

CITY OF MADISON
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL
CORRESPONDENCE

DATE: March 16, 2007

TO: Plan Commission

FROM: Bill Fruhling, Principal Planner, Planning Division 

SUBJECT: **Planning Division Recommendation: Resolution I.D. # 05720, adopting the Monroe Street Commercial District Plan and the recommendations contained therein as a supplement to the City's Comprehensive Plan.**

Background

The Dudgeon-Monroe and Vilas Neighborhood Associations and the Monroe Street Merchants Association received a Neighborhood Planning Grant from the City and matched it with their own funds to prepare the attached Monroe Street Commercial District Plan. These groups hired a planning consulting firm, Planning and Design Institute, Inc. (PDI) to prepare the plan, and Business Districts, Inc. (BDI) to prepare the market study.

The planning process began in 2004 and was lead by a steering committee comprised of representatives of the Dudgeon-Monroe and Vilas neighborhoods, and Monroe Street business owners and landlords. Three public open house/workshops were held, stakeholders were interviewed, and group discussion sessions were held with Monroe Street merchants. A community design preference survey was also conducted.

Plan Review

The Monroe Street Commercial District Plan was submitted to the City in February 2007 for adoption. Because of the extended involvement by neighborhood residents, businesses, and alders, the resolution adopting the Plan is scheduled to be before the Common Council on March 27 for consideration (the last meeting of the current Council). This timeframe did not allow for a final editing— this will be done after adoption to correct any typographical errors and update any other information (such as references to the former Ken Kopp's grocery store site, that is now Monroe Commons).

Plan Recommendation

The Plan includes numerous recommendations covering topics under the headings of:

1. Socio-Economic
2. Visual Characteristics
3. Environment and Landscape

4. Traffic, Circulation and Parking
5. Management and Operation

The Plan also identifies three distinct commercial nodes along Monroe Street and includes general recommendations for each. They are: the Monroe-Regent Node, the Monroe-Commonwealth Node, and the Monroe-Glenway Node. The Plan further identifies sixteen sites within these nodes that could potentially experience some redevelopment activity within the next 25 years, and offers site-specific guidelines for those areas.

Overall, the Plan is generally consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan, policies, and recent decisions. However, there are several aspects of the Plan that should be noted:

A. Design Guidelines

The Plan proposes many recommendations and guidelines that would apply to the physical aspects of future development/redevelopment activity. The format of the Plan sometimes results in the recommendations and guidelines for a specific property being found in several places throughout the document. Although these sometimes read as absolutes, there are numerous references in the Plan that reinforce that, although they represent the neighborhood's expectations, these are truly guidelines. The following excerpts from the Plan illustrate this point in general, and there are similar references related specifically to building heights in the next section:

- The section of the Plan entitled "Application of the Guidelines" in the "Redevelopment Guidelines" chapter states that: "For each redevelopment project...the property owner will be expected to follow the general guidelines...and also guidelines attributed to each particular site..." It also states that: "The magnitude of the project and the magnitude of the change to the area should determine whether strict adherence should be required." (p. 79).
- "There are no absolutes; projects should be considered on a case-by-case basis with the general guidance that compatibility with the surroundings should be an emphasis in rendering approval decisions." (p. 53)

B. Building Heights

As stated in the previous section, there are several instances in which the desired building height is stated in the Plan. However, the following excerpts reinforce that, although these are expectations, taller buildings may be considered in some instances:

- "Generally, no building on Monroe Street should exceed four (4) stories for the entire length of the street. This applies to buildings that are directly on Monroe Street, not buildings that might be in a position for greater setback from the street." (p. 53)

- The sixteen potential redevelopment sites identified in the Plan have recommended building heights of either “2-3 stories” or “2 stories”. (p. 78-93). In all cases, the Plan states that “future redevelopment should adhere to...” these guidelines.
- “Height should be measured both in distance and in stories, and not absolutely in each case.” (p. 53)
- “Superior architectural treatment of a particular property and the impact of a development in its entirety are factors that might make what would otherwise be a too tall building acceptable.” (p. 53)
- Under the “General Development Standards and Process” chapter: “To gain support, buildings higher than three stories would need creative design and presentation, consideration of contextual impact, important compensating value-added features, and effective prior consultation with the neighborhoods.” (p. 69)
- The Plan also suggests that “architectural resource and social factors” and “greater affordability expressed in density bonuses” should be considered for approving a project, including considering taller buildings. It points to the example of the recently-completed Monroe Commons project being justified at 5-stories because of the inclusion of a grocery store and its associated taller first floor and greater affordability due to an increased number of dwelling units. (p. 53)

Additionally, the Plan includes definitions of what is considered a story. It states that: 1) the ground floor should be at least 12’ floor-to-ceiling with no maximum height, 2) above the ground floor, a story is considered a habitable level no more than 14’ floor-to-floor, and if it is taller it counts as an additional story, and 3) that occupied penthouses are permitted and do not count as an additional story if the penthouse occupies less than half of the roof area. Although these are helpful in articulating the Plan’s expectations for building heights, they are somewhat inconsistent with the Zoning Ordinance definition of a story, which is:

That portion of a building, other than a basement, loft, or mezzanine, included between the surface of any floor and the surface of the floor next above it, or if there be no floor above it, then the space between the floor and the ceiling next above it. For the purposes of this ordinance, there shall be only one basement which shall be counted as a story when the front exterior wall of the basement level is exposed more than fifty percent (50%). A loft or mezzanine, as defined in the state building codes, is not a story. Any part of a building that is above the second story and between the eaves and the ridge line of pitched roofs with a slope of 8:12 (33.7 degrees) or greater, is not a story, but may be occupied as long as the requirements for human occupancy are met.

This can lead to confusion and the Plan should be revised to reflect the Zoning Ordinance's definitions (p. 68 and p. 72)

C. Urban Design District

The Plan suggests that an Urban Design District be created for the corridor (p. 57 and p. 68), and recognizes that a process would be necessary for the community to develop detailed design guidelines, building on the recommendations in the Plan. For this process to be effective and have the broad support necessary for it to be successful, it will require working closely with the business and property owners affected as well as with the neighborhoods. This will require a significant effort from Planning Division staff and will need to be prioritized and programmed into a future annual Planning Division workplan. This would typically be done after receiving a request from the Monroe Street Merchants Association and the alders representing this corridor.

D. Off-Street Parking

The Plan states that there is insufficient parking for store patrons in the eastern and central nodes of Monroe Street (p. 49). It makes several references to maintaining public parking areas, especially in the Monroe-Regent node, as new development/redevelopment occurs (p. 49 & p. 56), and suggests small municipal lots (p. 49). It is important to acknowledge this as an important issue, but these recommendations should not be interpreted to be promoting the creation of surface parking lots or preventing the redevelopment of existing surface lots. The appropriateness of establishing municipal lots should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Planning Division Recommendation

The Planning Division recommends that a substitute Resolution I.D. # 05720, adopting the Monroe Street Commercial District Plan and the recommendations contained therein as a supplement to the City's Comprehensive Plan be approved with the following being added:

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Planning Division is directed to make the following changes to the final document:

1. Planning Division staff, in consultation with neighborhood representatives, be permitted to make revisions to the final document, including format changes, to update, correct typographical errors, and clarify specific recommendations.
2. The definitions related to what constitutes a story are revised to be consistent with those in the Zoning Ordinance.
3. The Plan be clarified that the recommended standards, particularly relating to building height, express the neighborhood's expectations, but are not considered absolutes in all cases.

4. The process for establishing an Urban Design District be programmed into a future annual Planning Division workplan, upon request by the Monroe Street Merchants Association and the alders representing this corridor.
5. Identify a "special crossing" of Monroe Street at Wingra School.
6. That the comments from the Traffic Engineering Division dated March 14, 2007, as approved or amended by the Pedestrian/Bicycle/Motor Vehicle Commission be incorporated.



Traffic Engineering and Parking Divisions

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March 14, 2007

TO: Pedestrian/Bicycle/Motor Vehicle Commission

FROM: David C. Dryer, P.E., City Traffic Engineer & Parking Manager

RE: ID 05720 Resolution adopting the Monroe Street Commercial District Plan and the recommendations contained therein as a supplement to the City's Comprehensive Plan

Traffic Engineering staff has reviewed the Monroe Street Commercial District Plan and has the following recommendations:

Page 8: The Plan has a bulleted item to develop signage standards and requirements – this should be clarified to indicate private signage, not public street and traffic control signage (there is a standard for this already).

Page 27, Item 4, second paragraph: The comments should be corrected or include a source or reference.

Page 49, Off-Street Parking: The recommendation to locate small municipal lots in both business districts should be modified to say "Consider expanding public parking facilities in the Monroe Street area."

Pages 49, 55 and 56, Traffic and Pedestrians: The Plan needs to recognize that many of the desires/recommendations will have fiscal and budget implications for the recommendations to improve the corridor's pedestrian access, safety and environment. Pedestrian crossing treatments at three locations (Arbor, Sprague and Edgewood) are estimated to cost approximately \$15,000 apiece for a total of \$45,000. The Plan should also note that pedestrian islands need additional right-of-way to be installed; therefore, other treatments likely will need to be pursued.

Page 54, Signage: The Plan needs to include a fiscal note and/or budget for the recommendations to improve the corridor's ped/bike wayfinding signage. Treatments of the ones noted are estimated to cost approximately \$15,000.

Any recommendation for banners needs to be more fully studied and developed, including the potential for fiscal impacts to modify existing street light poles.

Page 56, Street Parking: The recommendation to add diagonal street parking to Harrison should note that this has already been done by the City.

Page 62, Item 16: The Plan needs to be more clear in the first sentence – this area has been studied and no further study or improvements are planned.

Page 62, Item 16: The term “traffic table” needs to be changed. The Plan use of traffic tables needs to be modified to a different term of something like aesthetic enhancements or paving treatments with special paving like Figure I-1 and Figure I-5. The term "table" needs to be replaced with paving treatment of no more than a 2% grade change along Monroe St. The term "gently sloped" should be amended to read "gently sloped raised area of no more than 2% along Monroe St." Figure I-6 should be modified or removed and replaced with a picture of an aesthetic enhancement or paving treatments, not a traffic table. It is also interesting to note that the picture is clearly within a residential district unlike Monroe St. See also Appendix Page 15 for potential examples. The Plan should note that any traffic speed reduction devices will need to be reviewed by the MFD.

Page 62, Item 16: The Plan reference to pedestrian refuge islands needs to note that they require additional right-of-way to be installed; therefore, other treatments likely will need to be pursued.

Page 65, Item 31: The Plan should include a reference to past traffic signal studies aimed to improve traffic management and pedestrian needs, including potential traffic signals at Knickerbocker with a fiscal note of \$60,000 +.

Page 65, Item 31: The term “traffic table” needs to be changed. The Plan use of traffic tables needs to be modified to a different term, e.g., aesthetic enhancements or paving treatments with special paving like Figure I-1 and Figure I-5. A "table" or paving is reasonable as long as there is no more than a 2% grade change along Monroe St. The term "gently sloped" should be amended to read "gently sloped raised area of no more than 2% along Monroe St." Figure I-6 should be modified or removed and replaced with a picture of an aesthetic enhancement or paving treatments, not a traffic table. The Plan should note that any traffic speed reduction devices will need to be reviewed by the MFD.

Page 67, Item 37: The Plan needs to reference that the Glenway intersection has a traffic signal and the term “traffic table” needs to be changed for symbol 37. The Plan use of traffic tables needs to be modified to a different term, e.g., enhancements or paving treatments with special paving like Figure I-1 and Figure I-5. A "table" or paving is reasonable as long as there is no more than a 2% grade change along Monroe St. The term "gently sloped" should be amended to read "gently sloped raised area of no more than 2% along Monroe St." Figure I-6 should be modified or removed and replaced with a picture of an aesthetic enhancement or paving treatments, not a traffic table. The Plan should note that any traffic speed reduction devices will need to be reviewed by the MFD.

Page 92, Figure K-17: The note "Pedestrian Safe Crosswalk Intersection Improvements" is unclear, particularly if a traffic signal exists at Glenway. The Plan needs to clarify this note and include a recognized safety source for what it means by ped-safe.

Finally, the Plan should reference the City's street functional classification map and note the streets where traffic is preferred such as Monroe St., Glenway, Commonwealth, Edgewood, and Grant/Spooner, with an additional note that all streets are subject to traffic based on an open and connected street pattern and development intensities.

DCD:gep