

# Neighborhood's Guidelines for Union Corners Design Competition

## Context

As a former industrial brownfield site located between several EastSide Madison neighborhoods, Union Corners has been the subject of special planning and design focus over the last decade. At each step of this extended planning saga, the core consensus principles that define neighbors' and the City's goals for the site have been reaffirmed.

## Consensus Principles for Union Corners

**Sources: Public input process, 2003+; the McGrath P.U.D.; the City's landbanking criteria; Friends of Union Corners process & draft community benefits agreement**

- Economically Viable
- Walkable, Bikeable
- Mix of Uses
- Good Fit with Adjacent Uses
- More than 1 story
- No parking at fronts of buildings
- Transit oriented development
- Mix of housing types
- Do Not break up site as piecemeal development
- Gateway corner at Milwaukee Street-East Wash
- Roundabout as existing to remain
- Sustainability of site, buildings and uses
- Project comes back on tax rolls
- Include community gathering place
- Provide some Green & Open Space
- Rebuild French Battery Building

**This site is unusual** for several reasons. It has:

- *Community*: energized & knowledgeable members of several neighborhoods with emotional connection to and years of sustained volunteer efforts towards improving this site;
- *Planning history*: unique masterplanning collaboration between neighbors and professional developer & designer team stretching over nearly a year. See [www.CityOfMadison.com/planning/UnionCorners/](http://www.CityOfMadison.com/planning/UnionCorners/);
- *Location*: intersection on a bend in East Washington, one that reveals to visitors an iconic view to the distant State Capitol building as they approach downtown;
- *Landbanking*: Union Corners sparked the first landbanking ordinance in the City's history;
- *Economics*: the timing of the financial downturn creates a challenging situation while affording the opportunity to explore innovative solutions.

## A Conceptual Breakthrough: Transitional Uses

The neighborhoods adjacent now understand that development at Union Corners will be evolutionary in nature. A single, massive development on the 11 acre site is unlikely in the current economic climate. Instead, neighbors envision temporary and transitional uses on the site. We want to do something creative and useful with the site -- to bring an audience and life -- while waiting for the economic conditions that would permit long-term visionary uses. And indeed not simply waiting, but in fact using carefully implemented transitional uses to encourage and support eventual high-quality permanent uses.

After all, "transitional uses" describes how cities have evolved for ages. The notion dovetails well with the goals of the CNU competition; the competition Design Approach states, in part:

*Entrants to the competition are challenged to design a flexible master plan that establishes a neighborhood center and plans for a variety of growth opportunities to occur as the site develops over time. ... Applicants should also consider how the site can organically grow over time, and plans for successional growth and adaptive building typologies should be considered.*

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We're also very much aware of the potential of this process to serve as a test-model for Madison's new landbanking ordinance. To that end, neighbors and the City have begun a process of identifying and vetting transitional uses that is rigorous and thoughtful, involves all stakeholders and addresses issues of liability, safety and contractual expectations, while not getting in the way of quality development.

## Community Input Process

When local residents and other stakeholders met recently to discuss possible temporary and transitional uses, we addressed three features of those uses. We distinguished between "stickiness," the "trajectory" of the use, and the "management" characteristics of temporary and transitional uses. Definitions of these concepts are below.

## Transitional Uses in 10 Categories

1. Art and Entertainment (e.g. outdoor performance space; ice sculpture)
2. Education (e.g. adventure playground; mini-Energy Fair)
3. Garden and Agriculture (e.g. urban agriculture; beekeeping)
4. Nature (e.g. landscape art; ecological remediation)
5. Public Space (e.g. outdoor night-time movies and storytelling; dog park)
6. Retail (e.g. CSA Cafe; farmer's market)
7. Shelter/Multi-use (e.g. multi-use temporary structure; CSA kitchen incubator)
8. Sports and Activity (e.g. many examples from lawn sports to frisbee golf)
9. Transportation (e.g. special-event rail stop; bike rental/repair hub)
10. Utility (e.g. renewable energy production; community composting)

The uses above are examples only; a detailed list of transitional uses (over 140 identified) from the community brainstorming session is available at [www.SASYNA.org](http://www.SASYNA.org). We will soon sort these into a prioritized matrix useful to designers and planners. Other materials from community input sessions are also available online; these include two slideshows (Photo Tour & Site Concepts), samples of input session worksheets, and a draft of a Community Benefits Agreement.

The community team which is leading the work on temporary and transitional uses at Union Corners believes that design elements can be created that meet **multiple stakeholder needs at once**, and thereby making them both more likely to happen and more robust in operation.

Successful master plans will **integrate high-value transitional uses, across categories** and show how these can adapt and grow organically into a lively, sustainable urban environment.

Our hope is that competition entrants will find this challenge exciting, and that they will develop design strategies that meet the needs for a **set** of temporary uses, and/or provide the infrastructure needed to support truly transitional uses.

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## Definitions

**Temporary Use:** Any use/activity on the site which is not permanent in nature.

**Transitional Use:** A non-permanent activity or land use of the site which does not conflict with, and which by its nature in fact fosters, supports or morphs into, a future permanent use. We call this a "**transitional trajectory**". May include some investment in semi-permanent or permanent improvements.

**Stickiness:** The nature of a use/activity that renders it more or less temporary, more or less likely to "stick" as a permanent use. Stickiness increases with increasing monetary investment, and also with positive public perception and attachment. For example, a straightforward rental use (say, a limited-term contract with an urban farmer) would be less "sticky" than a diffuse, community-based use (say, community gardens).

**Management:** Required coordination for non-permanent activities/uses, ongoing for as long as the site includes such activities. Could be volunteer or paid, or hybrid. Typically would include facilities coordination, marketing/outreach, scheduling, contract negotiation & administration, maintenance, security/policing, etc.

## Seven characteristics of a "viable transitional use":

- 1) **Excitement:** Activity is likely to happen because there is (or can be generated) sufficient interest/excitement and therefore money and personal energy;
- 2) **Strong Transitional Trajectory:** Use is related to a desired permanent use PLUS has a visible, plausible trajectory to that use;
- 3) **Stickiness-Trajectory Ratio:** If a use is "sticky", then it also has a strong transitional trajectory (i.e. in contrast, if something is very sticky and is not very likely to transition into a permanent-something-else, then it's not transitional, by definition. Likely it belongs instead in the list of permanent desired uses.);
- 4) **Money:** Activity can generate money for someone (including for the City) but does not generate much in the way of negative externalities (e.g. noise, excessive traffic, excessive drinking, risky or dangerous activities, etc.);
- 5) **Coexistence:** Use can reasonably co-exist in time and/or space with other uses, ideally both transitional and permanent;
- 6) **Contractable:** Use is of a nature that is amenable to contractual arrangements, as the City (the landowner) thinks of these; and
- 7) **Identity:** Activity is such a strong idea that it serves to create its own niche, serves in fact to create and enhance a unique identity for Union Corners.