

CAPITOL

NEIGHBORHOODS, INC.

MADISON, WISCONSIN

February 1, 2024

Plan Commission
City of Madison

Re: 139 West Wilson Street

The developers for this proposal first brought their plans to the Bassett neighborhood nearly two years ago. Over the course of the last two years, the neighborhood has had many conversations with members of the development team and we are appreciative of the time they have spent with us. However, the neighborhood has had serious concerns regarding this proposal from the beginning and most of those concerns remain. The neighborhood's memo to the Urban Design Commission dated September 18, 2023, outlines several of those concerns and while the latest iteration of the plans for this proposal does attempt to address some of these concerns both the neighborhood and UDC raised at the September 2023 UDC meeting, many of those concerns remain. The neighborhood supports the recent UDC recommendation to the Plan Commission to not support approval of this proposal.

For Conditional Use permits the ordinance requires that the Plan Commission find that all of the conditions of the applicable Approval Standards are met. The neighborhood does not believe that this proposal meets several of those Approval Standards.

Approval Standard 5: Adequate utilities, access roads, drainage, parking supply, internal circulation improvements, including but not limited to vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle, public transit and other necessary site improvements have been or are being provided.

Approval Standard 6: Measures, which may include transportation demand management (TDM) and participation in a transportation management association have been or will be taken to provide adequate ingress and egress, including all off-site improvements, so designed as to minimize traffic congestion and to ensure public safety and adequate traffic flow, both on-site and on the public streets.

Maybe first and foremost, the driveway is simply too narrow and too limited in space to handle the amount of traffic from delivery vehicles, trash and recycling trucks, taxis, and move-in, move-out vehicles that a 320 unit building will generate on a daily basis, much of it unscheduled and not schedulable. Such traffic will likely overwhelm that space at times and lead to blockage of the sidewalk, cycle track and likely the traffic lane.

With no parking provided for residents, there will be a steady stream of Uber, Lyft, and cabs picking up and dropping off in this space. Move ins, move outs, delivery vehicles, trash and recycling will all need to use this same space and the development team expects one lane to remain free at all times to provide access for the shared cars housed on-site. The pedestrian lake side access also will need to remain free at all times.

Approval Standard 1: The establishment, maintenance or operation of the conditional use will not be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, or general welfare.

The building faces onto a very busy street with a heavily used sidewalk and a cycle track, and none of the delivery, drop off and pick up activity, or trash and recycling removal can be allowed to occur in or block the public right-of-way. Without adequate space to turn around, vehicles backing out of the driveway will need to cross both the sidewalk and cycle track to back into a heavily used traffic lane.

Snow removal from this drive space will be problematic without blocking the public right-of-way. The neighborhood feels that the driveway space provided is simply inadequate to handle the amount of traffic that would be generated by the residents of this building.

Approval Standard 3: The uses, values and enjoyment of other property in the neighborhood for purposes already established will not be substantially impaired or diminished in any foreseeable manner.

The concerns noted above related to Standards 5 and 6 will have spillover effects that will adversely affect adjacent properties as well as the general public using the sidewalk, cycle track and street.

Approval Standard 9: When applying the above standards to any new construction of a building or an addition to an existing building the Plan Commission shall find that the project creates an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with the existing or intended character of the area and the statement of purpose for the zoning district. In order to find that this standard is met, the Plan Commission may require the applicant to submit plans to the Urban Design Commission for comment and recommendation.

The materials and design of the building exterior, while improved over the version that city staff found failed to meet city zoning requirements, is still uninspiring. A building with an exposure to John Nolen Drive needs to present a more interesting if not iconic facade as part of the downtown skyline. The UDC has not found that the proposal meets this standard.

The neighborhood is concerned that two elevators are not adequate to serve a sixteen story building with 320 units, neither during normal traffic days nor during days that involve tenant move ins and move outs.

The lack of bicycle stalls that conform to city requirements is troubling, especially in a building where many tenants will be without a car due to the lack of on-site parking. The four shared cars to be housed on site seems to be an inadequate number to serve 320 units and the potential need to sacrifice one of these shared cars to provide a handicapped parking space would only exacerbate that situation.

The interior design, with one long hallway with no articulation on each floor with micro-units on both sides, none of which will have operable windows, seems to be a design for dismal living conditions, especially considering that some of these units will face the neighboring building which will be a mere ten feet away.

The neighborhood has had a large number of frank and open discussions with Mr. Seamon of the development team and we very much appreciate the time he has taken to listen to our concerns. That said, given the number and extent of the concerns this proposal raises and their potential impact on both the surrounding area and the potential residents of this building, we feel that the current proposal is not an acceptable design for this space at this location and we cannot support this proposal in its current form.

We urge the Plan Commission to find that a number of the Approval Standards have not been met and to deny the request for a Conditional Use permit.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jonathan Cooper and Peter Ostlind
for the Bassett Neighborhood Steering Committee,
Capitol Neighborhoods, Inc.