

Report to the UDC on the Proposal for 414 E Washington
27 May 2020

This report represents the findings of a smaller group that volunteered at the 21 May steering committee meeting to draft a report to the UDC. Drafts of this report were circulated with the steering committee several times for their review and input. The neighborhood steering committee met with the developer on 7 May and then without on 21 May to discuss issues surrounding LZ Ventures' proposed development at 414 E Washington Ave.

Many members felt that more time was needed to solicit greater neighborhood involvement, because of this proposal's coming at the start of virtual meetings. **While there was some initial positive support for the proposal, the majority of the steering committee agrees that the proposal is out of place and does not conform to the zoning for the location.** The steering committee recognizes that the Urban Design Commission is empowered to influence the design of the proposed development for 414 E Washington. We would like the commissioners to consider the following.

Comments on Building Design

Mass

Some members of the steering committee were impressed with the grandeur and size of the proposed development. Some members felt that a large development was appropriate for E Washington Ave.

However, most committee members had reservations with the mass of the proposed building. The building is far too massive and is an inappropriate scale to have any meaningful relationship with the neighborhood in which it would be built.

Relationship with the surrounding neighborhood

The proposal has too little association and interaction with street life on each block front, broad garage entrance and exit doors near houses. The building would cast an alarmingly large winter shadow to make some of the houses within blocks undesirable for living and for future house hunters who may wish to live in or renovate an old house near the square.

Of greater concern is how abrupt the proposal's height appears next to adjacent buildings in the James Madison Park neighborhood. Furthermore there is nothing in the design that reflects the mostly 19th and early 20th century historic character of the downtown James Madison Park neighborhood.

Downtown Plan

On page 41 in the Downtown Plan:

Objective 4.11 The James Madison Park neighborhood should accommodate a mix of dwelling units. . . . The renovation of existing houses coupled with selective development that generally reflects the scale and rhythm of the existing structures. . . .

Recommendation 105: Allow infill and redevelopment along Hancock, Franklin and Blair Streets generally compatible in scale and design with the predominantly "house like" neighborhood character.

Also in Appendix C of the Downtown Plan:

- Appendix C of the Downtown Plan: : " ... Where additional stories are available, it is not intended that they be earned merely by complying with standards and criteria that would be required and expected in any case, such as underlying zoning regulations, good design, or sensitivity to the adjacent historic landmark. The intent is not simply to allow a taller building, and additional stories show not be considered "by right" heights. Rather, additional stories are to be used as a tool to encourage and

rewarded buildings of truly exceptional design that respond to the specific context of their location and accomplish specific objectives defined for the area.”

The steering committee feel in general that the proposed building is not of “truly exceptional design” and the proposed development does not deserve the excess 2 stories and because of its lack of integration with the neighborhood along Hancock and Franklin Streets.

Conditional Use Standard 14

When applying the above standards to an application for height in excess of that allowed by Section 28.071(2)(a) Downtown Height Map for a development located within the Additional Height Areas identified in Section 28.071(2)(b), the Plan Commission shall consider the recommendations in adopted plans, and no application for excess height shall be granted by the Plan Commission unless it finds that all of the following conditions are present:

- a. The excess height is compatible with the existing or planned (if the recommendations in the Downtown Plan call for changes) character of the surrounding area, including but not limited to the scale, mass, rhythm, and setbacks of buildings and relationships to street frontages and public spaces.*
- b. The excess height allows for a demonstrated higher quality building than could be achieved without the additional stories.*
- c. The scale, massing and design of new buildings complement and positively contribute to the setting of any landmark buildings within or adjacent to the projects and create a pleasing visual relationship with them.*
- d. For projects proposed in priority viewsheds and other views and vistas identified on the Views and Vistas Map in the City of Madison Downtown Plan, there are no negative impacts on the viewshed as demonstrated by viewshed studies prepared by the applicant.*

The steering committee found that the excess height does not relate to the neighborhood. The proposed 10 stories step down to 6 and then 2 and 3 stories at the adjacent properties. There is great concern from the adjacent neighbors for the deep shade that the proposed development would generate. **Based on standard 14.a., a majority of the steering committee feel that the excess height must be denied.**

The steering committee’s review of standard 14.b. determines that the excess height is not required to construct a building of higher quality than could be achieved without the additional 2 stories. A design with 8 stories at the façade and 4 stories in the rear could easily be a very high quality building. Such a design would not require the excess height approval and would transition better in the James Madison Park neighborhood.

Some committee members were concerned about Standard 14.d. Ironically, the building meets the Capitol View Preservation guidelines while it would literally block the view of the Capitol from hundreds of existing homes and apartments north/northeast of the Capitol.

Historic Preservation

The Landmarks Commissions unfortunate cursory review of the buildings with too little information from the consultants, deemed that there would be the loss of the vernacular architecture that characterizes the neighborhood. It would be replaced by something entirely foreign to the context of

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the neighborhood in scale and relatability to the buildings anywhere near it. This mix of residential with a few commercial buildings evolved over a hundred and 167 years. One has to go two blocks distant to find anything of a similar scale – a single building, the recent AC Hotel near the Capitol Square.

The two most important historical vernacular buildings in the footprint of the proposed development that defined the neighborhood's character are esteemed by the neighborhood. The Frederick Scheibel House, the vermilion brick house at 402-408 East Washington housed an early commercial retailer and his family and notably is a rare building type in Madison. The Emil Frautschi house, at 410 East Washington Avenue, is a Tudor-styled Arts & Crafts residence, also a rare building type downtown.

These buildings deserve a more in-depth study to assess their true historic and architectural significance and place within downtown Madison's dwindling inventory of historic houses. Unfortunately they were passed off in a Landmarks Commission meeting with too little information, little discussion, and the weight of an expensive new building that would add to the tax base, it is built and becomes occupied.

A mitigation of the preservation of the two buildings should be a condition of the development – that they be renovated in place as part of a development, or if necessary, moved to a compatible location and renovated. In any case, a condition preventing their demolition until all financing is in place should be part of an agreement.

Other comments from the Steering Committee

some comments from Zoom chat from 21 May, some comments from review of this document.

neighbors expect a traffic study to assess current and forecasted impact of additional vehicles on the neighborhood traffic flow.

My points: 1. Save 402-08 Wash - a must;
2. loss of existing affordable housing plus the lack of affordable units in the proposal;
3. wholly out of proportion with existing residential surrounding neighborhood and it will dwarf St. John;
4. NO to the "bonus" stories to further dwarf existing surroundings;
5. Braxton Lot across the street is a surface lot that is far more appropriate for such a massive development - use a surface lot before we consider ripping up long-established existing residential neighborhoods.

- I'm pro building 8 or 10 stories along east wash. It fits in on east wash because the road is so wide/busy, and given AC hotel and festival area already have tall profiles. We are only a few blocks from the capitol and I think it's our responsibility to allow for more density given the scarcity of land and housing shortage. Its also more environmentally friendly to live denser near work and good public transit.

- I'd say, however, we are not a "rooftop pool" neighborhood. (not sure if this is UDC relevant)

parking, traffic impact. I know they have enough parking spots for the building but there will be more traffic because of restaurant / retail. I agree, That is a large concern for me, too. Especially since it reduces street parking on the block in a neighborhood already difficult to find parking in. More parking would help the commercial tenants, too. Like parking for the employees.

My employer has had to turn down potential office spaces due to lack of parking (one building had a single parking spot)

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honestly, the developers are being long winded about saying they don't care about affordability I mean seriously look at the rest of the neighborhood, you think they want a homeless shelter next to the fancy apartments? it's my belief that the whole neighborhood will be developed in the near future and they're just trying to bs their way around our concerns about that.

like I think the extra stories are out, they need to scale it back I'm in the house next door and will literally get no sunlight in my house

Overnight guests of tenants of the proposed building could take the street parking, though.

a place for potential 8 stories could be Brayton lot on other side of E Wash, which has been part of a previous plan. This is adjacent to neighborhoods, without overpowering nearby residential, historic aspects.

also, there are people on this block that are still unaware of any of this. I met a neighbor yesterday who just heard about it and has desperately and unsuccessfully trying to get in touch with someone about these meetings

When these major projects are approved during a time such as this pandemic, it really feels like the developer and powers that be are taking advantage of this time. I suggest getting press about how opposed the neighborhood is to this project. There are people citywide who are concerned about the drastic change to this neighborhood. please send info to other neighborhood associations for anyone who wants to write in support of the current residents who do not want these drastic changes.

That is actually one of the best things about this neighborhood. The diversity of people that live, work, eat, drink, contribute to the fabric of our community is one of the reasons I love living here.

1. They need to slow this proposal way way down. I'm a developer and know exactly what they are doing. They are TOTALLY taking advantage of this pandemic. The developers want to SNEAK IN under the radar while having inadequate "VIRTUAL MEETINGS" They need to wait until we can have REAL UDC and Plan commission meetings.
2. Those houses at 402 East Washington and 410 East Washington need to be saved. I remember in 1985 I tried to buy 402 East Washington Avenue. I ultimately did buy it BUT I remember the owner telling me that a past President from the early 1900's lived in the property. Very interesting stuff. They cannot demolish those buildings
3. I've been an acquaintance of the developers for many years. Their game is to build the building, fill it up and then sell it to an out of State REAL ESTATE INVESTMENT TRUST.. They never hold on to any buildings. PACKAGES THEM AND THEN FLIP THEM FOR BIG PROFIT. Examples in Madison are Grand central and a building called XO all on UW Madison Campus
THESE GUYS DO NOT GIVE A CRAP ABOUT OUR NEIGHBORHOOD. They want to walk make as much money as they can and then walk out (Sell to an Out of State REIT)

The building is not compatible with and indeed invades the surrounding neighborhood, so the "bonus" stories would make it even more incompatible.

I agree, this trend is the antithesis of what Madison has meant to me since childhood