MADISON TRUST for Historic Preservation

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VIA EMAIL

June 23, 2023

Re: Plan Commission Meeting on June 26, 2023
Agenda Items 11, 12 and 13: 428-434-444 State Street

To the Members of the Plan Commission:

The Madison Trust for Historic Preservation includes more than 350 members who have a strong interest in maintaining and promoting the city's rich cultural heritage.

The matter before the Commission would drastically change the character of the central block of Madison's "premier street." At its meeting on March 15, 2022, the Board of the Madison Trust voted unanimously to both 1) oppose the demolition of the three buildings at 428, 434, and 444 State Street; and to 2) oppose the design of the building proposed to replace them, which is out of scale and out of character with its surroundings. In the intervening months, the proposed design has been modified somewhat, but not in any material respect.

The *Downtown Urban Design Guidelin*es are key to this Commission's review of proposed redevelopments on State Street. The Guidelines statement of "Purpose" includes the following:

> In applying these guidelines, the *Downtown Plan*, **which is incorporated herein by reference**, may be utilized to provide additional guidance. *Guidelines*, p.3 [Emphasis added.]

When Madison issued its *Downtown Plan* in 2012, it articulated what many already knew:

> State Street is widely considered to be Madison's premier street ─ a unique and special environment created over the past 40 years by innovative local merchants willing to take risks. . .. It is **a lively corridor comprised mostly of two- to four-story, small footprint buildings** housing ground floor shops, restaurants, and bars, with upper story residential and office uses. The diversity of businesses, the architecture of the buildings, and quality of the streetscape work together to create vibrancy for the district. *Downtown Plan*, p. 44 [Emphasis added.]

(Continued)

In its current iteration, State Street includes buildings in a range of sizes. However, many consider the street's character in terms of its smaller structures that front the street and differ widely in terms of their style, texture, and shape. The *Downtown Plan* suggests this smaller scale and rhythm are key to the street's character:

The vibrancy and intimacy of State Street is largely attributable to the rhythm of its buildings, with their typically narrow, small first floor commercial spaces that accommodate a wide variety of small businesses; and **it is essential that both the scale and rhythm of the buildings and the diversity of uses be retained**. The *Downtown Plan* supports limited development of some larger commercial spaces in the State Street district, but only if the buildings are carefully designed to maintain the predominant small-scale rhythm of the street frontage. *Downtown Plan*, p. 44-45

The *Downtown Plan* goes on to identify nine distinct recommendations for State Street, including two that specifically relate to this Applicant's redevelopment proposal:

> Recommendation 74: Maintain the two-to-four story building height on the State Street frontage that creates a sense of enclosure while also providing openness and access to sunlight.
>
> Recommendation 75: Encourage the preservation, rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of sound older buildings that contribute to the district's character.
> *Downtown Plan,* p. 44-45.

Conclusion:

The Applicant's proposal would demolish three buildings that are highly representative of the scale and rhythm of the mid-section of State Street that has existed for more than a century. It would replace them with a new building that would dwarf its surroundings and compete with their rhythm and scale. The Madison Trust for Historic Preservation opposes the application because it is inconsistent with the *Downtown Urban Design Guidelines*.

Sincerely,

Lynn Bjorkman

Lynn Bjorkman
President
Madison Trust for Historic Preservation