

AGENDA # 1

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION **PRESENTED:** February 8, 2012

TITLE: A Resolution Adopting the Downtown
 Plan as a Supplement to the City of
 Madison Comprehensive Plan. (24468)

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Alan J. Martin, Secretary

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: February 8, 2012

ID NUMBER:

Members present were: Richard Wagner, Marsha Rummel, Dawn O’Kroley*, Richard Slayton, John Harrington, Todd Barnett and Henry Lufler.

*O’Kroley was excused at 6:00 p.m.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of February 8, 2012, the Urban Design Commission **CONTINUED DISCUSSION** of the Downtown Plan. Wagner reminded Fruhling that a motion at the previous special meeting on the plan required that a third alternative plan be prepared for discussion for the Mifflin District based on comments by the Commission. The Chair noted that the Commission was expecting to see the language the Plan Commission would be approving, as they had stated at their previous meeting. Fruhling stated that the new Zoning Code has language in it pertaining to the downtown height zone: “All Planned Developments within the Downtown District shall comply with the height restrictions in those districts.” Fruhling further stated language isn’t needed if the Commission’s recommendation was that the plan allow the height to be waived through the PUD process. Fruhling distributed what the Plan Commission has received, pointing out West Washington Avenue being totally redeveloped and that that concept could be applied to the entire six block area. The Plan Commission wanted the Downtown Plan to go in that direction and that is reflected in the plan. He recommended that if the Urban Design Commission does not like the concepts in the plan, or the alternatives in Steve Cover’s letter, the Commission can articulate what they do not like about them and forward that on to the Plan Commission. West Mifflin Street has been talked about for a long time with the scenarios being narrowed down following the direction of the Plan Commission. Fruhling stated he understood the Urban Design Commission would like to see other alternatives but they cannot incorporate every Commission’s suggestions. The Chair replied that the Commission would not recommend approval of a plan that does not incorporate an alternative they want. Fruhling said their recommendation could be that they do not like anything in the plan and articulate what the Commission does not like. The group cannot continue to redo iterations of the plan. The Chair stated they should move to request a clear alternative be prepared as previously discussed. Discussion by the Commission continued as follows, based on discussion points in memos provided by Wagner, Slayton and O’Kroley:

- Should this be entirely residential (along West Washington Avenue), primarily residential or mixed-use or other options?

To me it's scale. Even a small building can be a mixed-use building so I support mixed-use.

We're talking about the boundary or just West Washington?

In my mind West Washington is separate. We're talking about Mifflin itself which is from the back lots of the West Washington area through up to Dayton Street.

I think mixed-use is appropriate there.

Bookended or interspersed?

To me it doesn't matter.

Are you thinking retail, office, residential?

West Washington has mixed-use with office, retail and residential. There's no reason that couldn't be done on Mifflin.

- Is there a reason that wasn't pursued?
- Very early on in the process we had a wide open range. Early concepts showed this entire area as being more of an employment focus. As we've been working on this plan for four years, finding out what people like or don't like, getting narrower and narrower with feedback, we get to the point where we can start coming up with some concepts and building forms and see how it all pieces together. This is the direction it went. There was not a lot of support in the community because it was viewed as primarily residential. Is it more the house form, more bigger buildings? We've had that discussion and made the decision years ago.
- We understand you made those decisions but you're in a different process now. You're asking boards and commissions for their approval and they have a right to their own decisions as part of the formal process.
 - Based on input from the Plan Commission.
- Why should we bother to discuss this?
- When I see mixed-use I don't see massive buildings but I do see intimate shops, like Monroe Street, Lakeside Street, where it's primarily housing but not limited to housing. I don't want it massive I want it to maintain some of the character it's always had.
- If there's a concern for employment downtown and you only have residential you're not providing those commercial spaces for employment. I agree it's not going to be big and industrial but there's no reason to preclude that from happening.
- Is there a way to recommend that being part of the plan? Do we care if these entities are introduced in smaller buildings or do we need to be more specific?
 - We haven't had that discussion with this level of detail applied to it.
- You're presenting the Plan Commission and the public with alternatives 1 and 2. I've heard enough sentiment in the Community to warrant alternative 3. To try to take the recommendations of this commission and continue that discussion. I think that's a fair way to present it.
- When I think of mixed-use it's really in the abstract. But how do you grow them? How do you look at the streets in terms of arterials? It really changes peoples' lives when you introduce mixed-use in a residential neighborhood. There will be restaurants that want to have alcohol; it may be fine but maybe not. How do we guide this in ways that the district works the way we want it to?
- I understand that Regent Street has issues. But on the other hand Monroe Street and Williamson Street are pretty successful examples as urban areas go.
- I have a concern; what's happened on Monroe Street and what happened on Wilson Street with that mixed-use isn't going to happen here because nobody's going to build at that scale anymore.
- If you're going to grow densities and have more people here they're going to have a need for restaurants or shopping places. If you create mono-cultural neighborhoods of just residential uses, what happens?
- I think this more intimate feel is appropriate, with nodes for commercial and mixed-use along this edge, and State Street is only two blocks away. The question is do you compromise the small scale? On both plans you don't for the most part.

- Having it built into the language would be a good thing to have for the opportunities for things like small coffee shops.
- Regent and Allen is an example where you've got crossroads with commercial on all four sides and it's successful.
- I don't think the kind of mixed-use I'd like to see is what is being built these days.
 - Most of the discussion about mixed-use is a mix of residential and office or employment. If you're talking about this 6 block area the amount of retail would be very limited. The primary use would be more employment office and residential.
- That makes sense.
- I'm getting some sense here that the City should be open to mixed-use. Maybe we need language that talks about the possibility of introducing other forms of mixed-use into this area as conditions warrant and as projects develop.
- When I think of mixed-use I think of something larger. I think of a building form rather than uses because you can take those little pieces that are side by side and that's clearly a mixed-use area but not a mixed-use building.
 - That's what I think we need to get to. If you're talking about mixed-use we don't have the right building forms on here. Maybe on the perimeter. Those are smaller footprint residential buildings. Something more in the four-story, warehouse form, with higher ceilings and bigger windows. That space is more flexible and can attract residential and a lot of employment or office uses. You can achieve that mix of uses but have a consistent theme design-wise.
- The mid-block urban lane reminds me of the two little courts off Park Street before Regent Street, which are just a messy mix of mopeds and bikes and cars that can't find anywhere to park. I'd love to see this great little brownstone feel; the tightness and scale is nice.
 - The mid-block urban lane was shown in this concept to show the form on the perimeter that unlocks the potential for the middle of the blocks. If another concept is to really go away from this, then that other lane probably becomes really difficult and expensive for not leading to what you're trying to get.
- City Centre has that pedestrian connection right through it and it's really a very delightful experience, so you can have it in larger forms. We're talking about urban place making that gives you distinction and circulation from pedestrians, and character.
- It recognizes the area as an oasis of housing surrounded by larger buildings. I could see it almost as that little place of respite to live and be five minutes from whatever you want to do in the City.
- I don't see the mixed-use disrupting the light feel of this somewhat smaller scale. A lot of trees and greenness in a tight area that you're not going to find once you go towards the Capitol.
- I have mixed feelings about the alley. I wonder if you did or didn't do that alley, how does that affect the density rations you're striving for? I can imagine it being nice but I can also imagine it being filled with mopeds and being sort of junky.
- It has to be a paved way for fire fighting.
- In terms of preserving the house form, it seems to me that Mifflin Street has been so severely eroded that it almost has the opportunity for larger redevelopment. West Washington has some historic character that could be preserved in just a two block area, with allowing larger density redevelopment on Mifflin and maybe the opportunity for this alley would provide garages on the back of West Washington parcels. Now they have garages and it's a different type of residential atmosphere and the pavement terrace on the front isn't needed for mopeds and bicycles.
- Think of the project on East Johnson Street where they put the parking underneath with the little porches coming down. That parking is also serving the houses on Gorham Street. Now the houses up on Gorham Street have much more desirability because they have garage space.

- You could improve West Washington and its greenness if you didn't have to have those driveways through there as well.
- If you take the idea of making the lane an alley you could have granny flats on top of those to increase the density.
- It would be interesting to see a study on the housing on Mifflin. I agree that the West Washington housing façade is really important and worth preserving.
 - From Building Inspection, generally they don't look good and have a lot of cosmetic needs. Generally those houses structurally along Mifflin are just fine. They've had decades of use and they need a lot of work.
- But who is going to invest in those? Continued investment by absentee landlords is not a desired solution for the City. We need something that changes the pattern of investment.
- If we focus on a block maybe we can keep that character. If we focus on a block, maybe the 500 block and take the 400 block as the transition to Broom Street where we've built up to the Metropolitan Place level.
- No one is going to build there given the cost of the parcels. It's hard to resolve because ultimately you're going to change the character of this neighborhood.
- I think we really need to develop a green infrastructure in this area. I would encourage thinking about stormwater and large canopy trees. Street trees can create the edge too if they're done right.
- Whether we like it or not those houses has a life space, no one is going to rebuild those houses.
- And nobody is going to build those houses in their current form.
- Is there hope for the house form? Maybe there's not.
- The City is trying to save the house form in 5 other areas of this plan. This area has the potential for a different kind of investment. You don't need to save the house form everywhere downtown.
- If you identify wed by ordinance?
 - No.
- Melissa's memo suggestion on Mifflin is 6-stories with flexibility on the PDD (if not 8).
- If Bassett Street really is a one-way thoroughfare that starts to destroy the character of this area, if things can be done along Bassett that calms the traffic without major islands, something that maintains the character we're trying to create and slows the traffic, green it up so it becomes more a part of the neighborhood rather than splicing through the neighborhood. That's the piece that destroys the feel of that neighborhood.
- I'm really going to push for larger canopy trees where the canopies are touching instead of what you've got here. And a setback that is appropriate for trees.
- As you redevelop this area you could create new urban terraces.
- What's the City's expectation for those houses in the next 10-15 years on West Washington?
 - I don't know that anything's going to happen if we don't do something and I think that's what this plan is trying to do. Give us a clear direction to make this happen. If we don't do anything different, 15 years from now they'll just be 15 years older.
- The West Washington redevelopment, encourage that to break down its scale in terms of parcel sizes.

Discussion then focused on bonus stories related to architecture, urban amenities and historic preservation.

- If this Commission puts a limit on height I'm not sure why we are discussing bonus stories.
 - We're saying there is a procedure for exceeding height, we're not wiping them out altogether.
- As things grow things neighboring it can maybe go a little taller. At this point a new development on any given block seems about right at the heights.
- There could be a range of criteria involved in bonus stories.

- The whole question of “so-and-so got a better bonus in my project than I’m getting,” when we do these new systems it sounds fine in the ideal because everybody gets the opportunity to go higher. At the same time how do you put that into operation?
 - We talked at the Plan Commission about bonus stories in Downtown Design Districts and talked about meeting certain criteria. We’ve used this operationally, the quality of the materials you use. We talked about whether a project provides parking. The plan primarily adopts a landmark criteria for bonus stories and wipes out all those other things. It seems to me you still want to keep some of those other things, like urban amenities.
- The first one out of the gate already need more than the bonus stories.
 - They had to address the criteria.

But right out of the gate, “the only way it’s going to be affordable is to go higher.” I think we really have to ask for a lot of things in exchange for bonus stories.

- I think it comes down to us evaluating something as an exceptional design.
- Maybe we need to think about how that checklist on bonus story criteria occurs and when in the process to make that better.
- All these buildings are substantial and should be superior. Some that have gotten bonus stories are less than stellar. The project has to be great. Structured parking, green roofs, that’s a safer approach because the other things, I don’t think that design is subjective.
- You can have good design but if it’s providing low cost housing, I’m willing to consider that as well as really superior architecture. I think we need a list that you can choose from but that we can also hold accountable in terms of making an appropriate determination.
- In areas where we’re not getting a plaza space make them responsible for the seasonal maintenance of the vegetation. If that could be part of it so a fund is set up and the neighborhood looks nice.
- Our push back is trying to get developers do to things other than what they always do. What tools do we have to do that? You either have to mandate it or create it as part of the negotiation process.
- And how to we keep them from saying it’s impossible to build in Madison.
- Innovative parking alternatives could include a bus pass with your rent, or a building with zero parking, or parking for just a few Community Cars.

Grand Boulevards:

- There should be a further claim on that but I don’t know that this plan precludes that.
- 60-foot+ trees.
- We need to emphasize the importance of the outer ring.
- It scares me that highways and arterial streets are in the same category.
- There’s a difference in those streets, even though they carry significant traffic there is a difference in hierarchy. Some finer grain on that would be useful. Maybe it’s as simple as major thoroughfare and minor thoroughfare.

Historic Preservation:

- The maps create presumptive historic district and the research hasn’t been done. You need to know the reason why they are designated. Just a collection of old buildings without the research doesn’t make a historic district. You’ve drawn a boundary that creates presumptions for people and without the research you haven’t justified designation.

Pedestrian Facilities:

- Minor thoroughfares also need to be considered.

Discussion continued on aspects of the plan noted in comments by Commissioners as distributed:

- This plan should have more in it, I agree.
- I agree to move ahead on this and keep working on the sustainability plan.
- Anything that's developed can be sustainable. If you have a document that addresses sustainability it trumps the building.
- I would encourage the plan say how we come up with what the urban amenities and define those things that work well.
- There was a comment in the plan that projects should not be judged as standalone efforts. But what are the tools to work with to go beyond stand alone?
 - This plan provides that tool with things like the maximum building heights, there is a pattern of building heights proposed based on the different types of developments and neighborhoods downtown. The maximum building height map should be viewed more as a pattern of building heights across downtown. Referring to the plan provides more of a context. It's about the physical context in which an individual site is located and how this plan tries articulates that better.
- What about the land bridges?
 - We're talking about something substantial for pedestrians to cross over, not just a pedestrian overpass like you'd see on the Beltline.
- In lieu of a land bridge consider an at grade crossing where this is just a place where you need to slow down and cross at grade.
- I think the grades accessibility, not making the bridge or the pass at grade be this great engineering feat should be the driving force.
- The railroad would be the much bigger issue. The land bridge is probably a good concept.
- My big concern is whatever is done that we encourage mixed incomes. I'd like to see low to moderate incomes living downtown where they might work.
- Being open to more Section 42 housing, that's one way that has been occurring in that area. And being open to smaller housing units, which they've been building for students provides less housing costs.
- I see those areas becoming more desirable and maintaining a certain percentage as affordable.
- On North and South Shore Drive people park there and walk or ride their bikes to work. If there were an opportunity to designate neighborhoods that are closer to the downtown area, maybe somewhere where Lakeside and John Nolen meet, that we can assign park and bicycle kind of things, that would keep downtown more pedestrian and bicycle friendly.
- I will always have a hard time with bike paths. I think the pedestrians get the zone near the shore and the bicycles get the zone between the pedestrians and the highway on John Nolen Drive. The bicyclists monopolize that terrace, I'd like to see it more accessible and more open to the lake. I'd like to think we could be a little bit more friendly to the pedestrian.
- The shoreline for the park, I'm skeptical about that. I find it less troublesome to put another block or two of John Nolen Drive in darkness by having a park plaza above the highway.
- If we do build on the lake we need to look at piers or jetties, things like that. I'm sure it'll be done in an environmental way.
- There is an aesthetic from all the views along John Nolen Drive, so consider those views when developing that.
- Broom Street is a great gateway isn't simply putting up an archway. The train really disrupts that gateway at least twice a day.

- The marinas could be great, they could also be a terrible misuse of the shoreline. Identify where those places could be an amenity and not wholesale.
- I like the idea of vendors because they give a certain amount of control over open spaces. An eye that keeps it a little bit safer for children and families. They may be encouraged to keep the park a little cleaner.
- I wonder about mixing the heights within a certain block so we don't have three towers looking at three towers. When I think of living on the 12th floor of a building I'd like to see 360°.
- We need to provide more soil for these street tree plantings.
- Bassett is lacking connections to Lake Monona, partly because of the elevation change but because of the railroad and John Nolen Drive.
- We need to take this opportunity to require better separation between bicyclists and pedestrians. We've got bicyclists riding down the sidewalk on Park Street, one foot away from a bike path on Park Street. It's not a safe sidewalk.
- Did you look at having the Union Transfer area as the cross over?
 - If not for that building it probably is a logical place for that.

ACTION:

No formal action was taken by the Commission with continued discussion contemplated, based on instructions to staff to prepare a third alternative plan as previously directed for the Mifflin District. The alternative plan should address previously noted comments and the following:

- Use base approach from the draft plan on West Washington Avenue.
- Include the urban lane; consider shifting to the south.
- Consider using warehouse form north of West Washington Avenue properties.
- Include portions with 6-8 story building heights toward Dayton Street.
- Explore the narrowing of Bassett Street, so as it is less of a dividing line within the district.
- Provide for large trees within an appropriately sized setback.