

Dear Neighbors - As Madison grapples with population growth, mixed-use developments along major corridors have the potential to provide much needed housing and bring amenities to adjacent neighborhoods. A new 55-unit, mixed-use development with approximately 10,000 square feet of first floor retail is being proposed for [1302 S Midvale](#). According to the developer, the building is intended to function as a “gateway” to the neighborhood, anchor future development, and promote pedestrian traffic – all with a cohesive transition to the surrounding neighborhood. At first blush, this all sounds great but what does it really mean for the neighborhood?

Let’s start with the height. At seven stories, the building would tower over adjacent homes and buildings. Other developments along Midvale, including [The Manchester](#) and the [Sequoia Commons](#), are capped at 5 feet.

How about anchoring future development? While the entire area adjacent to the beltline, including the strip mall and parking lot, has long been ripe for development, there has never been a plan or an incentive offered to promote development of the entire site. This means that, rather than something akin to the Sequoia Commons redevelopment, which transformed the old Midvale Plaza strip mall, we are looking at an ad hoc approval request for a single parcel of land. How will decisions on architectural style, building elements, height, step backs, setbacks, greenspace, road access and public amenities contribute to a cohesive vision for what could quite possibly be a high-density residential area for the city? What role would the community have in contributing to this vision? How do decisions on this project impact other potential development projects on the adjacent parcels? What architectural elements, including landscape architecture, make this a “gateway” building?

A key issue is ease of access both for cars and pedestrians. Under the proposed plan, drivers must follow an awkward route through the building’s parking to go west on Hammersley, east on Nakoma, or north on Midvale. For pedestrians, we all know what it is like to try and cross the Midvale / Nakoma intersection on foot. What can be done as part of this development to increase walkability and reduce traffic congestion?



Let’s be clear. This isn’t about being against the proposed development. It’s about being for good design. How do we achieve that? Speak up! Register to attend the upcoming meetings and email your alder, [Yannette Figueroa Cole](#).

What: UDC Meeting
When: Wednesday, January 10
Send comments to UDC: urbandedesigncomments@cityofmadison.com
Register:
<https://www.cityofmadison.com/city-hall/committees/meeting-schedule/register>
Select UDC meeting from the drop-down menu. The agenda item is #12.

What: Meeting with the developer
When: January 11
Register: <https://www.cityofmadison.com/MeetingJanuary11Midvale>

Let's take a deeper dive on what can be done and why.

1. **Ask the Plan Commission and the City Council to consider the impact on surrounding neighborhoods and limit the height of the building to five stories.** The City has [standards](#) that guide the review of development proposals including height restrictions and provisions that require consideration of the impact of a proposed building on neighboring land. The City's current [zoning regulations](#) limit the height of the mixed-use buildings to five stories. However, heights above that can be approved with a conditional use approval. Section 28.183 (6) (a), which relates to conditional uses, states that the City Plan Commission shall not approve a conditional use without due consideration of the recommendations in the City of Madison Comprehensive Plan and any applicable neighborhood, neighborhood development, or special area plan. Note that the [West Area Plan](#) has yet to be approved by the City Council.

Section 28.183 (6) (2) also states that no application for conditional use shall be granted by the Plan Commission unless it finds that all of a set of predetermined conditions are met. Among these is #12, which states that "When applying the above to an application for height in excess of that allowed in the district, the Plan Commission shall consider...the impact on surrounding properties, including height, mass, orientation, shadows and view, architectural quality and amenities; the relationship of the proposed building(s) with adjoining streets, alleys and public rights of ways; and the public interest in exceeding the district height limits."

2. **Ask the Urban Design Commission to work with the developer and architects to incorporate design modifications that create a better transition to the neighborhood and create a pedestrian friendly streetscape on the ground floor that can be experience while moving 1-3 mph.** As in the case of Sequoia Commons, there are architectural elements and design strategies that would go a long way toward creating a lively edge to the building connecting it with the social fabric of the neighborhood. These include separate and distinct entrances for retail with individual storefronts and separate display windows, overhangs or awnings, variations in roof lines, and step backs at the upper floors to name a few. Landscape architecture can also play an important role. This might include a dense canopy of trees and, as a nod to the nearby UW arboretum, extensive landscaping with native plants that could be carried through to both sides of Midvale and around the highway interchange. Evergreen trees could be planted to shield a view of the parking lot from Midvale. Public spaces with benches and good lighting could also contribute to a pedestrian friendly streetscape. These and other features would help to achieve a human scale and a more compatible and effective transition to the surrounding neighborhoods.
3. **Ask the Urban Design Commission to recommend that the Plan Commission require a comprehensive plan that includes the adjacent parcels before approving application for conditional use.** A comprehensive approach that includes the adjacent parcels of land, as opposed to piecemeal approvals, could bring much desired amenities to the neighborhood. These include more retail space, public spaces, better street connectivity, improved traffic circulation for cars, and better access and linkages for bikes and pedestrians. This is an infill opportunity that helps create a more walkable neighborhood with green space and public amenities. Urbanist Fred Kent explained it well noting, "If you plan cities for cars and traffic, you get cars and traffic. If you plan for people and places, you get people and places." Are there any city programs that could be used to support this approach? Could a [Tax Incremental Financing](#) program be created that extends the work done south of the highway interchange?
4. **Ask the Plan Commission to develop a gateway concept for the Verona/Midvale interchange area.** The proposed building, located next to a highway interchange, is described as a "gateway" building. Indeed, it would be. From the south, the Verona/Midvale interchange serves as the "front door" or "gateway" to both our community and the city. Why not make that a positive and proactively design it as such. As

described in an [article](#) on gateway design, “If we think of a gateway as an entrance corridor, then gateway planning means linking the sequence of views together with common elements that give the corridor its own identity.” What are the defining elements of the Verona/Midvale exchange? How will a seven-story mixed-use building fit in with that character? Are there opportunities for the community to work together with the Plan Commission to develop and implement a gateway concept that encompasses the land adjacent to the interchange, including the proposed new development?

Key issues are summarized in the table below.

Topic	Issue / Concern	Options
<i>Integration with the surrounding neighborhood</i>		
Impact of height on surrounding neighborhoods	Current zoning allows for more than 5 stories with a conditional use approval. However, if approved, the building will tower over other buildings jeopardizing the human scale of the neighborhood.	Cap the building at 5 stories, which is what has been done for other developments along Midvale.
Appropriate transition with neighborhood	Zoning codes (CC-T) require new mixed-use developments to relate to the design of traditional buildings in scale and character with appropriate transitions.	Cap the building at five stories and consider a step back on the fourth and fifth floors and/or a variation in roof lines. Activate the ground floor streetscape to improve human scale.
<i>Public Engagement</i>		
There has been minimal public engagement to date	The Urban Design Commission (UDC) meeting is scheduled for Jan 10. The first meeting with between the community and the developer is scheduled for Jan 11.	Provide the community with an opportunity to provide input in an informed and structured manner so that the developer can respond, and the community input can be adequately reviewed by the UDC.
<i>Transportation, Access & Egress</i>		
Access and egress create transportation and safety challenges and have implications for existing businesses in the strip mall and potential future development	<p>The proposed access easement through a parking lot is circuitous and awkward putting cars, bicycles, and pedestrians at risk.</p> <p>People driving from the strip to go north on Midvale or access Nakoma Road would need to drive thru a parking lot.</p> <p>What is the impact of these access issues on the existing businesses in the strip mall? What is the impact on the potential for further development?</p>	<p>Condition use not approved until traffic circulation issues – for cars, bikes and pedestrians – are adequately addressed.</p> <p><i>Note: Current zoning allows for the building to be set back up to 100 feet from the front property line allowing for a drive aisle and parking between the building and Midvale.</i></p>
There is no bus stop structure	While there is a designated bus stop in front of the building on Midvale, there doesn't appear to be any plan for a covered structure.	Build a covered bus stop with seating so that passengers are protected from the elements.
<i>Retail, Impact on Adjacent Business and Anchor for Future Development</i>		
Good streets have an “inside-outside” quality. The proposed retail for this building is all inside. Can multiple and clear entrances for the	The zoning code requires buildings that have more than one non-residential tenant to have a minimum of one functional entrance oriented towards an abutting street. The current plan is for the building to have between one and four non-residential tenants.	What architectural items and design strategies can be used to activate the streetscape? Separate entrances for retail tenants with individual storefronts and separate display windows? Delineated entrances with overhangs or awnings? These and other architectural elements could go a long way toward creating a lively

planned first floor retail be added?		edge to the building and connect it with the social fabric of the neighborhood.
Impact on existing business	What impact will this development have on existing business in the strip mall, particularly with the access and egress issues?	Have the existing businesses in the strip mall been consulted? How do they view the proposed access? What recommendations have been offered for improvement? Do they include accessibility and linkages for pedestrians?
Building Design		
What makes this a "gateway" building	The building is described as a gateway but it isn't clear what aspect of the design makes it a gateway.	Engage the developer to better understand what makes this a "gateway" building. Engage the city to determine if a "gateway" plan can be developed for the Verona/Midvale interchange and the highway corridor as it serves as a southern gateway to the city.
Tree Canopy and Landscaping		
Enhance tree canopy and landscaping	Trees are critical components of urban ecosystems, providing habitat, reducing stormwater runoff, and shading hardscapes to minimize heat islands. They are also one of the simplest ways to improve the character of an area, as can be seen on a tree-lined street compared to one without trees.	Incorporate more trees and landscaping, including native plants (as a nod to the UW Arboretum), into the design. Use trees for screening the surface parking lot from Midvale.
Parking and Pedestrians		
How many parking spots are really needed?	The plan calls for a total of 81 parking spots, including 38 above ground parking spots	Are car sharing facilities and an electric bike station an option? Would addition of these items enable a reduction in the number of above ground parking spots?
Will this development really promote pedestrian traffic?	Pedestrians take their life in their hands when crossing this intersection.	Ask the city, developer and the architects for clarification on how this development will promote pedestrian traffic. Can a pedestrian overlay be created?
Local Case Studies		
Local Case Studies	The redevelopment of the Midvale Plaza strip mall turned approximately 3.5 acres of surface parking and single-story retail into four-story buildings with 101 apartments, 45 condominiums and about 40,000 feet of commercial space, including the Sequoia branch library.	Can a planning process be put in place that includes the adjacent strip mall and parking lot before the conditional use is approved?

A few resources:

1. Madison zoning codes: https://library.municode.com/wi/madison/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=COORMAWIVOIICH20--31_CH28ZOCOR_SUBCHAPTER_28DMIECODI
2. Article on creating gateways: <https://plannersweb.com/wp-content/uploads/1996/01/114.pdf>
3. East Town Special Area Plan: https://www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/planning/documents/Greater_East_Towne_Area_Plan.pdf
4. West Town Planning Framework: <https://www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/planning/west-area-plan/3896/>

*Laura Scandurra
Nakoma Resident
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