

TO: Common Council

FROM: Community Gardens Committee

RE: University Hill Farms Neighborhood Plan – Agenda Item #65

DATE: January 5, 2016

The Community Gardens Committee first discussed the University Hill Farms Neighborhood Plan on October 27, 2015. Its recommendations are detailed in memos attached to Legistar #39335.

At its meeting on December 8th, the Committee discussed the Plan Commission's decision to recommend approval of the Neighborhood Plan, and generally supported its modifications to the Staff Recommendations with **one very important exception**.

The Community Gardens Committee feels strongly that the Neighborhood Plan should address the citywide need for additional garden locations in a more general way than it did in the August draft. During the discussion with Planning Staff and members of the Neighborhood Plan Ad Hoc Steering Committee who attended the October meeting, the following language was proposed for the Plan Recommendations Chapter concerning Natural and Agricultural Resources, in the section on Community Gardens (page 55):

Identify potential additional locations for community gardens in Garner and Rennebohm Parks, the Vernon Boulevard median, and explore other locations on public lands in the planning area.

Alder Schmidt, seeking flexibility to address the loss of a significant neighborhood asset mentioned many times in the Neighborhood Plan, the Sheboygan Community Garden, proposed substantive changes to the Committee's recommendation (underlined below) in the December 7th Staff Report to the Plan Commission:

Identify and determine the feasibility to locate community gardens in Garner and Rennebohm Parks, the Vernon Boulevard median. Explore other locations on public or private lands in or near the planning area for long term or permanent gardening opportunities.

The Plan Commission requested that Staff work with Alder Schmidt to clarify his intentions if private lands were to be considered for community gardens; for example, what assurances would there be that such lands would remain accessible to the public. The proposed revision for consideration by the Common Council reads as follows:

Explore other locations on public or private lands in or near the planning area with a preference for public lands or private lands that may become public in the future.

There are three very important policy problems with this recommendation:

1. City-supported gardens should be located on city-owned lands. The Common Council adopted this policy in 1999 and, ever since, we have been locating gardens in parks, on greenways and other city-owned lands. Implementing this policy enables the City to establish guidelines, standardize uses, and generally achieve a level of sustainable support for an activity that is increasingly important to our community. Suggesting that gardens be located on private land undermines and violates this well-established and important City policy.

2. City-supported neighborhood plans should limit their recommendations to the area that was actually studied during the planning process. The boundaries established for this neighborhood plan took into account how the area has developed over time and how it's lived in by its residents. Going beyond these boundaries means crossing major streets that present significant barriers to seniors, pedestrians and even cyclists; furthermore, areas outside the study boundaries were not analyzed or discussed during the process that produced this neighborhood plan. It's simply inappropriate to recommend actions outside the study area, however well intentioned they may be, and would set a bad precedent for the neighborhood planning process.

3. The City already has a process for locating community gardens. Several years ago, the Community Gardens Committee worked with Staff to develop a process for locating gardens on city-owned lands. Changes to this process should be made with due consideration by the departments and policy-makers that would be called upon to implement it, not as a last-minute revision in a neighborhood planning document.

REQUESTED ACTION: Adopt the University Hill Farms Neighborhood Plan as a Supplement to the City of Madison's Comprehensive Plan as modified by Staff Recommendations 2, 3, 6, 8 and 10, and the Community Gardens Committee's Recommendation #7 in the Staff Report as shown in bold on page 1 of this memo.