

GUEST COLUMN

Mitch Henck: Put Madison's public market Downtown by Lake Monona

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It's not too late. The Madison City Council's decision to put an indoor public market between East Washington Avenue and East Johnson Street can still be put in a place where it belongs instead.

City leaders want the \$15 million project out where people are asked to drive their cars to a regional food hub. It would feature multi-ethnic food, job training and a food lab.

It sounds appetizing, but not so far from Downtown.

Madison still has no direct access for the public to beautiful Lake Monona from Blair Street to Broom Street. My favorite Downtown architect, Kenton Peters, has a plan to build a six-acre park above a 500-car parking ramp above John Nolen Drive.

The public market including a bike center could be built as part of the same structure facing Lake Monona with direct access to the lake at the same level as the bike path along the water's edge. Peters believes the park and parking ramp could be built at no cost to the taxpayers.

He says the \$9 million park could be paid for with impact fees charged to developers. The city would borrow \$12.5 million for the ramp, but the debt service and the principal and interest on the loan would be paid back in full by a developer by charging commercial rates for the parking stalls. The cost to taxpayers would be zero.

Peters says a public market along the lake could be built for \$5 million, instead of the \$15 million for the East Side proposal. This way, up to 700 residents in the planned apartment building as part of the Judge Doyle Square project across the street could walk to the park and public market.

"They wouldn't have to drive their cars and pollute the environment," Peters says.

The \$1 million bike center, where people can park and work on their bikes, could face the lake as part of the same structure instead of up top and closer to the Capitol. The 1,200-foot-long and 70-foot-wide public market would be in a prime spot facing the lake, and there is more.

The city currently wants to build a 20-foot-wide walking bridge from the foot of King Street to the lake so people can get a closer view of the water between two 14-story

buildings on Wilson Street. The current plan is to demolish the vacant four-story McGrath building and convert it to a 14-story building with 107 small apartments.

Instead, Peters says the city could buy out the McGrath project to make room for a 100-foot gateway to the six-acre park overlooking the lake. It would be landscaped and paved for walkers with beauty in mind.

"It would be a bold way to celebrate the wonder of Lake Monona," says the visionary architect.

He estimates the cost of creating the gateway by buying and demolishing the current four-story vacant building and making the owner whole would be \$3.5 million.

It's not too late to change course.

Lake Monona should be treasured by visitors and residents alike. The city has spent millions of dollars studying Downtown revitalization for years. Peters, now in his mid-80s, has designed and built three buildings on Wilson Street already, and it's where he and his wife now live. It really is his life's passion, and he made me a believer.

Nothing is too late until groundbreaking begins. It is time to truly capitalize on why Wisconsin's capital city stands out from Des Moines, Iowa, or Austin, Texas, or Lincoln, Nebraska. Let's enjoy the lake, shall we?

Mitch is a Madison, Wisconsin based commentator, broadcaster and standup comic. The Mitch Henck Show is broadcast live 8-11a.m. Monday-Friday at www.madisontalks.com.

Watch Mitch's Daily Video Blog, "Two Minutes with Mitch," weekdays at madison.com.

Contact Mitch at: mhenck61@gmail.com