



Office of the Common Council

Aldersperson Julia Kerr, District 13

210 Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, Room 417

Madison, Wisconsin 53703-3345

PH 608.266.4071

FAX 608.267.8669

TTY/Textnet 866.704.2340

www.cityofmadison.com/council/district13

April 3, 2009

Chancellor Carolyn "Biddy" Martin
University of Wisconsin-Madison
161 Bascom Hall
500 Lincoln Drive
Madison, WI 53706

Re: Greenbush-Vilas Workforce Housing Initiative

Dear Chancellor Martin:

Welcome back to Madison!! I hope you are settling in and I am sorry that we have not yet had a chance to meet.

I met recently with Dawn Crim and Lori Kay of your staff and Gary Brown from Facilities Planning and they suggested I write to update you about a project that the City of Madison; UW-Madison; Greenbush and Vilas neighborhoods; and St. Mary's, UW and Meriter hospitals have been working on.

All of these entities began working together in 2006 on housing issues in these two neighborhoods. In recent years, many large-scale, student-oriented apartment buildings have come on-line in downtown Madison. That has caused many UW-Madison students to migrate from the older houses in the near-Isthmus neighborhoods like Greenbush and Vilas in favor of the newer, downtown apartment buildings. This has resulted in an escalation of vacancy rates in student housing. At the same time, the results of a jointly undertaken workforce housing survey in 2007 (see attachment A) indicates that some UW-Madison employees would like to live closer to work rather than commuting by car from out-lying areas.

The convergence of increasing vacancies in the older student housing stock combined with their often poor condition and the desire of some employees to live nearer work creates a terrific but challenging opportunity for the city. Obviously, Madison is greatly interested in encouraging employees of these institutions to live nearer work as it advances many of our environmental goals to reduce car traffic and the need for parking. We also believe that reinvesting in this older housing stock will help Madison maintain strong and vibrant near-downtown neighborhoods that are key to our excellent quality of life.

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Further, we believe that providing incentives to university employees to live closer to work will strengthen UW-Madison's ability to attract and retain key staff members. For example, if UW-Madison is competing with other institutions to hire a plant scientist, the ability to provide housing assistance could be an important factor in making the university the best employment option. As I know you know, having high-quality staff on-board is critical to ensuring that UW-Madison remains one of the country's leading universities.

Of course, we are not yet at the point of developing concrete workforce housing programs, but we have assembled a broad working group (see attachment B) and have begun to work hard on this issue. With assistance from some business school students, we have already begun some of the background research on housing trends (see attachment C). We also have raised \$36,500 from the neighborhood associations, City of Madison, and all three hospitals. Those funds are dedicated to hiring a consulting team this spring in order to continue our work on this project (see attachment D).

I hope that you will agree that continuing to collaborate on a workforce housing program is in the university's best interest, and that you will match the \$5,000 contributions made by Meriter and St. Mary's to this project from any discretionary funds that your office might have access to.

Thank you for your consideration and please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions. We look forward to continuing to work with your staff on this exciting project and are very grateful for their many contributions to date.

Sincerely yours,



Julia S. Kerr
Alder
Madison Common Council
District 13

cc: Gary Brown
Dawn Crim
Lori Kay