



FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT BUILDING CONSERVANCY

December 3, 2013

Urban Design Commission
City of Madison
ATTN: Al Martin

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To: Urban Design Commission, Richard Wagner, Chair
Commission Members

Subject: Robert Lamp House Agenda Item for Dec 4 meeting

Dear commission members:

The Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy is concerned about the future of the Robert Lamp House (1903). As an international preservation organization working to safeguard Wright's remaining built work, we applaud the thoughtful approach adopted by the City of Madison regarding the impact of development on this Madison cultural and historical asset.

We have expressed our general view to other civic commissions and committees but wish to share with you as well several important points. The Lamp House is a Wright building with a very personal dimension. Due to Wright's deep boyhood friendship with Robert Lamp, the architect responded to Lamp's circumstances by designing a house that would allow him special views of both lakes and the city. The significance of the house to Madison, in the heartland of Wisconsin where Wright spent his formative years, is as a little known but significant work in the chronology of Wright's career, since it is one of only two Prairie-style Wright houses in the state capital.

Much care was invested in the siting of this house. Wright would later become famous for his audacious site plans on difficult lots for more famous works but the Lamp House is an early example of how central the site considerations and construction orientation are to Wright's designs. To elevate the house above its neighbors for the sake of the views, Wright raised it two or more feet off the ground, a strategy he rarely employed, and placed it at the rear and at the highest extremity of the east-and-north-sloping lot. Positioning it in the interior of the block, he reshaped the landscape with retaining walls and to elevate the dwelling even more. He also created an elaborate approach to the house, guaranteeing privacy. Navigating this pathway was an exploration and it was meant to be so as part of the character of this house.

The residential nature of the block is central to this work and its historical context. Encircling this building with six and seven-story or higher construction would irretrievably

alter the context and further obstruct the views to and from the house, thereby destroying Wright's design intention for the Lamp House.

In keeping with the objectives of fostering civic pride in the beauty and cultural assets of Madison, assuring the highest quality of design, and promoting the preservation of Madison landmarks, we urge the Urban Design Commission to consider carefully how inappropriate development could destroy the neighborhood ambiance, residential character and integrity of the remaining portions of the block and their relationship with this important Wright building. These objectives could be accomplished by establishing a Historic District, by utilization of appropriate block specific zoning to recognize the period in the city's development and to encourage ownership and maintenance of these residential buildings, by requiring compatible and sensitive design and scale in the surrounding structures, or other recommendations that you develop to help Madison safeguard an unusual work by America's greatest architect.

Sincerely,



Janet Halstead
Executive Director

cc: Alder Ledell Zellers, City of Madison
Jason Tish, Madison Trust for Historic Preservation
Lois Berg, Wright in Wisconsin