

117-125 North Butler St. Steering Committee Report

On July-07th-2022, an initial virtual neighborhood meeting for a proposed multifamily development between 117-125 North Butler Street was held virtually. This public meeting was hosted by the city of Madison and the Alder for District #2 through zoom. The attendees at the initial meeting included the proposed developer's team, neighbors, tenants, property owners and other greater James Madison Park residents.

Following the initial neighborhood meeting, the Alder for district #2, reached out to those who attended the initial meeting to seek for volunteers to serve on a neighborhood steering committee that can help evaluate the above proposed development.

This led to the formation of a steering committee which had its first meeting on August-01st with the proposed developers and their representatives. The information gathered during these meetings and written emails directly provided by participants to the steering committee are summarized as follows under the following sub-topics:

General inputs and comments from attendees

Overall, we had inputs from stakeholders both in favor and against the proposed development. During the first neighborhood meeting (July- 07th-2022), some participants spoke in favor of the proposed development by pointing out the need for more housing and more capital investment to uplift the neighborhood and reduce blight. Others argued against the need to rezone from DR-1 to DR-2, neighborhood preservation and need for affordable not market rate housing. There were also participants who wanted to see changes made to the design and material choices shown during the initial presentation. Some also wanted to learn more about the developers plan for noise control and required quiet hours regulations.

During the August- 01st meeting, the developer's team did present modified renderings that addressed some of the key requested changes from the first meeting. Most of the other topics mentioned during the first meeting, were revisited during the August- 01st meeting as well. A summary of the collected inputs, gathered during and after these meetings, are presented as follows:

Design:

During the first neighborhood meeting. Some of the attendees reflected and chimed in on some of the design elements that were presented. These included the need to redesign the main garage door, front yard setback, choice of materials and color choices to make sure that the proposed building blends well with the surrounding and neighboring buildings. Some of these suggestions, such as the design of the garage doors, were taken into consideration by the design team and were adjusted and presented during our first steering committee meeting.

Rezoning:

Most of the committee members who submitted feedback, wrote in support of the proposed development and rezoning from DR1 to DR2. Those in support argued that there are already larger structures that were already approved and built within 3 blocks radius on all sides of this proposed development. However, there were also some folks who thought that it would set up a bad precedent for more tear downs and against current plans to maintain a small-scale feel within the neighborhood.

Historic Preservation:

Since these properties were not officially classified as historic, most of the committee members who are in support of the proposed development, are also in support of replacing the existing buildings with the proposed development. Those in support, also argued that these buildings are badly in need of update or replacement and seem fiscally unsound for whoever may own them. However, we also did have some members who thought that the proposed development will be imposing, does not match with the surrounding existing buildings and will make already historic buildings within the area lose their context

Affordable housing:

Most committee members who provided feedback, advocated in support of this project even though the proposed development is for market rate. Many who are in support, pointed out the need for housing in general, the need for more capital investment and the need to reduce crime within the area. However, there were members who submitted feedback arguing against developing more market rate housing instead of addressing the need for more affordable housing. Some also shared concerns that the current neighborhood consists of students and lower income folks who will not be able to afford to live in this location if developed for market rate only. The committee never came to a unanimous consent on this project but both sides elegantly argued their case and clearly communicated their views on the proposed project.

Additional community aspects:

The steering committee did evaluate the pros and cons of this project within the community. The collected feedback was very diverse and ranges from strongly in support to strongly in opposition. Generally, most of those who provided feedback were in support of the project over what is currently existing. Those who were in support, spoke about the need for more housing, the need for more capital investment, how underutilized the current parcels are and the need to reduce crime in this area. Those who were in opposition, provided feedback on concerns about rezoning precedence, the need for affordable house over market rate, historic preservation, and misfit between the proposed building footprint within the neighborhood. Despite the diverse opinions and feedback, everyone was very open to the discussions, clearly and politely communicated their thoughts as well.

Acknowledgements:

The steering committee would like to thank Alder Heck for all the work he had done to set up the neighborhood meetings and put together a steering committee. We would also like to thank the developer and their team members for the continued engagement with the neighborhood. The steering committee would also like to acknowledge and thank all those who participated and contributed their thoughts during these meetings. Your voice matters.