

CAMPUS AREA NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Johnson & Bassett Project Steering Committee Report
Request for Deferment to Plan Commission
May 8, 2023

To the Plan Commission & others whom the Johnson & Bassett Project concerns:

The Steering Committee for this development proposal respectfully requests that approval of this project is deferred by Plan Commission to the May 22nd meeting, at the very least. The Committee has been concerned with the public engagement process for this project, and we believe that there needs to be additional time to alert the public and solicit feedback from residents, especially from those most affected by the proposed development (tenants potentially displaced, students, Miffland District residents, etc.) and other community stakeholders to ensure we have a comprehensive understanding of how this project will affect the quality of life in this neighborhood. At this point in time, we do not believe that there has been adequate opportunity for the public to provide meaningful input which could have been duly considered and implemented within the proposed development.

CANA (the Campus Area Neighborhood Association) has followed a predictable and consistent process of multiple engagements with developers, especially with CORE Spaces. Our engagement on the neighboring Verve development and the Oliv benefited the community and developers. We have had proactive meetings (Zoom calls) focused on design, resident experience, sustainability, and affordability with developers. We are partnered on this project with the CNI Miffland Neighborhood District due to the W. Johnson Street border between our districts. We will also partner with the Miffland residents on the upcoming Johnson/Broom/Gotham Street CORE project.

For the Johnson & Bassett Project, CANA (Campus Area Neighborhood Association) and CNI (Capitol Neighborhoods, Inc.) were first alerted of the development proposal in November 2022, when they were undergoing their pre-application process for submission. An initial neighborhood meeting was planned for February 2023, but the plans fell through with the ensuing election activity for February primaries and the April 4th general election. The development team provided materials and updates from UDC informational hearings they participated in throughout March. The development team officially filed their application March 27th, 2023. The development team presented the project at the Miffland Neighborhood Association of CNI meeting on April 5th. We were able to meet the development team and go over the development proposal via Zoom on April 13th, 2023. At this meeting, the team introduced us to the development with their UDC (Urban Design Commission) graphic package from the previous night's UDC meeting where they were granted approval. For the Neighborhood "Postcard" Meeting on April 27th, the development team utilized their UDC (Urban Design Commission) Presentation and were able to answer supplemental questions asked by the public. So, public engagement on this project has been

minimal in comparison to the other development proposals we have facilitated in the past few years with CORE spaces.

New construction can have a positive or negative affect on the shape and character of an entire urban block. Buildings and sites are not isolated occurrences; their design should respect, reinforce, and enhance the surrounding properties. This proposal is centered along a major arterial street that provides a connection between the UW Campus and Downtown Madison. We believe the project must be refined to strengthen and benefit the neighborhood before final approval is granted.

In addition, while the proposed development at Johnson and Bassett does comply with the Downtown Height Map, **this building is considered a conditional use development in the Urban Mixed-Use (UMX) zoning district because it is more than 4 stories in height, requiring additional review and approvals.** Conditional approval will also be required for demolition permits, rooftop spaces, etc. As such, it is entirely reasonable for CANA and CNI to request changes to the proposed development to address neighbors' concerns, and the Plan Commission may stipulate that certain conditions be met prior to granting conditional approval.

Does the mobility/bus stop/pedestrian experiences fit within the context of the neighborhood?

The project site is located at the juncture of Bassett and W. Johnson Streets, yet it does not embrace the busy corner with a grand, welcoming entrance to complement the under-construction Verve Apartments or the Bassett Street Brunch Club/Hampton Inn across the street. **A new building, designed in an urban form with high quality materials, should have a well-defined entrance, pedestrian areas related to the public sidewalk and details that express a cultural identity.** New corner buildings in urban areas traditionally define the street intersection with distinctive architectural features such as towers, rounded walls, recessed entries, or other design elements.

Demolition of older structures reduces the range of housing options for low- and moderate income households, students, senior citizens, and families with children. This development increases density and uniformity of design at the expense of diversity and the classic vernacular of the working-class housing that characterizes the Mifflin neighborhood. A monolithic high-rise—soon to be twinned with a similar building by the same developer—with amenities designed to keep residents inside the structure rather than interacting with neighbors and integrating with the urban fabric is not consistent with the key elements set out in City of Madison policies and the Downtown Plan. This development is not a budding architectural gem or an engaging public space.

CANA believes that new buildings should enliven the public streetscape, complement the character of adjacent buildings, and provide inviting entrances to pedestrians/residents. Building designs should be sustainable as well. "Green" architecture, which use water, energy, and other natural resources more efficiently, is encouraged. Our views are consistent with best practices for urban design and the Downtown Plan:

“Vision: Downtown Madison will be a flourishing and visually exciting center for the arts, commerce, government and education. It will be a magnet for a diverse population working, living, visiting and enjoying an urban environment characterized by a sensitive blending of carefully preserved older structures, high-quality new construction, architectural gems, and engaging public spaces—all working together and integrated with surrounding neighborhoods, parks and the transportation system to create a unique and sustainable environment for the community, the region, and beyond.” (Downtown Plan, page 5)

https://www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/planning/documents/Downtown_Plan.pdf

The planning process for new construction projects envisions collaborative interaction between residents and developers. Plans are initially vetted by a neighborhood steering committee after a meeting chaired by the alder. Residents are notified of a proposed development by post card and invited to a presentation before the project is considered by a city committee. The “Postcard Meeting” is a prerequisite when a development is at a point where it is moving from pre-submittal, tentative and aspirational drawings to formal plans and a comprehensive design. This project, however, was announced to the neighborhood after the developer obtained approval from the Urban Design Commission (UDC). The neighborhood “postcard meeting” was held one day after the UDC vote. **This meant that neighbors were unable to make any meaningful improvement to the proposal — suggestions for adding setbacks and sustainable features were not possible. The decision-making framework for considering developments was circumvented by the City of Madison and the developer. Construction and land use decisions should proceed incrementally and over an extended time to ensure that community input, residents’ aspirations for the future of the neighborhood, and designs centered on sustainability are incorporated if at all possible.**

Does the proposed sustainability approach meet expectations?

“Key 9: Become a Model of Sustainability. Downtowns are inherently the most sustainable part of a community. They usually have higher residential densities, more jobs in close proximity to workers, a wider variety of transportation options, and more goods, services, and activities that are integrated into the urban fabric. This plan recognizes the interrelationships among these and other “urban systems” and the objectives and recommendations in each theme area advance the goal of having Downtown become a leader in sustainability.” (Downtown Plan, page 6)

CANA is focused on creating positive relationships and a dynamic urban environment coupled with fostering more sustainable lifestyles. We have a holistic vision similar to that endorsed by the City Council in their approval of the Downtown Plan. **However, residents and stakeholders must have the ability to modify developments to fit with their environment.** We need to maintain strong neighborhoods and districts as part of the planning process. The Downtown Plan envisions a more clear and consistent approval process.

The Downtown plan “should be used as a primary policy document when evaluating development proposals. Its goal is to provide a guide for new development potential

in a proactive and deliberate way by outlining basic parameters for new development to provide additional predictability for property owners, developers, businesses, and residents. It is important that each proposed development be evaluated not as a stand-alone project, but on how well the project fits the context of both its immediate surroundings and that of the greater Downtown and the vision embodied in this plan.” (Downtown Plan, page 23)

If observed, the Downtown Plan should guide residents and developers to a more clear and consistent approval process, but with some flexibility. The plan notes that Downtown projects can be lengthy and unpredictable. Allowing residents to articulate expectations and reconcile sometimes competing objectives with developers can clarify a path to achieving a joint vision for the Downtown’s future direction. It is vitally important that neighbors have confidence their voice has been heard during the review process. The developer’s reputation will suffer and have detrimental impact when a project is rammed through the approval process.

Moving forward, we would prefer that the developer follow streetscape design principles including step-back listed in the Downtown Plan. *“The thoughtful utilization of building setbacks and upper-story step-backs can also be effective approaches to ensuring that the scale of new buildings is compatible with its context.”* (Downtown Plan, page 38). We note that all recent UW Housing dorms are LEED Gold buildings; this proposal is LEED Silver or lower in design. Sustainable elements such as adding a purple roof, solar collectors, and painting other areas of the roof with white UV reflective paint should be added. (We provided the developer with information about small, silent, bird-friendly vertical access wind terminals that, if installed in clusters, could partly take the building off the MG&E grid.)

The developer has agreed to allow groups such as Habitat for Humanity to remove wooden floors, cabinets and other resalable items from doomed buildings before demolition. The Lexington apartment building at Bassett and W. Dayton Streets (454 W. Dayton) is unfortunately surrounded and overshadowed by the CORE proposal. The property was not purchased as part of the parcels assembled for this project, but it would make a perfect micro-park if acquired by the developer; a semi-public space like this would benefit the neighborhood and activate the area because open green space is non-existent in the Mifflin District. It could also benefit the CORE development as a rain garden.

A key recommendation of the Downtown Plan was to “develop a new park near the intersections of Bassett and West Johnson streets to meet the needs of the undeserved high-density housing at this location.” A previous planning process recommended a new park on Bedford Street, but this location would be a good multipurpose adjacent amenity for the neighborhood.

We note that the project site also has frontage on W. Dayton Street, which is the northern boundary of the Mifflandia Plan which contains sustainability and resilience elements. A pocket park and a LEED Gold or LEED Platinum building is consistent with the Mifflandia Plan and should be under consideration as elements of this proposal.

https://www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/planning/documents/Mifflandia_Plan_Final%2011-5-19v3.pdf

“Green & Resilient Recommendations

Sustainability

1. Establish sustainable design as a core identity of the neighborhood and support this through requirements and guidelines within an Urban Design District.
 - a. Consider making Mifflandia an energy efficiency district by encouraging net zero buildings, electric vehicle charging stations, and solar ready buildings.
 - b. Improve and preserve urban biodiversity and support natural habitat with native plantings.
 - c. Improve lake and stream water quality through stormwater management guidelines, incentivizing green infrastructure and adaptive stormwater management such as on-site retention, blue roof design and underground storage.
 - d. Encourage integration of vegetation into the built environment, such as green roofs and green walls.
 - e. Consider a pilot for food scrap compost program in the neighborhood to reduce landfill waste.

Park Space

2. Preserve and enhance historic tree terrace width to provide for a healthy tree canopy.
3. Improve the open space at the City owned plaza adjacent to the Madison Senior Center to create a pocket park.
4. Support a new downtown park in a location that creates a welcoming space for diverse gathering and social events, reflects the history of the neighborhood, provides an opportunity to demonstrate urban greenspace water management and sustainability, and is reflective of the growing diversity of Madison.
5. Preferred Park Site: 602 W Washington Ave
 - a. The existing building is eligible to be on the National Register of Historic Places, and likely eligible for local landmark status. This parcel's conversion to a park could provide a building with restrooms, community space for events, as well as an open space with great visibility and access to the City's transportation infrastructure.
 - b. The City will remain open to other potential sites as properties become available." (Mifflandia Plan, page 21)

The Downtown Plan characterizes the project site as part of the Johnson Street Bend area and notes the development of large-scale, high-density apartment towers occupied almost exclusively by UW students, but adds that no additional park space has been created in the five-block area: *"As evidenced by the frequent use of privately-owned vacant lots as de-facto park space, this area has a critical need for public open space just to meet the needs of its current residents. With the continued residential growth of this area as proposed in this plan, it is critical that a new park be established in the vicinity."* (Downtown Plan, page 51)

Does the proposed resident experience and outdoor space/programming for green roof areas offer amenities that appeal to student needs?

The developers have not shared roof programming information. Regardless, the proposal offers rooftop pool and other gathering amenities, most of which are on the 12th story roof. The proposal also includes green space on both roofs, with most of the 6th floor rooftop

being green space. Rooftop vegetation and amenities may appeal to some student “needs,” but the green roof proposals may not meet student sustainability “needs” in comparison to purple-roofs. See the Appendix for more information.

Does the added density supply need housing stock in the neighborhood while matching the downtown plan recommendations and surrounding/emerging context?

While the proposed development at Johnson and Bassett would significantly expand the supply of housing in the neighborhood, there are many important factors to consider beyond the total number of units or beds being produced. To be sure, much more student housing is needed downtown and in near-campus neighborhoods. However, as housing experts and policymakers have noted, all [“three P’s”](#) of housing must be considered when evaluating housing policies and development proposals:

- 1) **“Production** of new housing at all income levels, **especially affordable housing**;
- 2) **Protection** for current residents to avoid displacement;
- 3) **Preservation** of existing housing affordable for lower- and middle-income residents” (Shaw, 2020, p. xvii; Metropolitan Transportation Commission, 2023)

Madison is currently experiencing a severe housing crisis, and this crisis is felt particularly acutely by students. One in 8 City of Madison residents is a UW-Madison undergraduate student, but the City’s Comprehensive Plan currently “doesn’t account for growth in student housing” or the urgent need for more **affordable** student housing near campus (Wethal, 2022). According to the [Dane County Housing Needs Assessment: 2019 Update](#), Dane County needs to produce 11,000 more housing units just to meet 2019 levels of residential demand, and Dane County also needs to produce 10,812 additional units of housing that is affordable for households earning 30% AMI or below (Dane County Housing Initiative, 2019, p. ii). A “disproportionate share of the region’s lower-income renters” live in the City of Madison, and many of these low-income renters are UW-Madison students living downtown and in near-campus neighborhoods who are “not eligible for affordable housing programs” (DCHI, 2019, pp. ii, 16).

There is clearly an urgent need for the production of more affordable and market-rate student housing downtown, and this will require the construction of new high-density buildings. However, when there is a shortage of developable space downtown and students are struggling to find the decent, affordable housing that they need to gain access to education, affordable units or beds should be a significant component of all new, high-density student housing developments. This need was expressed in the [Downtown Neighborhoods Coalition Affordable Housing Resolution](#), which was approved by CANA, CNI, the Marquette Neighborhood Association, and the Tenney-Lapham Neighborhood Association in 2021 and 2022. This Resolution notes that, at the current average Madison hourly wage of \$17.24, a student would have to work 46 hours per week to afford the average one-bedroom apartment in downtown Madison (Downtown Neighborhoods Coalition, 2021). Students also typically work lower-paying service-sector jobs, and at the Wisconsin minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour, a student would have to work 94 hours to afford the average studio apartment in downtown Madison, and 110 hours to afford the average one-bedroom apartment (DNC, 2021). In the Resolution, the Downtown Neighborhood Coalition “requests that **at least 15% of available units [in new downtown developments]**

be qualified as affordable” for a household earning 30% of Dane County’s Area Median Income (DNC, 2021). The Downtown Neighborhood Coalition also **“expects developers to seek out financial assistance from the City of Madison**, Dane County, federal, and/or other local funding partners ... **prior to indicating to neighborhoods or development approval bodies** like the Plan Commission **that affordability was not an option** for the given project...” (DNC, 2021).

As a result, we are disappointed that an affordable housing element is not part of this proposal. CANA provided CORE Spaces with a copy of the DNC Affordable Housing Resolution, but none of the priorities expressed in the Resolution were incorporated into this proposed development. We pressed the issue of affordability multiple times with CORE Spaces representatives during the initial Steering Committee meeting on April 13 and the neighborhood “postcard” meeting on April 27. Our requests for an affordability component were consistently rebuffed, with no further explanation provided by CORE Spaces aside from vague statements that Johnson and Bassett would be a market-rate development and that the inclusion of affordable units was not possible. CORE Spaces representatives also clearly stated that they did not engage in serious conversations with City or other funding partners about affordability, in direct contradiction of the DNC Resolution.

This is even more disappointing given that CANA and CORE Spaces recently worked together with UW-Madison and the City of Madison to establish an income-specific rental rate reduction at the Oliv project, which is located on a similar site just two blocks from the intersection of Johnson and Bassett. Affordable student housing was included in the Oliv project - for at least the next 30 years, 112 of the 1,001 beds at Oliv (approximately 11%) will be rented at a 40% discount to students who qualify for need-based financial aid at UW-Madison. This model proves that it is possible to provide affordable student housing under current market conditions and City policies, yet CORE Spaces has declined to replicate this model at Johnson and Bassett. CORE also rejected the idea of providing academic year/nine-month leases as offered by the nearby [Lucky Apartments](#), a similar high-rise housing development marketed primarily towards students.

As mentioned above, the preservation of existing “naturally occurring” and subsidized or deed-restricted affordable housing is also a key factor to consider when evaluating any new housing development. The buildings proposed for demolition at Johnson and Bassett all offer relatively affordable housing options for students, and serve a community purpose by providing decent, affordable homes for students, who are a valuable part of the downtown service and retail workforce and patronize downtown businesses. If approved, this proposed development would **result in the demolition of approximately 75 units of “naturally occurring” affordable housing** that are primarily occupied by students. No special consideration has been given by CORE Spaces to prevent the displacement of current tenants of the buildings facing potential demolition, and these tenants will likely be pushed further from campus and the downtown core when they are forced to relocate.

The rushed public engagement process for this project has also made it very difficult for students facing displacement to have their questions and concerns addressed. Only three undergraduate students were able to attend the neighborhood “postcard” meeting on April 27 in person, and only one attendee was a resident of one of the buildings facing potential demolition. That attendee (who was a UW-Madison student) expressed concerns about the

loss of the naturally occurring affordable housing at Johnson and Bassett, and asked if affordable student housing could be included as a component of this proposed development. It is likely that other students and residents at Johnson and Bassett hold similar concerns, but their voices have not been heard during a public engagement process that was conducted in less than a month and which overlapped with the busiest part of the academic year for university students. Additional time is needed to ensure that the voices of students and residents facing displacement are heard.

We therefore urge the Plan Commissioners to refer this project to allow for further meetings with CORE Spaces to improve the project.

Respectfully submitted,


The Johnson & Bassett Project Steering Committee
The Campus Area Neighborhood Association
The Capitol Neighborhoods, Inc. Miffland District

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the Steering Committees and who had provided comments for the Steering Committee's consideration. We acknowledge Eli Tsarovsky, Tim Kamps, Cleo Le, and Alder Mike Verveer for coordinating with the development team to schedule the Neighborhood Postcard meeting and managing communications with the development team. Special thanks to Steering Committee members Stephen Smith, Evan Bonsall, Tanner Mechura, and Cleo Le for aiding in the submission of this report; and, special thanks to members of the Miffland District Neighborhood & Capitol Neighborhoods, Inc. for their insights on the proposal.

The Committee also appreciated Brian Munson's ongoing communication with CANA and CNI throughout the process, and the development team's in-person hosting of the neighborhood meeting on April 27th and their attendance at the first steering committee on April 13th. We respect the work that the development team has done and hope to continue our cordial relationship on this and future development proposals.

Additional Information

 4.13.23 Johnson & Bassett SC #1

 4.27.23 Johnson & Bassett Street Development Neighborhood Meeting.pdf

Sustainability information presented to CORE Spaces

Green, blue, brown and white roofs – what are they and why do we need them?

<https://gca.org/green-blue-brown-and-white-roofs-what-are-they-and-why-do-we-need-them/>

The Purple-Roof concept improves on the green roof design to maximize storm water retention.

<https://www.purple-roof.com>

The concept fosters more water detention than a traditional green roof design. The concept uses friction between layers of needled materials to retain runoff. The Purple-Roof concept is a non-proprietary specification to delay runoff. Water is captured by a base layer of natural needled material which reduces peak runoff intensity and minimizes the need for fertilizer and plant replacement.

Flower Turbines to complement photovoltaic installations.

Cluster installation provides more efficient collection. Wind is collected 24-hours per day in all weather conditions. A sizable wind/solar cluster placed on both building levels where green roofs are proposed might take the project 50-percent off the MG&E grid.

<https://www.flowerturbines.com> General company information.

<https://www.flowerturbines.com/product-page/small-wind-turbine-cluster-of-5-off-grid>

This is a set of five small size wind turbines (blades 1.15 meter high, 0.5 meters diameter) with grid connection.

Low-carbon Concrete

Low-carbon concrete has a smaller carbon footprint, called “embodied carbon,” than regular concrete. Reducing the embodied CO₂ in concrete by just 20-percent on one large building can cut climate impact as much as taking 50 cars off the road for a year. Due to the sheer volume of concrete used globally, and the emissions intensity of cement—concrete’s key ingredient—the manufacturing of concrete generates an estimated 8-percent of the world’s carbon dioxide emissions. By using a more sustainable material, the developer could mitigate the negative climate impact created by concrete production, reduce the carbon footprint of the project, and encourage more local concrete producers to adopt such an innovation.

<https://madison.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=10970467&GUID=6465195C-5FDC-4916-98FB-28A484C2EACF>

There are different ways to make ready-mix and precast concrete with less climate impact:

- Use less cement by using supplementary cementitious materials and admixtures
- Sequester waste CO₂ from industry in the concrete through carbon injection, carbon curing, or artificial aggregates (rock made out of CO₂)

These approaches can be used together to make concrete that is between 20% less CO₂ all the way to carbon negative! They are already being used on major projects all around the world, and aren’t even necessarily more expensive.

Mass timber construction to increase sustainability, speed project timelines, and lower labor and material costs.

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/delivering-mission/apply/worlds-tallest-timber-building-opens>

Citations

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