

AGENDA # 6

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION **PRESENTED:** May 8, 2019

TITLE: 134-140 S. Blair Street & 506-518 E.
Wilson Street – New Development
Consisting of Residential Units,
Commercial Space and Internal Structured
Parking. 6th Ald. Dist. (55518)

REFERRED:
REREFERRED:
REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Chris Wells, Acting Secretary **ADOPTED:** **POF:**

DATED: May 8, 2019 **ID NUMBER:**

Members present were: Richard Wagner, Chair; Cliff Goodhart, Tom DeChant, Lois Braun-Oddo, Christian Harper, Shane Bernau, Craig Weisensel and Rafeeq Asad.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of May 8, 2019, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** for new development located at 134-140 S. Blair Street & 506-518 E. Wilson Street. Registered in support of the project were Lance McGrath, Marc Schellpfeffer and Paul Cuta. Registered in opposition to the project were Bob Judy, Sharon Long and Juli Wagner.

McGrath gave an overview of the project boundaries of approximately 60,000 square-foot lot (note: this does not include Hotel Ruby Marie or the four houses on S. Blair Street). The project would sit in the rear parking lot as well as the Essen Haus building (506-518 E. Wilson Street). What they are proposing is close to 100% compliant with the Zoning Code. There are two historic districts that encompass the site: East Wilson Street is a National Historic District and the local First Settlement Historic District. The team is also working with the Landmarks Commission. The project is 5-stories with lower level commercial, and parking behind and underneath. They are working with WHEDA to include 20% of the units as affordable housing. They have had several neighborhood meetings and have another one scheduled on May 16th. Schellpfeffer presented more detailed massing diagrams, noting that City plans do call for more density in this location. Guests would enter from S. Blair Street at a recessed component. Commercial flanks S. Blair and E. Wilson where the Essen Haus and Come Back In are currently housed. The main pedestrian entry to the residential units happens on E. Wilson Street; current street work would afford more defined entries along the street. Trash and loading zones would occur off of S. Franklin Street where it drops about 5-6 feet. The 2nd and 3rd floors of residential would have a larger base and relate in height to the Germania Condominiums. The upper two levels of residential create more of a stepback. A change in elevation between this building and Germania allows for a sense of privacy between the two, as well as allowing these residents to be able to come out in more of a confined area outside of their unit without engaging the edge of that green roof condition. Examples were given of holding the datum and relating to the Hotel Ruby Marie. From their property line to the face of the parking wall is 7 ½-feet, where they would plant additional landscaping. At the commercial component they stepback about 4 ½-feet from the sidewalk, and near the four houses they are about 18-inches from the back of the sidewalk.

Juli Wagner spoke as a Germania resident and face of a community neighborhood group to evaluate this project. They have had 3-4 community meetings in addition to a couple meetings with the developer and the City. The development team has been positive in that conversation and engagement has occurred from the get-go. The neighbors want to see a successful development here that builds on the neighborhood. They want the design to reflect the Downtown Plan, First Settlement Plan in concert with preservation efforts; it should be compatible and integrate with the area. Right now they feel the project is imposed on the space rather than integrated. There is concern about the project interface with Germania Condos; plans talk about 2-3 stories in a compatible way but they are challenged with the plan to bring parking right up to the backside. They are opposed to a service entrance off of S. Franklin Street, it's a low traffic one-way residential street. Parking is insufficient for what is being planned. They feel challenged with the proposed timeline; they haven't seen a baked plan. They wish to see a shade study and a traffic impact study.

Sharon Long spoke as a resident of Germania. She is concerned about the size and extent of the proposed development. She appreciates the efforts to improve the services and economic contributions for the property. This development will negatively impact the residents' quality of life and their properties. The mass and density of the proposed building appears to crowd and shade their back porches and eliminate the trees that serve as a buffer from their properties and the parking lot. It's her belief that the impacts of this building with a direct view into the structure right up to the back porches will negatively affect the value of the properties. The proposed delivery route would also negatively S. Franklin Street; this will increase the noise, air pollution and traffic in this quiet neighborhood.

The Commission discussed the following:

- Is it a proposed or existing PD?
 - It's currently zoned PD. It would have to be renewed or zoned out of PD. It's assumed it would continue if it's approved.
- As Lance stated it complies with the underlying zoning of neighboring properties?
 - I believe so.
- Do you know whether any of the buildings are contributing to the historic district that are slated for demolition?
 - I can't speak to that.
 - 506 (Come Back In) and 518 are contributing but they have way too many issues to be salvageable. The Essen Haus is not contributing.
- I'm not a fan of stepbacks because essentially a big building is a big building. I don't think that should be your focus. I don't think it solves the solution you're trying to solve in relation to Germania.
 - It's also related to zoning.
- It's still not preferred. If your goal is to try to mask the size of a 6-story building, this is not necessarily the best way to do it massing-wise.
- The relationship of Germania to the new building is an important one but I don't think it's a question of massing.
- Staff mentioned that the Landmarks Commission is up in the air because part of the project is in the district. My sense is they should do whatever they think is appropriate from a historical point of view and we can discuss it from a design standpoint. We have differing criteria for reviewing projects.
- The green area facing the condominiums, is that occupied greenspace or unoccupied?
 - The occupied portion would be directly outside the unit with a green roof that would not allow residents of that unit to go to the edge. Right now, there's about 15 feet.
- From what I can tell the green roof still looks higher than the condominiums. It would be more successful if those were equal because it's still a view down onto somebody's deck. If there was a more equitable leveling of that, the green roof would also be viewable from the condos.

- Can you do some bushes and plantings on that green roof that could be used to screen?
- Focus on making that a shared amenity to the benefit of both.
- Is there an option to access utility other than on Franklin, for loading and unloading?
 - The challenge would be maneuvering trucks on Blair Street. If they have to pull in, they have to pull out. I understand what the neighborhood concerns are.
- The entrances on Blair Street, it's nightmarish as it is now where traffic is backed up from Wilson to E. Washington. Has there been any preliminary Traffic Engineering looks at this?
 - The City has asked for a traffic study. The City also brought up that Blair Street will be rebuilt in 2022, and they're taking steps to provide more gaps in the traffic flow. There's also space for 3-4 cars to pull in off of Blair, before entering the garage.
- The City would really like to see some electric charging options in these new developments, thinking forward.
 - We've done that on our last three projects and we'll be doing it here as well.
- It's not going to work any other way except right-in/right-out on Blair Street.
- It appears you're treating that like a side yard rather than a rear yard with a lot more activity on the Germania side, and putting a building right up against the property line. I'd recommend pulling that back and rearranging other things in there as well.
 - At their grade, it's all driveway.
- But how many stories are you building there?
 - Three stories. 19 feet at this face from their parking. I don't think the space at their grade level is a unique inhabited space, that's happening 5 ½ feet down from our residential first level. It's an important juxtaposition between the two but I don't know that a residential component in our building at their grade level would be all that used. I wouldn't want to live off of somebody's back parking lot.
- That little canyon is going to be totally unusable for anything. If it were filled rather with dirt that you can plant on top of it, rather than have it be a dark empty canyon, you can work those amenities between the two buildings. Helping explain those functionalities would be helpful and important.
- Just because they're not using it now doesn't mean it will continue should the Germania site be redeveloped.
 - We'd be open to having discussions too if they want their concrete wall to go away for more landscaping.
- Give another look at where your bike entries are, they're the farthest from the bike path.
 - The idea between Ruby Marie and our building along E. Wilson is a zone that a majority of our bike parking is sitting in.
- Looking forward, Zoning will require you to have some at-grade public use bike spaces. Also having images of the buildings to be razed and context of this would be helpful. A shade study is needed too. The experience on Blair as a pedestrian is horrible. Knowing the width of that right-of-way, I don't want to make it worse and that ties to articulation, the façade, specifically on that and the Wilson Street façade.
- I'm not really certain about the covered entry plaza there, having a big void along Wilson. Most of us probably don't want to see this kind of regurgitated Ruby Marie or Cardinal look. There is something to be said to what the floor to floor heights are, the proportions of openings to solid wall. A new interpretation of that might even suggest that balconies along E. Wilson might not even be appropriate. As you showed what's going on along there it is a nice edge, and you could continue that but your massing shows that void in the middle.
- Respect the historic nature but don't rebuild a 1920s building here.

ACTION:

Since this was an **INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** no formal action was taken by the Commission.