

Madison Plan and Zoning (Public Comment Opposing the Rezoning of the 1954 E. Washington Avenue Redevelopment Property)

We are a collective of Emerson East Neighbors (listed on page 3) opposed to the requested rezoning of the property located at 1954 East Washington (defined by the City of Madison as Low Medium Residential (LMR)) because the request directly contradicts the City of Madison Comprehensive Plan and the 2018 Future Land Use Map definition of Low Medium Residential (LMR) Density.

Excerpt From: “Imagine Madison”, May 2017

“The 2017 Future Land Use map maintains a low-density district of less than 15 dwelling units (DU) per acre while adding a low-medium density district that allows for buildings that are denser than single-family detached houses, but still less dense than most apartment buildings (e.g. townhomes, duplexes, three- and four-unit buildings, etc.). The medium- and high-density residential districts were altered to better fit the pattern of development and to accommodate future growth. The mixed-use districts have been similarly adjusted. Within the residential and mixed-use designations, height and building form are emphasized over dwelling unit density.”

Low-Medium Residential (LMR) - Mix of single-family homes, two, three and four-unit buildings, row/townhouses, and small apartment buildings (1-3 stories; 7-30 du/acre)

Excerpt From: 2018 Madison Comprehensive Plan, page 27

“Low-Medium Residential (LMR) areas are made up of any or all of the following types of housing: small-lot single-family development, two-unit buildings, three-unit buildings, rowhouses, and small multifamily buildings. LMR areas are largely characterized by what is sometimes referred to as the “Missing Middle” of housing development: the range of multi-unit or clustered housing types that fall between the extremes of detached single-family homes and large apartment buildings (see page 49 for more on Missing Middle housing). Building forms present within the LMR category of housing are generally compatible in scale with single-family homes and may therefore be intermixed with small-lot single-family development or used as a transition from more intense development to lower intensity areas comprised primarily of single-family development. While some areas mapped as LMR are currently multifamily developments that are isolated from surrounding development, LMR areas should be characterized by a walkable, connected street network. Existing, isolated LMR areas should be better connected with their surroundings when opportunities arise, and newly developing LMR areas should be seamlessly integrated with surrounding development. LMR areas should help meet the growing demand for walkable urban living.”

Wisconsin State Journal, excerpt from “Explainer: Why Is Madison’s Land Use Map Changing” by Abigail Becker, March 6, 2018

“In the draft 2018 map, the city added a new residential category — Low-Medium Residential — to capture the “missing middle.” That’s a range of multi-unit or clustered housing types that are compatible in scale with single-family homes.”

The low-medium residential use allows for development that is generally more dense than single-family detached homes on large lots but less dense than most apartment buildings. Think duplexes, townhomes and three- and four-unit buildings. This type of housing is expected to meet the growing demand for “walkable urban living.”

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We maintain that the proposed 4 story, 44-unit apartment (73 bedroom) building does not conform in any way with the obvious intent of the “Low-Medium Residential” designation as detailed in the 2018 Madison Comprehensive Plan, and as reported in the press. Further, given the small footprint and bungalow style design of most homes immediately adjacent to the proposed building and widely prevalent in the entire neighborhood we feel the proposed 14,460 sq. ft., 48-foot-high structure is a particularly inappropriate for an exemption to the LMR designation.

The only reference we can find as to why this development may qualify under the LMR designation is that it is on a “Primary Arterial Street”. The issue is that street in question is East Washington Avenue which is often viewed as an already failed transportation corridor, i.e. already too congested, and cannot be made bigger or faster. East Washington Avenue has one of the highest accident rates in Madison and the location of the proposed building places it just ½ block from one of the most congested/dangerous intersections in Madison (1st and E. Washington). It’s important to make special note that East Washington Ave. is even more dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists attempting to access eastbound bus lines and commercial/retail located on south side of the Avenue. And although we tend to think of East Washington as primarily a commercial thoroughfare it’s important to note that this section of East Washington (east of 1st Street to Milwaukee St.) is primarily a single-family unit residential corridor. The reality is that the proposed building is not taking advantage of transportation infrastructure but rather is adding substantially to an already serious transportation problem.

We also question the logic of developing a proposal to add to the City’s affordable housing inventory which is dependent on razing a perfectly viable and occupied 8-unit affordable housing building. It’s difficult to project but logic tells us that given the need to cover the cost of new construction, and increases in apartment market rental rates, the new units will rent at a higher rate than existing compatible apartments.

We would like to understand why this proposal was even considered an appropriate fit for this valued LMR designated zone, and to better clarify that decision, can Plan and Zoning provide us with examples of other similar proposals (i.e. dense, large footprint, 4 story apartment buildings located in primarily residential areas) which have been built in downtown Madison neighborhoods designated as Low-Medium Residential?

Again, we oppose the requested rezoning based on Madison Plan and Zoning’s own designation of this property as Low Minimum Residential. But, if in the end Madison Plan and Zoning grants Madison Development Corporation’s rezoning request, we request a detailed written narrative as to why that exemption to the Low-Medium Residential designation was granted.

Thank you in advance for your careful consideration of our concerns.

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