

Regent Neighborhood Association Meeting, March 26, 2014

Members present: Jon Miskowski, John Schlaefer, Mary Czyszczak-Lyne, LD Oakley, Mary Sarnowski, Ronnie Hess, Ron Rosner, Dan O'Callaghan, Betsy Greene, Marcia Vandercook.

Guests: Shiva Bidar-Sielaff, David Mollenhoff, Lee Mollenhoff, Gene Devitt, Professor Sam Dennis, Karin Wolf, Steve Hiniker, and 4 others.

1. **Minutes** of February 26 approved with 2 corrections. On p. 1, C-1 zoning should be CI zoning. On p. 2, a remark attributed to "Robbie" was actually made by Ronnie.

2. **Bike path gardens.** Last month the board voted to appropriate "the same amount as last year" for the garden jointly maintained by RNA and Dudgeon-Monroe. The figure mentioned was \$200, but last year's actual figure was \$350. The board approved spending \$350.

3. **Mansion Hill redevelopment on Gilman Street.** Presentation by David and Lee Mollenhoff of the Mansion Hill Neighborhood Association about the implications of a proposed development in the 100 block of Gilman Street. The Landmarks Commission voted against the proposal because it does not conform to the requirements of the landmarks ordinance in terms of compatibility with the visually related area, which is 200 feet in all directions. The 1960s Highlander Apartments and two small historic houses would be razed and three 5-story apartment buildings would be built in a brownstone style. The proposed buildings have a greater height and smaller setbacks than the surrounding buildings. Although the building does not comply with the landmarks ordinance, it does comply with zoning requirements. The developer, Steve Brown Apartments, has appealed the decision to the Common Council, which can overrule the decision of the Landmarks Commission with a 14-vote supermajority.

Apart from the specific proposal for Gilman Street, there are several issues relevant to other neighborhoods: the contrast in size between the proposed development and the rest of the historic district; allegations that the developer allowed the buildings to deteriorate over the 15-20 years he has owned them, pursuing "demolition by neglect"; and general arguments that the landmarks ordinance impedes increased density and valuable redevelopment and proposing that the law should be changed so that the council would need only a simple majority to overrule the Landmarks Commission. Mansion Hill NA has asked for and gotten the support of the other neighborhoods with historic districts, Marquette (Third Lake Ridge and Marquette Bungalows) and Capitol (First Settlement). It is asking RNA to join in supporting the importance of the ordinance, because if it is overridden for Mansion Hill, it may not be taken seriously by developers after that.

Gene Devitt, president of Mansion Hill, spoke about the number of historic buildings that would have been torn down without the ordinance but were rehabbed when demolition

permits were denied. People who buy these houses and rehab them depend on the ordinance to protect the neighborhood and their investments. The vote is coming up on April 8.

Jon thanked the Mansion Hill representatives for their presentations. He read an email from John Schlaefer that he thought laid out the issue for the RNA board: "The RNA should not take a position on Steve Brown's project per se, but I think it is important that we take a position on the integrity of the Landmarks Ordinance. I think RNA must take the position that the Council overruling a decision that was made according to official criteria established by the Landmarks Ordinance creates a very dangerous precedent that threatens all of the historic districts in the city." Jon asked the board members to go around the room and give their views.

LD supported that position, as did Ronnie. Ron and Marcia passed until they could hear other discussion. Dan disclosed that his law partner, Bill White, is representing the developer on this project. He said he thought it was best to leave this to the common council and landmarks commission and not get involved, letting the process unfold. He did not think RNA had a vested interest in this issue. Karen said that she owns four buildings on Mansion Hill. She thought that some bigger landlords treat the landmarks ordinance as a joke and do not even try to maintain their buildings, letting them get so bad that demolition is the only alternative. She thought the city should support property owners and smaller landlords and enforce the ordinance. Mary C-L said she didn't want to see people use a divide-and-conquer technique on the neighborhoods, so she supported John's position. Mary S. supported that position. Betsy supported it and thought that any letter written should point out that demolition by neglect should not be rewarded. Ron continued to abstain. Marcia supported John's position.

Shiva pointed out that in terms of setting a precedent, there has already been a council override of the landmarks ordinance with the Edgewater Hotel development. Neighbors can contact her individually with how they would like to see her vote and may contact the other alders as well. The only thing the alders will be voting on is the Gilman Street proposal and not the bigger discussion about the future of the landmarks ordinance. Marcia asked if the board could still address the bigger picture by supporting the values expressed by the ordinance and asking the council not to sanction demolition by neglect. Jon said he thought there was a consensus, so he would draft a statement and would circulate it to the board by email. If the board can agree on the statement, the executive committee can vote to approve and send it.

4. Corridor plan update. John reported that the plan passed the economic development committee this afternoon. The EDC members noted that every neighborhood wants "less" – less density, less height, less traffic. They said they would have a more general discussion of

that at another time. They made one amendment, recommending that the plan commission reconcile a contradiction between the corridor plan and the comp plan.

Jon said on Saturday, June 5 at 11:00 am, there will be a meeting to discuss the plan commission staff report, which should come out early the week of 3/31, and prepare testimony for the plan commission meeting.

5. Arts project for Walnut and Highland underpasses. Professor Sam Dennis of the UW landscape architecture program returned to present the ideas and drawings his students prepared based on their study of the underpasses and their meeting with the RNA board in January. Fifteen students mapped the area, reviewed the corridor plan and the campus master plan, inventoried existing businesses, and diagrammed transportation. They studied similar projects from around the world, including “lost urban spaces” in New York, Chicago and Detroit. Prof. Dennis will send the RNA board all drawings, diagrams and photos of their concepts so we can put on our website. He highlighted a few for the board. The concepts included translucent colored panels over lights, murals, undulating metal panels, a ribbon of green encircling the bridge, another ribbon of bronze above and underground, a mural revealed under brick, tree motifs, historical photos, and lights responsive to pedestrian movement. The designs try to make walking and biking through safer and more pleasant, but they aren’t set up for people to sit or linger under the bridge.

Karin Wolf, city arts administrator, said that the Marquette NA has installed a mural and is now building a sculpture on Willy Street. It takes years to get the permits and permission to do something on this scale, but she’s willing to work with us if we decide to do it. The big question will likely be “whose bridge is it?” Steve Hiniker said that 1000 Friends of Wisconsin is willing to provide grant-writing support. Jon thanked Professor Dennis for all the work the students had done and said the board would take this under consideration at another meeting.

6. Elected official report. Shiva reported that the 2600 block of Chamberlain petitioned for and was granted speed bumps. Traffic engineering looked at a request from members of St. Andrews church for a signal at Roby and Regent, but determined that the sight lines were poor and there was another controlled intersection a block away. They recommended more prominent sidewalks, which Shiva supports.

Shiva has talked with Reverend Alex Gee and Torry Winn of the Race to Equity Project about finding someone to facilitate a discussion session for our neighborhood. They can’t come on the date of the May RNA meeting but could work with us to pick a date in early June. First Congregational was suggested as a location. Jon said he would follow up.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00. Minutes submitted by Marcia Vandercook.