

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

PRESENTED: December 4, 2013

TITLE: 17, 19 & 25 North Henry Street and 201 East Mifflin Street – Deconstruction of Four Homes and the Construction of a New 6-Story, 58-Unit Apartment Building. 2nd Ald. Dist. (31341)

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Alan J. Martin, Secretary

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: December 4, 2013

ID NUMBER:

Members present were: Richard Wagner, Chair; John Harrington, Melissa Huggins, Henry Lufler, Cliff Goodhart, Tom DeChant and Lauren Cnare.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of December 4, 2013, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** for the deconstruction of four homes and the construction of a new 6-story, 58-unit apartment building located at 17, 19 & 25 North Henry Street and 201 East Mifflin Street. Appearing on behalf of the project was J. Randy Bruce, the project architect. Registered and speaking in opposition were Jack Holzheuter, representing Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy; Michael K. Bridgeman and Marilyn Martin. Bruce noted the request for rezoning of the property to allow for this development. After review of existing site conditions, views in and out of the Lamp House were shown. Landscaping plans include creating a buffer around the Lamp House. Two levels of underground parking will be accessed off of Mifflin Street. Elevations were presented showing the future building footprints over the existing building footprints. In a way to help minimize the height and mass of the building they stepped the sixth floor back a significant amount on all sides to a point where if you're across the street you wouldn't see the upper level.

Jack Holzheuter spoke in opposition, noting that the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy, as well as Frank Lloyd Wright Wisconsin and other individuals are tracking development in historic areas. The apartment building would aesthetically overwhelm the Lamp House. The design, despite the setbacks on the upper stories, would give an overwhelming backdrop to the Lamp House that would diminish its original and largely intact monumental and magnetic appearance. One of Wright's gifts was to make even small houses look large, through careful proportioning, approach, landscaping and hardscaping. Its current appearance aside, the Lamp House and its surroundings are probably Wright's most elaborate and successful urban example of these design techniques. He noted in the statement of purpose contained in the Zoning Code which states "promote the preservation and conservation of historic buildings and districts while providing for infill and redevelopment as provided by the City plans." The City is now revisiting the adopted City plans for infill and redevelopment of this block. The Landmarks Guidelines promote the protection of buildings designed by master architects. The proposed rezoning will not lead to a development that will attract tourists and enhance Madison's reputation. Preservation of the Lamp House and its surroundings will.

Michael Bridgeman spoke in opposition. He noted that one of the Commission's purposes is to foster civic pride in the beauty and nobler assets of the City. We must protect those qualities and assets that make Madison unique. The Lamp House unquestionably meet that standard. We need to think of this not as a precedent, but an opportunity to correct and oversight for a unique situation. On two occasions he spoke at working sessions for the Downtown Plan to raise issues with this area. It's important to know that this building as intentionally surrounded by other residences in the middle of the block. Apart from more contemporary intrusions on Butler Street and East Washington Avenue, this block remains pretty much as it was when Wright created his design. He had pointed out at the working session that the integrity of the Lamp House was being threatened by the proposed bonus stories and suggested at the time that the Downtown Plan give greater protections, not less, to the Lamp House. On March 29, 2012 he thanked the working group for eliminating the bonus stories in this area and pointed out that this change in itself is not enough to protect the Lamp House. He had suggested a small historic district to protect the Lamp House. He mentioned other cities that protect and celebrate what Wright designs they have left. As proposed the building overwhelms the Lamp House and it is visually intrusive. When you look at the massing images, keep in mind in the future development massing we didn't see future development on Mifflin or Butler Streets; that may be a bit disingenuous.

Comments and questions from the Commission were as follows:

- I'm curious of the status of the ad hoc committee looking at this block.
 - (Ledell Zellers) That has been going full steam ahead; it is their hope to conclude by the end of the year. She is disappointed to see this move through the process without the benefit of that committee's findings.
- Was this zoned as it is now specifically with the Lamp House in mind?
- Would like to see something that complies with the existing zoning.
 - To a degree. That's why there are no bonus stories. At the same time one of the biggest factors of this project as proposed, with the underlying zoning, is the massing, it just does not conform. The current thinking of Planning staff is they don't support the rezoning.
 - (Bruce) Everybody, including myself, wants to make sure we get this right. This is a site though that is an important transition between the Downtown Core on two of its sides and Capitol Point. We've got an existing context there that is not just the Lamp House and other existing homes; what we're proposing would be less imposing than this building and the existing building. We are hoping for feedback here and hoping to get construction in the ground this coming summer.
- For those in opposition what would you like to see there?
 - For me personally (not representing any Wright foundation) I would like to see the building heights on Webster come down to the height of the Lamp House. That would be one half of what is proposed. Three stories maximum. What I'm concerned about actually is the issue of privacy on the roof of the Lamp House if it is restored. People would be looking down on the private activity on the people of an open roof surrounded by a pergola with a lot of plantings. There is only one picture that survives of what the Lamp House looked like originally and it shows a large framework (pergola) on the roof covered with vines. The owner of the Lamp House has said many times that he would like to restore it, or he has also said that he might make it available to a non-profit that would operate it more or less like a museum. I do not personally believe that the views of the Lamp House from Webster Street matter.
- You're speculating a bit how this would occur with the Zoning Code. What do you think is going to happen here?
 - Most of these are owned by the Apex Group.
- I don't expect to see everything built up to those maximums the way you're talking about these massing studies. The building on the corner that was restored after a fire might have been torn down and gone higher. I don't think we ought to presume that's the future reality.

- We've just tried to make some reasonable estimates.
- It's very difficult – I appreciate that you tried really hard and want some design recommendations from us, but I think it's really hard just not understanding the context of the whole building. We don't have the benefit of all the thinking as a whole. There's a lot to like about it but it's hard to say anything concrete about it without thinking about the whole context. That said I also do really struggle with, I know this is an important building, but if you don't have a group that's ready to step up and do something with it, at some point that can't hold up.
- We don't want to just take the first solution that comes along. My concern is a sense of place here. My opinion with the St. Francis house is that has lost its sense of place. I'm concerned about how the impact on sense of place comes to that building, and it is a valuable asset. You are making steps but I'm still not convinced this fits here.
- I think it's really important that the ad hoc weigh in on what they want. There's a whole lot of "don't want" but that doesn't give good direction. When you say what's acceptable I think that makes progress towards this.
- I'd like to see a bit more effort toward that 60-foot mass. We've heard that you were really not looking to establish views to the Lamp House, but it does sound like that massing of the existing and underlying zoning is important. I don't see how I can say 6-stories is too high when the zoning allows and the Downtown Plan allows it. But I guess I would encourage the building to think about itself as a backdrop or curtain behind the Lamp House that could frame a view.
- Would like to see building as a backdrop or curtain behind the Lamp House to frame it.

ACTION:

Since this was an **INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** no formal action was taken by the Commission.

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 rating for this project is 6.

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION PROJECT RATING FOR: 17, 19 & 25 North Henry Street and 201 East Mifflin Street

	Site Plan	Architecture	Landscape Plan	Site Amenities, Lighting, Etc.	Signs	Circulation (Pedestrian, Vehicular)	Urban Context	Overall Rating
Member Ratings	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6