

DESIGNING FOR PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE ALONG EAST WASHINGTON AT UNION CORNERS

Comments submitted to the Urban Design Commission, City of Madison
by Maya Lea, Union Corners Steering Committee (Emerson East) and
Chair, Placemaking/Public Art Task Force, EENA on May 7, 2014

The pedestrian experience along East Washington—this development’s most public perimeter—is critical to the project’s successful integration into the Emerson East, Eken Park, and Darbo-Worthington neighborhoods.

The Union Corners Steering Committee shares the concern expressed in the City Planning Division’s Staff Report that facades along this high-visibility, high-traffic edge of the site be “well-articulated, porous, and highly activated” in order to achieve what the 2006 Comprehensive Plan calls a “high-quality public realm.”

We need more than a few doorways here. We need a carefully crafted route that promotes walkability through its rhythms, detailing, and amenities. People need to be sheltered from high-speed corridor traffic with trees and other plantings. They need to be engaged by what lies inside the buildings they walk past, as well as by the architecture. And the pathway surface itself should be both spacious and attractive.

The closer this pathway feels to a public plaza the better the pedestrian experience of Union Corners will be, and the better the pedestrian experience of Union Corners is, the more synergistic its relationship with the surrounding neighborhoods will be.

The Steering Committee feels strongly that the large surface parking lot shown on the site plan should *not* be visible from East Washington. We are concerned about the nebulous nature of the “transit hub” introduced in the most recent iteration of the developer’s site plan as a screening device separating the parking lot from the street.

Given the current uncertainty of the City’s commitment to Bus Rapid Transit, this hypothetical structure may or may not become a BRT station at some future date. We could easily find ourselves looking at a long, unscreened stretch of parking lot for a long time, which would seriously compromise the pedestrian experience of the entire

site. People walking by on East Washington would be surrounded by cars on both sides.

We urge the Commission to pay particular attention to this element of the site's design, and to insure that a high-quality screening element be incorporated into the *first* phase of development.

Thank you.

To: City of Madison Urban Design Commission
From: Union Corners Neighborhood Steering Committee
Re: Gorman Union Corners GDP
April 30, 2014

We have all been thinking and talking about Union Corners for years – almost a decade. In this most recent iteration, this group has convened to provide substantive input from the affected neighborhoods to the Gorman team. Our steering committee is made up of people from the SASY, Eken Park, Emerson East and Worthington Park neighborhoods. Some of us have been part of these conversations from the beginning; others are new to the issue. A few of us were members of the committee that chose Gorman via the City RFP process.

Our group, as a result of significant discussion and in response to the two initial proposals from Gorman (their response to the RFP and their informational submission to UDC), developed a list of priority issues for the site, and distilled out twelve bottom line issues. We shared these issues with the Gorman team in a series of meetings. Below, we present these issues and our assessment of how the latest submittal from Gorman responds to our ideas and requests.

1. Plan the site as a whole, not piecemeal - make this a real GDP.

We were concerned that, with the strong focus on the UW Clinic in phase one, the rest of the site would not get the attention it deserved, and that the rest of the GDP would be more aspirational than not. We appreciate that Gorman has separated the GDP from the first SIP, and that many of the whole site issues we raised (pedestrian connectivity, for example) have been addressed. While the real test of the GDP will come with SIP development and implementation, we feel that Gorman has responded to this concern.

2. 75% of parking should be underground or structured, the rest lining retail/residential buildings in a linear (not rectangular) manner (including on-street parking).

3. Shared, structured/underground parking in 1st phase.

4. Wrap or screen parking so it's not visible from E. Washington.

One of our primary concerns in the GDP process has been the amount, type and location of parking. Gorman's intermediate proposal presented far too much surface parking, and did not show structured parking until later phases, which caused us to worry that it would not happen. The current submission has reduced the total amount of parking, and has placed a significant amount of it underground. In addition, all parking is now masked such that it is not (entirely) visible from E. Washington and Milwaukee St. We encourage UDC to ensure that the proposed transit hub is included in phase one and is designed to be both functional (i.e. actually serves transit customers, not just as an auto ramp) and aesthetically pleasing. While some of us would still prefer less surface parking than shown in the current submission, we feel that Gorman has been largely responsive to these concerns. We encourage UDC (and Gorman, in the SIP phase) to think through the layout of all surface parking from both a pedestrian and stormwater perspective and to create parking lots that are as environmentally and pedestrian friendly as a parking lot can be.

5. Bring more height to the corner of E. Washington and Milwaukee (4-6 stories total).

6. Show a density gradient from E. Washington to the back triangle.

Throughout the history of planning for this site, a primary concern has been what goes on the "signature corner" of E. Washington and Milwaukee. When the proposal to site the UW Clinic on this corner showed it being 1-2 stories, we felt that would set the tone for the rest of the site to be no taller,

and waste this signature corner. The current submission has moved the Clinic and now shows a 4-6 story building at this corner, which we consider a very significant improvement, and a clear response by Gorman to neighborhood desires.

Another key concern has been the way that height develops over the site. We have advocated for the tallest buildings to be along E. Washington, especially at the corner of Milwaukee, and to step down towards the existing neighborhood. The current site plan is responsive to this idea and an improvement on previous plans. Our remaining concern is the one-story buildings on Milwaukee St. – we feel this area could accommodate 2-3 stories.

7. Union commons should be a pedestrian way through the entire site and the GDP should show a serious commitment to that, not just a pass through but a real place, community-centric, with amenities surrounding it.

8. GDP should lay out separation between drive aisles and pedestrian ways.

Another theme in planning for this site has been the inclusion strong pedestrian connectivity and a dedicated pedestrian way. In early plans, Gorman had shown the Union Commons as a combined auto and pedestrian way, and did not relate it to the adjacent buildings. Further, the Commons did not extend throughout the entire site. In the current submission, there is a pedestrian-only way that stretches from Winnebago St. to Milwaukee St., which is a significant and welcome improvement, and clearly responsive to our concerns. However, it is not clear if or how this space will be more than a sidewalk, and how it will relate to the buildings around it. We encourage UDC to discuss, and Gorman to include, more specifics about how this space will be active and pedestrian-friendly, if not in the GDP than in the first SIP. It is also important that this space, and all pedestrian ways, be affirmatively included in a specific phase of the SIP, and not just left to develop as auxiliary to the buildings.

9. Buildings should be street facing, especially on E. Washington.

We are very interested in development on this site being accessible and inviting to the surrounding neighborhoods. One way to do this is to have buildings that face E. Washington and Milwaukee St. The current submission indicates entrances on these streets, but we will reserve judgment on this item until we see SIP plans.

10. The site should maximize commercial/retail uses for the job possibilities – this implies density and a really strong phase 1.

It is in the best interest of the neighborhoods, and the city as a whole, for this site to support significant employment opportunities. While this is not a goal that is easy to incorporate into our land use approval process, we believe that the density and amount of commercial, especially retail, included in the site is a good step. Going forward, we hope that Gorman and their tenants will make significant efforts to hire local residents.

11. At least 75% of the residential density in the McGrath plan, which showed 450 dwelling units.

One, perhaps unexpected, theme from the neighborhoods has been the desire for significant density on the site. To that end, we hoped to see residential density that reflects the initial McGrath plan. While the GDP does not include a number of units, it does show significant opportunity for residential development.

12. Very good or better quality architecture on the corner, more than decent throughout the site.

We aspire to high quality, green buildings that can survive transitions from their planned use to second and third uses and beyond. The details of this will be revealed in the SIPs, and we look forward to discussing them.

In conclusion, we wish to make two points. First, we want to be clear that the current GDP submittal from Gorman is much more responsive to neighborhood concerns than the previous informational submittal. We thank them for the ways in which they have changed their plans to respond to our concerns, ideas, and input. Second, we recognize that there are always devils in the details, and that there are many issues that are important to us that will not be addressed until the SIP process. Because we know that Gorman intends to move forward with the phase 1 SIP very shortly, we include here some of our key concerns for the SIP process. We hope that UDC and Gorman will keep them in mind as the process moves forward. These concerns include:

- The amount of space available at the E. Washington edge for a really engaging pedestrian environment
- The design of the pedestrian way through the site: will it be shady in summer, protected from wind in winter, have places to sit, things to look at, multiple uses/activities?
- The design of the building on the corner of E. Washington and Milwaukee. This should be a signature building, and include engaging public space.
- The degree of variety in design between buildings – variety in massing, articulation, and interaction with pedestrian environment.
- The design of street edges, which need to be warm and welcoming – both the buildings and space in front of buildings.
- The quality of design of the buildings. We believe they should be high quality, green built and of good materials that will last. We encourage the consideration of a range of sustainable technologies, including but certainly not limited to green and white roofs, and the incorporation of both passive and active solar.
- The degree of sustainability of the entire site – we encourage Gorman to seek LEED ND certification for the site and LEED certification for individual buildings. We also encourage the use of district systems for energy, water, and stormwater; green infrastructure for storm water management; inclusion of bicycle- and car-sharing and the undergrounding of electric lines.
- Initial plans showed one or more community gardens on the site. We would like at least one site reserved for community gardens, and consideration of edible landscaping throughout the site.
- Inclusion of public art, including the proposed work by a Ho-Chunk artist and use of the French Battery bricks
- Inclusion of a playground and/or space designed for young people and young families.

Thank you for your service, and for taking our concerns into consideration as you evaluate and vote on this project. We are excited by the prospect of finally breaking ground on this site.

Ken Fitzsimmons - SASY Neighborhood and Farwell St Resident
Alfonso Flores V - President, Worthington Park Neighborhood Association
Brad Hinkfuss - Chair, SASY Neighborhood Association
Lou Host-Jablonski - SASY Neighborhood Association
Maya Lea, Chair, Emerson East Neighborhood Association Placemaking/Public Art Task Force
Satya Rhodes-Conway - Eken Park Neighborhood Association
Jody Werzinske - Co-Chair, Eken Park Neighborhood Association
For the Union Corners Neighborhood Steering Committee

~~Robert J. Steines~~

Gorman - Union
Corners

John Steines, Urban Design Commission May 7, 2014:

A) The need to incorporate meaningful green space treatment into each phase of the development, not just pretending that effective green space treatment will occur in between buildings as they are built in phases;

B) The need for effective stormwater treatment built into the overall design of the site.

A. Meaningful green space - each phase

The Union Corners Steering Committee ask that significant green space be included in each phase. For Phase 1, we believe all green space surrounding the clinic and abutting the parking lot needs to be fully developed, including significant aspects of Union Commons (curving walkway through clinic/grocery block from below traffic circle to Milwaukee Street).

This includes:

- i) green parklet below traffic circle containing pedestrian entrance and enclosing UW Clinic entrance drive
- ii) green terraces abutting the UW Clinic parking lot to walkways, and including pedestrian walkways. We recognize that all components of green space may not be prepared as Building 4, for instance, might provide attractive space for surface storm water runoff or rain garden feature into green space adjacent to parking, but planning for such adjacent to walkway is meaningful.
 - a) adjacent and interior to Union Commons (east west pedestrian walkway)
 - b) north south pedestrian walkway entrance off of East Washington Avenue (all green space).
- iii) Completion of elements of the small triangle wedges of green space along the bike path on either side and opposite of the UW Clinic vehicle entrance (south side of Winnebago) would increase entrance attractiveness and sense of completions for Phase 1.
- iv) Green roofs have been repeatedly requested and are expected. As greenspace, they help insulate structures, mitigate heat island effect, slow storm water runoff, increase biodiversity and enhance visual pleasure of community participants, and technology has been in use since late 1970 - 1980's with many advancements in application.
- v) Pervious pavements allow for green growth that enhances walkways, driving lots and urban space. Edges of main walkways are ideal spaces as well as parking surfaces and entrance egress edges.

Ideally, much of Union Commons extending across the entire site to Milwaukee

Street would also be developed. This creates linkages and extends to future users and business interests a sense of the quality of life that is and will be Union Corners.

B. Effective storm water management:

i) Rainwater needs to be viewed as a valuable resource in our environment to be stored and sacred for use, not shunted out of our systems. Roof gardens slow storm water runoff.

a) below grade shallow terrace pools, curb cut rain gardens and swales filled with rain garden plants increase biodiversity in environment and interest for humans

b) Vertical gardens coming off of green roof scape provide stratified biodiversity and habitat production

ii) Innovative storm water use - numerous examples exist. Artists working with engineers lead the way in demonstrating effective means of using storm water as an asset in sound (aural), reflective, and green design effectively combining sculpture with function. Storm water terracing off of buildings creates green space opportunity and slow falling water, a cascade.

a) Combine city grant request projects with storm water utility funds to develop innovative crowd pleasing and healing solutions

b) Collection pools with cleansing aeration systems which function as fountains are in increasing use. Plan at least two into the site for both halves of main block - clinic & grocer side. These do not need to be expansive to be effective.

c) Grade change does not need to be significant, in fact, the more gradual and longer the runoff trail, the greater the benefit to landscape.

C. Green space and wellness relationship is critical and well documented - ethic!

i) The critical importance of green space, wildness habitat (biodiversity) is increasingly documented in medical archives. a) The reference list for documentation on Harvard Medical School (Harvard Medical School on health and wellbeing) physician Eva M. Selhub and naturopath Alan C. Logan's book *Your Brain on Nature* is 55 pages long and a good place to start in examining the research: <http://yourbrainonnature.com/referencesalanlogan.pdf?C=71513c79d5894d63ac0656b1a8bc1456&URL=http://www.webpr.ca/alanlogan/referencesalanlogan.pdf>

referenc

b) Harvard Medical School Resiliency Conference, 2013:

- Engagement with nature is #1 in improving wellbeing, recovery,

stress reduction.

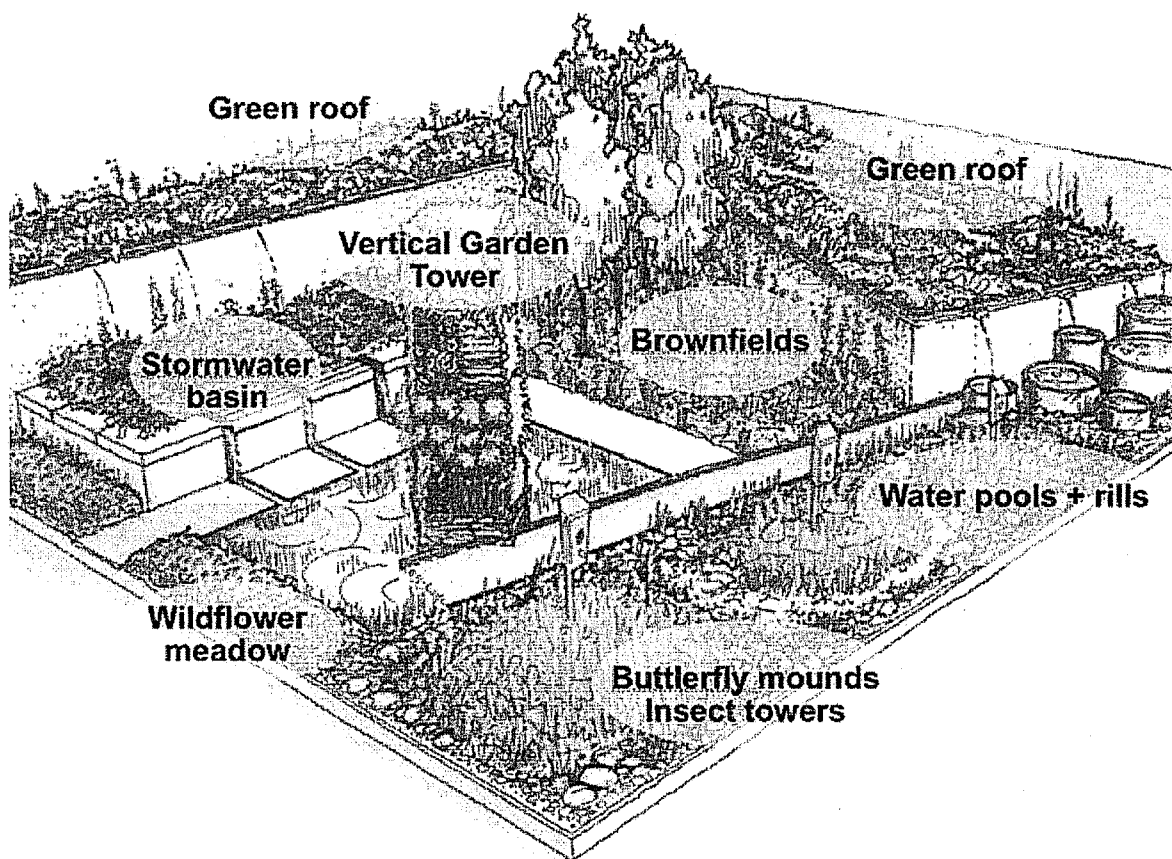
- Physical activity in outdoor greenspace trumps all others - walking/ exercise paths engage community.

ii) Engaging greenspace in stratified small space is increasingly celebrated for the value these spaces add> The benefits fall under general wellbeing, quality of life, outdoor engagement, education and other. **Teardrop Park** (Battery Park City) , a children's park in lower Mahnhattan, is one densely placed environment, providing multi age engagement space.

a) There are many examples and the best designs reflect local values, materials and species.

b) Plan and execute carefully designed and thoughtful outdoor spaces.

Image of multiple applications of greenspace & storm water use found at <http://thlandscapedesign.blogspot.com>:



John Steines
3327 Chicago Ave.
Madison, WI 53714-1815

May 7, 2014

To: Urban Design Commission
Re: Gorman & Co's GDP for Union Corners

My name is Ken Fitzsimmons, and my wife and I and our 20-month old son own a home directly adjacent to Union Corners. I'm not an urban designer though I've learned a lot about development through this process of working with Gorman & Co and the neighborhood steering committee on Union Corners.

TRUST

I do know about building and maintaining trust. In January Gorman presented a GDP that differed so greatly from the previous RFP that it felt like a breach of trust. Words uttered by many neighbors included "bait and switch."

The design of the UW Health Clinic in that proposal was virtually complete despite having only one neighborhood meeting a few months prior. In that meeting attendees clearly stated a desire for more floors above the two-story clinic and much more structured parking than is currently in the design.

After the scolding UW Health received by this commission in January, they began sending a representative to our meetings. When we then asked about changing the design of the clinic, we were told that there wasn't enough time.

So the onus shifted to Gorman & Co to build trust into the GDP and specifically Phase I. To help with that the neighborhood steering committee created a list of items to improve the site. I'm pleased to say that Gorman was able to include most of those items. Even UW Health made some compromises. Though the fundamental structure of the clinic did not change, they did move the site and make changes around driveways and parking.

Joe Schwenker of Gorman & Co asked if we would come support them should they include these changes we were asking for. Understanding that building trust is a two-way street, I'm here to carry through our end of the bargain and state my and our support for this GDP

BOTTOM TRIANGLE

We'd like to consider the four buildings of the lower triangle to be barely adequate placeholders. The RFP had many townhomes and generally a more attractive design than these four buildings. Whereas a lot of work has gone into the area above Winnebago, it feels like much less has gone into this area. Given the short timeframe, the majority of effort has been focused on the clinic and the design of the area above (west) of Winnebago—likely because the bottom triangle is separated by Winnebago.

Gorman & Co has proven to be very adept at managing the needs of multiple stakeholders—clients, the neighborhood, city staff, the mayor's office, and of course their own needs. We'd like to that same ability applied to the residential area along with the kinds of creativity we see above.

I believe that the process that has occurred since January is a good example of how to proceed with the rest of this development process. We will be present for each step of this GDP and subsequent SIPs.

We feel that Gorman & Co has worked to rebuild trust, and I look forward to maintaining a positive relationship with them throughout this process.

Sincerely,



Ken Fitzsimmons
58 Farwell St