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Subject: 619-21 N Lake St Steering Committee Report
Date: Wednesday, November 18, 2020 7:13:02 PM
Attachments: [619-21 N Lake St Steering Committee Report.pdf](#)

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Colin (and others, cc'd),

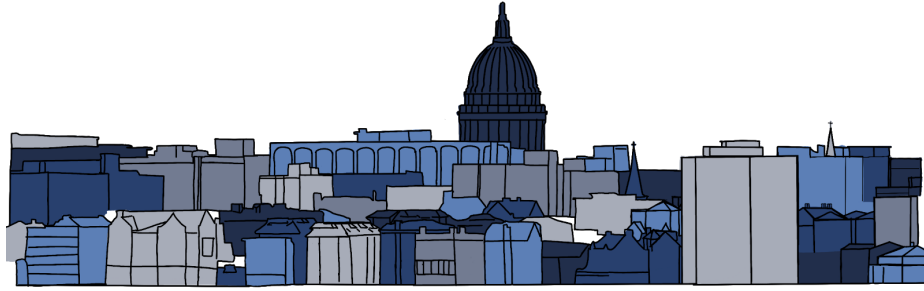
I am a senior of the UW-Madison campus, studying math and econ. I am also the President of the [Campus Area Neighborhood Association](#). Please find attached herewith the steering committee report on the proposal for 619-21 N Lake St, Alchemy Apartments.

A little bit about the outcome of our work, also found in "Steering Committee Recommendations." At the steering committee, attendees shared detailed feedback about the proposal with the architect and developer. Consequently, the significant majority of them voiced strong support for the overall project and concept. Most members also deemed the demolition of the two houses used by fraternity to be necessary and appropriate, so that the fraternity could retain its original "historic" location. A minority of them, however, shared unease with a demolition of two houses in a National Historic District due to houses' contribution to the District's architectural variety. Those attendees did provide valuable recommendations and feedback to the developer, though they eventually did not support the project being approved. Nevertheless, all attendees' opinions and considerations are articulated in the report.

May I also request if I can please be granted the opportunity to speak to this project at the beginning of the Plan Commission meeting. I have a virtual exam at 7p and would value my academic obligations first as a student. If this does not get to the agenda by 8:45p, when the exam finishes, my colleague, Eli Tsarovsky, will be available to answer questions from the Plan Commission. After that, I will too and if necessary.

In the meantime, please direct any additional questions or concerns to Eli and me.

Best,
Amol Goyal



CAMPUS AREA NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

619-21 N Lake St Steering Committee Report

Nov 18, 2020

The Campus Area Neighborhood Association respectfully submits the following report to the City of Madison Plan Commission.

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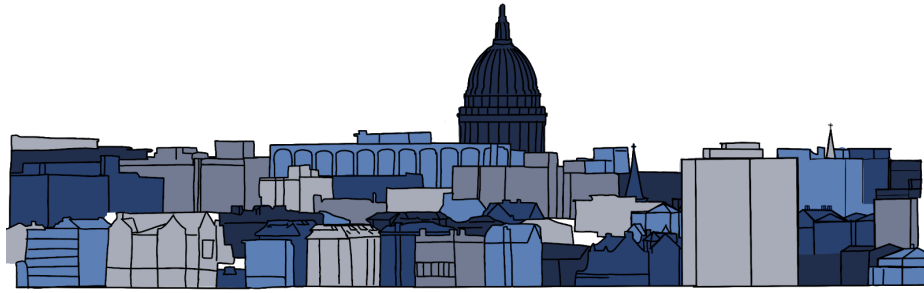
Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide a set of facts, observations, and recommendations to the City Plan Commission regarding the development proposal, Alchemy Apartments. This project, aiming for two houses to be demolished and redeveloped into an eight-story apartment complex, was submitted by Jay Sekhon, President of Alpha Corp, the building corporation of the Alpha Chi Sigma fraternity on October 7, 2020. The Project Architect is Josh Wilcox, from Gary Brink & Associates.

Background

Since the 1920s, Alpha Corp owned two houses on 619 and 621 N Lake St, to be used as a community living & programmatic space for the Alpha Chi Sigma fraternity, a professional chemistry fraternity of UW-Madison students.

At the time of submission of the proposal, Sekhon and the fraternity claimed that the houses were unsustainable and damaged. To provide safe, functional, and affordable housing for students, as well as to retain the historic location of the fraternity's living space, a mixed-use development, called Alchemy Apartments, was proposed in lieu of the two houses. This would contain community space for the fraternity and also address the need for student housing in the campus area.



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The two currently existing houses lie in a National Register Historic District, albeit not a Local Historic District of the City of Madison.

Neighborhood Association

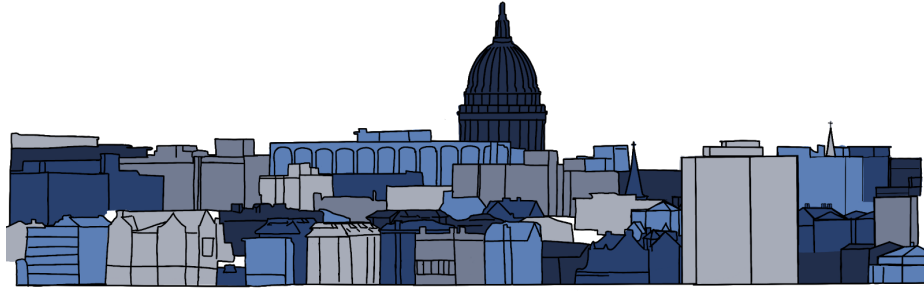
The Campus Area Neighborhood Association (CANA) is a grassroots, not-for-profit advocacy group that meets regularly to build civic engagement, community solidarity, and neighborhood advocacy for the residents of the UW-Madison campus & related areas. In connection with our locally elected Alders Heck, Verveer, and Prestigiacomio of the City of Madison, CANA is officially recognized as a Neighborhood Association. This means, from time to time, local developers and public safety officials can consult with CANA as an important entity prior to presenting their development or proposals to the City. Such a norm allows CANA to serve as a vehicle for its constituents to voice their concerns and questions on the shape, character and future of their neighborhood.

This proposal falls right within District 8 and the boundaries of the CANA. Anyone involved with both CANA's leadership and the fraternity recused themselves from the steering committee to avoid conflict of interest.

Steering Committee Overview

District 8 Alder, Max Prestigiacomio, in collaboration with President of the Campus Area Neighborhood Association, Amol Goyal, set up a Neighborhood Meeting held on Oct 26, at 5p on Zoom. This event was advertised virtually on the Alder's webpage/blog as well as in other online locations. Virtual communication was deemed as the most effective way to gather community presence, especially knowing that previous outreach efforts to send out postcards were not useful or effective in gathering resident input. There were about 38 attendees at this meeting, including various community stakeholders, students, alumni, property owners, and other residents.

The Steering Committee met four times after this, on Nov. 5th, 10th, 12th, and 16th. Amol Goyal chaired the Steering Committee. The number of attendees ranged from 8 to 15 at each meeting. There were no voting members, given the large possible range of opinions on this project. The first meeting consisted of an overview of group expectations, a summary of the project, and an examination as to whether the proposed demolition was necessary or appropriate. The second meeting concluded that discussion on demolition and then focused on the conditional use approval standards and security considerations in the proposal. The



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third meeting focused on landscaping and traffic/site usage. The fourth meeting included follow-up discussions from the previous meetings and a review of the architecture and building materials.

One attendee at the meetings argued that the membership of the Steering Committee included an overrepresentation of students already in the fraternity, Alpha Chi Sigma. On the other hand, others in the Committee argued that collegiate members of Alpha Chi Sigma make up a large part of the neighborhood. The development of Alchemy Apartments would primarily impact them, and the Steering Committee was the most tangible avenue for those attendees to give their input on the proposal.

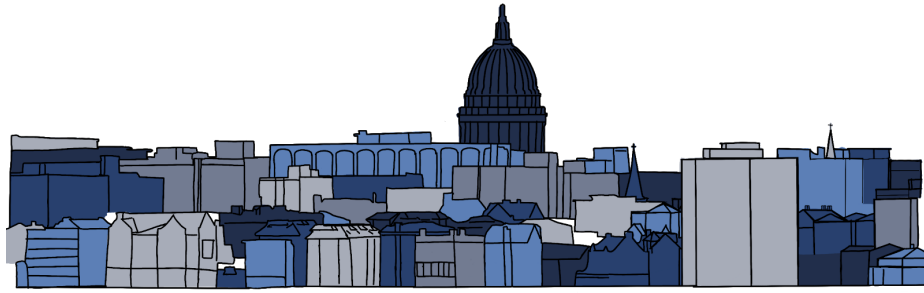
Nevertheless, all meeting agendas and minutes were widely circulated for those who could not attend meetings. Goyal also individually reached out to various fraternity houses, building corporations, and neighboring organizations and offices, who lived or held activities adjacent or close to the Alpha Chi Sigma fraternity, so that they had the opportunity to attend the meetings of the Steering Committee.

Steering Committee Recommendations

In terms of both the demolition of the houses and the concept of the proposal, a **significant majority** of the attendees voiced support, whereas a **minority** expressed serious discomfort and lack of confidence in the project.

The **demolition** was viewed as an overall necessary step toward satisfying the serious needs for affordable student housing in the area. Those who opposed it thought that it would adversely impact the wellbeing and historic character of the neighborhood and was unnecessary for the fraternity, which could instead move to a different location. A minority dissenter acknowledged that eventually these two buildings would be demolished inevitably, but that the “box modernism” style of the proposed development was inappropriate.

In terms of **height and massing**, a **minority** of the attendees felt that eight stories was far too tall and would characterize a blemish to the neighborhood; one steering committee member asserted that if the height was reduced to four storeys instead, then they would fall in favor of the project, acknowledging the importance and value of the fraternity to the community. However, the **majority** felt that in conjunction with the City of Madison downtown plan, eight stories were sufficient to improve student housing options close to campus. Everyone agreed that **sustainability** should be a priority, if the project is approved; the implementation of this (e.g. stormwater collection) would be discussed in future meetings



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and is a subject of interest to which the Neighborhood Association will hold the developers accountable.

Most members supported the building proposal, especially in terms of its traffic/site usage, building materials, and security plan. It was emphasized that certain parts retain flexibility, e.g. lighting be amped up or down depending on the time of year, usage and security needs; the elevator key fob requirement be installed if necessary; and parking be made an option if there is an expectation for that, knowing it would increase the apartment rent. It was also expected that the landscaping of plants and trees be revisited with the neighborhood association in the coming months, should the project be approved.

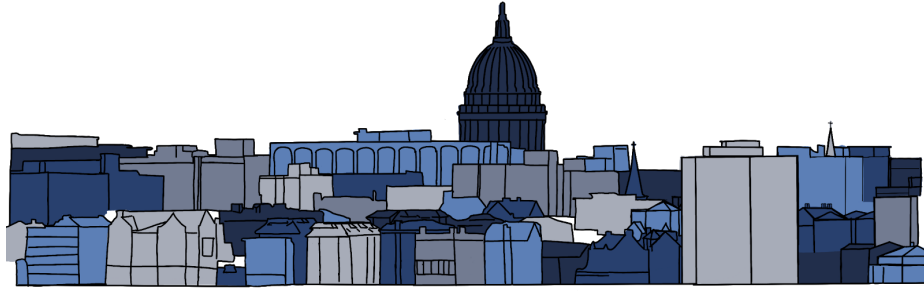
Meeting Summaries

Initial Neighborhood Meeting

Jay Sekhon, President of Alpha Corp, argued that the current housing was maintained via “sweat equity,” and that neither students of the fraternity nor the building corporation thought that the endeavor to maintain the houses as is or to rehabilitate them, would be appropriate. To create housing that would be ADA-compliant, accommodating for all genders, safe, affordable, and respectful of the Alpha Chi Sigma fraternity’s historic location in 619-21 N Lake St, Alpha Corp partnered with Patrick Properties to create the proposal, Alchemy Apartments. Josh Wilcox from Gary Brink & Associates described an elevated patio, a short-term parking stall, and indoor bike parking for the movement of crowds. The proposed building would be of the same height as 625 Mendota Court, though to this point, some attendees argued that the height was excessive and would distort the character of the area.

Fraternity students and alumni talked further about the houses being uninhabitable. They described how several pipes burst and serious investments were directed toward boiler repair annually. They shared about the necessity of their communal spaces being secure so that they were not invaded upon by partygoers and other intruders late at night. They felt that this fraternity did not have the generational wealth that was sufficient to maintain the houses, as they argued costs to do so exceeded \$1.5 million. They talked about dangerous wiring and unsafe walls. They also explained about one of the houses having a crumbling foundation and support beams that provided a temporary fix to that problem.

Attendees in opposition to the project stated that historic preservation tax credits were accessible after the landmarking of these buildings, given their location in a National Historic District. Since the property owner is a not-for-profit organization, full benefits of the tax



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credits are achieved by avoiding any capital gains tax. To this point, the property owner contended that the process of receiving tax credits was not viable for a 501(c)2 organization (Alpha Corp) nor a 501(c)3 organization (Alpha Chi Sigma) and that neither he nor his colleagues had success in terms of raising the appropriate capital for such an endeavor. More broadly, attendees not in support of the project stressed the architectural significance of the two houses. They felt that the alumni of the fraternity, as a social organization, were supposed to give back to the community in ways that they were not doing with this development.

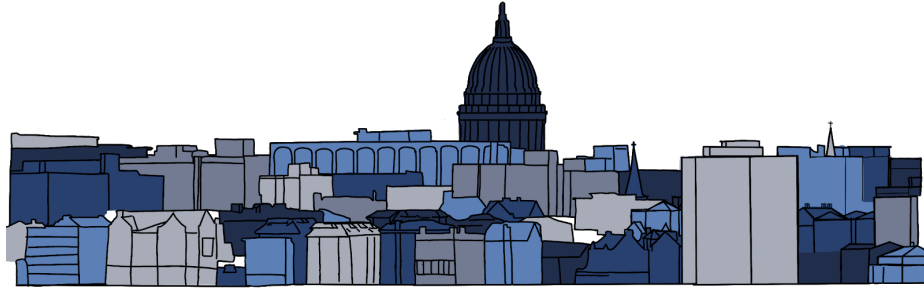
First Steering Committee Meeting (Group expectations; demolition)

Goyal commenced the meeting and shared an outline of the goals of the committee. Goyal shared his group expectations and asked members to contribute to what theirs were. These included civility, honesty, and a balanced, forward-looking perspective. An attitude of collaboration and open communication was strongly valued.

Attendees who spoke in dissent of the project described the diversity of architectural styles in the area. They explained that one of the reasons that N Lake St is important to the National Historic District is that the community lost all of the 19th-century buildings between Park St and N Lake St, over the past few decades. The buildings that are there now represent what was important in the 19th century. That may not be important for a newcomer or current student, but for alumni or people who visit the area for something like a football game, or dropping their kids off for college, they would really enjoy seeing the historic district the way they remember it, back in something like the '90s or even the '60s.

On the contrary, attendees leaning in favor of the development stated that the university already has jurisdiction over the "historic" areas that are taken away on Park and/or N Lake St. Therefore, the developers who wish to contribute toward expanding the university's mission and vision as is, should not be held liable for doing so. The fraternity alone lived in this area for over a hundred years, which is in its own way, historic. In terms of alumni relations, alumni have not been able to visit their own former homes and check-in on residents of this fraternity. They have not been able to observe and experience their former community activities. Alumni in and out of the fraternity could not be invited for events as the two houses aren't lived in any further.

Members shared about various artifacts that were of importance to the fraternity in the old houses. At their stakeholders' meeting, they reviewed things like fireplace emblems, memorabilia, and hardwood floor materials that would be integrated into the new design. For



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what it's worth, those in opposition to the project overall shared credit for the fraternity in this regard.

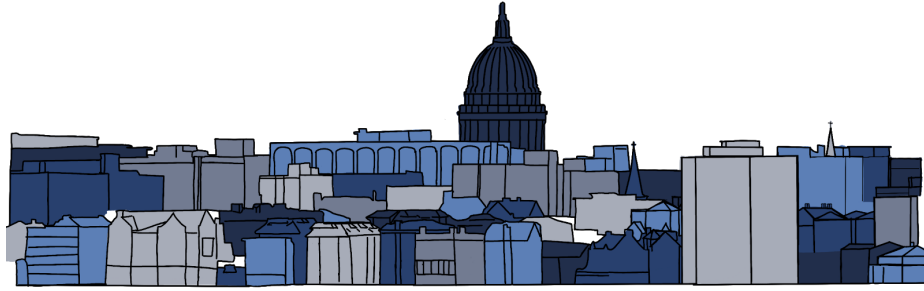
Students and alumni of the fraternity also stated that the fraternity's leadership structure included elected positions to handle the maintenance and rent collection. Members, outside of elected leaders, were required to spend specific hours maintaining the houses. With these points, the building corporation followed a co-op resident model which empowered students to take more active roles and stewardship in maintenance, while paying lower rents. Nevertheless, the building corporation did not have the financial reserves to keep up with costly repairs and took mortgages to do so in the past, one of which was used to install and maintain a fire suppression system.

Second Steering Committee Meeting (wrap up demolition considerations; conditional use standards; security plan)

Attendees in favor of the project explained disagreement with the Landmarks Commission. They talked about the Memorial Union being remodeled and renovated, as well as the alumni park adjacent to it. They stated that both of those recent, more modern, developments, maintained the traditions that they held in the past; i.e. the Memorial Union still served as the student union space that it had since 1928, and the alumni park was created to honor the university's previous traditions and celebrations. With a similar trajectory, the chapter houses would retain a great deal of what they did previously, even while modernizing. Other attendees on this line of thought argued that the whole point of the Madison General Ordinance was to not demolish in haste or spite - and that this demolition that was proposed was responsive to neither attitudes. Attendees who stood with Landmarks noted similar concerns as from previous meetings and agreed to do a virtual tour, which was conducted on Saturday, Nov 14th.

The committee reviewed the security plan as laid out by the architect from Gary Brink & Associates. There would be cameras in the interior and exterior of the building, which would far exceed what the older houses have currently; presently, there is repeated presence of unauthorized guests laying around in the houses or on the porches for rest breaks. The process for entering rooms would be put in place by giving residents key fobs; a central advantage of this would be that if a student loses it, then the lost fob can be immediately disengaged.

However, some attendees voiced concern about drunken crowds coming down the road to these houses and related buildings to and from the KK bar; they will create unnecessary



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disruptions, especially late at night. One attendee stated that when they would move between different work locations, they would run into those crowds repeatedly; this, in turn, led that individual to plan their route home and avoid encounters with unruly crowds loitering the streets. It was felt that this establishment would increase the presence of such crowds. On the other hand, it was also argued that security cameras and key fob systems would prevent drunken individuals from getting access to the building, which means they would be less likely to create disruptions in the area. It was also noted that the standard screening practice of tenants before lease-signing should be enforced. For the proponents of the building, the presence of drunken crowds would not be increased to the extent it was argued by the opposition, should the project be approved.

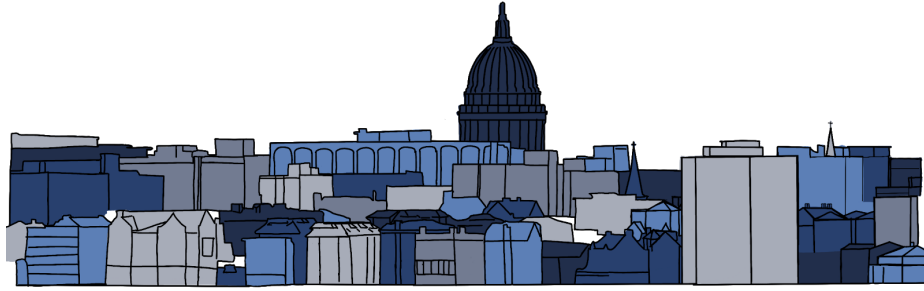
Some attendees asked about expecting tenants to scan their key fob at the elevator. Josh Wilcox from Gary Brink & Associates stated that those key fobs could be used at the elevator -- if necessary. At the moment, elevators will not be programmed in that way, as it is generally perceived as too restrictive. Similarly, lighting could also be dialed up or down, depending on the circumstances of the neighborhood during different times of the year.

Third Steering Committee Meeting (Landscaping; traffic/site usage)

Wilcox gave the committee an overview of the landscaping plan. One attendee pointed out that Pin Oaks are not appropriate for Dane County and that the other trees may be too shaded and too large for the intended location. If necessary, they also recommended an *Ostrea Virginica* rather than a *Deschampsia*.

Attendees also asked as to why trees were being planted when the space could be used for other reasons, such as parking or event space. The developer stated that if, in the future, it was felt that the landscape would be better suited for other activities, they could make it so. However at this time, the developer thought that green space would better align to city standards. Parking was also an expensive option, which would take away from the affordability of other units in the apartment complex.

Wilcox also gave the committee an overview of bike parking stalls and short term car parking. He shared the depiction as to how Amazon deliveries would be processed. A few attendees voiced concerns over N Lake St not having space to account for food deliveries and how the loading zone may not be visible. However, the developer pointed to the existing driveway adjacent to the property line, for delivery drivers. In addition to this, there was short-term parking closer right across the street from the building.



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Final Steering Committee Meeting (Follow-up considerations; Architecture and building materials; overall stances)

The architect shared that the landscapers would be amenable to the changes suggested in terms of landscaping, i.e. removing Pin Oaks and Deschampsias.

In terms of architectural and building materials, Wilcox described the use of wood, glass, brick, and metal. He explained how these things in combination would be used to emphasize security. For instance, the lobby of the building would contain glass walls where that communal space can be seen from the exterior of the building. As a location where a lot of incoming residents are in vulnerable positions to outside parties or unwelcome guests, it being visible to the general public would mean anyone in the area could call an emergency hotline or intervene as necessary. However, the glass would not be used to show bike parking, as that location would be behind closed doors for security.

Sincerely,
Amol Goyal, CANA President
Eli Tsarovsky, CANA Vice President