



Advocacy News

September 2021

In this month's advocacy news, we'd like to explore a preservation strategy that has been getting a lot of attention lately—the prospect of relocating a noteworthy structure from its original site to a completely new physical location in order to save it from demolition. In this case, we are talking about a majestic 1911 building that had been nominated for designation as a local landmark in 2009. Now it stands in the way of a 10-story, 200-unit apartment building that has obtained Plan Commission approval, but with various conditions that have to be resolved before construction (and demolition) can begin. The proposed new address is an empty lot adjacent to 1103 Jenifer Street that is in the Third Lake Ridge Historic District. If all the necessary approvals and arrangements for the move can be made by the time the developers satisfy the conditions for the apartment project, the structural move will cover a distance of about 1.5 miles. Here's a look at what's involved and what has happened so far.

In 2008, Madison's Preservation Planner described 151 W. Wilson St. in glowing terms:

The house at 151 is a wood frame triple-decker of outstanding progressive late Queen Anne design and is quite intact on the exterior. The two story Roman Ionic columns are quite unusual and the rest of the exterior woodwork is refined and beautifully proportioned. Other distinctive elements of its style include the round-topped dormers and leaded glass transoms. It is quite probably the finest remaining example of a standard early 20th century three-flat, a building type that was used often in Madison during one of Madison's greatest boom periods.

But the property owner, Madison's Apex Property Management, opposed the landmark nomination and went so far as to remove the "quite unusual" two story Roman Ionic columns, relegating them to off-site storage and replacing them with unadorned supports. The change had the effect of undermining any historic designation effort.

Apex partnered with another developer to propose the 10-story apartment building that is now slated for 145-151 W. Wilson St. as well as parcels along South Henry Street. As noted in a May 26, 2021, [article by Dean Mosiman in the Wisconsin State Journal](#), published immediately after the Plan Commission approved the proposal,

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the developers “would be willing to allow any of the [7] structures [in the way of the project] to be moved by any interested parties.” Moving any of the structures out of the way would presumably also reduce the developers’ demolition costs.

It is Eric Welch, a local commercial painter, who has taken on the preservation mantle, because he sees value in moving the structure and remodeling it as an investment. Eric has already established himself as a friend to historic preservation as evidenced by his involvement in The Tinsmith, an adaptive reuse project that is a recipient of a 2021 Historic Preservation Award from the Madison Trust.

The proposed relocation site, just off the corner of South Ingersoll and Jenifer Street, lies within the Third Lake Ridge Historic District, which comprises an area extending from Blair Street to the Yahara River and from Williamson Street to Lake Monona. A single parcel of property at the corner contained a former church, what used to be the church parsonage, and an expanse of grass along Jenifer Street. Because the property is part of a local historic district, Madison’s Landmarks Commission had to approve adding a structure as well as any change to lot size. The owners of the parcel wanted to divide the single large lot into three lots, turning the grassy area into a lot for the triple-decker from West Wilson.

For a building to be considered for relocation to this district, certain criteria must be met so that the “new” building displays similar architectural and historical features to the structures nearby. These include gross volume; height; the ratio of solids to voids along the street view; materials, patterns, and textures used; roof design; directional expression; and landscaping. Heather Bailey, the Preservation Planner for the City of Madison, made a study of the appropriateness of moving this structure onto the lot on Jenifer Street. and recommended approval of Eric Welch’s request. In her report, she noted that the adjacent houses were built in 1908 and 1913, so the added structure would be contemporaneous. She also noted that while height and gross volume are at the threshold for the block, the other criteria are “easily met.”

[At its meeting on July 26, 2021](#), the Landmarks Commission approved both the lot division and the relocation of the three-flat to the new lot.

The two approvals from the Landmarks Commission are significant steps on the path to a structural move from West Wilson Street to Jenifer Street. But success will require two more approvals from the Plan Commission. And the clock is ticking—Welch states that his biggest problem is one of time. The developers of the West Wilson project have agreed to the relocation, but only as long as it doesn’t hold up their project.

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While he is happy to have gained the green light from the Landmarks Commission, Welch says he is running out of time to obtain the other required permissions, a process he describes as “sluggish and costly.”

Stay tuned for more information on this fascinating story as Eric Welch tries to navigate the complex permitting process within a strict timeline. It would be a great result for historic preservation if he were successful.

If you are interested in learning more about the many challenges involved in moving buildings, and the feasibility of using this as a preservation strategy, save the date for a virtual talk by Heather Bailey and Tammie DeVooght Blaney on February 9, 2022, part of the Madison Trust’s “On the Road” 2021-2022 Architectural Series.

Kurt Stege
Susie Seefelt Lesieutre