



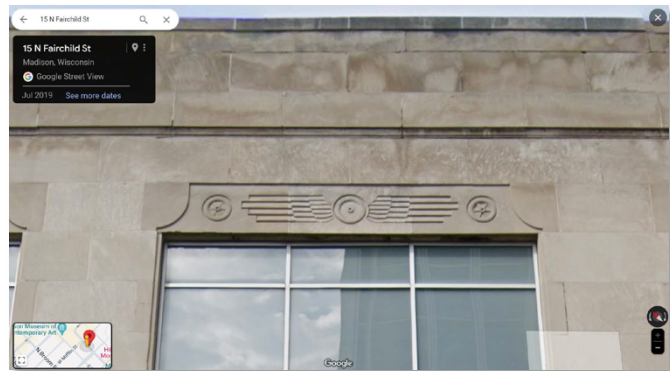
Advocacy News

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Update: Hovde Demolition Proposal in Block 75

By Advocacy Committee

Last month's Advocacy News included an [opinion piece](#) that examined the Landmark Commission's recommendation relating to the historic value of the Union Bus Station (a wing of the Wisconsin Power & Light Building) in the first block of North Fairchild Street. At that time, the Bus Station and the five segments of the Mifflin Street Arcade were proposed for demolition by their owner, Hovde Properties. Hovde tied the demolition request to the approaching construction of the Wisconsin History Center on the corner of North Carroll Street and West Mifflin Street, suggesting the demolitions were necessary for "safety" reasons. The proposed demolition of all six buildings was scheduled to be reviewed by the Plan Commission at its meeting on February 26.¹



Lintels on the Union Bus Station. Image from Google Maps.

The “Better Than It Might Have Been”: The Union Bus Station is Withdrawn from the Demolition Proposal.

On February 21, just five days before the Plan Commission meeting, Hovde narrowed the scope of their proposal to exclude the Union Bus Station. While one might hope that the February 1st opinion piece in the Advocacy News was at least

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¹ Relevant documents are found in [Legistar File # 81556](#).



The Mifflin Arcade and its terra cotta façade as it appeared in 1956. George H. Stein

part of the reason for this last-minute change, it is clear from the long-term development ideas floated for this large corner of Block 75 that Hovde has every intention of demolishing the Bus Station at some future date.

The Bad: The Mifflin Street Arcade is toast.

The Plan Commission has the authority to permit building demolitions, but it has a rigorous set of standards to apply when making its decision. There are seven distinct “Standards of Approval” in [Sec. 28.185\(9\)\(c\)](#), Madison General Ordinances (MGO), and every one of the standards must be met in order to approve demolition. “Historic value” (standard 4) as

reported by the Madison Landmarks Commission must be considered as well as “the condition” of the buildings (standard 6). The latter requirement can only be met if the fire department, police department, or building inspection files a report that one or more public health and safety concerns support demolition. The 7th and final requirement is for the Plan Commission to consider all the evidence relating to standards 1 through 6 and conclude whether the proposed demolition is consistent with the ordinance’s statement of purpose in [Sec. 28.185\(1\)](#), MGO. “and with the health, prosperity, safety, and welfare of the City of Madison.”²

The Madison Trust opposed the demolition of the Arcade and filed a letter to that effect in advance of the Plan Commission’s meeting. Opposition to demolition was further articulated in the testimony of three Madison Trust representatives as well as two other public hearing speakers.

While Hovde representatives said little that seemed to resonate with the members of the Plan Commission, the statements by representatives of the State Historical Society were better received. The Historical Society took the position that construction of the new Wisconsin History Center on the corner of North Carroll and West Mifflin, would be aided if its contractors could occupy the

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² The way the conjunction “and” is used in [Sec. 28.185\(9\)\(c\)7](#), MGO, there are actually eight standards that must be satisfied for a demolition.

private alley that grants access to the back of a Hovde-owned building facing North Carroll Street. It appears that Hovde offered to provide that access as well as an advantageous construction staging area in exchange for Historical Society support of the Mifflin Arcade demolition proposal.

Hovde's position was undermined by the firm's longstanding neglect of the Arcade and by its decades-long efforts to obliterate Arcade buildings. Hovde began its purchase of individual Arcade buildings 40 years ago and had acquired four of the five buildings by 1996. Statements made before the Plan Commission made it clear that Hovde's desire to eliminate the Arcade buildings was the determining factor in the demise of the mid-1990s effort to create a State Street National Register Historic District. Hovde later failed to gain approval to demolish Arcade buildings to create a surface parking lot. At no time has Hovde advanced a specific development proposal, other than for surface parking or construction staging. Hovde has simply allowed the buildings to languish, without tenants. Their "dark store" approach to ownership has been a head-shaking contrast to the level of activity these buildings offered the city in the 1950s.

There were a number of probing questions asked during the February 26th Plan Commission meeting by Commissioners Heck and Solheim to try to slice through the prepared comments offered by those supporting the demolitions. In addition, Alders Rummel and Verveer provided a well-defined context for the specific proposal at issue. But in the end, the Plan Commission voted four (Commissioners Field, Figueroa Cole, Duncan, Spencer) to one (Commissioner Heck) to approve demolition of the Mifflin Arcade. Demolition now appears to be imminent.



The rapid rise in the popularity of the automobile was a key cultural development in early 20th century America. The fact that autos are now ubiquitous should not blind us to tangible evidence of how commerce changed as their popularity increased. The rebuilt facades of three early automobile dealerships in Block 55 on West Gorham and West Johnson streets that are now part of the towering Oliv development can provide a hint of our cultural progression that now often places vast car dealerships surrounded by acres of asphalt closer to the edges of continuing development. Madison will lose a touchstone when our first arcade, the Mifflin Arcade, disappears from our lives as an ancestor of the shopping center.