

City OKs Capitol West development

Project to transform 4.5 acres downtown

By Lee Sensenbrenner
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A \$110 million plan to redevelop an entire block just west of the Capitol Square has won approval and financial support from the city.

Developer Randy Alexander's design will use some existing structure to build three towers and three sets of townhouses on a rectangular block bounded by West Washington Avenue, West Main, South Henry and South Broom streets. The 4.5-acre property now holds what was once the Methodist Hospital.

The Madison City Council on Tuesday unanimously backed the plan, and on a 14-6 vote approved \$4.27 million in assistance for the project, which is slated to include 400 condominiums as well as significant retail and office space.

Capitol West, as the project is called, has been discussed for more than a year and a half since it was first proposed. What remains of neighborhood concerns centered mostly on how close townhouses would come to Broom Street and whether the city should have given the project aid through tax incremental financing.

Only the setback along Broom Street is still unsettled. Alexander Co. architects are asking to build within 12 of the street, but some neighbors want 15 feet of lawn between the sidewalk and the front walls of the new buildings. The council is expected to iron out this final wrinkle in about two weeks.

With only this technicality left to overcome, proponents of the project celebrated its success, and Alexander Co. representatives said that they were very pleased with the city's actions.

Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz called Capitol West "a truly fine project" and said that if council members supported the transformation, it followed that they would also approve of the city's role in providing financial assistance.

"The project as detailed cannot happen without the financing package," Cieslewicz said.

The \$4.27 million in tax incremental financing will go partly toward razing and decontamination of the site, city staff said, and about \$1.2 million of it will support affordable housing units under Madison's inclusionary zoning ordinance.

Natalie Bock, Alexander Co. development project manager, said that the market prices for the condominiums would range from about \$160,000 to \$900,000 and that the affordable housing units would start at \$109,000 for a one-bedroom condo. A two-bedroom unit for those who qualify under the IZ ordinance would go for about \$130,000

and a three-bedroom would be priced at \$150,000. The city's one-time assistance for each of these units would average about \$67,000.

Ald. Mike Verveer, who represents the downtown district in which Capitol West will be built, said that over the last year the development has improved with neighborhood collaboration and that it could now serve as a national model for renewing a central urban block.

The design has a mix of buildings of varying heights, interior parks, garden roofs and a variety of environmentally friendly features.

"This is smart growth," said Sonya Newenhouse, president of the firm Madison Environmental Group. She said the plan made clever use of the site and should make the city proud.

"I just love the efficiency and effectiveness of this," she added.

Gene Devitt, who said he has lived in the neighborhood for decades, said he fully supported the transformation of the block.

"This is one of the best-planned projects I've ever seen," he said. "I'd like to welcome new neighbors downtown."