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June 2, 2014  
Ken Opin, Chair  
City of Madison Plan Commission

Dear Mr. Opin and Members of the Plan Commission,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Marquette Neighborhood Association (MNA) Board to register our opposition to the application by Marty Rifken for a Conditional Use permit for his project at 702-706 Williamson Street.

While MNA has not taken issue with demolition of the current building at 702, MNA does object to the project that is proposed to replace it. The building, as proposed, **does not conform to the goals and guideline of City zoning, does not conform to the neighborhood BUILD II plan, and does not meet community expectations.**

#### City Zoning and BUILD II:

We understand that the new City zoning code assigns the category Traditional Shopping Street (TSS) to the 702-6 Williamson site. The stated height limit for this category is 3 stories, with the provision that building height exceeding the maximum may be allowed with conditional use approval (Section 28.065). However, conditional use should consider neighborhood plans and community standards. Neighborhood meetings specific to this proposal indicate that the proposal does not meet community expectations for projects build under City zoning and BUILD II.

Although the proposed project clearly does not comply with the height limits set in BUILD II (5 stories) nor those in City zoning (3 stories), most importantly, the project is out of line with the vision and goals of both BUILD II and City zoning. The community standards for new development are addressed in BUILD II and echoed in City TSS zoning; the current proposal does not meet those standards. Principle 1 of BUILD II (page 12) is to "Preserve Transitional Neighborhood Scale" including step downs and step backs and to:

- Maintain nominally consistent heights between buildings on the north and south sides of the street.
- Step back taller buildings (and the upper stories of street-front buildings) away from the street-edge.
- Articulate the massing of larger buildings with varied roof-lines and setbacks. Maintain the rhythm of visual breaks and openings in the block face.

The vision for areas such as Willy St. (Williamson Street.) has been also articulated in City zoning as TSS districts. Those districts are intended to:

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- (a) Encourage pedestrian, bicycle and transit use as a means of accessing and moving through these corridors.
- (b) Encourage diversification of uses, including residential, commercial, and civic uses, in order to enhance the vitality and appeal of these areas.
- (c) Maintain the viability of existing residential buildings located within or adjacent to these corridors.
- (d) Encourage appropriate transitions between higher-intensity uses within TSS districts and adjacent lower-density residential districts.
- (e) Facilitate preservation, development or redevelopment consistent with the adopted goals, objectives, policies, and recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan and of adopted neighborhood, corridor or special area plans.

More generally, according to its statement of purpose, the TSS District is established to encourage and sustain the viability of Madison's mixed-use corridors, which sustain many of the City's traditional neighborhoods. It is also hard to see how the proposal conforms with the historic district. Under the guidelines for new construction in the Third Lake Ridge Historic District, the "...rhythm of solids and voids in the street facade...of any new structure shall be compatible with those...within its visually related area (Section 33.19(11)(f))." The proposed building, on the corner of Williamson and Blount streets, is two stories higher and significantly taller at 72 feet than the immediately adjacent Olds Seed Building which, at 54 feet, is the tallest building on Williamson Street. Additionally, the building on Blount Street immediately adjacent to the proposed 6-story project, the International Harvester Building (listed in the National Register of Historic Places), is only 3 stories high.

It is hard to see how this project fulfills the goals of a TSS district to: "Encourage pedestrian, bicycle and transit use as a means of accessing and moving through these corridors." (26.065 TRADITIONAL SHOPPING STREET (TSS) DISTRICT. 1(a)) or fulfills the goal of the TSS to "Maintain the viability of existing residential buildings" or to "Encourage appropriate transitions between higher-intensity uses". The TSS district is also intended to: "... (e) Facilitate preservation, development or redevelopment consistent with the adopted goals, objectives, policies, and recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan and of adopted neighborhood, corridor or special area plans." (Section 28.065)

In addition to preserving neighborhood scale, the neighborhood BUILD II plan places emphasis on preservation of neighborhood character, social diversity, pedestrian focused development and maintenance of affordable housing. There has been no articulation of how this project would meet those neighborhood goals. In brief, the project does not seem to fulfill the goals of either the neighborhood BUILD II plan or the City TSS zoning.



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Mr. Rifken has had four meetings with the neighborhood. We have asked for a reduction in height, more than token stepbacks, and other design elements to mitigate the massiveness of the building. In the meetings Mr. Rifken was encouraged to be more specific as to how affordable housing would be incorporated into his project. He and his team have followed some suggestions, but not those that would meaningfully relieve the project's massiveness nor have it been clarified as to how the project would address neighborhood affordability goals. Therefore, the MNA Board voted unanimously to oppose the current design at its meeting on April 28. However, the board did support, by vote, a similar design but of five stories, with more significant stepbacks of the 5th floor on the Blount and Williamson St. sides to reduced perceived mass and the inclusion of substantial affordable housing. Stepbacks should be more than token and should follow the guidelines on pages 12 and 32 of the BUILD II plan in order to minimize the visibility of the top floor from the street. Affordable housing should follow the guidelines articulate in Appendix B of the BUILD II plan.

The MNA Board asks that the Commission deny the request for a Conditional Use permit until the project meets more of the goals and guidelines of both the neighborhood BUILD II plan and City TSS zoning district and is more in line with community expectations and standards.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael Jacob, President, Marquette Neighborhood Association