

AGENDA # 3

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: LANDMARKS COMMISSION

PRESENTED: 6/1/20

TITLE: 817-821 Williamson St - Demolition of an existing commercial structure, construction of a new three-story mixed-use structure, and land combination in the Third Lake Ridge Hist. Dist.; 6th Ald. Dist.

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: 6/5/20

ID NUMBER: 59708

Members present were: Anna Andrzejewski, Richard Arnesen, Katie Kaliszewski, Arvina Martin, and David McLean. Excused were: Betty Banks and Maurice Taylor.

Also present: Alder Marsha Rummel, District 6

SUMMARY:

Kevin Burow, registering in support and wishing to speak
Stephen Ohlson, registering in opposition and wishing to speak
Linda Lehnertz, registering in opposition and wishing to speak
Scott Thornton, registering in support and wishing to speak
Gary Tipler, registering in opposition and wishing to speak
Rachel Bauer, registering in support and wishing to speak
Brandon Cook, registering in support and available to answer questions
John Martens, registering in opposition and available to answer questions
Eric Welch, registering in support and available to answer questions
Mary Ann McBride, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak
Ross Wuennenberg, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak
Michael Engel, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak
Helen Schneider, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak
Jack Kear, registering in support and not wishing to speak
Joy Newman, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak
Pilar Gomez-Ibanez, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak
Mary Schneider, registering in opposition and not wishing to speak

Bailey described the proposed work to demolish an existing commercial structure, resolve the underlying lot line for a land combination to create one lot, and construct a new three-story mixed-use structure. She said that the project meets the standards for demolition, and the existing structure is outside of the period of significance for Third Lake Ridge. Regarding the land combination, she explained that the new parcel size would be compatible with similar lots in the vicinity. She said that the new construction needs to be visually compatible with historic resources within 200 feet, and the standards also emphasize the street façade. She said that staff recommends approval of the demolition and land combination, and approval for the new construction could be met with the condition that the bay on the south side be stepped back approximately 8 feet to be comparable to the bay on the north side. She reiterated that the standards don't require the new

building to be identical to the historic resources, but visually compatible. She said that the applicant has submitted new renderings that show what the building would look like with staff's recommended changes.

Andrzejewski opened the public hearing.

Andrzejewski asked the applicant to respond to staff's recommendation for an 8 foot setback on the south section. Burow said that they updated the plans to make sure it would work with regard to maintaining the character and efficiency of the building and they are acceptable of the condition recommended by staff.

Ohlson said that the proposal is simply too large for this location. He said that the building mimics industrial properties in the area but the appearance is a disguise to sneak a warehouse-sized building into an area of much smaller residential properties and to place the building at the sidewalk as if it is commercial, when really it is residential. He said that approving this proposal will set off speculation down Williamson Street. He said that when Cook, the applicant, appeared before the Marquette Neighborhood Association's Preservation & Development Committee last year, he admitted that he wanted to put a five-story building on the lot. Ohlson said that the applicant's goal is not to fit in the historic district, but to extract the greatest number of rents from the property.

Lehnertz referenced the letter she submitted prior to the meeting. She said that the north side of the street was more industrial because of the railroad and the south side of the street had little merchants. She said that the proposed building is over four times larger than anything else in the visually compatible area and the height is approximately 13' higher than other buildings on the block and will be set right at the sidewalk. She said that the additional height is readily visible and the corner setbacks don't do a lot to reduce that height. In reference to the discussion of precedence of other nearby buildings, she said that 831 Williamson was built in 1965 and wouldn't be approved today and 801, now 803, Williamson is a corner property with more prominence. She said that a more appropriate comparison would be to 739 Williamson, which has a third story setback and a living wall on the elevator shaft that was required by the Landmarks Commission. She pointed out that at the time, staff was still concerned about the mass of that building. She said that by looking at these comparisons, she thinks they support the idea that the proposed building is too large.

Thornton said that he supports the development, and the meeting Ald. Rummel held last month was well attended by the neighborhood and there were positive comments toward the building. He said that he does not think it is too large. He compared it to the Nature's Bakery building in the middle of the 1000 block of Williamson, which is much taller than the surrounding houses and abuts the sidewalk, though it is not as wide as the proposed building. He said that what the applicants have done on the corner of the building and how they have treated the driveway to cut back on massing has improved the building. He said that the applicant, Cook, does good work in the neighborhood and this will also be a quality building and asset to the neighborhood for quite some time.

Tipler referenced the letter he submitted prior to the meeting. He said that he is concerned that the mass of the building is too big and while he likes the styling of the front of the building, the mass is inappropriate for the block. He agreed that the applicant, Cook, does quality work in his developments. He said that his critique is in the massive scale, which does not meet what he interprets to be the Landmarks Commission's criteria and Zoning mass based on the fact that this approval still requires conditional uses and will go before the Plan Commission. He said that he would prefer to see a smaller building, and was concerned that in this proposal, people will see a bigger building on the lot than they thought was possible and speculation will occur, which is destabilizing. He said that his concerns are stability, longevity, and good health for the residential area.

Bauer said that she is the property owner and resident of the adjacent property at 825 Williamson, and is in support of the building. She said that she is constantly flabbergasted with the mighty hurdles developers are up against, largely coming from people who have never developed property or put the money, time, and effort into owning these types of properties, which are bringing great projects to the city. She said that she is frustrated to hear some of the critiques because Madison should be competing with other great cities, yet people want to

see smaller buildings with more parking and fewer residents, which doesn't make sense. She said that Cook, the applicant, is a great developer and this is the right project for the lot which needs to be developed.

Bailey read the list of remaining public comment registrations. Andrzejewski noted that commissioners received extensive written correspondence as well.

McLean said that he had questions regarding the building's massing and siting. He said that relative to other properties on the block and across the street, the north side is more industrial and the south side seems to have more setbacks from the sidewalk to the building façade, and he asked if that was considered for this building. He said that the building at 801 Williamson looks like it is set back 1-2 feet, which relieves the tension between the residential structures and the commercial building and may help with concerns people have voiced. He said that the second floor elevation is significantly higher than the third floor elevation and roof deck, which he assumed was due to the sloping of the site and pointed out the use of retaining walls in the back. He asked if there was a possibility to shorten the first floor/lobby level, which would mean the building could go further back on the south end and lower the retaining wall. Burow said the building is set back similarly to 803 Williamson, at two feet from the sidewalk. He said that McLean is correct in that the sloping side grade is uphill toward the back of the property where there is an existing retaining wall, and they are blending the second floor level into the top of the retaining wall where grade exists. He said that it does set the second floor up approximately six feet higher than is traditional so they can have an exit door out the back onto the existing grade. He pointed out that there are also existing trees in the back that they are trying to maintain. He said that they can't push the building back any further based on the existing vegetation and creating a 20' rear yard, which they want to maintain. McLean asked if the trees will be salvageable with the retaining wall going that close to them. Burow said that they should be safe because they are currently uphill of the existing retaining wall. Given the floor structure, Arnesen asked what ceiling height they are trying to maintain for the commercial and residential space. Burow said that for the residential, they are maintaining a 9' ceiling, which is also the case for the back half of the building where the floors are stacked. He said that the commercial space on the front of the building has a 14-15' ceiling opportunity depending upon the use.

Ald. Rummel said that there was good attendance at the neighborhood meeting on April 23, and there was general appreciation for the design of the building but there were also a lot of questions on setbacks and the proximity to rear properties. She said that the Landmarks Commission received good feedback in the public comment letters that were submitted. She referenced a letter that discussed that on the south side of the street, one doesn't often see the combination of two lots. She said that once you have two lots and it gets wider, you run into a disconnect with width and the nearby façades, which she said is a legitimate concern. She said that she isn't convinced that staff's recommendation to set back the southwest bay by 8 feet really solves it. She said that she thinks it should be more even, but the middle part is still pretty wide. She referenced Lehnertz' letter, which discussed the difference between the south and north side of the street, and said that they have approached redevelopment with that information in mind, as well as that midblock infill is different than on a corner. She said that she's not sure the applicant's design is there yet. She said that she appreciates the traditional design, but being so much larger and higher is something that needs to be discussed. She said that some people mentioned a flat roof versus a gabled roof, and while she doesn't have significant concerns, that question deserves more discussion as well. She said that at this point, she thinks that the design needs more work and looks forward to the Landmarks Commission's comments.

Andrzejewski closed the public hearing.

Kaliszewski said that she agreed with Ald. Rummel that it is a nice early pass at the building design, but it is too large for the site, particularly with what is around it. She said that the applicant mentioned matching the setback of one other nearby building, which is nice, but there are many buildings in the area and it doesn't match the setback of the buildings right next to it. She said that it would be nicer to have it set back more and more stepped in the front, which she understands takes away living space and square footage, but the façade is too dominating, particularly to other buildings on that block. She said that she agreed with Tipler that it potentially opens up issues moving forward in the historic district, which already had some issues with infill.

McLean agreed and said that his first impression with the two houses flanking it is that the building is way too proud to be sited where it is. He said that he understands 801 Williamson being on the corner, but this building is flanked by buildings very different from it. He said that he isn't sure if stepping back the front, more articulation on the front, or bringing the building back would help, but it is currently way too proud for that location. He said that he would appreciate seeing another rendition that attempts to scale it back somehow. Andrzejewski asked if he was referring to 41.23(6)(a) or (b) regarding gross volume or height. McLean said both, and the mass itself brings it so close to the street. He said they did a nice job on the parking garage side by breaking the mass down and setting that back, which helped narrow some of the front façade to have less mass at the street. Looking at the perspectives, he said that between the height and mass, it looks overwhelming.

Ald. Rummel referenced the staff report and said that looking at the 200' visual compatibility area and imagining this parcel being mostly filled in, it doesn't fit the gross volume and seems way out of scale to what surrounds it. She said that she understands it's a new building and will be bigger than before, but they are taking two parcels and aside from the drive aisle and some setbacks, mostly filling in the usable space that can be built on, so she believes that both gross volume and height are concerns. Kaliszewski clarified that she was also objecting to the gross volume and height, which together are the issues she sees with the standards in what is currently being proposed.

Arnesen said that he is generally in favor of the project, and referenced the staff report that recommends approval. He said that compared to what is there now, a one-story 1960s building with a surface lot, this would be a much nicer building. He said that one can't just shrink the building by 10% because architecture doesn't work that way; instead, they would have to redesign the entire thing, though he isn't opposed to seeing if the team can come up with something less intrusive. He agreed that it is pretty prominent on the street, but it is difficult to make the kinds of changes that would satisfy some commissioners because the changes would be incremental. He asked if there was an opportunity to step back the third floor on Williamson Street because that could help. He said they would be giving up leasable square footage, but it could potentially still work.

Burow said that he appreciates the sentiment with regard to the overall layout of the building. He said they could look at stepping the third floor back, but in the front there is a studio and a one bedroom apartment, which are already small so they don't have additional square footage to allow for a stepback and there would be limited opportunities. In regard to the siting of the building, he mentioned the two foot setback of 803 Williamson and pointed out that this proposed building is not the lone anomaly in the middle of the block because just two doors down, 831 Williamson is set on the sidewalk. Arnesen asked if they would lose two units if they were to step the third floor back, and Burow said they would lose at least one and possibly both units.

Arnesen left the meeting at 5:55 pm.

McLean said that a focus on the second to third floor transition, or lack thereof, might help. He said that while it doesn't do anything to the massing, it would be nice to see something happen to it, and suggested they bring it down. He gave the example of the upper beltline running along the transom of the third floor windows and asked if it would make sense to lower it instead of pushing it up so high. He said that it could be something as simple as working with the perspectives and proportions to see if that would make it more successful. He said that coupled with staff's recommendation to step back the side, it could create an opportunity for a different detail on the second to third floor transition on the street façade.

Arnesen returned to the meeting at 5:57 pm.

Burow said that they are willing to look at other options if the commission decides they need to come back. Andrzejewski referenced the staff report, which said that the width of the proposed project is larger than the width of similar buildings in the historic district, as well as Bailey's earlier comment that the project does not have to be identical, it has to be compatible with historic resources. She mentioned the standards in 41.23(6), which discuss the rhythm of solids to voids and the distribution of elements along the façade, and asked for

additional comments. Bailey provided additional information on the building's siting, showing a 1908 Sanborn map. She pointed out that the width of the proposed parcel would be the same as the width of parcels that had historically been on this block, though on most parcels, two separate buildings were developed. Regarding setbacks, she pointed out that most residential buildings originally had porches that spanned the front and because a lot of the porches are no longer there, it gives the impression the houses are set back much further than they were originally when the porches were there. She pointed out that many buildings on the block were fairly close to the front property line.

ACTION:

A motion was made by Kaliszewski, seconded by McLean, to approve the request for the Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition and land combination. The motion passed by voice vote/other.

A motion was made by Kaliszewski, seconded by Martin, to refer the request for the Certificate of Appropriateness for new construction to a future meeting to allow the applicant to consider the commission's comments on height, volume, and the front façade design. The motion passed by the following vote:

Ayes: 4 - Arvina Martin; David W.J. McLean; Richard B. Arnesen and Katherine N. Kaliszewski

Excused: 2 - Elizabeth Banks and Maurice D. Taylor

Non-Voting: 1 - Anna Andrzejewski