

AGENDA # 1

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: LANDMARKS COMMISSION

PRESENTED: 5/6/19

TITLE: 134-140 S Blair St and 506-518 E Wilson St - Mixed-Use Development in the First Settlement Hist. Dist.; 6th Ald. Dist.

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: 5/10/19

ID NUMBER: 55514

Members present were: Stuart Levitan, Richard Arnesen, Katie Kaliszewski, Arvina Martin, and David McLean. Excused was Anna Andrzejewski.

SUMMARY:

Lance McGrath, registering in support and wishing to speak

Marc Schellpfeffer, registering in support and wishing to speak

Paul Cuta, registering in support and available to answer questions

Juli Wagner, registering in opposition and wishing to speak

E. Edward Linville, registering neither in support nor in opposition and not wishing to speak

Bob Worm, registering neither in support nor in opposition and available to answer questions

McGrath described the 60,000 square foot site they plan to redevelop. He pointed out that the properties on E Wilson St are part of the East Wilson National Register Historic District, and the northern side of the site is in the First Settlement local historic district. He mentioned that they are also acquiring four houses along S Blair St, but they are not part of this redevelopment project. He said that he is not purchasing the Hotel Ruby Marie and a portion of the lot to the north of it, nor is he acquiring the two corner properties at E Wilson St and S Franklin St. He said that they will save the building where the Come Back In is located and will apply for tax credits for the renovation. The buildings between the Come Back In and the Hotel Ruby Marie will be demolished, and the rest of the site they are developing is currently a parking lot.

Schellpfeffer presented the specific plans for the site, noting that the architecture is not defined yet, but they wanted to have a conversation about the thought process that went into the current plans and how they were shaped by their discussions with the neighborhood. He said that they also considered the First Settlement local historic district ordinance and its requirements for height, scale, proportion, and rhythm. He explained that while they realize the proposed development is larger than the existing buildings and parking lot, they can scale the new structure appropriately to fit the site. He said that on the front of the site on S Blair St, there is a six story height limit, and E Wilson St has a six story limit as well. The structure will step down to three stories on the west side of the site near the Germania Condominiums and also include small terraces to provide some space and privacy between the two buildings. He said that the main parking and dropoff entrance will be located on S Blair St, and the main residential lobby will be on E Wilson St. He explained that the Cardinal and MG&E campus became the height datum for this building; on E Wilson St, there are two story buildings on either side of the development, so they intend to use a series of stepbacks and material changes to maintain that scale.

Alder Rummel said that the developers have been attentive throughout this process and came to the district alder and neighbors first to get feedback on this unique development. She said that as a result, the plans have evolved to keep the four houses on S Blair St and to study the E Wilson St façade more closely. She said that she has received many emails from citizens mourning the loss of the buildings to be demolished on E Wilson St, and asked if there was something more they could do because there is no protection for the properties on E Wilson St. She mentioned that the treatment of the E Wilson St façade does not strike her as historic, and the storefront windows and entryway openings seem too large for this historic street. She said that people are excited that the four houses on S Blair St are being set aside for this project, but there are also concerns that their future is an unresolved question. She pointed out that the houses need care, and if they could be rehabilitated to have a life beyond well-worn apartments, it would be a win for First Settlement. She said that she has also heard concerns from commercial neighbors about the amount of parking available, and she wants to ensure that if a commercial frontage is developed on E Wilson St that the businesses are being served well. She said that she has also heard concerns from neighbors about using the entrance on S Franklin St for trash pickup because it is a one-way residential street. She ended by saying that overall, many people following this project are encouraged by the development team, but the details are important as well. Levitan asked if Rummel had concerns about the overall mass, and Rummel said that she would need to see a more detailed rendering because the design is currently so conceptual that it is difficult to tell.

Wagner said that the First Settlement neighbor group has had a positive experience with the development team and they have had good dialogue, but additional discussion is needed. She referenced the group's statement submitted prior to the meeting and highlighted their primary concerns. She said that the proposed land combinations would create a lot much larger than the average lot size on E Wilson St and would be inconsistent with the lot size patterns in the First Settlement local historic district. Another concern is the demolition of properties within the East Wilson National Register Historic District, and she suggested that they consider maintaining and restoring some of the structures proposed for demolition. She said that an additional concern is regarding the future of the four houses on S Blair St, which many neighbors supported retaining; however, now that they are separated from the current project, neighbors are wondering if there is a plan in place for them.

Linville commended the development team on how far they have gotten on this project because of their positive involvement with neighborhood residents. He said that his main objection is the discussion of datum. He explained that because this building is in the middle of the block and everything is stepping down from there, it looks like the building is eating the frontage. He explained that he realizes articulation and setbacks mean a lot, but the building's big form as shown in the models feels out of proportion. He said that because development continues to get pushed away from neighbors and streets, it will be a challenge for that portion of the building to feel like it's not pushing its way onto E Wilson St.

Bailey referenced a map of the site depicting the national and local historic districts involved and explained that the Landmarks Commission has purview over the properties in the First Settlement local historic district, but not those in the East Wilson National Register Historic District, though they will have an opportunity to comment on those properties as part of the demolition review. Levitan asked to which buildings the comparison is when evaluating new principal structures. Bailey replied that it is all properties within 200 feet in the First Settlement local historic district.

Levitan asked if commissioners had concerns about the height or massing of the proposed structure in context of the properties within 200 feet. Arnesen asked what is limiting the height on E Wilson St, and Schellpfeffer said that the Downtown Plan height map allows six stories. Kaliszewski said that she has concerns about this being a residential area and the building having solid walls on all sides that don't pull back at all. She said that you will be able to feel the mass of the solid wall while driving on S Blair St, and the building is going to rise up and push against its surroundings, which will change the entire feel of this area. Levitan asked if this could be changed with fenestrations. Kaliszewski said it potentially could, but she isn't sure. McLean said that he doesn't see fenestrations solving this issue. He said that he understands the datum for the two story lobby entry on E Wilson St, but it may emphasize the mass of the new building even more because the entrance will be the same size as the entire building next to it. He said that the larger scale of the entire building will dwarf

the block. Arnesen said that he would rather see more height in the north side of the site rather than the E Wilson St side. McLean said that the north side of the site will be hulking behind the Hotel Ruby Marie, which has a nice turret feature that will be lost. Kaliszewski said that the models show that the new structure won't go above the Germania Condominiums, but a portion will go above even if it is stepped back.

Schellpfeffer explained that the renderings show where they are currently at with the building design, so the wall along S Blair St is not going to be a solid wall; it will be permeated with commercial and residential entries that will articulate motion along that side. He said that he disagrees with concerns about the severity of the wall along S Blair St because the traffic moving along there is completely different than the more residential aspects on S Franklin St. He said that whether the images show it or not, they are able to have a building of this scale not feel impactful on a residential neighborhood. Regarding the two story entrance on E Wilson St, he said that the proportion of voids and storefronts along that street do create a rhythm that stays in line with the two story components. He said that a five story building on E Wilson St is not going to look like a two story building, and they aren't pretending it will. Arnesen asked how tall the residential floors are on E Wilson St, and Schellpfeffer said they are 10'8" tall.

Cuta said that they modeled the heights carefully, so the images should accurately reflect the proposed building heights. He said that they were trying to be sensitive of the rowhouses and how to get scalable residential density close to the core of the city. He said they will come back with more detailed plans that include proposed materials. Kaliszewski said that they need to consider what the character of Madison and this neighborhood has been as they develop their plans. McLean said he appreciates that the back side of the building is stepped back toward Germania, and the terraces there create a light, airy feel. He said that most concerns are regarding the transition from a solid model to an articulated piece, and they know they will see more details in future plans. Levitan said that they have heard many comments regarding scale, massing, and height, and he trusts the development team will reflect on that feedback as the Commission looks forward to seeing a more developed proposal.

ACTION:

No action was taken.