

From: [Wolfe, James](#)
To: [All Alders](#)
Cc: [Lerner, Sarah](#); [Fries, Gregory](#); [Schmidt, Janet](#)
Subject: Stormwater Utility Vegetation Management Plan Update
Date: Tuesday, June 11, 2024 10:40:00 AM

Hello Alders,

It was brought to my attention that you had received an email from a concerned resident regarding the Engineering Division's ongoing work to develop a Vegetation Management Plan for lands owned and maintained by the Stormwater Utility. I just wanted to provide you all an update related to that work and clarify some of the issues that were mentioned in that email you had received.

1. The email stating the plan is nearly complete is incorrect. The [Stormwater Utility Vegetation Management Plan](#) has not yet been drafted. We have just completed the front-end engagement phase that included engagement with residents and outreach to approximately 160 technical experts. Our process to develop this plan was intentionally set up to include robust public engagement, and significant involvement with a large variety of technical experts. As chapters of the plan are drafted, this information will be presented to the Board of Public Works, and we will continue to update the BPW periodically on the progress. The next Board of Public Works update is scheduled for the June 26th meeting.
2. There are a variety of very specific areas of expertise related to the multiple ecosystem services provided on stormwater property. Therefore, as part of this process, we have reached out to approximately 160 experts in the fields of conservation, entomology, carbon, climate change, hydrology, stormwater resources, ecology, invasive species, and forestry. This list included staff from Dane County, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, non-profit land managers, and faculty from the University of Wisconsin's database of campus sustainability experts, and also included technical experts recommended by the City's Office of Sustainability. There is also an internal working group that includes staff from urban forestry, conservation parks, Dane County Land and Water resources, and former UW faculty and member of the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts. We also asked for input from volunteer experts, people in the community with backgrounds in these areas of expertise. Faith was one of the volunteer technical experts that had reached out to the City and was included in this outreach to experts. We will make sure to include Faith's comments as we begin to develop our Vegetation Management Plan.

For your reference, we received detailed responses from over 60 experts as part of this process. The results of this study and the response of these volunteer experts is located here on the project website at:

https://www.cityofmadison.com/engineering/documents/projects/Technical%20Response%20Summary%20-%20April_0.pdf

3. In addition to the technical response questionnaire, the city held a focus group workshop with expert volunteers who graciously dedicated their time. These ~20 volunteer experts included folks from non-profit environmental advocacy groups, conservation land managers, restoration ecologists, climate science, and experts in soil and carbon storage from the University of Wisconsin. The results of this workshop were quite varied and are located on the project website at:
https://www.cityofmadison.com/engineering/documents/projects/Focus%20Group%20Workshop%20Summary_0.pdf
4. This plan (when drafted) will not call out for large-scale removal of mature trees as part

of our general land management strategies. Individual reconstruction projects may require tree removals for larger flood capacity infrastructure improvements, and these specific projects will be considered individually and separate from this overall plan. Individual projects typically undergo an extensive analysis of each tree within the project, along with evaluation of hydrology and hydraulics, recommendations from the watershed studies, and public engagement.

5. We agree with many of the points reflected in this email about riparian tree benefits, and have been planting trees within these corridors for several years. Again, there is no draft plan, so this methodology has not yet been addressed in the plan as this email suggests.

The feedback we have received through the public input process, technical responses, and the focus group workshop shares larger community values and the importance of these natural spaces. It also reflects many competing concerns and different viewpoints that the City hears each day – which include differing viewpoints from experts on a variety of species and ecosystems that should be removed or encouraged.

The environmental impacts related to climate change are multiple and often have competing solutions, with no one unanimous solution. As presented at the public listening sessions, we live in an increasingly complicated environment with extensive environmental pressures ranging from heat island impacts, habitat and biodiversity loss, native pollinator loss, increasing flood events, and nutrient overload in our lakes and waterways. The solutions to these issues don't always align, showcasing the complexity of the issues we face today.

We hope that this front-end work on the Vegetation Management Plan sheds light on the diversity of opinions on this topic. This plan will consider all opinions received through this front-end work, including specific stormwater issues, as we begin to draft the plan. This plan is not intended to provide an absolute finite solution for these issues, but to create a framework for our day-to-day maintenance that can provide a transparent document that responds to our most frequent questions on vegetation management practices.

Please feel free to contact me, or others copied on this email, if you have any questions. We are also happy to update you on this topic, the work done to date, what we are seeing through this process, or please feel free to attend any of the upcoming updates to the BPW that staff will be providing. Vegetation is a very complex issue, and increasingly so as we continue to deal with the impacts of climate change. This has been a consistent theme in our planning, and we hope to provide a well-rounded approach that takes this into consideration and is incorporated into our day-to-day land management activities. We are grateful to have such great land stewards in our community, and hope that this plan and recommendations can start to better showcase the city's resources and process for managing these lands.

Thank you!

As a reminder, please do not reply all to this email.

Jim Wolfe, P.E. (he/him/his)

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