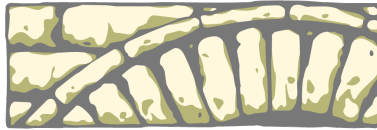


MADISON TRUST



for Historic Preservation

Advocacy News

July 2021

Development Proposal

Core Spaces plans to build “Oliv Madison,” which would consist primarily of residential space designed for UW-Madison students with 1,100 beds in a mix of apartment types. This large-scale development is slated for Block 55, the downtown Madison block that is bounded by State, West Gorham, North Broom, and West Johnson Streets. The beds themselves, not the apartments, will serve as the rental units, so each person in a unit will have their own lease. According to the developer, most of these units will be “luxury” apartments, with average monthly rent around \$1,040. To make the development more appealing to the local neighborhood groups, Core Spaces is likely to offer 10% of the beds at a reduced rate to those students who can show financial need as ascertained by University administration. The developer hopes to win approval to build two “bonus” stories in addition to the standard of eight on some of the block.

The developer has still not submitted a formal Land Use Application to city planning for the overall project, but they have taken a couple of preliminary steps that have served to identify some preservation issues (and concerns).

Facades and Madison Trust position

The Madison Trust is concerned about the loss of several of the structures in this block, representing a mix of architectural styles and periods. Three of the buildings along West Gorham and West Johnson have been the focus of much of the discussion; these buildings were originally car dealerships and represent a forgotten piece of history surrounding Madison’s early car culture.

On June 22, the Madison Trust sent a letter to Core Spaces and its partners explaining the Trust’s position regarding the three automobile showrooms at 315 W. Gorham, 317 W. Gorham, and 322 W. Johnson:

We strongly encourage the preservation of buildings that define a moment in time, especially those that complement the architectural rhythm and flow of a

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historic neighborhood. The existing buildings on the site of the proposed development help passersby visualize the richness of Madison's early automobile culture and contribute significantly to the pedestrian experience in the area. The remaining facades help to explain how and where early automobile dealerships entered Madison's commercial sphere.

The Madison Trust feels it is important to preserve this experience and we encourage your careful consideration of the adjacent contemporary facades [in the planned development] to be sympathetic to the rhythm, proportion, materials, and scale of the historic facades and to retain as much original character-defining material and detail as possible as the historic facades are reconstructed.

Landmarks Commission, Urban Design Commission and Next Steps

The developer's proposal to demolish all of the buildings within the footprint of the entire project (which would not include the locally landmarked firehouse at the corner of Broom and Johnson as well as several businesses around the Johnson and State corner of Block 55) was reviewed by the Landmarks Commission in February. This review was in order to obtain Landmarks' recommendations that will eventually be considered by the Plan Commission when that body conducts its wider-ranging review of a Land Use Application that, once filed, will cover both demolition and construction.

Landmarks' recommendation identified the three auto showroom buildings as having "historic value based on architectural significance due to their revival style commercial architecture, and historic significance due to their early automotive sales history, and their status as contributing structures in an eligible National Register Historic District." Of the three different levels of historic value that the Commission can identify, this is the highest level. In a separate motion, Landmarks also concluded "that the building at 341 State Street has historic value related to the cultural history of the LGBTQ community in Madison, but the building itself is not architecturally significant at this point in time," and identified the middle level of historic significance.

The developer also made two informational presentations to the Urban Design Commission (UDC) in February and May to obtain preliminary feedback regarding design ideas. While the February presentation merely showed building masses without any exterior design details, the May presentation showed the auto showroom facades with only modest spatial differentiation and a jarring visual distinction with the rest of the

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development. UDC members made several comments expressing doubt that the preserved facades meshed well with the overall building as proposed. [You can see the May design here](#) and reach your own conclusions. The Madison Trust became concerned that the developers might decide to entirely forego integrating the auto façades into the project.

The Madison Trust decided it was important, even before a final design has been identified, to formalize its concerns about whether the facades would be included and whether the rest of the structure will be a sympathetic complement to them. A neighborhood steering committee is currently engaged with the developer and the Madison Trust believes that an early and formal expression of our position is more likely to influence the developer's final version and city review. This background formed the basis for the Madison Trust's June 22 letter that is quoted above.

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Core Spaces hopes there will be smooth sailing for a ten-story project on the block. They are likely to submit a Land Use Application relatively soon, but it will still have to wend its way through both the Urban Design Commission and the Plan Commission before the existing buildings are removed. Undoubtedly, the application will reflect at least some modifications from the developer's May submission to the UDC.

There have already been dramatic changes to the scale and visual interest of the buildings imposed upon this very central part of Madison. This proposal suggests a prominent new physical and visual presence in our midst. What happens with Oliv Madison will set the stage for other projects to come.