City of Madison Common Council

Public Hearing Regarding Appeal of Grant of
Certificate of Appropriateness for Proposed House on
Old Spring Tavern Property, 3701 Council Crest
(Legistar File 80871)

Remarks by Rick Chandler

January 9, 2024

I'm Rick Chandler, President of the Madison Trust for Historic Preservation, with more than 500 members throughout the city. We support the appeal of the Landmarks Commission decision which approved a new 4,200 square foot house at 3701 Council Crest. We urge the Council to send this matter back to the Landmarks Commission.

The proposed house is incompatible with the landmark Tavern and makes unacceptably large changes to the landmark west yard.

Our opposition is not based on NIMBYism but on a desire to preserve a unique landmark, which includes the 1854 Tavern built as a stagecoach inn and the historic yard. This is one of the city's most important historic sites.

We want to preserve the best of the past as we help shape the city's future. Protecting historic sites like this preserves our cultural history and helps make Madison an attractive place to live.

The proposed house fails to qualify under MGO 41.18, which requires it to comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

It violates Standard 1 because it makes more than a minimal change to the site and environment, including damage to the historic 234-year old black walnut tree.

It violates Standard 2 because it does not retain the historic character of the property.

It violates Standard 9, which requires it to be compatible with the massing, size and scale of the Tavern, because it's much bigger than the Tavern.

It violates Standard 10, because its environment would be significantly impaired.

Also, the homes in the adjacent neighborhood have an average size of 2,255 square feet, much smaller than the proposed 4,200 square foot house. No other home in the adjacent neighborhood is larger than the 3,573 square foot Tavern.

We recognize that the Landmarks Commission reached a different decision, on a 3-1 vote with three members absent or not voting. Reasonable people can reach different conclusions on this. However, letters and testimony in the Legistar file show that many respected preservation experts believe the proposed house does not meet the standards. The preponderance of opinion is that it does not.

Under the ordinances, the Council has full legal authority to review and modify Commission decisions. The Council should decide that the proposed house is incompatible with the historic site. Then, the Landmarks Commission can give this further review and approve a smaller, compatible house. There are ample legal grounds to reverse the decision. Any suggestion that there is no legal authority to change this is incorrect.

This property has been preserved in its historic form for almost 170 years. It is important to take adequate time to review this carefully and to require a house that meets the standards.

Thank you.

Rick Chandler
810 Ottawa Trail
Madison, Wisconsin 53711
608-628-0433
rgcwis@charter.net