

City of Madison, Wisconsin

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**REPORT OF:** URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION      **PRESENTED:** December 19, 2012

**TITLE:** 145 Iota Court and 619 & 625 Henry Street  
– PUD(SIP), Deconstruction of Three  
Buildings for a New 8-Story Student-  
Oriented Apartment Building and the  
Addition of 2-Stories to an Existing  
Building (Cliff Dwellers) at 140 Iota Court.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Ald. Dist. (27553)      **REFERRED:**  
**REREFERRED:**  
**REPORTED BACK:**

**AUTHOR:** Alan J. Martin, Secretary      **ADOPTED:**      **POF:**

**DATED:** December 19, 2012      **ID NUMBER:**

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Members present were: Richard Wagner, Chair; Marsha Rummel, John Harrington, Tom DeChant, Melissa Huggins, Richard Slayton, Dawn O’Kroley and Cliff Goodhart.

**SUMMARY:**

At its meeting of December 19, 2012, the Urban Design Commission **REJECTED** a PUD(SIP) located at 145 Iota Court and 619 & 625 Henry Street. Appearing on behalf of the project were J. Randy Bruce, Carole Schaeffer, both representing Palisades, LLC; Jeff Houden, Chris Houden, Sarah Carpenter and Jason Batton. Registered and speaking in opposition were Benjamin Pierce, Stephanie Stender, representing Kappa Kappa Gamma; and Tim Morgan. Appearing in opposition but not wishing to speak were Jordan Corning, representing Chi Psi Fraternity; Gavin Denzer, Thomas Madsen, Benjamin Ganther, William Van Hefty, Alex Stein and Karen Carlsen. Bruce gave a brief overview of the project and other developments in the Langdon Street area for size comparisons. The proposal calls for an extension of Langdon Lane creating a multi-modal transportation corridor with no parking (loading and drop-offs can be accommodated). Architecturally they wish to create one building mass, another building that anchors the corner and the third building that would be around the back corner along Iota Court and Langdon Lane. Some of the new design elements include a masonry base and a masonry upper level in a lighter color with buff on the upper levels. The size of the courtyard has increased and the mass of the back corner of the building has been decreased, reducing the density of the project by about 10%. They continue to pull back building mass in both directions to try to get enough landscaping around the perimeter to be effective. The floor plans have been redesigned with 8% of the bedrooms being internal; other student properties have had a ratio of about 25%. The Cliff Dwellers building is now glass on the back with a French balcony for the apartments with that orientation. The front door locations have been increased with a new entry canopy proposed.

Benjamin Pierce spoke to the difficulty of working in a historic neighborhood. He does not feel that the new designs resemble anything like what the neighborhood stands to lose. He feels scale has not been adequately addressed; these are monumentally larger in scale than anything currently in the neighborhood. He finds it disturbing and it would greatly disrupt the current density, appearance and history of the location.

Stephanie Stender spoke as a historical sorority house representative. They have great concerns about the dissolution of the historic character of this neighborhood, and the increased traffic and safety issues this building will bring. The mass and height are not at all in keeping with the neighborhood. The footprint of this building will be about the same size as the Madison Municipal Building in a neighborhood of 3-4 story house. The restoration of the Cliff Dwellers is a very attractive proposal but this building is inappropriate for this site.

Tim Morgan spoke about the driveway that would be eliminated by this project. He sees this as a violation of the conditional use standards as it would create hardship for neighboring property residents. He stated the residents were never told about this through their Alder or any other means. There is currently a fire lane it just isn't adequately signed.

Comments and questions from the Commission were as follows:

- Could you explain how an internal bedroom works?
  - It's set up as a bedroom in all other factors with a door and a closet, but no window. You supplement the fresh air and light with mechanical air and light. Provisions within the building code allow for that. About the year 2000 the building code changed. In other cities it's used as well, even in very high end properties. We also find with student properties that some students would prefer to have the darkness that an internal bedroom provides.
- (Cover) We've reviewed this new layout and staff finds it OK.
- I have difficulty with bedrooms with no windows.
- The Downtown Plan calls for 5 plus two bonus stories (7). I don't see how we can approve 9 stories.
  - I don't believe we're at 8. The Downtown Plan states 5 plus 2 bonus, measured from the high portion of the site. We do have a community room included within the penthouse level with roof deck access, mechanical space, stairs/elevator coming up. This occupancy of the community room could trigger another floor level but we have in other projects had an allowance for community space and a roof deck.

I recall something different for measuring the height of the building.

(Cover) The old method is take the front façade which would be the Henry Street side, the middle point of the building and measure up. The Downtown Plan and the new Zoning Code measures from the far right hand side upward, so there is a difference between the old and new.

(Rummel) How do we count the community room?

- I won't vote for this because the mass is way oversized. There's nothing wrong with the building but it does not fit in the context of this neighborhood. It overpowers this whole area. I'd like to hear what the rest of the Commission has to say about that before we delve into the design issues.
- I think our responsibility is beyond design but the issue of scale does relate to our charge. I would agree 100%; the scale is inappropriate for this neighborhood. This is not the place for larger footprint buildings and I cannot support it either.
- Given my druthers I'd probably choose something different, but on the other hand the improvements overall to the City are something that need to be weighed. I'm willing to work on the design and let the Plan Commission and Common Council weigh that issue. We're part of the process.
- The fact is we have a Downtown Plan which we just approved that identifies this as a redevelopment site for up to 7 stories. It is in keeping with the plan which we all approved. I also believe that one of the things that this community struggles with is how you experience buildings from the street, and I think the size of this building will not be experienced as that large when you are a pedestrian.
  - We did approve this height but not such a mass. I disagree that you won't feel the mass of this building as a pedestrian. This is just too large a mass that will destroy the character of the area.

- The articulation of the mass is not broken down. All the brick is the same, maybe 2-3 window styles. It's designed as a mass, it's not designed with the articulation of the traditional block or property size in this area.
- Treating the other building on the lake in a more modern style is more appropriate than putting in false historic style on the building but it still does not include the 60s building's relationship to its surroundings. It's almost redesigned within a vacuum rather than addressing the context.
- I actually like the 60s building design. It will never relate to its context but I like this treatment much better than the false historic treatment.
- What is the floor area ratio?
  - We're approximately at 4. The FAR isn't limited, that's one of the bulk standards that's been relaxed. I would agree more with Melissa's point of view that we have what we perceive as smaller masses as we're on the street. The perception of it isn't necessarily of a single building about 4 FAR.
- It looks like with some work you could meet the criteria for bonus stories, not including the overall height and clubroom.
- This just looks like the Humanities building sitting on top of an apartment building. I don't know how to fix that but that's what it screams to me. I don't like this as much as what you did next to Dottie Dumpling's.
- When we see developments go into neighborhoods that aren't ready for the parking, what it does to the neighborhood, at the Parman site the street is loaded with cars. I'd hate to see this happen in this area.
- The Downtown Plan also identified this area as something we should plan on creating as part of our local landmark district. I can't support this at this point; the mass is too large.
- Landmarks has a view and City plans often have multiple policies that conflict with one another.
- I really do like the brick and the feel of it, and I like that you've expanded the entrance to the building. I wonder what you can do with the white elephant on top to make it not so white or to help it complement what's going on down below as opposed to being such a separate structure.
- I like the windows coming down and the fact that the two Henry Street brick masses are different heights, that helps with the articulation.
  - The stepback on Iota Court to those upper levels is very significant.
- Have you done any sun studies?
  - We have. We were most concerned with what was happening here and here, but the sun's gets high enough to maintain those light levels on Iota Court. We could bring those studies to a later meeting.
- As a design review board we're talking about the idea of a general mass and overall scale of what we think is appropriate, and then we have bonus stories for architectural merit. But in this case I've only heard "you're never going to see the top." It's not part of an overall composition that in my mind deems bonus stories because it's great; we're talking about trying to hide it.
  - We're talking about trying to minimize it due to the impact of the scale on the surrounding buildings, that's the intent.
- Sacrificing 2-3 units and eliminating two 4-bedroom units and really letting that be a little bit more slender right there, keeping the roof level there would really bring down the mass and the concern of this big looming façade.
- This project is beyond the architecture, it's simply too big and too massive for the area it's going into.

### **ACTION:**

A motion was made by Goodhart for **INITIAL APPROVAL** with the condition that the height be restudied on the southeast corner with elimination of the 8<sup>th</sup> floor and reexamination of materials on the top stories of the

building. Rummel asked for referral. Slayton remarked that initial approval is site layout and massing. The Chair stated that the approval with specific suggestions could be done; it might be best to refer since the question of the brick seems to be unresolved. Huggins seconded. The motion failed on a vote of (2-5) with Goodhart, Huggins voting yes; Rummel, O’Kroley, Slayton, Harrington and DeChant voting no.

On a motion by O’Kroley, seconded by Rummel, the Urban Design Commission **REJECTED** this item citing the lack of architectural merit does not credit the bonus stories as noted within the Downtown Plan based on statements that the top stories never will be seen, are not of architectural merit and try to hide the top. The motion further stated that the Commission could not make a finding that the Planned Unit Development District approval criteria in Section 28.07(6)(f). Madison General Ordinances was met, in addition the Exterior and Interior Criteria for Planned Unit Development Districts in Downtown Design Zones was not appropriately addressed for waiver of the bulk standards. The motion was passed on a vote of (4-3) with Rummel, O’Kroley, Slayton and DeChant voting for the rejection; and Goodhart, Huggins and Harrington voting against.

After the Commission acts on an application, individual Commissioners rate the overall design on a scale of 1 to 10, including any changes required by the Commission. The ratings are for information only. They are not used to decide whether the project should be approved. The scale is 1 = complete failure; 2 = critically bad; 3 = very poor; 4 = poor; 5 = fair; 6 = good; 7 = very good; 8 = excellent; 9 = superior; and 10 = outstanding. The overall ratings for this project are 3, 3, 3, 5 and 7.

**URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION PROJECT RATING FOR: 145 Iota Court and 619 & 625 Henry Street**

	Site Plan	Architecture	Landscape Plan	Site Amenities, Lighting, Etc.	Signs	Circulation (Pedestrian, Vehicular)	Urban Context	Overall Rating
<b>Member Ratings</b>	8	6	6	7	-	8	8	7
	2	5	6	-	-	4	1	3
	3	7	-	3	-	-	-	3
	3	5	7	-	-	5	3	3
	5	5	5	-	-	5	6	5

General Comments:

- Look at removing 2-3 floors.
- Simply way too massive a building for Langdon Street site.
- Too much mass for historic area, doesn't meet bonus story criteria. Good architecture in wrong location.
- Mass is significantly out of context with the neighborhood.