

DATE: January 27, 2020

TO: Colin Punt, City Planning Division

FROM: James Matson and Beth Robinson
1022 Vilas Avenue, Madison

SUBJECT: **Proposed Demolition and Redevelopment Plan for 1027-29 Vilas Avenue**

Colin, we are unable to appear in person at this evening's City Plan Commission meeting, but ask that you share this memo and report our concerns to the Commission prior to their deliberations and decisions.

We would like to express our concerns about the proposed demolition and redevelopment plan for 1027-29 Vilas Avenue, which is scheduled for City Plan Commission action on Monday, January 27 (this evening). We live across the street from the proposed project, in a traditional downtown neighborhood that is zoned TR-C *for the express purpose of preserving its traditional residential character*. We note the statement of purpose for the TR-C zoning district in which this property is located (see attached), and we believe that purpose is not being adequately honored in this case.

The city staff memo to the Plan Commission indicates that there is no known opposition from neighbors. We received short notice of the applicant's proposal. A notice of hearing was postmarked January 16, but not delivered to our residence until January 21. Project plans were not posted on Legistar until Thursday afternoon, January 23 – scarcely more than 2 business days before the proposed Plan Commission meeting. Given that short notice, and lack of timely access to critical plan information, how are neighbors to decide whether they support or oppose the application? Furthermore, as we write this on Monday morning, January 27, there are numerous utility trucks on the property, apparently preparing for the imminent demolition. This does not feel like a good faith effort to get neighbor input.

If the current proposal is approved, the applicants will have completed the dramatic transformation of a single corner lot (which previously had just one building, reasonable green space, and traditional neighborhood alley access) into four separate lots – each tightly packed with a 2-story home and suburban-style attached garage that forms a prominent part of each front façade. Traditional alley access will have been eliminated in favor of four private driveways that substantially reduce green space and empty directly onto busy neighborhood streets.

The applicants recently built two other houses on the South Mills Street side of the same corner, immediately behind the Vilas Avenue duplex now proposed for demolition. Each of those houses has its own front-façade garage, and a driveway emptying directly onto the street. That action intentionally cut off the possibility of vehicle access to the Vilas Avenue properties via the rear alley. The applicants now propose to replace the existing duplex with two closely spaced houses, each with its own street-façade garage and front-yard driveway facing Vilas Avenue. *This does not preserve the traditional neighborhood character*. Far from it.

Of great concern is the fact that proposed plans show that *the garages and driveways will be very prominent features of the proposed front façades* (representing roughly half of the

combined façades' widths). No other home in the 1000 block of Vilas Avenue has a garage on the front façade -- a feature typical of a spacious new suburban development that is out of keeping with our traditional downtown neighborhood. We can safely assume that cars would also be routinely parked in the front driveways, effectively turning much of what is now a front lawn into a paved parking area.

The four tightly packed buildings (2 recently developed, and 2 more now proposed) will collectively eliminate a very large amount of green space. On the two recently-developed Mills Street lots, gravel and concrete have entirely replaced grass lawn; and the building and porch setbacks, although apparently in compliance with zoning requirements, are inconsistent with other buildings on the block. It is difficult for us to ascertain where the front of the proposed new buildings will be located when compared to the other homes in the 1000 block of Vilas Avenue, even though they apparently meet the zoning requirements for a 15-foot front setback. Our concern is that the new structures will be closer to the sidewalk than the other houses and that this, along with the proposed street-facing garages and driveways, will substantially alter the traditional block face.

Per the Planning Division's staff report, the proposed new residence on Lot 2 features *a double-wide garage on the front façade that exceeds the maximum garage width recommended by neighborhood plan guidelines, and fails to meet even the modest garage setback requirement under the zoning code.* The setback has been flagged for correction while the issue of the garage width has not. Regardless of the significant problems with setback and garage width, *the proposed double-wide front-façade garage and associated double-wide driveway are wholly out of keeping with the traditional character of our neighborhood.* Driveways will apparently consume half of the front yards of the proposed new residences, replacing grass with concrete and parked cars. We urge the Planning Commission to disallow both—the front-façade garages and associated driveways.

Additionally, the west-facing side of the building proposed for Lot 1 will be visible from South Mills Street and will not enhance that street. The west elevation labeled as "Ultimate Kavanaugh 1029" shows an oddly arranged set of windows and a door with no symmetry or apparent rhyme or reason.

Also, the proposed new structures are located directly across the street from a state-designated historic residence. Its owners (our next-door neighbors) have spent considerable time and resources restoring and improving that residence in a manner that is sensitive to the neighborhood and its history. We fear that this new demolition and development proposal does not reflect a similar sensitivity, and will set a very destructive precedent.

Finally, if allowed to proceed as planned, the new homeowners will back out their cars *immediately adjacent* to the busy residential corner of Vilas and Mills Streets (where traffic accidents are common), and will be directly exposed to cars turning off of South Mills Street. Some on-street parking, currently in high demand, will be permanently eliminated.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jim Matson and Beth Robinson, 1022 Vilas Ave., Madison

Cc: Ledell Zellers, City Plan Commission Chair
Heather Stouder, City Planning Department

28.041 - TRADITIONAL RESIDENTIAL - CONSISTENT DISTRICTS.

(1) Statement of Purpose. The TR-C Districts are established to stabilize, protect and encourage throughout the City the essential characteristics of the residential areas typically located on the Isthmus, near East and near West portions of the City, and to promote and encourage a suitable environment for family life while accommodating a full range of life-cycle housing. The districts are also intended to:

(a) Promote the preservation, development and redevelopment of traditional residential neighborhoods in a manner consistent with their distinct form and residential character.

(b) Ensure that new buildings and additions to existing buildings are designed with sensitivity to their context in terms of building placement, facade width, height and proportions, garage and driveway placement, landscaping, and similar design features.

(c) Maintain and improve the viability of existing housing of all types, while providing for updating of older housing in a context-sensitive manner.

(d) Maintain or increase compatibility between residential and other allowed uses, and between different housing types, where permitted, by maintaining consistent building orientation and parking placement and screening.

(e) Facilitate the preservation, development or redevelopment goals of the comprehensive plan and of adopted neighborhood, corridor or special area plans.