accepted, we submit this letter to document our interest and conviction to solicit more public dialogue in encouraging the city to view the potential value of these properties with more scrutiny than what would result from a sale. We would ask that you be one of the first to offer your opinion and then agree to advocate for more creative and forward thinking regarding the future of these neighborhood jewels.

Madison, Wisconsin has been graced with many fine artists who love living here, but feel crucially challenged by the depletion of public and private venues that incubate, subsidize or present artworks from and for the community. In the past five years, we have seen the arts community diminish in size directly due to this reality. A new plan and partnership of artists, schools, business and city resources could serve to give impetus to fresh and imaginative ideas. We ask that you take time to share our vision and communicate your thoughts to us at your earliest convenience.

Respect—



Hanah Jon Taylor,

Neighbor, Musician, Educator

Cc: Tenney-lapham Neighborhood Association

Dan Rolfs, City of Madison Dept. of Planning and Economic Development ✓

Bridget Maniaci, District 2 Alderperson

Madison Cooperative Center

Commonwealth of Madison

Bill Leuters, Isthmus Newspapers

## 640 and 646 Gorham Neighbors Alternative Proposal

*We, the undersigned, support alternative plans to the proposed sale and purchase of the properties at 640, 646, and 704 East Gorham Street. Due to uncertainties over the motives and intentions of the prospective bids for the properties and their ability to enhance or maintain the esthetic of the neighborhood, we would prefer to see the three properties NOT sold to an outside buyer.*

*We feel it is in the best interests of the neighborhood, the city and the properties to select a plan for the houses that utilizes the current residents' knowledge of the houses, provides a steady source of revenue for the city, adds a positive cultural element to the city and neighborhood, and begins the process of repairing and restoring the buildings.*

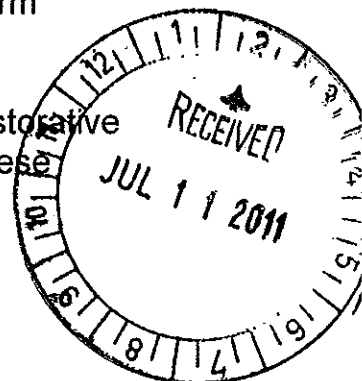
*We, a collaboration of current residents and neighbors, offer the following idea for the use of the houses as an alternative to the proposed sale of the three properties:*

The city of Madison has recently presented the opportunity for potential buyers to propose offers on three historic houses located at 640, 646, and 704 East Gorham Street. Although the monetary value of each offer will be a factor in an ultimate decision, the official *Notice of Request for Proposals* explicitly states that an emphasis be placed on rehabilitation and restoration on the historic properties.

The city has explicitly stated it will not determine the best proposal based strictly on monetary value but also on a number of supporting criteria focused on the future well-being of the properties.

An alternative suggestion to the city, rather than selling the houses, would be to transform them into a community cooperative. This model, in alignment with other cooperatives, would prioritize community engagement and service while encompassing a self-sustaining management system that would require minimal municipal efforts and maximize long-term municipal profits.

Another focus of the community cooperative would be ongoing restorative efforts by all tenants to ensure that the historical significance of these



properties is maintained. The cooperative would report on a monthly basis to the city regarding the specific actions taken towards fulfilling this vision.

We want to note that by selling the properties to the highest bidder, the city increases its risk of losing these homes, both as financial assets if a new owner defaults, but also as significant community cultural assets. We are skeptical of the motives and ambitions an outside investor would have in keeping the properties in line with the criteria of maintaining a comprehensive plan that is compatible with our neighborhood.

In terms of financial benefits for the city of Madison, we feel it makes little sense to sell such valuable assets at a time when assessed property values are at an unprecedented low. The city would benefit financially over the long term by having the properties accrue an annual dividend rather than a one-time lump sum being offered at a time when historically low home values characterize the housing market.

Additionally, the city would save money by not acting as a manager or hiring a company to manage the properties. As a working cooperative, the homes would be self-sustainable, with residents assuming a number of specific responsibilities towards the ongoing maintenance of the properties, as well as responsibilities toward restorative improvements.

Madison is a city with a proud tradition concerning its historical landmarks. By allowing these historically significant homes on Gorham Street to become part of a self-sustaining model, the city can assure itself that efforts to restore and revitalize the properties will continue to progress and not fall by the wayside. Actively including residents with genuine interest in the rehabilitation of their homes will prove to be much more successful than selling those guarantees away to a private bidder. Allowing neighbors and residents to take the lead on restoring and maintaining their own homes will allow the buildings to return to their full architectural and historical significance.

The city need not worry about the commitment of the current tenants to the architectural and cultural significance of our own homes. We all have a demonstrated record in being role-model citizens, and in proactively assuming responsibilities that better our community.

We point to our record of organizing and hosting numerous cultural events that demonstrate our commitment to improving our neighborhood. Among these events, we wish to highlight musical performances hosted in the 646 residence by local and national acts such as The Nod, The Big Strong

Men, Hanah Jon Taylor, and Kelly McCrae; the founding of the Gorham Street Community Broomcats Broomball League (coming off it's successful 6<sup>th</sup> year); the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Spring Jubilee Celebration; serving host to numerous visits by the bio-fuel powered BioBus; and holding numerous Sepak-Takraw matches in the park space adjoining the properties.

We have also been proactive in maintaining the outside appearance of the properties to the best of our abilities. The residents of the properties have performed much of the landscaping efforts and garden work for many years.

As demonstrated, we are extremely proud of where we live, both in our Gorham Street homes and in Madison. We feel as residents of the neighborhood it is unfair to be completely displaced from our homes for a decision that is a financial risk as well as a risk to the historical and cultural integrity of our neighborhood.

We strongly believe that the city and the neighborhood stand to gain from a partnership involving such a cooperative. As highlighted in the accompanying letter from 640 East Gorham resident Hanah Jon Taylor, the Gorham properties have immense potential to serve as a live-work space for local and visiting artists. A unique and eclectic city such as Madison, which prides itself on cultural involvement and forward thinking, would benefit greatly from such a public space in the Collins House that is more accessible and community friendly.

As residents we realize our voices are relatively small, but we also believe our idea can have a larger, positive, and more resounding impact on the community and city at large. We hope to begin a respectful and informative dialogue with the city about our vision for the use of these properties that we call home.

Respectfully,

Jeff Jordan  
Erik Goserud  
Scott Bieniasz  
Tyler Allee  
Hanah Jon Taylor  
Ben Halfen  
Charlie Cahill  
Nathan Safron