

: Michael D. Barrett [REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, November 04, 2014 11:05 PM

Dear UDC members,

Regarding the Royster Corners proposal before you Wednesday evening, Agenda Item 6, I oppose it. I submit this letter and the following article in rebuttal to the proposal:

<http://www.isthmus.com/daily/article.php?article=43906&sid=5fd53d3c0405e89dce70fa754ed9feal>

You are undoing a lot of work toward reducing the amount of parking in this city.

I note that the proposal before you far exceeds any rational call for parking. I was on the Urban Design Commission during the Roaring Aughties, when our packets were so thick they routinely had to be mailed in three very thick envelopes. It was typical to receive projects that paved & parked excessively. We were lucky, though, in that we had a majority on the commission which routinely knocked down the excessive parking that came before us. We were usually successful in getting it down to about 2/3 the zoning code (sometimes even less) at the time. Developers told us it would lead to economic disaster. I've gone back to view these projects in the years after completion and fully rented/leased. Not one of the reduced parking lots is ever more than 2/3 full. Ever. Often, the peak parking utilization is much less. The disaster failed to materialize in every case. Indeed, the reduced lot size was still too much.

I note that what is before you far exceeds any zoning requirement. I also note, with sadness, that so much of what gets approved by your commission these days militates against a quality urban aesthetic. In recent years we have typically gotten boxes that present no convivial, pedestrian-scaled interrelation between the architecture and the public street. Indeed, most buildings you approve exude fear. It looks like that is what is going on here yet again; the priority is the car at the expense of architectural and landscaped beauty.

301 parking spaces? For 89 apartments and just 41,000 sq. ft. commercial?

Why are you recreating the 80s suburbs all over again? Parking-light neighborhoods have far outstripped those hideous places in terms of value, livability, community. Why? Because they aren't burdened with the ugliness and costs of too much paving and too much parking.

It seems clear that, after the cratering of the suburbs during the crash, we already have a surfeit of car-oriented Sun Prairies and Fitchburgs in this world. During that same crash, however, our ped/bike/transit-oriented 'hoods thrived. What we have too little of is cool places that de-emphasize the car. And that's right, you can't simultaneously have a cool place and a car-coddling place. The car--it's ugly infrastructure and the ugly attitudes it fosters--is anti-everything that makes a place a pleasant & enjoyable one to live in.

So why are you doubling down on 1980s car ideology?

Parking lots are not fun. They are ugly. They add unnecessary costs. They reduce the value of property. They are unsustainable. Are you even aware that we have a sustainable transportation master plan in the works--in reaction to ugly, car-oriented developments like this? Are you even aware that Chicago is now granting parking waivers down to zero for new construction? The latest, a hundred-unit building (near Milwaukee & Division, one of the parking-lightest areas of the city outside of the Loop), was met with howls of protest and predictions that it would never rent. It rented to capacity very soon after construction completed.

Face it, you and Madison developers come from a generation (or a culture) that doesn't have the first clue about living the good life without a car. That is simply not true among the generations entering (& recently entered into) the work force; they are eschewing cul-de-sac-&-car living. They are embracing urban living and a car-light->car-free lifestyle. Developments like this have us competing at the level of Peoria (or Fitchburg) when we should be competing with Chicago and San Francisco.

The upshot: Parking lots are ugly places that beget ugliness. So why are you kicking things off here with such anti-pedestrian, anti-urban design hideousness?

I remind you of your charge as a commission:

"The Mission of the Urban Design Commission is to assure the highest quality of design for all public and private projects in the city; protect and improve the general appearance of all buildings, structures, landscaping and open areas in the city; encourage the protection of economic values and proper use of properties; encourage and promote a high quality in the design of new buildings, developments, remodeling and additions so as to maintain and improve the established standards of property values within the city; foster civic pride in the beauty and nobler assets of the city and, in all other ways possible, assure a functionally efficient and visually attractive city in the future."

Yet all we are seeing is a back to the 80s architecture, when car was king.

-Mike Barrett

████████ Sommers Ave.
Madison, WI 53704