

April 7, 2014
Re: 706 Williamson Street Proposal

Members of the Landmarks Commission:

As a member of the Marquette Neighborhood Association Preservation & Development Committee, and the Williamson Street BUILD 2 Committee that drafted the framework for new and larger projects on the western blocks of Williamson Street, I ask that you refer the vote for Marty Rifken's 706 Williamson Development for a month.

While as neighborhood volunteers we've met with the committee and separately with Rifken several times during the past few weeks, the MNA P&D Committee has yet to make a recommendation.

There are still several points, particularly height, and setbacks are perhaps the chief ones, that must be dealt with that aren't adequately represented in the proposal you see before you today.

There are two considerations that the Landmarks Commission staff hasn't taken into account in her report. The first is the potential for mitigating the impact of mass and height on the street corner by setbacks on the top floor – and not calling for a full height corner feature which accomplishes nothing. The corner feature was one that was championed by planner Archie Nicolette, staff for the development of the BUILD plans for Williamson Street. At the time, we were looking at the historic vocabulary of architectural motifs of corner buildings of perhaps three or so stories in height – features that help define a corner such as cornice features, roof enhancements and details such as ornamented pediment walls. We did not intend these features to be a full story higher than the perceived height of the building, as provided by setbacks, such as in the present proposal.

The other chief consideration that staff has not been made aware of is the protected view of the Capitol from Spaight and Jenifer Street right-of-ways. While this is sometimes seasonal, it is none the less one of the cherished characteristics of the residential neighborhood. Presently the mass suggested by a tall building built to the corner of the lot fails to treat this with much sensitivity. Alterations to the proposed building plan that have been suggested include:

- Increased transparency with full glazed corners at the intersection of Blount and Williamson;
- Step backs to provide “breathing room” so the building isn't jarringly adjacent to the Capitol;
- Open balconies without a corner support; and,
- Significant step back of the upper floors. This is important on the street sides of the building, but particularly important at the corner.

We hope that the project design is modified to find a compromise that is acceptable to all parties.

Thank you for your consideration.

Gary Tipler
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