

To: City of Madison Urban Design Commission
From: Union Corners Neighborhood Steering Committee
Re: Gorman Union Corners GDP
April 30, 2014

We have all been thinking and talking about Union Corners for years – almost a decade. In this most recent iteration, this group has convened to provide substantive input from the affected neighborhoods to the Gorman team. Our steering committee is made up of people from the SASY, Eken Park, Emerson East and Worthington Park neighborhoods. Some of us have been part of these conversations from the beginning; others are new to the issue. A few of us were members of the committee that chose Gorman via the City RFP process.

Our group, as a result of significant discussion and in response to the two initial proposals from Gorman (their response to the RFP and their informational submission to UDC), developed a list of priority issues for the site, and distilled out twelve bottom line issues. We shared these issues with the Gorman team in a series of meetings. Below, we present these issues and our assessment of how the latest submittal from Gorman responds to our ideas and requests.

1. Plan the site as a whole, not piecemeal - make this a real GDP.

We were concerned that, with the strong focus on the UW Clinic in phase one, the rest of the site would not get the attention it deserved, and that the rest of the GDP would be more aspirational than not. We appreciate that Gorman has separated the GDP from the first SIP, and that many of the whole site issues we raised (pedestrian connectivity, for example) have been addressed. While the real test of the GDP will come with SIP development and implementation, we feel that Gorman has responded to this concern.

2. 75% of parking should be underground or structured, the rest lining retail/residential buildings in a linear (not rectangular) manner (including on-street parking).

3. Shared, structured/underground parking in 1st phase.

4. Wrap or screen parking so it's not visible from E. Washington.

One of our primary concerns in the GDP process has been the amount, type and location of parking. Gorman's intermediate proposal presented far too much surface parking, and did not show structured parking until later phases, which caused us to worry that it would not happen. The current submission has reduced the total amount of parking, and has placed a significant amount of it underground. In addition, all parking is now masked such that it is not (entirely) visible from E. Washington and Milwaukee St. We encourage UDC to ensure that the proposed transit hub is included in phase one and is designed to be both functional (i.e. actually serves transit customers, not just as an auto ramp) and aesthetically pleasing. While some of us would still prefer less surface parking than shown in the current submission, we feel that Gorman has been largely responsive to these concerns. We encourage UDC (and Gorman, in the SIP phase) to think through the layout of all surface parking from both a pedestrian and stormwater perspective and to create parking lots that are as environmentally and pedestrian friendly as a parking lot can be.

5. Bring more height to the corner of E. Washington and Milwaukee (4-6 stories total).

6. Show a density gradient from E. Washington to the back triangle.

Throughout the history of planning for this site, a primary concern has been what goes on the "signature corner" of E. Washington and Milwaukee. When the proposal to site the UW Clinic on this corner showed it being 1-2 stories, we felt that would set the tone for the rest of the site to be no taller,

and waste this signature corner. The current submission has moved the Clinic and now shows a 4-6 story building at this corner, which we consider a very significant improvement, and a clear response by Gorman to neighborhood desires.

Another key concern has been the way that height develops over the site. We have advocated for the tallest buildings to be along E. Washington, especially at the corner of Milwaukee, and to step down towards the existing neighborhood. The current site plan is responsive to this idea and an improvement on previous plans. Our remaining concern is the one-story buildings on Milwaukee St. – we feel this area could accommodate 2-3 stories.

7. Union commons should be a pedestrian way through the entire site and the GDP should show a serious commitment to that, not just a pass through but a real place, community-centric, with amenities surrounding it.

8. GDP should lay out separation between drive aisles and pedestrian ways.

Another theme in planning for this site has been the inclusion strong pedestrian connectivity and a dedicated pedestrian way. In early plans, Gorman had shown the Union Commons as a combined auto and pedestrian way, and did not relate it to the adjacent buildings. Further, the Commons did not extend throughout the entire site. In the current submission, there is a pedestrian-only way that stretches from Winnebago St. to Milwaukee St., which is a significant and welcome improvement, and clearly responsive to our concerns. However, it is not clear if or how this space will be more than a sidewalk, and how it will relate to the buildings around it. We encourage UDC to discuss, and Gorman to include, more specifics about how this space will be active and pedestrian-friendly, if not in the GDP than in the first SIP. It is also important that this space, and all pedestrian ways, be affirmatively included in a specific phase of the SIP, and not just left to develop as auxiliary to the buildings.

9. Buildings should be street facing, especially on E. Washington.

We are very interested in development on this site being accessible and inviting to the surrounding neighborhoods. One way to do this is to have buildings that face E. Washington and Milwaukee St. The current submission indicates entrances on these streets, but we will reserve judgment on this item until we see SIP plans.

10. The site should maximize commercial/retail uses for the job possibilities – this implies density and a really strong phase 1.

It is in the best interest of the neighborhoods, and the city as a whole, for this site to support significant employment opportunities. While this is not a goal that is easy to incorporate into our land use approval process, we believe that the density and amount of commercial, especially retail, included in the site is a good step. Going forward, we hope that Gorman and their tenants will make significant efforts to hire local residents.

11. At least 75% of the residential density in the McGrath plan, which showed 450 dwelling units.

One, perhaps unexpected, theme from the neighborhoods has been the desire for significant density on the site. To that end, we hoped to see residential density that reflects the initial McGrath plan. While the GDP does not include a number of units, it does show significant opportunity for residential development.

12. Very good or better quality architecture on the corner, more than decent throughout the site.

We aspire to high quality, green buildings that can survive transitions from their planned use to second and third uses and beyond. The details of this will be revealed in the SIPs, and we look forward to discussing them.

In conclusion, we wish to make two points. First, we want to be clear that the current GDP submittal from Gorman is much more responsive to neighborhood concerns than the previous informational submittal. We thank them for the ways in which they have changed their plans to respond to our concerns, ideas, and input. Second, we recognize that there are always devils in the details, and that there are many issues that are important to us that will not be addressed until the SIP process. Because we know that Gorman intends to move forward with the phase 1 SIP very shortly, we include here some of our key concerns for the SIP process. We hope that UDC and Gorman will keep them in mind as the process moves forward. These concerns include:

- The amount of space available at the E. Washington edge for a really engaging pedestrian environment
- The design of the pedestrian way through the site: will it be shady in summer, protected from wind in winter, have places to sit, things to look at, multiple uses/activities?
- The design of the building on the corner of E. Washington and Milwaukee. This should be a signature building, and include engaging public space.
- The degree of variety in design between buildings – variety in massing, articulation, and interaction with pedestrian environment.
- The design of street edges, which need to be warm and welcoming – both the buildings and space in front of buildings.
- The quality of design of the buildings. We believe they should be high quality, green built and of good materials that will last. We encourage the consideration of a range of sustainable technologies, including but certainly not limited to green and white roofs, and the incorporation of both passive and active solar.
- The degree of sustainability of the entire site – we encourage Gorman to seek LEED ND certification for the site and LEED certification for individual buildings. We also encourage the use of district systems for energy, water, and stormwater; green infrastructure for storm water management; inclusion of bicycle- and car-sharing and the undergrounding of electric lines.
- Initial plans showed one or more community gardens on the site. We would like at least one site reserved for community gardens, and consideration of edible landscaping throughout the site.
- Inclusion of public art, including the proposed work by a Ho-Chunk artist and use of the French Battery bricks
- Inclusion of a playground and/or space designed for young people and young families.

Thank you for your service, and for taking our concerns into consideration as you evaluate and vote on this project. We are excited by the prospect of finally breaking ground on this site.

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