

AGENDA # 4

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: LANDMARKS COMMISSION

PRESENTED: August 12, 2013

TITLE: 17, 19, 25 North Webster Street and
201 East Mifflin Street – Construction
Adjacent to a Landmark – Deconstruct
Four Homes and Construct a 6-Story,
58-Unit Apartment Building. 2nd Ald.
Dist. (31119)

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Amy Scanlon, Secretary

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: August 12, 2013

ID NUMBER:

Members present were: Stuart Levitan, Chair; David McLean, Christina Slattery, Erica Fox Gehrig and Michael Rosenblum.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of August 12, 2013, the Landmarks Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** for construction adjacent to a landmark located at 17, 19, 25 North Webster Street and 201 East Mifflin Street. Registered and speaking in support of the project were J. Randy Bruce and Jessica Thompson, representing Fred Rouse Management. Registered in opposition to the project were Jack Holzhueter, representing Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy; Michael Bridgeman and Franny Ingebritson. Appearing neither in support nor opposition were Gary Tipler and Jason Tish, representing the Madison Trust for Historic Preservation.

Bruce gave an overview of the site and its context, noting the four existing homes, the Pahl Tire site on the opposite corner, the City parking ramp, and the outer loop of the Square. The Downtown Plan shows this corner of the site having a height limitation of 6-stories, while the frontage along East Washington Avenue is 8 plus two stories and the inner ring is subject to the Capitol View Height Preservation Limit. The site is currently zoned DR-1; they are requesting a rezoning to UMX to allow for this proposed development. The center of the block is the Lamp House, which is surrounded by paving and parking. One portion of the site would be free of any building so landscaping, in combination with the existing landscaping that sits there now, gives an appropriate setting for the Lamp House. Plans also include a sight line and staging area for tours of the house. Perspectives and elevations were shown. The architecture is remaining simple as a background building with the main intent of this development to create a site that is appropriate for the Lamp House and give a landscaped setting for it.

Jack Holzhueter, representing the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy spoke in opposition to the project. The Lamp House, its siting, landscape and hardscape and its views of Madison’s lakes and Cityscape are an intentional ensemble and work of art by the one of the 20th Century’s greatest artists, Frank Lloyd Wright. The international art world considers him a genius in architecture, as well as a landscape architect, planner, typographer and a designer of furniture, glassware, china and decorative objects. Frank Lloyd Wright is the Michelangelo of Madison. This Commission can help guarantee that Wright’s intentions for the Lamp House

and its environs suffer no more deprivation but are preserved as an integrated work of art, the core of a major income-generating tourist attraction that could last 100s of years. If the proposals at hand do not meet Madison's planning guidelines then the plans should be altered, not Wright's realized designs. The Lamp House has a revolutionary floor plan that was publicized, copied and used around the country for decades; revolutionary landscape and hardscape plan by which Wright intentionally and deliberately placed the house at the rear of a complex parcel requiring numerous retaining walls and terraces. No other central urban work by Wright has been so elaborately and painstakingly sited and landscaped; it is unique. To accommodate his client's interests, Wright incorporated the existing viewshed into his design, a viewshed that includes both lakes, elements of the downtown district and the east side. The City can set things in motion by retaining the buildings surrounding the Lamp House, integral elements to Wright's design, and reject the proposal both for the sunlight inhibiting apartment complex to its rear, and for the destruction of pre-existing houses that Wright incorporated into this design. May the sun continue to shine on the Lamp House. Holzhueter further explained how this proposal would impact the viewsheds. From the roof there are wonderful views. These proposed buildings come so close and would be so high that the rear of the house would no longer get any sun, the view of the City and these buildings would be gone. This site was originally purchased because it allowed the opportunity of these views.

Michael Bridgeman explained that when the Downtown Plan was in development, he was a resident of the First Settlement Neighborhood a few blocks from the Lamp House. He then objected to a bonus area "(G)" which would have allowed higher developments. That bonus area was eliminated, but his concern is that simply removing the bonus area may continue to expose the Lamp House and its context to negative development. There are ways the site could be protected, such as a local landmark district, national registry district, some kind of viewshed protection; none of which was built into the Downtown Plan. The issue is bigger than this house alone, there's potential here to be realized if we think broadly about more than simply this house; we think about Frank Lloyd Wright, his being a resident of the City and his contributions to the City over the decades. We don't necessarily need to build the things that were never built, we need to protect and defend the developments that do exist. Levitan asked if the primary issue is the viewshed to the lake. Bridgeman responded that half of the block has already been ruined by the Odessa and the office building on East Washington Avenue. But interestingly, most of the block is as it existed at the time the Lamp House was built. He designed for an environment that to a significant degree still exists; he can't understand why we would now think we could do better and enhance a Wright design. Levitan further asked if any development on the block that remove the existing conditions as of 1903 would by definition be damaging to the Lamp House and thus has to be opposed? Bridgeman replied that he would say by definition, but he would establish a very high bar for what would be acceptable for any new development. Slattery asked if height would be the primary concern; Bridgeman responded height is a primary concern, also the profile of the buildings is of concern. He's not enthusiastic about a solid wall of masonry across that block and behind the Lamp House because it changes an existing historic context that Wright took into consideration when he designed the Lamp House.

Levitan then read the pertinent part of the ordinance relative to this proposal. The question for the Landmarks Commission will be whether the proposed development is so large or visually intrusive as to adversely affect the historic character and integrity of the adjoining landmark or landmark site.

Gary Tipler explained that he would like to minimize the impact on the environment in this context. He sees something of a jewel in the Lamp House that could draw national attention and could be a major heritage tourist destination. Anything done in proximity has to be done extremely sensitively and with the understanding of all the qualities and characteristics that that context has served in all these years. The landscape qualities of the grounds and setting are essential. The light situation weighs in hugely on its interpretation and attractiveness as a heritage tourism destination. Levitan remarked that this block has been under consideration for five years;

why wasn't something done in that time to secure a heritage tourist destination? Tipler replied that there have been opportunities lost in terms of taking this discussion forward but he doesn't think it's too late.

Jason Tish spoke on behalf of the Madison Trust for Historic Preservation, neither in support nor opposition. It's regrettable if the houses along Webster Street are demolished, but the bigger concern is the Lamp House of which is he also on the steering committee for this project. There has been a lot of discussion of this proposal's relation to the Lamp House. The bigger concern on this block is the silo effect that is already underway and how this proposal would continue that and shroud the Lamp House from public view. The architect has agreed to some shifting of the design to enhance the views particularly from Mifflin Street and that is an appreciated amendment to the design. Perhaps this project could be broken into two masses with some view between them? The steering committee had asked the developer to create a model of the area to get a real sense of the effect of this proposal on this block but to his knowledge that hasn't yet happened. There is statewide nationwide attention on this block and concern for what happens to this house. To the extent that this Commission can encourage, require, preserve some access and viewshed to this very significant building, he asked that they do what they can. McLean inquired about Frank Lloyd Wright's career and progression of styles; Holzhueter replied that it is an urban prairie structure, said to begin in 1902. This building was supervised and the exterior was largely influenced by Walter Burley Griffin, who was working with Wright at the time. There was to have been a true prairie style house in front of this one, but Wright simply ran out of money and sold the parcel where the rather dreary and ordinary Madison-style 2-story apartment building is on the right side of the driveway. That would have made the whole parcel look much more prairie-like. In addition they had "prairie-ized" the mansion left on the property, taking off two wings and putting a ring of windows on the second story that is definitely prairie. The full concept for the site, which was never realized, was in the prairie style.

Levitan reiterated that the Landmarks Commission is tasked with advising the Plan Commission and Urban Design Commission whether or not the proposed development is so large or visually intrusive as to adversely affect the historic character and integrity of the adjoining landmark. He showed the outline of the Lamp House and asked how we find that this does not adversely affect the character and integrity of the Lamp House. Bruce replied that they look at it as not just in the context of that ordinance requirement, but in the larger perspective. They believe this site will be redeveloped, along with other sites in the area towards the Capitol. They are trying to do this in a way that will maintain and ensure an appropriate setting for the Lamp House and maintain the viewsheds to the Lamp House. This is a bigger structure than what is there now but they are trying to do it in a way that will ensure an appropriate setting.

Gehrig requested that on future submitted materials the Lamp House be called out with its address.

Levitan inquired about the timetable for this project. Bruce responded that they have been working through presentations to the neighborhood and steering committee, a forthcoming Urban Design Commission presentation, receiving inputs from all interested parties and trying to balance the issues related to the development on this site before they can reach a point to submit a formal development plan. In a perfect world construction would commence next year.

Slattery asked about the two building proposal and why that won't work for this development. Bruce stated that he missed one neighborhood meeting and didn't hear that particular request. They didn't agree that the viewsheds into the site along Webster Street were significant.

Ald. Ledell Zellers, District 2 noted that the sight line is better, but to keep in mind that as other property is developed on Mifflin Street it could also affect the sight line.

McClellan asked Bruce if there are viewsheds out of the site. Bruce noted that right across the street from the site the building heights are limited by the Capitol View Preservation Limits. They felt that the primary views are towards the lakes in two directions, which they are not impacting. Realistically they have to look at the neighboring sites, what may be done there and how that would affect the viewsheds.

Levitan remarked that that the Commission needs to see the proposal's context in its entirety, at the very least the photo montage the Lamp House with the new building on the site.

Staff noted that if there are large and pressing issues that it should be mentioned at this time to the development team. Levitan responded that the viewshed to the water is historically the primary viewshed that needs to be protected, and the question is when does it get so large as to be visually intrusive? That's a subjective interpretation. How does holding or receding from the corner impact on the overall height and mass? There are moving parts to the extent that there is going to be something other than rehabilitation of the existing structures there.

Gehrig stated she is struggling with "visually intrusive." If the buildings that are already there are the ones that are supposed to be there for the building, wouldn't that make anything else in the whole world visually intrusive? She asked the Commission members to think about other landmarks and where they have been put in this type of situation before where the siting is so significant. Levitan responded that the historical record of the importance of this site to this project is probably greater than most any other landmark in the City.

Levitan then asked the Commission if they had any comments on the architecture and style of the proposed development. Gehrig noted gable roofs on Webster Street, Holzhueter pointed out that Wright kept a blank wall with a room that has only one window that faces one of these houses because it stared into a building; he was clearly incorporating the existing structures and they still exist today. And that's at the rear of the building. At one point he had designed an entrance from Webster Street but it's possible he could not get the easement for the driveway, and every occupant since 1903 has used Webster Street as the main entrance. The importance of context was mentioned. Gehrig requested shadow studies for a future presentation.