

November 20, 2023

Re: Legistar # 80605

Dear Chair and Members of the Board of Public Works:

I am unable to attend the BPW meeting tonight due to a competing work obligation, which I notified Heidi Fleegel about on November 6th.

I am not in support of the changes to this project, proposed by the Transportation Commission, that involve the removal of 9 established trees on top of the 36 identified for removal by City staff. Initially, over 70 trees were under discussion for removal. I applaud City staff in Engineering, Transportation and Forestry, the Alders who have been seeking to balance City goals, as well as the overwhelming input from residents in the area who support saving as many mature trees as possible, in arriving at a reasonable compromise before the plan went to the Transportation Commission. The City can uphold two positive goals at the same time—safety for those using City sidewalks and bike paths *and* preserving our tree canopy.

Large tree canopies are a [critical aspect of wellbeing](#) for all of us. A recent [article in the New York Times](#), “How to Cool Down a City” is based on Singapore’s concerted efforts to build and rebuild with a focus on trees as part of the infrastructure. We, as a City, need to start following this path with much more intentionality and the Board of Public Works is a pivotal committee for leading that charge. Trees are and should be part of our City infrastructure. Madison has a long-held legacy of environmental stewardship. Safety and accessibility do not have to compete with reducing the heat island effect and helping to keep our City as cool as possible. We can do both. It may sometimes cost a little more, involve a bit more creativity, and require making adjustments to one-size-fits-all plans, but it is a false choice to pit people against the environment.

As my BPW colleagues know, large trees provide shade that [cools pavement](#) and soak up rainwater that is released as cooling vapor. The absorption of rainwater is one key element of protecting our lakes, and we need to be fighting harder to not just maintain lake quality (which is tied to urban stormwater runoff, not just agricultural runoff), but reverse the damage we have been doing to our lakes for decades. We have far too many days of beach closures and safety warnings related to the degraded conditions of the lakes in our area.

Mature trees can’t simply be replaced with trees that take decades to have the same cooling effect on the City. **Without** the changes proposed by the Transportation Commission related to tree removals, the 2.5 mile project (~13,200 feet in length) would involve narrowing the sidewalk on only 6% of the entire length. I believe the vast majority of sidewalk users across all modes are willing to manage going a little slower and with a little more care on a small segment of the project in exchange for preserving more of our tree canopy.

I ask my colleagues on the Board of Public Works to vote no on the changes recommended by the Transportation Commission that involve the removal of any additional established trees identified by City staff and the City Forester as worth preserving.

Respectfully Yours,

Kristen Slack  
District 19 Alder