

GUEST COLUMN / WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL

# Mitch Henck: Not Too Late for Judge Doyle Project

October 4, 2015

It's not too late. The Madison City Council could still reconsider the Judge Doyle Project and actually begin ways to revitalize the downtown. By downtown I don't mean State Street. It's the area from the Square to Lake Monona...and going a few blocks on both sides of The Square. The way to revitalize that area is not to put in another office building. We have 22 office buildings in the area already. A 23rd and a couple of parking ramps won't do it. There is no guarantee at this point there will ever be a hotel as proposed.

Here's the deal. The Census tells us that 177,500 people work in the city. 62,000 live in Madison. Of those about 6,000 live in what is referred to as downtown. If that trend continues, about 40 of the 400 employees in the new Exact Sciences Building will live downtown. The rest will drive to work and drive home to the suburbs. Yes, the lunch hour is happening downtown but the vitality we need is missing unless more people live downtown.

The most vibrant street in the city is State Street. I see it when I drop off my daughter at the end of Frances on the way to her State Street Apartment. It's jumping with activity. Students are shopping and seeking entertainment within a short walk from their homes. It's alive all the time and there are no office buildings on State Street.

Now going back uptown the streets are dead after the dinner hour has ended. We need more housing of all income levels near retail shops, clothing stores, health clubs, food markets and salons that residents can frequent day and night. It's not enough to come downtown for Farmers Market 26 days a year or six summer concerts. If you only work downtown you will spend about ten percent of your waking hours outside your office.

The City is giving away the store on a private parking ramp for the Developer. Instead of charging the going rate of \$140.00 or more a month for a parking stall, the city is charging \$15 dollars a month. Give me a break....If the office building, hotel and parking work out the way supporters say, city taxpayers will earn less than five percent on their \$47 million dollar investment. In fact, the \$20.8 million for the private ramp is paid for with tax incremental financing or a (TIF) loan from taxpayers that will only be paid back with property tax collections after 27 years.

The \$19.2 million public portion of the ramp will be paid with profits from Parking Authority fees over several years. According to architect Kenton Peters, the city

could build a ramp over John Nolen Drive with a six acre park on top for same amount of money. That idea would give the public access to the lake unlike any park in the country. It would also be part of a vibrant strategy to bring the downtown to life. That along with a housing and retail strategy would encourage people to live in and visit a beautiful downtown that would be electric instead of a ghost town after dark.

If people live in the neighborhood they will care about making the area safe and people will come from all over the world to visit a magical city on the water. I can hear the jazz clubs and piano bars now. Come on City Council, let's do try again.