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2 August, 2011

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In advance of the Landmarks Commission's May 9 meeting, please see comments on agenda items from the *Madison Trust for Historic Preservation* below.

**Item 1 – 300 Block Livingston St.**

Informational presentation. No comments.

**Item 2 – 1328 Spaight Street**

Concur with staff report.

**Item 3 – 625 East Gorham - Restoration Plan.**

Concur with staff report. We recommend approval of Joe Lusson and Aleen Tierney's proposal for 625 E. Gorham Street. Lusson and Tierney have demonstrated a commitment to the improvement of the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood, sensitivity to the historic character of the neighborhood, and a willingness to invest in the unique character of the Fourth Lake Ridge historic district. They have obtained a competent assessment of the property, and we have confidence (based on their work on other properties and their sensitivity to historic architecture) that their proposed improvements will be done in a manner that is consistent with the historic character of the house.

**Item 4 – Marshall Erdman & Associates Office and Shop Landmark Nomination.**

The Erdman office and shop building appears to be eligible for Landmark status under the criteria of the Landmarks Ordinance at 33.19(4)(a)1 and 2. Marshall Erdman & Associates had a dramatic impact on Madison's post-war development. The company was a prominent, prolific and successful local contributor to the rapid post-war expansion of residential subdivisions on Madison's west side, and it was a company that demonstrated a commitment to high quality and low-cost homes for their Madison neighbors. The company's legacy is prevalent throughout the city - in the more-than-150 pre-fabricated homes the company built in our post-war subdivisions, the Unitarian Meeting House, the prototype of the Doctor's Park in Shorewood Hills that the company successfully marketed nationwide, and Middleton Hills, the area's first neighborhood to adopt New Urbanist principles.

The property at 5117 University Ave. is the location where the innovations and the progress of the Erdman company took place. It is not a pretty cluster of buildings, but, like Aldo Leopold's chicken coop where he wrote *A Sand County Almanac*, the office and shop complex illustrate the practical, nuts-and-bolts operation of the company rather than the product of the company and its innovation. It is where the innovation and adaptation of the Erdman company took place. In that sense it is uniquely qualified to convey the production and adaptation of the company.

We fully support the right of Amy Kinast, as a resident of Madison, to submit a nomination for the property. We fully support the contention of the nomination that the property is eligible under the criteria.

We feel that the timing of the nomination is unfortunate and has led to a potentially contentious discussion about whether the property should be designated a Landmark. The poor timing, however, does not diminish the property's significance and eligibility under the Landmarks Ordinance.

We feel strongly that the contentious nature of this nomination, coming as it does in conjunction with a development proposal for the property, should not be interpreted as a shortcoming of the Landmarks Ordinance, or of the Landmarks Commission. This situation, and recent ones like it, come about because Madison does not have planning tools that identify potentially historically significant properties throughout the city. Such surveys would essentially flag potentially significant properties immediately so that property developers and city staff would be aware of them before the design process goes too far. Existing surveys of historic properties are concentrated on the downtown area and on pre-WWII properties. The entire body of post-war development (65 years) is completely unsurveyed (we commend the

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Commission for undertaking the survey scheduled for a few west side neighborhoods later this year). But beyond that the dearth of information leads regularly to situations like this one where historically significant properties sit unnoticed until a development proposal is submitted.

**Item 5 – Discussion about applying for a Certified Local Government (CLG) Grant from the State of Wisconsin Historical Society.**

We are wholly supportive of any historic property survey that may be undertaken in Madison. To reiterate we are holding \$500 contributed by a member and specified for a historic property survey. We will contribute it to whatever funding is made available for a survey. A city-wide survey (or series of surveys) of historic places is necessary to avoid situations like we are currently facing with the Erdman Office building. The Woman's Building was nearly lost in a similar situation. The Woman's building situation shows that a survey based on the National Register criteria may not capture all properties that are significant locally. That building was deemed ineligible for the National Register because of its EIFS exterior, but it is clearly an important building in local history. This is an issue that needs deep discussion and action, and we're glad to see the Commission addressing it.

Respectfully submitted,

Jason Tish  
Executive Director  
Madison Trust for Historic Preservation