

# Frank Productions "stunned" by city of Madison's staff opposition to East Washington music club

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STONE HOUSE DEVELOPMENT

**A rendering of the proposed Frank Productions music venue development at Block 170 on East Washington Avenue, as seen facing northwest.**

Larry and Fred Frank -- owners of Madison's concert promotion company, [Frank Productions](#) -- thought they had found the perfect location for a 2,000-seat entertainment and music venue on an old industrial street, the 1000 block of East Washington Avenue.

And at first, city officials seemed solidly behind their [concept](#), which would be paired with office space, parking and 100 units of

affordable housing. But the Frank brothers were devastated this week when Madison planning staff informed them they do not support the club proposal.

"We're just stunned," Larry Frank tells *Isthmus*. "We thought we were doing something the city wanted and that was good for the community."

"What's the problem here?" Larry Frank asks. "If I read what development for East Washington is supposed to be [according to city plans], I thought we were providing that. It says, entertainment, it says, high density."

Steve Cover, the city's director of planning, community and economic development wrote in a [Nov. 7 letter](#), that parking and traffic were primary concerns for opposing the club.

Officials "spent countless hours trying to identify alternative solutions to the parking and traffic control issues," Cover writes. "To date, we could not identify a realistic and satisfactory solution."

Some neighbors have opposed the music venue portion of the project. A group, citing similar concerns, recently [formed to stop it](#).

The Franks first learned that city staff was against the project Thursday in a meeting with officials. Larry and Fred Frank both say they offered solutions to each problem raised. The Franks note that they've [helped subdue](#) the riotous State Street Halloween bash into a successful gated event, now called Freakfest, and have experience managing both traffic and crowds.

The Franks' venue would have 280 parking spaces available within the development. And they say they've offered to hire traffic cops and to run shuttle buses to nearby ramps for larger shows. They also note that Madison has plans to use [Breese Stevens Field](#) in the 900

block of East Washington for events that would draw many more people.

"Every time we came up with a solution, they came up with another problem," Larry Frank says. "We can keep coming up with solutions, but they keep changing what the problem is."

Fred Frank says that suburban communities have tried to recruit the venue away from Madison. But Fred Frank adds: "That's not what we want to do. We don't think that is where it belongs."

Frank Productions has been around for almost 50 years, and Larry Frank says that until recently, Madison has always been a college market. But that has begun to change, with the company promoting more shows that appeal to young professionals in their 20s and 30s.

"It was only in the recent years that this market has changed to a 25-to-35-year-old demo," Larry Frank says. "We were excited because it was a way of keeping [young] people in the city. We're not just a college market, there's much more going on here."

Neither Cover nor Ald. Ledell Zellers, who represents the area, could be reached for comment Friday. Ald. Marsha Rummel, who represents a neighboring district and attended some meetings about the project, says that city officials worked hard to find a solution.

She says the "intensity" of activity at specific times caused concerns for both traffic and parking engineers.

"Traffic engineering spent some time looking at other options for parking," Rummel says. "They were trying to figure out what could work. I wasn't part of those discussions, but I know they seriously looked at options."

"I know there was some frustration that it took a while to get this answer from the city," Rummel adds. "But city staff tried to figure



out if it would work. There was an earnest effort to figure out if there was a solution."

Rummel says the club would have been a much easier sell if it had been located across the street, where fewer people live.

The Franks were upset that both Rummel and Zellers are seeking money in the budget to study where to locate a new parking garage in the East Wash corridor, while the city complains the club doesn't have enough parking. Rummel says that proposal is still in the planning stage, with no site yet identified and construction not anticipated until 2017.

The Franks are doubtful that they will push the project at this site, without the support of the neighborhood, alder or city staff. They're open to looking at other locations but are doubtful city staff will be able to find one. "The only thing we could be looking forward to is to see if the city really has viable alternatives for us," Fred Frank says.

Officials from [Stone House Development](#), which is overseeing the housing and office elements of the project, could not be reached for comment. Rummel says that she spoke with Stone House officials Thursday and they are planning to move ahead with it, seeking another component to go where the club was proposed.

Says Rummel: "I think the city would really welcome their project without the music venue. They will be looking for another thing to fill out their project."

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