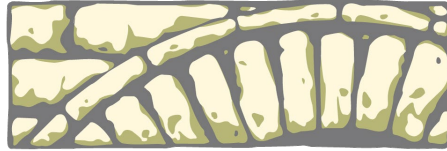


MADISON TRUST



for Historic Preservation

Advocacy News

July 2022

Plan Commission Expected to Take Up Large Project in 400 Block of State Street on July 11

and

Hill Farms Office Building Imperiled

By Kurt Stege, Advocacy Committee Co-chair



Image produced by Knothe & Bruce, Architects

A perspective of how the northern side of the 400 block of State Street would appear if the proposed redevelopment by JD McCormick Properties is approved and built.

400 State Proposal Hits Another Bump in the Road

If you have been reading the Advocacy News over the past months, you are already aware of a proposal to redevelop 428 to 444 State St. that calls for the demolition of the existing three two-story mixed-use buildings in order to build a single six-story mixed-use building. The new building would have between 23 and 26 residential units

(Continued)

and two floors of commercial space with interior bike stalls. It does not provide any car parking spaces. The Madison Trust has formally opposed both the demolition application and the design of the redevelopment.

The proposal was reviewed by the Urban Design Commission (UDC) on June 29 to determine whether the proposed new structure conformed to design standards and guidelines. The Commissioners identified several different concerns¹ after listening the applicant's presentation and hearing public comments from two members of the Trust's Advocacy Committee. Assuming that the applicant will make significant design changes, the Commission voted unanimously to recommend to the Plan Commission that the matter be referred to the UDC, again, for additional review.

The building site is bordered on one side and on the back by the Lisa Link Peace Park and the proposal faces objections from the Madison Parks Division related to 1) construction phasing and staging, and 2) the relationship of the designed building to the park once it is built.

Another headwind faced by the project is the City Preservation Planner's [report](#) about the three existing buildings. The report generated the Landmarks Commission's [finding](#) dated January 31 that each of the three existing buildings have historic value.

The project is expected to be considered by the Plan Commission at its July 11 meeting, but there could very well be a delay in that schedule, or the Plan Commission could simply return the project to the UDC without a substantive review.

Once the agenda for the Plan Commission's July 11 meeting is established, the agenda will appear [here](#) along with information about how to participate if this project is to be considered.

This is a very important redevelopment proposal in terms of the future character of State Street. It deserves your attention.

(Continued)

¹ One Commissioner's apt description: "Sore-thumbish." At least two other Commissioners referenced how the proposed design simply did not fit into the State Street context.

Hill Farms “Cheese Grater” Office Building Imperiled



Grayson Building (4414 Regent Street, at the corner with Price Place)

On May 2, the City issued an electronic notice that a demolition permit would be filed on June 13 “for Plan Commission review for a[n] office building located at 4414 Regent St . . . to be demolished.” A quick check to see a streetside view made it clear that the Grayson Building is a special structure in an area that has recently been under heavy pressure for redevelopment.

Just a week later, the Landmarks Commission considered the potential demolition and concluded the building:

has historic value based on its status as a contributing structure in the University Hill Farms National Register historic district. The district is significant for its grouping of MidCentury commercial and residential architecture, and this structure contributes to the overall character of the district. The building is a striking example of a Contemporary office building, which is a property type that is quickly disappearing.

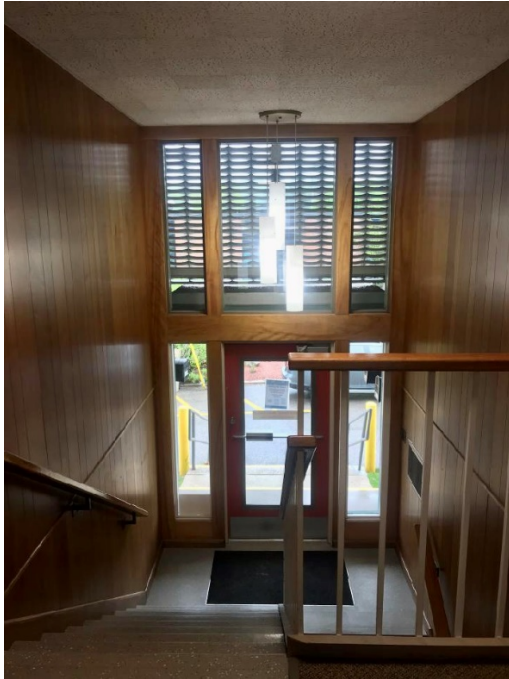
The Advocacy Committee met the next day and voted unanimously to recommend the Board oppose the demolition. The Board has now adopted that recommendation.

Despite the expectation that a formal demolition application would be filed on June 13, City Planning reports that none had been received by June 28. We also heard that the Plan Commission would take up the demolition question on July 25, but have just recently received conflicting information. At the time of this writing, there is no firm schedule known to us. We expect the building’s owner is continuing with necessary design and planning work and will file the required documents with City Planning soon so the Plan Commission can take up the proposal.

(Continued)

Meanwhile, we will be monitoring developments and reaching out to meet with interested parties.

Additional photos of the Grayson Building by Kurt Stege.



Madison Trust Board member Charlie Quagliana, AIA, kindly prepared his perspective of the Grayson Building's architectural significance. See the following document.

(Continued)

Grayson Building *June 6, 2022*

4414 Regent Street
Madison, WI

Built: 1962

Architect: Graven, Kenney & Iverson

National Register: Contributing Building within the University Hill Farms Historic District

Architectural Style: Modern

Commentary

The Grayson Building is an example of Modern suburban office building design.

The Modern Movement was an artistic and architectural movement that embodied the unique early twentieth century notion that artistic works must look forward to the future without overt references to historical precedent. (1930-1960s)

Modern design emphasized expression of functional, technical or spatial properties rather than reliance on decoration. The style was based upon new and innovative technologies of construction, particularly the use of glass and metals within a slim exterior wall construction.

Although there were many such office buildings in Madison within the Hilldale area and Marshall Court, Doctors Park in Shorewood, few remain.

The Grayson building is a long rectangular form, expressing the horizontal, with a flat roof. The exterior is based upon a modular pattern, symmetrical in design. The roof cantilevers out beyond the masonry wall façade to support a sunscreen on each of the long axis sides of the building. The end walls are essentially blank facades of yellow brick masonry.

At the first floor, the long facades feature a series of windows set side by side to form a continuous band horizontally across a façade. These are ribbon windows and many of them are operable. Below this band is a brown brick masonry wall.

The second floor long axis facades are dominated by modular aluminum expanded metal screens set out in front of the masonry wall by approximately three feet. Within the masonry wall are large operable windows. The screen allows air flow through openings while rejecting unwanted morning and afternoon sun as well as rain.

The primary entrances, located along the long axis feature a mid-level entrance, central stair, lobby and access to both first and second floor office areas. Tenant entrances for two first floor office suites are located on the north façade.

The exterior is virtually intact from original construction. The interior entrance lobby is also intact. Second floor office space is generally intact with first floor office areas generally remodeled.

Opinion

1. Technological merit

Standard structural system of the era. Perhaps innovative use of aluminum expanded metal sunscreen.

2. Aesthetic merit

Remarkably uncomplicated design, skill at composition in handling of proportion and scale. Simple details.

3. Canonic merit

Work of a relatively well know Madison architect, Paul Graven. Designed many Madison public schools and University Buildings.

4. Integrity

The original design intent is clearly apparent. No exterior material changes have been made. Some loss of interior integrity.

5. Context

The context of the property is diminished as many adjacent buildings of the era are no longer extant.

6. Significance

Local, Good example of Modern suburban office building design.

The multi block office area where the building stands was part of the original plan for the Hill Farms neighborhood.

7. Character defining features

- Low scale, rectangular and horizontal exterior design.
- Set back from the sidewalk on the two street sides by lawn and landscape. (suburban)
- Opposing facades are essentially symmetrical about the center axis of the building.
- Lack of exterior ornament, clean horizontal lines, simplicity of design, flat roof.
- Use of a minimal number of different materials on the exterior.
- Innovative use of sunscreen as a functional and major aesthetic element.
- Use of turquoise, cream and orange color scheme. (Classic 1960s colors)

Summary

The building is a good example of suburban *Modern* office building architecture of the era. It possesses a moderate degree of significance, likely local level significance. The building has been determined to be eligible for listing, as a contributing part of the University Hill Farms Historic District. It is one of the last remaining examples of its kind on the west side of Madison and is highly intact. Strong consideration should be given to its retention and possible rehabilitation.

Prepared by

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