

TO: City of Madison Plan Commission

FROM: Susan Millar, 2233 Rowley Ave., Madison

SUBJECT: Item 59635: UrbanWorks proposal for properties located at 8110-8134 Mid Town Road and 1833-1859 Waldorf Blvd

DATE May 18, 2020

This comment on Item 59635 has two parts. Part One considers the larger context of this applicant's proposal. Part Two addresses some of the details of their proposal.

Part One. A bunch of dense-occupant apartment buildings served by cars

This applicant proposes more of the same type of housing already in the area, which is a bunch of dense-occupant apartment buildings served by cars. That said, their proposal appears to be of less high quality than many of the other apartment buildings in the area. For example, the 4-story apartment buildings adjacent to their proposed Building A have solar panels on their roofs, and many of the apartment buildings in the area are less tall, more distinctive in character, and appear to be very sturdily built.

I now consider the matter of shared outside space in this housing area. There is just enough of it to enable apartment dwellers to get from their apartments to parking spaces outside. While this design helps increase occupant density/acre, it is not consistent with the City's plans for Neighborhood Mixed Use areas; "walkability" requires shared outside common spaces like playgrounds and parks that people want to use and that are within an easy walk.

Touring this area on May 16, a warm Saturday morning, I saw only one playground within a mile of the proposed site, and no parks. I noticed empty bike racks outside existing apartment buildings. That the racks were empty did not surprise me, given that there are no bike paths, and only narrow bike lanes on some of the 40 to 50 mph roads serve this area. Few businesses are seen – I only noticed a kids learning center. A quick online search makes clear that the best way to get by bus from 8110 Mid-Town to a grocery store (fastest by bus is the HyVee on Whitney Way) takes 40 minutes, including a 22-min walk, and costs \$2. Each way. This entire area is explicitly designed to require a car to get anywhere, even to playgrounds or other types of substantial green space. This is a "single-use" housing area - a bunch of dense-occupant apartment buildings served by cars. It is not a "mixed-use neighborhood." It appears that the City's efforts to establish a Neighborhood Mixed Use development in this area have not yet succeeded. This applicant's proposal further entrenches the "bunch of dense-occupant apartment buildings served by cars" character of this area.

So here is a question that is quite independent of this particular proposal: How and when will we, the citizens of Madison, act to stop further entrenchment of this kind of housing, and instead:

- (1) insist that developers provide plans that meet or exceed the City's criteria for mixed use neighborhoods, for real neighborhoods where neighbors see each other interact while enjoying walkable commercial resources, and
- (2) reward developers who design with low green-house gas (GHG) emissions features that go beyond the state standards, thereby enabling renters to walk, bike, and use mass transit to get to everyday services, and to use renewable energy and pay significantly lower energy bills over time?

These opportunities are not only good for renters' immediate health, social well-being, and energy bills, but also good for their--and their children's--longer-term well-being because they help reduce, rather than continue to increase GHG emissions. In other words, when will the Commission stop approving apartment buildings that are designed for "yesterday"?

It is for these more overarching reasons that I strongly encourage the Plan Commissioners to file this proposal, and actively seek a developer whose plan not only achieves #1 (above), but also moves toward achieving #2. To enable this shift, I ask the Plan Commission to begin now to use standards for new housing that are explicitly and actionably align with goals for radically reducing GHG emissions that are stated in the City's *Sustainability Plan*.

Part Two. A surprising, below minimum standards, applicant

It is not surprising that the applicant, UrbanWorks, has proposed to add yet another set of "dense-occupant apartments served by cars" to the Mid-Town apartment complex. They propose an apartment complex quite similar to those already there, and expect approval.

What is surprising is how UrbanWorks changes their plans. In 2007, they proposed 70,000 - 100,000 square feet of commercial space for this site. Prior to a neighborhood meeting on 5/19/2020, they reduced the retail space to 4,000 square feet. Then, their 04/13/2020 proposal to the Plan Commission reduced the retail space to zero. In response to the Plan Commission's specific request that they provide retail space, their 5/19/2020 addendum to the PC states that they have "added roughly 4,000 square-feet of retail space." More correctly, the applicant **reinstated** the limited retail space that was in the plans reviewed at the Nov. 21, 2019 Neighborhood meeting.

Bearing in mind the Neighborhood Mixed Use (NMU) standards designated for developments in this area, this reinstated 4,000 sq. ft. of retail space is a tiny step in the right direction. An NMU has "walkability" to retail, restaurants and other services--access to amenities and services within a neighborhood. What we have here is a situation where renters will need to drive to all commercial services that are not provided in those 4,000 sq. ft. As Alder Harrington-McKinney points out in her 04/27/2020 comments,

"The 2018 Comprehensive Plan recommends Neighborhood Mixed Use development for the site which runs along the eastern side of Waldorf: retail, restaurant, services, walkability, access to amenities and services within the neighborhood. The nearest commercial services are miles away and accessible only by car. Currently there is no public transportation scheduled for the area."

What is surprising is that during their April 13 presentation to the Plan Commission, the developers stated that the people who attended this Nov. 21, 2019 neighborhood meeting to provide feedback on this proposal said they did not actually want the proposed commercial space. Yet, Alder Harrington-McKinney stated, during that same meeting and in her April 27 comment, that the people attending this neighborhood meeting,

“...were very clear in their desire to have some commercial space in the design. The recommendation of neighborhood-oriented commercial uses is critically important to this prime area of development, as the nearest commercial sites are more than 1 ½ miles away. They discussed the empty commercial strip current facing Mid-Town [and] said that they do want the proposed commercial space.”

It also is surprising that the applicant did not inform the Alder, and thus the neighborhood, of their plans to remove all commercial space for the April 13 submission, essentially cutting off opportunity for public comment by the neighbors.

What is surprising is that the applicant emphasizes that the Urban Design Commission recently approved their proposal, but with several requests for improved landscaping, but that the landscaping improvement offered by the applicant consists of lowering the height of a raised planter.

What is surprising is that the applicant, in their 5/19/2020 addendum to the Plan Commission, offers an “amenity” - the addition of a bike café consisting of 1,250 sq. ft. of space. This last-minute addition is window dressing; one look at the lack of bike paths or safe bike lanes in the area makes clear that this bike café “amenity” will not alter potential renters’ almost 100% dependence on cars for transportation.

Then there is the total, and unfortunately not surprising, absence of information about how these apartment buildings will be any more environmentally sustainable than the standard stuff built 40 years ago. There is no mention of solar panels on the roof, all-electric building, provision of EV charging stations, use of heat pumps. Just nothing. Also, there is no mention, at least in my reading, that their proposal provides affordable housing units.

Taken together, this developer asks the Plan Commission to approve a proposal that does not meet expectations for a “Neighborhood Mixed Use” development, and that does not even mention 21st century environmentally sustainable standards. It is for the reasons stated in this second part of my comment that I strongly encourage the Plan Commissioners to file this proposal.

From: Ann Smiley <salutsmiley@gmail.com>

Sent: Sunday, May 17, 2020 6:04 PM

To: Planning <planning@cityofmadison.com>

Cc: Nancy Vedder-Shults <nancyv-s@tds.net>; Pat Anderson <pata4729@gmail.com>; Susan Millar <sbmillar@gmail.com>

Subject: Apartment complex planned for Midtown Road

Please consider more than mere window dressing. There is a perceived lack of Interest in the Public Good. No attention has been paid to sustainable building design & construction.

Nor is there planned use of renewable energy for renters.

- Ann Smiley

(a Dane County resident , neighbor and consumer)

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Ann Smiley

TO: City of Madison Plan Commission

FROM: Pat Anderson, 4729 LaFayette Drive, Madison

SUBJECT: Item 59635: UrbanWorks proposal for properties located at 8110-8134 MidTown Road and 1833-1859 Waldorf Blvd

DATE: May 18, 2020

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing in hardy support of the comments submitted by Susan Millar. The concept that this apartment development is a Neighborhood Mixed Use (NMU) area is a gross misnomer. In fact the original plan was not a NMU and has become even less so with modifications over time to reduce commercial space, provide no affordable housing units, no creation of or nor connection to walkable or bike paths, etc. These factors require that the occupants will need to use cars to function within these apartments thereby emitting destructive green house gases (GHG) over time. This is inconsistent with the Plan Commission's goal to use standards that radically reduce GHG as listed in Madison's Sustainability Plan. Further, there are no provisions for GHG reduction via solar panels, EV charging stations, etc. Hence the buildings will continue to have deleterious environmental impacts for the life of these buildings.

I concur with Susan in strongly encouraging the Plan Commissioners to seek a developer that meets the City's Sustainability Plan criteria. This would increase the health and well-being of the occupants for generations as well as for the environment for decades to come.

Sincerely, Pat Anderson

From: Nancy Vedder-Shults <nancyv-s@tds.net>
Sent: Monday, May 18, 2020 12:15 PM
To: Planning <planning@cityofmadison.com>
Subject: Midtown Road development

Dear members of the Plan Commission:

The apartment complex being developed on Midtown Road doesn't satisfy the sustainability needs of our time. In order to buy groceries or even a cup of coffee residents will need to drive four miles or more, releasing carbon into the atmosphere and thereby increasing global warming. Please reconsider this development.

Sincerely,
Nancy Vedder-Shults
5110 Spring Ct.
Madison, WI 53705