

**From:** [Margaret Nellis](#)  
**To:** [Plan Commission Comments](#)  
**Subject:** Comments Re: Agenda Item #68084  
**Date:** Monday, December 13, 2021 11:50:23 AM

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To Members of the Plan Commission,

I object to passage of the South Madison Plan at this time since several changes were made to the plan without any opportunity for public comment.

Margaret Nellis

To: Plan Commission

From: Dave Davis, Carrie Rothburd, Barb Gilligan, Ms. Pia, Russ Bennett, Mark Howard, Charlene Sweeney

Re: South Madison Plan, Agenda Item 3, File # 68084

Date: December 13, 2021

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We believe that the South Madison Plan as before you today with should not be approved without further review by the community. As intended by the Common Council, in its resolution authorizing the South Madison Plan, the South Madison Plan process was supposed to ensure “ample opportunities” for citizen input, review, and feedback. Both the Height Map and Olin Triangle Plan, on the one hand, and the revised Thorstadt Area Concept Plan on the other were unveiled after public discussion of the South Madison Plan had concluded, which meant neighbors had no opportunity to digest them, think about them, talk about them with one another, ask staff questions about them, and provide suggestions for modifying them. This top-down approach to neighborhood planning is entirely out of keeping with the promise for empowerment of the community that the Common Council foresaw and promised as part of the South Madison Plan process.

### **Height Map and Land Use map for the Olin Triangle**

City of Madison planners are proposing to allow buildings of up to 12 stories along the John Nolen Drive corridor immediately adjacent to the city’s Turville Point Conservation Park. The land use designation for the John Nolen Drive corridor along Turville Point will remain Employment.

In addition, the proposed height map would allow 12 stories for the easterly portion of the so-called “Olin Triangle,” the current site of the historic Wonder Bar, which is bounded by Wingra Creek, John Nolen Drive, and East Olin Avenue. The westerly portion of the Olin Triangle, which borders Wingra Creek, would have an 8-story limit. The land use designation for the entire Olin Triangle would be changed from Suburban Employment to Regional Mixed Use.

Planning staff has acknowledged that the Height Map and Olin Triangle Plan support the AEC’s proposed (but not yet approved) Destination District, which is made up of privately owned land surrounding the Alliant Energy Center campus and includes several City of Madison parks, was developed to complement and enhance the Alliant Energy Center’s Master Plan, which is also not yet approved by the county. It’s interesting to note this Master Plan calls for “human scale” development on its campus with a maximum building height of eight stories, while the Destination District Vision & Strategy calls for buildings of greater height. As Plan Commissioner Fernandez expressed at the July Commission meeting where McGrath’s Plans were put on hold, developers should not be the driving force behind the city’s neighborhood or area plans. Nor, according to the Plan Department’s own guidelines, should unapproved plans guide the planning process.

Despite neighbors’ repeated requests spanning more than the two years of the South Madison Plan process, the city’s planners have consistently declined to discuss questions about:

- 1) the interface between the Alliant Energy Center campus, Destination District, and the surrounding community

- 2) the capacity of these plans to promote gentrification and displacement in the surrounding residential neighborhoods
- 3) how to prevent gentrification and displacement from happening.

While gentrification and displacement may be an inevitable outcome given the scope of the AEC's two plans, this would seem important enough to merit an honest and open public discussion which includes representatives from the AEC and Dane County, as well as the city and South Madison residents.

There has also been no discussion of the impact of 12-story buildings directly to the south of Turville Point. This park has been described by the city's Parks Division as a "natural gem...a short walk from downtown" with "large red, bur, and white oak...under which a variety of spring wildflowers bloom" and containing "a seven-acre prairie." Turville Point is also an important stopping point for the area's migratory birds. Since Turville Point and Olin parks are heavily used by people from throughout the Madison area, a discussion with park users, focused on the impacts of the proposed height map, needs to be held prior to Council's review and vote on the Plan.

### **Thorstad Focus Area**

The revised plan would increase the number of units in the Thorstad Focus Area from a total of 240 to 399. The goal of this revision is apparently to satisfy calls by city committees for more housing in this area, which is accomplished by greatly reducing the single-family lot sizes. We understand that the goal is community wealth-building and generational wealth transfer, but will units like this provide the increases in property values over time to make that possible? Is there a market for 115 of those units in Madison? Would they most likely be owner-occupied or rental housing? Would that area be better developed with apartments that provide ground level, open, green space for the residents use? After over two years of public process having been invested in the South Madison Plan, we feel these questions, and likely more, merit community discussion before the South Madison Plan moves forward to final adoption.

Plan Commission  
Meeting of December 13, 2021  
Agenda #3, Legistar #68084, South Madison Plan

I am writing to comment on one aspect of the draft South Madison Plan, the “eyebrow” of 12-story buildings along E Olin and John Nolen.

### **12 stories**

The area designated for 12 stories along John Nolen and E Olin totals about 25 acres. Though redevelopment might include some retail and office, at 12 stories the major use is almost certain to be residential. If all parcels were developed to the maximum, at least 2,000 housing units could be located on this stretch. And, if one uses the 222 E Olin 12-story proposal (now apparently withdrawn), which had a density of 192 units/acre at 12 stories, this eyebrow area could support almost 5,000 residential units.

The Plan Commission has held two special meetings recently on the BRT overlay, which has a purpose of creating more density along the BRT routes. Does it make sense to create the opportunity for a dense residential enclave that has to be car-oriented due to limited bus service? Will developers choose this area rather than an area along the BRT route?

Staff comments for 900 John Nolen (an 80 unit apartment building with first floor commercial), which was approved in 2013, noted that “the wider range of commercial and service uses are about two miles away by bicycle or automobile.” Little has changed in the intervening years, and the area still lacks commercial and service uses. The Alliant Energy Center Campus Master Plan does not show a clear path forward for creating additional complementary commercial and service uses (see discussion below about the AEC Master Plan and its difficulties).

Even if the Alliant Energy Center Campus Master Plan were to be implemented someday, that plan calls for 8 story buildings, so the AEC campus could be surrounded on the north side by a row of 12-story buildings.

The plan, page 36, states: “The building heights relate to the proposed land use and zoning classification for properties.” The 12-story height does not correspond to the SE zoning category which permits 5 stories (4 stories for residential). (This is unlike the rest of the height map, page 40, which generally corresponds to the zoning map on page 39: the 5-story areas are generally in CC-T and CC, both of which are permitted uses at 5 stories.)

### **Olin Avenue: RMU Goals**

The three E Olin parcels have a proposed land use category of Regional Mixed Use. The Comprehensive Plan states RMU “includes existing and planned high-intensity centers supporting a variety of multifamily housing options and commercial activity serving the needs of the region” and that “RMU areas are mapped close to the junctions of major streets, along major roads, close to highway interchanges, and along existing and planned high frequency/high capacity public transit routes.”

The existing RMU areas are East Towne, West Towne, Hilldale, Westgate Mall, and South Park around Wingra drive. These RMU areas are all on a planned BRT corridor or within ½ mile of a BRT corridor (or, for the Westgate Mall area, within ¼ mile of the West transfer station).

East Olin, in contrast, does not meet the Comprehensive Plan's criteria of existing/planned high frequency/high capacity public transit routes. There is one bus route (route 13) that runs once per hour every day. There are two bus routes (routes 11 and 12) that run only weekday morning and weekday afternoon service (route 11 has 3 weekday morning and 3 weekday afternoon buses, route 12 has 4 weekday morning and 4 weekday afternoon buses).

The size of this proposed RMU area is about 7 acres. This is smaller than the smallest existing RMU area – Westgate Mall at 9.56 acres (and Westgate is across the street from a RMU area of about double the size). Can the RMU purpose under Comprehensive Plan be achieved with so small a parcel? Can this small parcel support a “variety of multifamily housing options and commercial activity serving the needs of the region”?

### **Justification for the proposed RMU designation**

The reason for RMU, as stated in the draft plan:

“The proposed Regional Mixed-Use (RMU) recommendation is consistent with a recommendation in the Destination District Vision and Strategy (DDVS) *accepted* by Dane County in 2018 as part of its Alliant Energy Center Campus Master Plan efforts, which identifies the area for mixed-use redevelopment in taller buildings to take advantage of views of Lake Monona.” (emphasis added)

The Destination District Vision and Strategy has NOT been *adopted* by the Dane County Board, nor has the Alliant Energy Center Campus Master Plan been *adopted* by the Dane County Board. The Alliant Energy Center Redevelopment Committee apparently voted to approve the plans after the AEC plan was presented to the County Board - the Board merely received a presentation.

The future of these plans is questionable. The County issued a RFP in April to identify a qualified development partner for the potential development of the Alliant Energy Center campus. Per the meeting of the Alliant Energy Center Redevelopment Committee on October 5, 2021: (1) Madison would need to be a partner and create a TIF district (TIF scope of about \$23.4-90 million over 20 years, half of which could go to AEC); and, (2) even after creation of a TIF district, there would still remain a public funding gap of at least \$100 million. The County asked two of the developers, Kothe and Landmarks, to refine their proposals (due 10/8/21) by: (1) prioritizing a hotel development; (2) providing more detailed tax increment revenue; (3) have a public investment not exceeding 50% of the tax increment over 20 years; and (4) specifically discussing the land lease for Clarion Suites because there are covenants related to other on-site lodging facilities – a developer will need to get the current owners cooperation, partner with them, or buy them out. The goal was to focus a new RFP on these four points, and move the master plan forward in an incremental fashion – a hotel on the grounds is one of the best opportunities for a private/public partnership. Developing mixed-use will likely take a decade – it is interesting, but fraught with risk due to market changes. The hotel is achievable mid-term. Creating a district, with separate taxing authority, is not likely.

Should plans not adopted by the County, and not adopted by the City, and which have a questionable future, form the basis for creating a RMU land use?

### **Turville Point Conservation Park**

About two-thirds of the 12-story stretch on John Nolen abuts Turville Point, and the other third abuts the lake (with the railroad tracks intervening).

Turville Point is not just a park, it is a conservation park. The City's webpage on Turville Point states "Conservation Parks are uniquely managed to further protect native species and wildlife" and "all plants and animals are protected."

MGO 8.40, Preservation of Conservation Parks, states the intent of the ordinance: "The Common Council declares that it is important to the residents of Madison that the City preserve Madison's native landscapes, its plant and animal populations for residents' careful use and full enjoyment."

What effect will 12-story buildings have on the animal population? The lights alone could have a detrimental effect. Or the effect on migratory birds? Or the diminishment of resident's full enjoyment since the looming buildings would be visible from at least the prairie? The Board of Park Commissioners did vote in support of the South Madison Plan, but it was only a vote of 3-2, in part due to height on John Nolen.

### **Conclusion**

Adding the 12-story section along John Nolen/E Olin to the height map does not make such development by-right. Conditional use approval would still be required for more than 5 stories (4 stories if residential) and also required for residential uses. What this height map does do is signal developers that they are almost certain to get approval for a 12-story project. But doesn't a decision of what is the right type of development on John Nolen depend upon how the Alliant Energy Center is redeveloped? Might it make more sense to remove the 12-story maximum heights and, instead, reach a decision in connection with approval of the Alliant Energy Center redevelopment? If the AEC is redeveloped with a lot of residential, that might increase bus service and make this area more transit oriented rather than car dependent.

Respectfully submitted,  
Linda Lehnertz

**From:** [Jim Winkle](#)  
**To:** [Plan Commission Comments](#); [Evers, Tag](#)  
**Subject:** South Madison Plan comments  
**Date:** Monday, December 13, 2021 2:57:05 PM

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Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Dear Plan Commission members,

This is regarding the South Madison Plan before you tonight.

I support the proposed density along and near the John Nolen corridor. We desperately need more housing in Madison; demand is outstripping supply, which is making prices rise more than usual. This is a great area for density since it won't shade any neighbors and is compatible with the density planned for in the AEC's Destination District.

Spot-checking the City Assessor's website, I see that houses in nearby Bay Creek have been selling for 25-40% more than assessment (and the 40% house was already expensive at \$650k... it sold for \$900k!). As people are priced out of Bay Creek (and they are... I hear from them), they'll turn to more affordable neighborhoods like those in the South Madison Plan study area, and those neighborhoods will quickly become gentrified. I'm probably not telling you anything you don't already know... this is a well-studied phenomenon.

For the same reasons, I also disagree with creating low density housing in the Thorstad Concept Area. The goal of creating housing as a means of community wealth-building is a good one. I support this idea and am a monthly donor to the "Own It" program, so I get it. But this is not the place for it; it's a major corridor which would easily support more density without shading anybody. Could we meet both goals by providing affordable high-rise condos there? Could we at least have a mix of high density and low density?

Regarding both of these areas, we've always known that tall buildings are more environmentally-friendly, but I recently learned at a UW-Madison forum that they're also more bird-friendly, too. If we put the same amount of housing/businesses in lower buildings, there will be more total bird strikes, since birds don't generally hit buildings that are higher than the tallest trees.

I live in the Bay Creek neighborhood, which is adjacent to this planning area, and I also frequent the planning area so am pretty familiar with it.

Jim Winkle  
813 Emerson St