

Paul Skidmore, ASLA
13 Red Maple Trail
Madison, Wisconsin 53717-1515

December 6, 2023

Dear Plan Commission:

As a former alder and former member of the Madison Board of Park Commissioners, I am very concerned about the erratic and opaque process that city planners have used to propose a north-south bike path and several east-west bike paths in the Sauk Creek Greenway as buried in the West Area Plan which you will consider Dec. 7. I oppose any bike path in the hilly, narrow 26-acre heavily wooded Sauk Creek Greenway and I call on you today to immediately stop any further discussion of bike paths in Sauk Creek Greenway.

As a professional landscape architect and past president of the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, I strongly urge The Plan Commission to halt any feedback or discussion of bike paths in Sauk Creek until engineers release their plan for the creek reconstruction that will determine the fate of its 5,000-plus trees. Only then can the Plan Commission and other city agencies thoughtfully consider bike paths in what clearly will be a very different creek area with a widened and possibly redirected channel.

As a former member of the Tamarack Trails Board of Directors, I can relay to you the serious concerns that many residents share about the irreparable harm to the environment that bike paths would bring to the greenway. We are environmentalists on the Far West Side and choose to live here to be good stewards to nature and wildlife, just as the protestors to the 26 trees on Mineral Point Road recently showed.

In these days of climate change, the Plan Commission and other city officials need to hear the residents of Madison about issues of trees and vegetation because those natural elements are our first defense against toxic plumes from Canadian forest fires and global warming that could eradicate our Wisconsin agriculture industry and harm the health of Madison citizens.

Why are you and the mayor not listening to these dedicated taxpayers and neighborhood advocates?

I have additional concerns that include:

1. The City and our Alder Nikki Conklin have ignored significant feedback against a bike path in the Sauk Creek Greenway; therefore, we have not had a true engagement process. Your staff did not mention, discuss, or show any slides of bike paths at the first four West Area public meetings.

Neighbors submitted numerous petitions at the Common Council meeting on Nov. 15, 2022-Legistar file 73264-agenda number 1, and new ones will be attached to this agenda item. Residents wrote more than 20 letters of objection to the Transportation Commission for its meeting on Aug. 8, 2023, after the neighborhoods first found out a path was shown in the Complete Street Guide while the engagement process was underway Legistar file 79282 agenda item three, and these citizens received no response to their timely feedback. The neighborhoods were never informed of the inclusion of a bike path in the Sauk Creek Greenway when it was first introduced on Nov. 2, 2022 Legistar file 74436 agenda number and passed on January 3, 2023 Legistar file 74926 BEFORE the engagement process started in February 2023.

In the City Planners' first phase planning survey, 69 residents had/have concerns about a path in the Sauk Creek greenway; in addition, 27 residents in the second Phase Two survey were against a path compared to 6 who were for a path. Staff said in its memo to you that they continue to recommend this feedback as evidence that the bike paths are popular. This does not coincide with the above numbers or other noted feedback.

2. City planners claim that the path goes back 30+ years. I have lived in the Tamarack neighborhood for decades and know that THIS IS INCORRECT. The Park and Open Space plans do not apply to the Sauk Creek greenway, and the 2000 MPO Bike Plan said a Sauk Creek path was listed as a third priority given "suitable on-road routes exist." The 2015 MPO bike report said there is not a bike gap in the neighborhood and refers to the following roads that are within 1000+ feet of the greenway: Westfield Road, as the primary bike road and High Point Road, a secondary bike road. Most importantly, this is the root document that the City then used for other reports (2018 Comprehensive Plan, etc.) and the neighborhood was not notified about it so it could voice its deep concerns. The neighborhood first heard about it at the March 2018 City Engineering meeting on the greenway.

3. City staff mentioned in its memo to you for your Dec. 7 meeting that residents' concerns include that the path will cause safety concerns (dangerous), increase crime, lead to losing too many trees, does not connect to anything, negatively impacts wildlife, increases runoff, costs too much to build and maintain, and increases noise and litter. This is true and your staff summarily dismissed these concerns without substantive evidence to the contrary. In addition, the staff ignores strong environmental concerns from residents, some of whom are scholars and researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, such as Michael Notaro, director of Center for Climatic Research at UW's Nelson Institute.

The other paths that your staff mentions as good models for the Sauk Greenway are not comparable for several reasons. Those paths did not require cutting down massive numbers of trees to build the paths; the other bike paths were platted before the homeowners acquired their lots; the paths are near commercial uses and not the 90% frontage of homes that abut the Sauk Creek Greenway eliminating a buffer to the homes; the other paths are longer than .8 miles etc. The other paths did not cause significant animal displacement such as the coyotes, foxes, owls, deer, and birds that live in the Sauk Creek Greenway.

4. The City is incorporating in the streets "safe" bike paths per its Complete Green Street Guide, and it can avoid a bike path in the Sauk Creek area by using the nearby High Point Road or Westfield Road, both of which directly connect to the new BRT stations, Westfield Road, West Towne Mall and the future connection across the beltline to Watts Road shown in the WAP street rendering in the planners Dec. 7 memo to you. Also, city officials show that a bike path should connect in the Bike Network rendering to connect to High Point Road, just north of the future bike path across the beltline. It makes more sense to use a shared bike path on High Point Road rather than build an expensive bike path on the narrow Sauk Creek Greenway. High Point Road is also shown to connect to the south to a new bike path that will parallel the beltline.

In summary, I am asking that you inform the City West Area planning team to remove a bike path from the West Area Plan, which goes against the City's Civic Engagement, Equity and Stewardship Values.

Thank you,

Paul Skidmore, ASLA