

MADISON CITY PLAN COMMISSION

Minutes

August 6, 2025

The Madison City Plan Commission held a special meeting on Monday, August 6, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. at Ivy Tech Madison Campus. The meeting was called to order by Josh Wilber, President, with the following additional Board Members present: Patrick Thevenow, Mike Armstrong, Karl Eaglin, Zac Laughlin, Joel Storm, Jerry Ralston, and Rick Farris. Van Crafton participated by video call. Also present: Nicole Schell, Director of Planning and Joe Jenner, attorney.

The meeting was convened at Ivy Tech's facility, with an emphasis on ensuring public comfort and capacity constraints acknowledged. J. Wilber outlined the meeting protocol, including public comment procedures and time limits, and emphasized respect for speakers regardless of opinions. Attendees were reminded to silence phones to avoid disruptions. The meeting concerned Resolution 2025-PC1, proposing an amendment to the Madison zoning ordinance, specifically creating a new "Riverfront District." It was clarified that the city was the requestor of this resolution, not an applicant, which is unusual for the plan commission. The resolution aimed to rezone a smaller area between St. Michael's and Jefferson on the north side of Vaughn Drive with reduced building height limits (from 45 ft to 35 ft) and fewer allowable uses. The resolution had been tabled previously and was now being taken off the table for reconsideration. Public comments would be limited to two minutes per speaker to accommodate all voices.

New/Old Business and Public Comment:

1. **Resolution 2025-PC1:** City of Madison – Application to Amend the Zoning Ordinance, Official Zoning Map, and Schedule of Uses. The applicant is requesting to create a Riverfront District (RF) within the zoning ordinance. This requires an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance, Official Zoning Map, and Schedule of Uses.

N. Schell provided a summary of the resolution and the specific changes to the zoning district, including:

- Creation of a new riverfront zoning district.
- Reduction in allowable uses and building height.
- The area affected is primarily between St. Michael's and Jefferson on Bond Drive.

J. Wilber asked for a motion to take Resolution 2025-PC1 off the table. J. Storm made the motion to take the resolution off the table – seconded by K. Eaglin – Roll Call Vote – all ayes – Final vote is nine (9) in favor and none against. Motion Carries.

After reading the resolution, J. Wilber asked for a motion on Resolution 2025-PC1. K. Eaglin made the motion approve Resolution 2025-PC1 – seconded by Z. Laughlin

J. Wilber opened the floor for public comment. The following individuals spoke during the public comment portion of the meeting: Elizabeth Chapa, Meg Perry, Anthony Kidd, Bob Vonch, Tina Stambaugh, Randy Bellamy, Dr. Richard Jones, Garrett Boyd, Valecia Crisafulli, Deanna Shelley, Bob Canida, Judy Staicer, Champ Claussen, Julie Thevenow, Karen Skillman, Mark Timmons, Tami Hagemier, Warren Auxier, Rane Wilson, Edward E Stigall Jr., Nathan Montoya, Jan Vetrhus, Shelly Murphy Smith, Robert Staicer, Chris Cody, Amy Stuart, and Peggy Vlerebome.

The majority of public comments voiced significant opposition to the proposed zoning change and development. Key concerns included:

- **Loss of Open Space and Riverfront Character:**
Residents emphasized the importance of preserving the riverfront as open, peaceful, and community-oriented space used for walking, exercising, festivals, and as a scenic gateway to Madison. They feared that a large apartment building would congest the area with cars and people, detracting from its current use and beauty.

- **Housing Location and Suitability:**
Many speakers acknowledged the need for more housing but argued that the riverfront was not the appropriate location. Suggestions included focusing development on other parts of the city such as the hilltop or redeveloping existing vacant buildings downtown rather than encroaching on open riverfront space.
- **Flooding and Infrastructure Challenges:**
Concerns were raised about flooding risk and the practicalities of living in an area prone to floods, especially regarding parking displacement during high water events and the safety of residents.
- **Historic and Aesthetic Impact:**
The proposed building was criticized for being a generic, boxy structure that lacked architectural character and did not fit Madison's historic aesthetic. Residents wanted development that respected the town's unique identity.
- **Procedural and Legal Issues:**
Several commenters questioned the legality of the process, including the city's standing as applicant, the use of a resolution instead of a formal application, and whether proper notification and public input had been conducted. There were calls for clearer rules, transparency, and even legal challenges.
- **Spot Zoning and Incremental Changes:**
Opposition included fears of "spot zoning," where small pockets of land are rezoned for specific projects without broader planning, which could lead to uncontrolled development and undermine the integrity of the riverfront district.
- **Economic and Tax Implications:**
Some residents worried that tax abatements or short-term rentals could negate the anticipated financial benefits to the city, while others questioned whether the money from outside investors would truly benefit Madison.
- **Community Ownership and Vision:**
Residents advocated for a community-driven vision for the riverfront, including ideas for recreational uses like tennis courts, pickleball, mini golf, picnic areas, and flexible festival space instead of residential buildings. There was a strong call for the city to host contests or forums to gather public input on the best use of the space.

A smaller number of participants expressed support for the zoning change and development, highlighting:

- **Economic Development and Future Growth:**
Supporters emphasized the need for revitalization and new investment in Madison's downtown and riverfront areas, citing the long period without significant new construction as a barrier to economic progress.
- **Historical Precedent:**
One speaker noted that historically, the area along Vaughn had dense development, including buildings that are no longer present, and thus the proposed project would restore a previous pattern of urban density.
- **Increased Housing Supply:**
Proponents stressed the need for more housing options to retain residents, especially younger generations who struggle to find rentals and affordable places to live downtown.
- **Local Economy Benefits:**
It was argued that new residents would support local businesses, increasing spending within Madison and helping sustain the community economically.
- **Compatibility with Historic District:**
Supporters believed that the project could be compatible with the historic district through oversight by the Historic District Board of Review (HDBR), which would ensure appropriate architectural standards.

J. Wilber noted for the record that the Plan Commission received written correspondences related to this proposal which have been received by the Plan Commission prior to the meeting. P. Thevenow added that he received two petitions which were submitted to N. Schell for the public record. Written correspondences for the records were received from: Chris Cody, Jessica Spiess, Angela Lobb, Michael & Marsha O'Dea, Link Ludington, Mayor Courtney, Ron Bateman, Don Rosenbarger, Julie Patterson (petition of 1594 signatures), Ed Stigall Jr. Deanna Shelley, Joel Ferguson, Kasie Lessley, Cathy Jackson, Colleen Johnston-Burdette, Tracy Keller Green, Sandy Palmer, and Warren Auxier.

J. Wilber asked for comments from the board. Commission members reflected on key issues which were raised by P. Thevenow:

- **Concerns About the Proposal's Specifics:**

Some members expressed reservations about the scale, height, and vagueness of the proposed zoning regulations, particularly the lack of detailed restrictions on density, parking, unit mix, amenity space, and lighting.

- **Procedural and Transparency Issues:**

Commissioners noted the rushed nature of the proposal and the lack of a comprehensive plan for the entire riverfront area, suggesting a need for a more holistic approach rather than approving a resolution tailored to a single project.

- **Preservation of Riverfront Character:**

There was consensus about the importance of maintaining Madison's riverfront identity and ensuring that any development is carefully controlled to avoid detracting from the community's cherished open spaces.

- **Floodplain and Height Calculations:**

Questions were raised about measuring building height from flood protection grade rather than actual ground level, which could effectively increase building height beyond what appears permissible.

- **Need for Clearer Standards:**

Commissioners advocated for measurable criteria for lighting, setbacks, signage, and other development aspects to provide certainty and protect adjacent property owners.

J. Wilber opened the floor to the City of Madison's representative. Mayor Bob Courtney addressed concerns by stating:

- There was no secrecy or rush in the process; multiple years of investment and planning had taken place.
- The design was still preliminary and would undergo Historic District Board review and community input.
- There was a recognized need for more housing, especially given the lack of rental options.
- The development was intended to coexist with the historic district and riverfront.
- The city plans further zoning reviews by year-end to improve overall planning.

Roll Call – R. Farris – No, J. Ralston – Yes, P. Thevenow – No, J. Wilber – Yes, M. Armstrong – No, Z. Laughlin – Yes, J. Storm – Yes, K. Eaglin – Yes, V. Crafton – Yes – Vote is six (6) in favor and three (3) against. – Motion Carries.

Resolution 2025-PC1 was approved in accordance with the motion and vote.

No further business brought before the Board.

K. Eaglin made the motion to adjourn – seconded by P. Thevenow – Unanimous Consent Vote – all ayes – Final vote is nine (9) in favor and none against.

Meeting adjourned at 7:34 p.m.

BY ORDER OF THE MADISON CITY PLAN COMMISSION

Josh Wilber, President

Nicole Schell, Secretary/Director of Planning