

From: [Bill Connors](#)
To: [Plan Commission Comments](#)
Cc: [Vaughn, Jessica L](#)
Subject: Smart Growth's Comments re PC/UDC Working Relationship
Date: Wednesday, October 15, 2025 3:20:38 PM

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Chair Gnam and Plan Commission Members:

Smart Growth Greater Madison recommends that the Plan Commission communicate the following directions to city planning staff during the discussion of how the Plan Commission and Urban Design Commission (UDC) should interact, which is item 4 on the agenda for your meeting on Thursday, October 16 (Legistar 90360).

First, please inform city planning staff that the Plan Commission does not need advice from the UDC about the positioning of a building or buildings on a development site or vehicular, bicycle or pedestrian circulation within a development site. The Plan Commission routinely reviews these issues and has amply demonstrated it is more than competent to do so. The members of the UDC have no particular expertise regarding these issues. The UDC does not have authority to review these issues in its current ordinance and was recommending to amend its ordinance to add these issues to its scope of review. We urge the Plan Commission not to support the UDC's desire to expand the scope of its authority to include these issues.

Second, please request that city planning staff draft clear, measurable design standards for the UDC to apply when they are giving advice to the Plan Commission regarding the exterior design and appearance of all principal buildings and the landscape plans for "residential building complexes"--for the Plan Commission and UDC to review. There currently are no design standards for residential building complexes in the zoning code. If you do not believe us, please ask city planning staff to show you and us where those written design standards are located. Because there currently are no written design standards for residential building complexes, the UDC can provide the Plan Commission with advice on anything and everything. Frequently, the UDC's advice to the Plan Commission about a residential building complex is so extensive that the UDC provides only "initial advice" (something that is not authorized anywhere in the zoning code) to the Plan Commission and asks the Plan Commission to send the project back to the UDC for final approval/disapproval, even though the zoning code says that the UDC is supposed to give advice to the Plan Commission, nothing more, and zoning code does not give the UDC authority to approve or not approve the project--unless the project also is in an Urban Design District.


Third, please stop returning projects the UDC for final approval/disapproval in situations where the zoning code says that the UDC is supposed to give advice to the Plan Commission, not be a body that approves or does not approve the project. For example, if the Plan Commission approves a Conditional Use Permit and one of the conditions of approval is subsequent final approval by the UDC, the UDC is not providing advice to the Plan Commission at that subsequent meeting, because the Plan Commission has already acted on the Conditional Use Permit. When the Plan Commission returns a project to the UDC for final approval/disapproval in a situation where the zoning code says the UDC is advising the Plan Commission, not an approving/disapproving body, the Plan Commission is deciding that the Common Council was wrong when it said in the zoning code that the UDC is an advisory

body, not an approving/disapproving body, for that particular kind of project.

Fourth, please inform city planning staff (and the UDC) that the Plan Commission will no longer consider any advise from the UDC that is not based on a written design standard which the zoning code makes applicable to the particular kind of project. The UDC routinely spends a small amount of time focused on written design standards in the zoning code (the staff reports ask the UDC to focus on these written design standards) and most of its time on a wide-ranging conversation about what each of the commissioners individually, subjectively believes would make the project a "successful design."

These directions to city planning staff would greatly clarify and streamline the UDC-Plan Commission process and enable good projects, most of which contain housing units, to be efficiently reviewed and acted upon.

Thank you for your consideration.

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