

Board of Public Works
Meeting of May 21, 2025
Agenda #1, Legistar 87869

Note: I am writing this letter as an individual, not as a member of the Friends of the Isthmus Path Prairie Garden.

At the Board's April 2nd meeting I testified regarding Legistar 87717, the Capital City Trail Box Culvert Replacement, asking for various protections for the existing prairie on the 800 block. The IPPG had made comments and requests prior to the BPW meeting. The Board discussed the prairie and asked various questions. Staff was asked: "But you have every intention of trying to address those [IPPG] comments." Staff replied with a yes, adding that most were very manageable, but a few would need to be coordinated with the street engineering section. The Board's recommendation to Council, as reflected in the minutes, was "RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL TO ADOPT with City working with the prairie partners and their input." (The actual motion was for approval, assuming, or in good faith, that Daniel is working with the prairie gardeners and their desires.)

There may be different interpretations of the meaning of "working with." Staff was responsive to questions. Staff refused to share the bid documents with the IPPG before the project was put out for bid, but did provide a copy the day after the bid date.

The bid plans call for the destruction of the existing prairie. The plan note for the 800 block states:

EXCAVATE 1' OF SOIL. ROTOTILL AREA (6" DEPTH, KEEP 10' FROM TREES) PRIOR TO BACKFILL. INSTALL 6" SELECT FILL (PIT RUN SAND), THEN 6" 85/15 ENGINEERED SOIL, & SHORTGRASS PRAIRIE SEED MIX. TEMP SEED WITH REGREEN SEED MIX. NO MULCH OR MATTING.

I asked how the project morphed from disturbing as little of the prairie as possible to one which specifies excavation and tilling. The response was:

"Engineering determined that the contractor would need full use of the public ROW to complete the work, and Traffic Engineering set requirements to keep streets, sidewalk, and path open. The concern was due to trench widths to install new sewer, track width of machines to install the new sewer, and providing sufficient laydown area for materials to keep the street intersections as open as possible to traffic. Excavation cut and rototilling were proposed to cultivate the 800 block, and the removed depth would be replaced with clean select fill and engineered soil to provide a planting bed for native seeding. We believe the restoration provides a beneficial improvement while allowing sufficient access for the contractor to complete construction effectively and efficiently. Estimated restoration costs are quite high. This option was the most practical for constructability and, we believe, provides the best value compared to other options."

Perhaps all should be satisfied with the creation of a new prairie, but I question Traffic Engineering requirements. TE's requirement to keep the bike path open is only applicable to weekends, on weekdays there will be a detour to E Main. (When the Board asked why the storm sewer couldn't be placed under the bike path, the response was a desire to not shut the path down.) TE's requirement to keep the streets open is curious because S Paterson has not

been a through street for 2 years – the 100 block has had a full closure for construction of a new development. I also question why Engineering could not have determined at an earlier date, one prior to the April 2nd meeting, whether the contractor would need full use of the public ROW to complete the work.

More importantly, I think this raises the question of the level of completion of plans when the plans are presented to the Board for approval. The Board was concerned about the prairie and recommended to Council that the City work with the prairie group. The Council adopted that recommendation. But then new requirements/decisions were made by staff that essentially overruled the adopted resolution. It is not as though this was some sort of emergency project – as far back as last October there were draft plans – so there was time to work through these issues prior to the April 2nd Board meeting. Under Wisconsin law, it is the Board's duty to "superintend all public works," a duty that can be made more difficult when the Board is not provided accurate information.

Respectfully Submitted,
Linda Lehnertz