



To: Members of the Urban Design Commission, Members of the Plan Commission

From: Rocky Bluff Neighborhood Association, Erik Haroldson, President

Re: File # 48877, Redevelopment of 2901 University Avenue and 2902-2912 Harvey Street

Date: January 10, 2018

The Rocky Bluff Neighborhood Association (RBNA) respectfully submits this letter with regard to the application received by the City in November 2017 for a redevelopment project between the streets of Ridge, Harvey, and University Ave. We appreciate the responsiveness of the development team as the project has taken shape and the continued opportunity to participate in the process. Our hope is to ensure both that the development is harmonious with Rocky Bluff's unique character of a "neighborhood in a forest" and that the new elements the project brings to the neighborhood will be acceptable to the residents.

As the proposal comes to the Urban Design Commission (UDC), now as a formal application, this letter notes many welcome improvements over the previous design, as well as a few outstanding issues. One major improvement, consistent with UDC recommendations, is a design that has two separate buildings: Building A ("mixed use building"), a 5-story building with commercial space and apartments fronting on University Avenue, and Building B ("townhomes"), a structure on Harvey Street consisting of 8 townhome-type rental units. We believe that this new design allows for a better transition into the neighborhood over the previous design.

We are also pleased to see the increased use of natural materials, such as stone and wood, as this project will be adjacent to an "urban forest" area of Madison. We still feel the design could further distinguish itself aesthetically from other apartment buildings constructed in Madison in recent years. But we are glad to see some changes, including an apparent reduction in the number of balconies attached to individual units. And with regard to the townhomes, we appreciate that the scale and character is more in keeping with the surrounding neighborhood. The lower density adjacent to Harvey Street is also more appropriate.

For the mixed-use building, RBNA would especially like to see some locally-owned businesses in the commercial space, as well as staggered business hours for those tenants, and hopefully none operating after 10:00 p.m. And we would like the City to stipulate that the private vendor for the project's trash and recycling could not serve the site before 7:00 a.m.

Overall, we're glad the density of the project has been reduced somewhat and the greatest mass of the project has been moved away from Harvey Street, as specified in the Hoyt Park Area Joint Neighborhood Plan (Hoyt Plan) and Madison's Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan). However, we're still concerned that the density of the building, and particularly, the changes in zoning designation necessitated through the project's lot assembly do not demonstrate the required consistency with the Comp Plan and Hoyt Plan specifications. Also, while the neighborhood would generally prefer to see the mixed-use building be of smaller size, we at least would like to see an increase in the setback of the 5th floor, which could help reduce the appearance of mass.

Another topic on which the developer has been responsive is lighting, which was raised at the December neighborhood meeting with the development team. Residents understandably desire as little light pollution

from the project as possible. The development team stated that they have taken steps in the lighting design to stem spillage of light into the neighborhood, and we are hopeful that will be the case. Moreover, where LEDs are used, there is the matter of the perceived color or “warmth” of the light. The proliferation of LEDs that appear very bright and “cold” has been identified as a potential health hazard for humans and animals. The neighborhood, therefore, prefers to see lighting in the warm part of the spectrum. The development team seemed to agree that such lighting would be appropriate for this project.

One component of the project that isn’t described in detail in the developer’s application is signage. In general, the neighborhood is hopeful that the signage will create a consistent feel across the commercial space, similar to what is seen in the renderings, rather than the disparate signs seen in some other retail spaces. RBNA would certainly prefer the signs introduced in the project to be of smaller size and not overly bright. One nearby example of such signage can be seen at the Shorewood Shopping Center on University Ave (across from the west end of the neighborhood, site of Vom Fass and Conscious Carnivore). In addition, we ask that special care be taken with the signage on the back of the mixed-use building, which will face into Rocky Bluff.

As relates to signs, RBNA is grateful to the developer for including a neighborhood sign as part of the project at this important point of entry into the area. We hope to have additional discussions with the development team about the neighborhood’s vision for the form and location of this sign as plans progress.

Outside of the design of the building, residents remain concerned about a variety of other issues, including traffic and parking. This arises from both the high number of cars belonging to project residents (due to the number of units), as well as various types of increased traffic due to the commercial uses. Unfortunately, Harvey Street and the Ridge/University intersection each have difficult, and potentially hazardous, traffic and parking issues which already require attention. A higher population density on that block will only heighten these problems, or drive them further into the neighborhood. Such problems range from the difficulties pedestrians have crossing University using the two-stage divided crossing as vehicles speed down the hill, to backups on Ridge when turning onto University, to speeding cars and crowded parking on Harvey, to buses already overcrowded by the time they arrive at neighborhood stops. Further, given that the project will inevitably increase foot traffic on adjacent streets, the neighborhood is concerned about the issues on all sides that will develop on Harvey Street where there are stretches without sidewalks. These are serious safety and infrastructure problems, and solutions should be addressed by all parties before the issues are made more significant.

The developer has addressed some other parking and traffic issues raised by RBNA. For instance, the development team has stated that residents of the project will not be allowed to obtain street parking permits from the City, and we hope the City will make that a stipulation. Another stipulation that we’d like to see, also supported by the developer, is the requirement that delivery/service truck traffic turn left onto Ridge Street in order to exit the neighborhood via eastbound University Ave, rather than travel through the neighborhood.

In addition to project design and traffic, RBNA would like to raise awareness about several potential burdens to the Rocky Bluff area. These include loss of mature trees, light pollution, noise pollution (both of which are worsened by the loss of mature trees), odors from commercial uses, and loss of scenic views. While some of these problems are inevitable with increased development, some issues will be compounded by the proximity of a large project to smaller scale residential dwellings. Some residents have also expressed concern about the effect of the project’s light and noise pollution on some nocturnal inhabitants: that area’s cherished, unique Katydid population. As described above, we wonder if the project can be even modestly tweaked to minimize some of the burdens which would be placed onto the neighborhood.

Finally, many of the design changes are welcome ones, including the earth-tone color schemes and appealing landscaping features. One landscaping concern, also noted by the UDC in September, is canopy trees. An issue with the current plan is the project's reliance on City trees for most of the larger canopy trees. First, RBNA would like to ensure that the City will plant larger caliper trees (if possible) that will attain canopy height. Second, we would hope the project itself could go a bit further to better harmonize this project with the area's identity as a "neighborhood in a forest" (Hoyt Plan, pp. 7, 51). In addition to planting more canopy trees outside of the rights-of-way, we still hope even one or two of the lots' numerous mature trees could be preserved. Maybe it would be an option to curve the sidewalk around one of the tall conifers near the corner of Ridge and Harvey Streets, creating a small grove-like greenspace as a location for the neighborhood sign. This solution not only would enhance the project's landscaping, and fit with Rocky Bluff's forested character, but would be a welcoming feature of the apartments and businesses, and would soften the transition from a 5-story building immediately into a small neighborhood street.

Overall, the character of Rocky Bluff is forested and rustic. We would like to see a development which reflects that existing character, using it as a guide to create a welcoming and uniquely appropriate addition to the neighborhood. This would comport with the Hoyt Plan's repeated expectation that future development and redevelopment is consistent with and sensitive to the neighborhood's scale and character (pp. 10, 32, 38).

Thank you for this opportunity to bring our Rocky Bluff perspective to these matters. And we look forward to continuing to collaborate with both the City and the development team in future stages of this project.