

304 West Washington Avenue Letter of Intent

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) educational charity, intends to expand our 3,000 square foot building in downtown Madison, which we have owned since 1990. FFRF has an accepted offer to purchase the building next door at 10 North Henry, which we intend to raze and replace with a 4-story addition joined to our original building. As a nonprofit, FFRF has come up with a plan that answers our needs and future growth, without being cost-prohibitive, and which preserves a part of our downtown history.

While we've outgrown our Italianate building, it is solid and fully functional, featuring deep, tall windows providing lovely and plentiful natural lighting. It was built in 1855 with Gold Rush money by Neelie Gray and Adeline Comfort Gray. It briefly serving as a rectory for the nearby Episcopal Church. An addition by doctors in the 1940s converted the porch fronting West Washington Avenue into office space, covering the much of the building's original sandstone with stucco to match the addition. We have removed small sections of the stucco and found the stone to be in very good condition and therefore plan to remove the remaining stucco, in harmony with the mixture of sandstone mansions and Prairie-style buildings throughout Madison's historic districts.

FFRF, a national organization headquartered in Madison, has grown greatly in the last few years, from about 6,000 members in 2007 to more than 19,000 today. Our staff is growing very fast as a result. Currently our building houses 13 fulltime staff members (including 4 attorneys) plus part-time student workers, regular volunteers, and many interns. They're extremely cramped among all the boxes, books, shared offices and two of the tiniest "restrooms" imaginable. FFRF is a publisher that already rents storage space for most of our 9 published books. Our current library of more than 2,000 cataloged books is full; hundreds of cataloged books await space for shelving. The project would add a necessary 3rd floor library with additional workspace for interns atop the original building. FFRF would restore the cupola and vista that was removed in the 1940's, which will provide important natural lighting for the 900-square foot new library, a novel view of the Capitol, and additional meeting area/lunch space. The plans include an attractive meeting hall on the addition's 4th floor, so FFRF can host speakers, weddings and hold more local events — which lack of space has prevented in the past.

Our plans will not only benefit the local construction business, but enable FFRF to hire much-needed additional staff, including students and interns from the University of Wisconsin. With interns, students and volunteers we can have as many as 18 persons working in our petite building.

The four story addition will blend with our building's 1940's "Prairie" addition and showcase the original structure; in short an enhancement to downtown Madison. The landscaped courtyard along Henry Street softens the transition between architectural styles while the stucco seat/curb wall and fence connects the two prairie additions. By building along Henry Street we are not adding to the "canyon" effect on West Washington or diminishing the natural importance of the State Capitol.

Bill Montelbano is our architect. Engineering consultants and a general contractor will be selected as the project progresses.