

From: [Kristen Slack](#)
To: [Wolfe, James](#); [Petykowski, Christopher](#)
Cc: [Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Trying again
Date: Wednesday, February 2, 2022 4:59:58 PM
Attachments: [Spring Harbor Neighborhood Survey_Final 01_23_2022.pdf](#)
[ATT00001.htm](#)

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Hello, Jim and Chris.

I sent a similar message to the Mayor (from whom I received a boilerplate response) and the Transportation Commission (from whom I received no response).

I am writing as a resident of the Spring Harbor neighborhood, where the reconstruction of Lake Mendota Drive is planned to begin this year.

Disappointingly, the City's planning process for the Lake Mendota Drive reconstruction process has been non-transparent, deceptive, and deliberately exclusionary, in no small part because of Alder Furman's abysmal leadership. Our alder has done nothing to try to broadly solicit neighbors' opinions about the full scope of the project and has mischaracterized the neighborhood's collective view to the City on several occasions, including a blatant attempt to create hostile feelings toward neighborhood residents by cherry-picking negative comments that serve his own and the City's views and agenda. Concerns about the loss of permeable surface, increased storm water run-off into the lake, increased use of salt to maintain sidewalks, as well as potential damage to large, established trees have all been omitted or heavily downplayed by the alder and other City staff. Tellingly, *protecting the lake and lakeside environment is not even a stated goal of the project*. If the current City plan is ultimately extended throughout Spring Harbor, the end result could be multiple acres of new concrete, which may very well be disastrous for the lake and lakeside ecology.

To counteract this exclusionary approach, a survey was developed by the Planning and Development Committee of the Spring Harbor Neighborhood Association (SHNA) and disseminated to its members via email, as well as posted on the Nextdoor app, and disseminated through other neighborhood email lists, asking everyone who lives in the neighborhood (not just those along Lake Mendota Drive) about preferences and needs around sidewalks and street calming mechanisms, and about safety concerns. Nearly 200 residents have responded at this point, with approximately half living along Lake Mendota Drive and the remainder living elsewhere in the neighborhood. The clear majority of residents (68%) have concerns about the installation of sidewalks for a myriad of legitimate reasons. This sentiment includes households with members who have mobility limitations (68%), households with individuals 70 years of age and older (78%) and as far as households with young children, just over 50% do not want sidewalks but another 16% are not sure of their position at this time. The majority of neighborhood residents both on and off Lake Mendota Drive do not want sidewalks. Concerns about sidewalks are not coming from a place of being "selfish" as Alder Furman has repeatedly accused residents of being when they have raised questions about this component of the project, but rather that people are complex and have many values, not the least of which in this neighborhood is protecting the lake and the old tree canopy.

Other examples of the lack of transparency on this project include the fact that the January 11th public hearing meeting was not put on the project website until very shortly before it occurred. A pervasive comment on the SHNA neighborhood survey was that receiving the SHNA neighborhood survey (developed and distributed beginning on December 27th after we received, presumably as Lake Mendota Drive homeowners, a notice in the mail) was the first time they were hearing about the intended project or the initial public meeting. Many good questions were asked about the project at the January 11th meeting, particularly relating to the impact on the historical and environmental integrity of the neighborhood. Many of these questions were, in turn, met with glaringly insufficient answers by City staff, and neighbors were essentially asked to “just trust us.” The commitment from the City to “engage” with residents was made very clear in that meeting—it was merely performative listening. City officials had already made up their minds about project elements like sidewalks. A staff member of the City Planning Division (a neighborhood resident himself) even posted derogatory messages about the neighborhood residents.

Neither was the Transportation Commission meeting scheduled for January 12th posted on the LMD project website with reasonable advance notice, and it was mentioned only in passing during the 2.5 hour public hearing on January 11th. It was never made clear that residents could register to speak at the Transportation Commission meeting, putting aside the fact that holding the Commission’s meeting only one day after the public was informed about the full scope of the project is disingenuous at best and intentionally exclusionary at worst with respect to ensuring residents had an opportunity for authentic engagement. Finally, when the Transportation Commission meeting did appear on the LMD project website, it was characterized as “...an initial presentation to the commission to gather input on guiding the design work.” What actually transpired at that meeting, as now reported on the project website, was a vote by the Commission to proceed with a planning phase *that includes sidewalks*. I want to reiterate—this vote by the Transportation Commission was made based on inaccurate and grossly incomplete feedback from AlderFurman, and it occurred without any reasonable time allowance for residents to digest the information they had received less than 24 hours prior, and without any meaningful effort to inform residents about the meeting and the opportunity to register to speak.

As a result of the faulty process so far and lack of leadership from our representative to the City, there are, understandably, a lot of very angry and distrustful residents. They feel that information has been intentionally withheld from them until the 11th hour in order to force the project through without meaningful community engagement, and that they don’t have any formal representative they can trust to bring their concerns to the forefront. Several countermeasures are currently being considered by neighborhood residents. To avoid this project further spiraling into an unnecessarily adversarial mess, I ask that the Transportation Commission’s vote to proceed with planning be reversed until leaders at the City have taken the time to *meaningfully* engage with and listen to the Spring Harbor residents’ questions and concerns, and until more complete information about the potential unintended consequences of this project is available. After this has occurred, the Transportation Commission and subsequent committees involved in the project will have better and more complete information on which to base their decisions and votes. I also request that any planning aspects going forward include representation from the Spring Harbor Neighborhood Association, particularly the Planning and Development Committee, an entity that has sought to fairly represent the full range of the neighborhood's concerns. Alder Furman has been highly biased, has withheld key information about the project components, and has not accurately reflected the feelings of his constituents in this process. He has lost the trust of far too many Spring

Harbor residents.

I and many other neighbors I've spoken with see a way to an outcome that residents can largely agree upon and even be excited about, but that will only occur if authentic community engagement occurs. The neighborhood survey showed several points of agreement - over 80% of every group mentioned earlier are concerned about the removal of large trees and the potential net increase of hardscape. There may indeed be design solutions that adequately attend to these concerns, but until more complete information and better answers from the City are available, no genuine assurances can yet be made in this regard. Effective leadership involves listening to residents and engaging with them around their concerns early in the planning process, rather than last-minute as has happened here, and trying wherever possible to build on points of near consensus. This is exactly the opposite of what we have seen so far, yet it is imperative for a good outcome.

Kristen Slack