

Plan Commission, February 23, 2009

Sustainability Goals for Northeast Neighborhoods

Alder Tim Gruber

I support the sustainability goals for the Northeast Neighborhoods. These goals are achievable, but will require significant public and private investment.

When roads are built, they can be designed so that storm water is infiltrated, along the lines of retrofits that have been done on existing streets in the city. Buildings can be designed so that roof water is directed towards rain gardens. Buildings can have green roofs. Solar and wind power can be incorporated throughout the neighborhood, particularly on roof tops of larger buildings. Buildings can be designed to be energy efficient, with a long term savings on energy costs.

Due to the location of the neighborhood and the history of development in Madison, the most difficult goal will be to promote transit use and reduce vehicle miles travelled,

There needs to be a funding source for the sustainability goals. While it is nice to hope for Federal and State money for sustainability, and it could be coming, we can't rely on it. I suggest that we use Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) to achieve sustainability goals. TIF policy currently supports job creation. The Northeast Neighborhoods should have a large amount of employment, as part of a mixture of primary uses. TIF policy should also support sustainability goals, such as renewable sources of energy, green roofs, structured parking, and transit.

For this neighborhood to be a Transit Oriented Development (TOD), there must be high density, at least 100 units per acre, along the transit line, with mixed-use, less parking required, and pedestrian friendly development throughout. I envision a State Street like pedestrian mall, with a streetcar line down the center that connects to commuter rail and the rest of the city and region.

The area around the commuter rail stop should not be a park and ride, but a node of high intensity of use. Parking near this rail stop should be structured. This should be the area with the tallest buildings, most density of residential, commercial, and employment uses.

We need to make a public investment in transit, commuter rail and a street car line, in order to spur private investment.

There is a private benefit to creating Transit Oriented Development (TOD), in that less parking has to be built and more people are able to access the homes and business of the neighborhood.

There is a significant public benefit in investing in transit, allowing (requiring) more density, and requiring less parking (restricting parking): better land use, more private investment, a better sense of place, a neighborhood that maintains its value over time, more green space (both within the neighborhood and in Dane County), meeting sustainability goals, less vehicle miles travelled, less pollution, and attracting green business to this neighborhood and our city.

We take it for granted that there will be roads and cars in new neighborhoods. Why not take the same attitude with transit?

In planning for the Northeast Neighborhoods, I suggest we take the attitude of, "don't build a suburb, don't build a subdivision; build a neighborhood, build a city."

Here are some goals I suggest for the Northeast Neighborhoods Plan:

1. Build transit first.
2. Make a big public investment in infrastructure, transit, structured parking, and other sustainability goals using TIF and other sources.
3. High density along the transit lines.
4. A mixture of primary uses, including employment, residential, retail, and commercial.
5. Small blocks.
6. Create a sense of place and ensure that the neighborhood is pedestrian friendly. Include wide sidewalks, parks, promenades, pedestrian malls, plazas, bike paths, and buildings oriented towards the sidewalk and street.
7. No park and ride at the commuter rail station. Rather, create a high-density node of mixed use, with a high level of interest and intensity of use. Provide structured parking, and limit surface parking.
8. Build bridges across or under the Interstate for cars, bikes, and pedestrians.