



MOHS · WIDDER · PARADISE

FREDERIC E. MOHS
THEODORE C. WIDDER, III
GREGORY J. PARADISE
JOHN W. VAN NOTE
TIMOTHY F. UMLAND

20 N. Carroll Street
Madison, WI 53703
Phone: (608) 256-1978
Fax: (608) 257-1106

June 24, 2019

City of Madison Landmarks Commission
210 Ml King Jr Blvd
Madison, WI 53703

Re: Block 115/Essex House Development Proposal

Dear Madam and Gentlemen:

I totally agree with the Mansion Hill Historic District statement regarding Block 115.

I have a little bit of history that I thought I would add having to do with the early days of historic preservation in Madison, and in particular, the part played by Madison Gas and Electric. I was a very young MG&E board member and had been recently appointed by Mayor Soglin to serve as the only business-oriented member of his committee on how to improve downtown Madison's housing stock.

At the time, Madison was growing briskly and the company decided it had outgrown its office building located on the corner of Fairchild and West Mifflin Street where the Overture Center is currently located. The new site was to be adjacent to the company's coal fired electric generating plant at Railroad Street and Blair. The new headquarters was to have its westerly location on Blair and involved demolition of the Northwestern Depot building along with its adjacent Freight House and the old Wagon Works across Railroad Street to the north. MG&E assumed that there would be no problem in demolishing a railroad station that was no longer going to be used and the old Wagon Works whose purpose had disappeared years ago.

But the historic preservation movement was powerful. The community and the City administration would not back down. Even though the Depot was going out of business, many people remembered it fondly as the site of the arrival of many people who had a major part in building the new town. One of the first actions taken by the newly formed preservation unit was that the City decided that the Depot, including its Freight House

and Wagon Works, should be preserved. MG&E was stunned by the prospect of not being able to build a modern building right out on to Blair Street.

Later, when the new MG&E general office building was designed, the architects had preserved the Depot and the Wagon Works. MG&E decided to incorporate the Freight House into its design by remodeling the interior into a large meeting hall that would later prove to be very useful in itself.

When the new MG&E facility was complete, there was a grand opening and Paul Soglin appeared on behalf of the City and enthusiastically recognized MG&E for working cooperatively with the City to preserve the historic look of South Blair Street. It was the start of a cordial, cooperative relationship between the company and the City that goes on to this day.

So what did we learn from all of this? It is common for parties to modify their plans to conform to the requirements of a Landmarks Ordinance. In the case before us, we have decided that the height and size of the proposed project conflicts with the requirements of the historic district to a degree that, I believe, is unprecedented, in the history of historic preservation in Madison. The proposed project unquestionably produces a building that in terms of sheer volume is out of scale with the immediately adjacent neighborhood. Even if the footprint of a large building is broken up to make it look like it is a series of buildings, it will still look like one big building.

If this proposed massive project is not modified to a maximum of three stories, the result will damage not only the adjacent properties in the First Settlement Historic District but will set a precedent that will encourage others to ignore the Historic Preservation Chapter. It is very-very important that this is done right.

Sincerely,

Mohs Widder Paradise LLC



Frederic E. Mohs

FEM/da