

SASY

Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara Neighborhood Association

Thursday, February 26, 2015

TO: The Garver Feed Mill Criteria and Evaluation Committee

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for your efforts on this important committee. The residents of the Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara (SASY) Neighborhood recognize that the preservation, redevelopment, and reuse of the historic Garver Building will have a significant impact on our neighborhood for generations to come. We appreciate the inclusion of the SASY Neighborhood's concerns in the RFP and proposal criteria. Many residents have the highest concern for the evolution of this property. Taking that concern a step further, we send this letter to communicate our history, our interest, and our deeply informed opinion about the future of the Garver property.

Of the four proposals submitted, the SASY Neighborhood Association recommends the selection of the Baum proposal. This proposal best captures the desires and support of the neighborhood. Not incidentally, this proposal best meets the neighborhood concerns and priorities included in the RFP evaluation criteria while also meeting the needs of the city. The context and rationale for our support is outlined below.

History

The Friends of Starkweather Creek (FSC) and the SASY Neighborhood Association have worked together for over a decade to facilitate research and public engagement on issues related to the Garver Building and the land north of the Garver Building, known as the North Plat. The following efforts testify to that work:

- In 2003, FSC started a 3-year public engagement process that included hundreds of residents and partnered with the UW-Madison Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies.
- In 2006, SASY hosted a day-long public workshop to "Visualize the Issues of the North Plat for the Garver RFP," the results of which were reflected in the first Garver RFP.
- After the demise of the first RFP, we lobbied for strategic capping of segments of the exposed walls and removal of the broken roofs to prevent further damage.
- During those years, the FSC and SASY also worked with Olbrich Botanical Gardens on a public education program specific to the Starkweather Watershed. The results of that program include the educational signs that now stand along the creek walk in Olbrich.

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- More recently, in 2011, SASY partnered with a landscape architecture student named Parker Jones. His year-long senior Capstone Project offered a masterplan for the entire Garver site. His work was heavily grounded in the history and values of the neighborhood.
- In 2013, the SASY Neighborhood Association helped initiate a postcard campaign to urge the city to save the Garver Building. Hundreds of cards were sent to the City by SASY residents featuring a picture of the Garver Building.

The most recent effort on this front occurred earlier this month on February 4, when SASY invited all four developers to present their proposals at a public meeting in the neighborhood. The format included brief presentations by all of the developers, followed by questions and interaction with an audience of about 50 people. While concerns varied, clear themes emerged. Neighbors expressed the strongest concern over these aspects of the proposed developments:

1. **Program** and its impacts on the neighborhood
2. **Public access** to the building(s) and site
3. **Environment** as embodied in the North Plat and land surrounding the Garver Building

Attendees were not asked to vote, but wrote comments about most/least appropriate aspects of the proposals. The Baum proposal had the greatest number of positive comments and least number of negative comments (transcript available).

We have included this record of the years of public process that has informed this letter because it is important that you understand how much work local residents have done to inform themselves because they care about this place. This letter reflects the concerns and values of the residents of the SASY Neighborhood and why these concerns should be given every consideration during your deliberations. This is the heart of the neighborhood we call home.

The SASY Neighborhood Association recommends the selection of the Baum proposal. We provide a brief discussion of that rationale below as it relates to the neighborhood values and corresponding evaluation criteria in the RFP.

Consideration of the Proposals

The SASY Neighborhood Association carefully considered all of the proposals. We quickly concluded that the Alternative Continuum of Care and Ogden proposals are seriously out of step with neighborhood priorities, as suggested by the entire history and public process mentioned above. Furthermore, the RFP lists housing as an example of an incidental use. It has no place as the primary use. We reject these proposals outright and do not discuss them further.

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There was considerably more discussion about the Baum and Alexander proposals. That discussion plays out in the sections below, clearly concluding with strong support for the Baum proposal.

Program

The importance of program correlates strongly with the *Visionary Destination* criterion of the RFP. In terms of program, the Baum proposal maintains the strongest connection to the neighborhood and its history. The plan for preservation and redevelopment of the historic building is in keeping with its agri-business history. Furthermore, the variety of programs gives visitors, including residents of the neighborhood, different levels and means of interacting with the redeveloped building and site: craft food vendors, a restaurant, micro-lodges, demonstration gardens and stewardship for the North Plat. When we talk of building a sense of place it is precisely this engagement with the public on multiple levels that would make this project a visionary destination.

In contrast, the Alexander features a mini-convention center which could just as easily be in suburbia with its nearly 400 parking spots. Alexander emphasizes destination with a strong treatment of the building, but it is not visionary for this site or this neighborhood. The proposed use foregoes any connection to the history or unique context of the site. Neighborhood participation would likely be very sporadic, and regional draws of potentially large crowds offer little value to the surrounding area. These regional draws could have negative consequences for the character and traffic safety of the surrounding area.

Public Access

The selection criteria call for a development that lays good groundwork for *Multi-Modal Access*. This is also of high concern to the neighborhood. The means of public access will heavily influence the ways in which everyone can interact with the project, not least of all the neighborhood. On this front, Baum provides the most thorough multi-modal transport; providing pedestrian pathways around and into the building and adjoining lands and neighborhoods, and even providing kayak access.

It is worth noting that Parker Jones' proposal (mentioned earlier) envisions the North Plat as the start of an east side arboretum. This green space potential extends from the North Plat nearly unbroken all the way to the freeway south of East Towne. Exploring that green stretch by kayak, bike, on foot, by ski or snowshoe, or some combination, is a pleasant surprise in our urban environment. Baum embraces this sort of multi-modal access. Alexander, in contrast, proposes a car-oriented plan more often found in suburban destinations.

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A final note regarding access, the residents of SASY understand that the owner of the Kessinich's property is open to working with whichever developer is awarded the contract. This expands the potential success of all the proposals and suggests room for partnership on vehicular access.

Environment

When the neighborhood emphasizes environmental concerns we are expressing concern about the **Context Sensitivity**, as articulated in the selection criteria. An event/convention center is unpredictable in type and frequency of events, and in attendance. Some of the potential events that Alexander has mentioned in public meetings fail the test of context sensitivity (e.g., tattoo and motorcycle conventions). In contrast, the Baum proposal incorporates a number of stable uses that respond to the history of the building, the neighborhood context, and the adjacency of the property to the North Plat and Olbrich Botanical Gardens (e.g. demonstration gardens, "How It's Made" demonstrations, and a sustainability showcase).

Perhaps the most telling environmental feature is how differently these two proposals treat the land surrounding the Garver Building. Baum proposes to begin by adding 10-15 "micro lodges" to the site as part of the sustainability showcase. This conservative beginning is scalable and could grow to as many as 50 such lodges. In stark contrast, Alexander does not include any other buildings but proposes to surround the historic building with an enormous parking lot for almost 400 cars. Baum proposes small blocks of parking dispersed comfortably around the building and across a vegetated landscape for a total of 153 cars.

The Alexander proposal raises serious concerns about the impact of that many cars, and potentially 800 -1000 users at once. Events attracting so many users will significantly increase traffic, parking, pedestrian, and bike safety issues in this residential neighborhood. Both Fair Oaks and Atwood Avenues which are already very busy thoroughfares will have to accommodate more traffic during the day. Furthermore, the Alexander proposal ignores the North Plat. They will not invest in improvements. Yet thousands of users and hundreds of parked cars month after month will certainly have an impact on the North Plat. The Alexander proposal does not acknowledge the reality of that proximity. What is not considered and addressed in the Alexander proposal is telling and disturbing.

In contrast, Baum proposes a variety of uses that transition from the historic building into the North Plat. The North Plat is preserved and enhanced in alignment with the Parker Jones Plan as a result. The FSC and SASY Neighborhood have always viewed the North Plat wild space as one that

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needs to be enhanced with a sensitive remediation and habitat restoration. This is how the neighborhood has engaged and valued the North Plat for decades. We cannot stress this concern too adamantly.

In Closing

Thank you for your hard work on developing the evaluation criteria and process for judging the Garver proposals. Your service on the Garver Building RFP Development and Proposal Review Committee has been critical to the quality of this process.

Thank you also for encouraging input from the public. When Si Widstrand (formerly #2 in the Madison City Parks Department) encouraged us to form the Friends of Starkweather Creek and Alder Judy Olson urged us to form the SASY Neighborhood Association, both of these veteran city leaders told us that our area of Madison was going to see major development activities and our voice would be needed soon. We had no idea how true this was.

This historic building and its adjoining land offer Madison a unique chance for visionary planning. We close by wishing you the best of luck in choosing the proposal which best embodies the opportunity and responsibility of the Garver Building Development.

Respectfully,



Brad Hinkfuss

Chair, SASY (Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara Neighborhood Association)

CC: Mayor Soglin, Alder Rummel