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January 18, 2011

**To: Mayor Dave Cieslewicz
Alder Rummel, District 6
Other Members of the Common Council,**

Re: Reconstruction of Williamson Street

As a result of meetings with the neighbors, business owners, the Marquette Neighborhood Association (MNA), and the Greater Williamson Area Business Association (GWABA), the reconstruction of Williamson Street has evolved into a project that accomplishes many goals.

First, the basic public infrastructure of the street is to be replaced, which includes the curb, pavement, sidewalks and driveway aprons as needed, storm and sanitary sewers, water main and lead laterals, street lighting, and traffic signals. In addition, the project will include improvements to pedestrian safety, storm water quality, serve as a pilot project for other storm water treatment techniques, and improve the overall appearance of the street, among other improvements. The neighborhood has sought for the project to become as "green" as possible, and these proposed improvements work toward that goal.

The most impactful change to the plan is the proposed narrowing of Williamson Street from 48 ft. to 44 ft. from Blount St. to Baldwin St. This will allow for more green space on the street as most of the terraces will be restored with grass, provide space for larger growing street trees and protection of the existing trees, and potential for other amenities. The narrower street width could also improve pedestrian safety by shortening the cross walks and providing a larger buffer between the on street vehicles and the sidewalk. This space will also help with the installation of ADA compliant sidewalk ramps. There is not a consensus amongst the neighborhood regarding the street width as it may have a negative impact on bike use, but there was a majority at the public meetings in favor of the narrowing, and the 44 ft. width is viewed as a compromise between those wanting a narrower street and those wanting to maintain the current 48 foot width.

The following proposed improvements contribute to the "Green Street" initiative and are significant pedestrian and bike improvements:

1. **Count down timers** for new traffic signals.
2. Traffic and **pedestrian refuge islands** at Brearly St. and Few St with yield to pedestrian signs on them.

3. **Bump-outs on side streets** at Livingston St. and Brearly St. to the north of Williamson St. to shorten those crossings.
4. **Colored cross walks** at Livingston St., Few St., Brearly St. and Dickinson St. (non-signalized intersections) to improve visibility of the cross walks.
5. **Overhead "Yield to Pedestrian"** signs at Livingston St., Brearly St. (one side only), and Dickinson St. (non-signalized crossings that do not have islands)
6. **Narrow the travel lanes between Blount St. and Jenifer St.** and **mark an east-bound bike lane to Jenifer St.**
7. **Widen the bike path on the southerly side from Blount St. to Jenifer St.** so that bikes and pedestrians can be separated. The separation will be defined for the users.
8. **Sidewalks will be replaced to meet ADA requirements**, including replacement of all of the sidewalk ramps at the intersections
9. **Significantly more bike parking** facilities will be installed along Williamson St.

The following proposed improvements contribute to the "Green Street" initiative and are related to storm water management:

1. Multiple **catchbasins** are to be installed to help **remove suspended solids** from the storm water.
2. **Rain gardens** are proposed **on some side streets**, but the additional assessments and maintenance still needs to be approved by some property owners. Some rain gardens will be required to be plugged over winter so salt from the street does not enter them.
3. **Two locations** are being tested for **storm water bio-vaults** which will treat storm water prior to entering the system.
4. **Two locations** are also to be tested for **depressed terrace to drain storm water to trees**, which will be planted in engineered soil to help filter the storm water

The following proposed improvements also contribute to the "Green Street" initiative.

1. The large **concrete island** at Blount St. is to **be replaced with a landscaped island**, and it will also help improve the aesthetics of the entrance to the Williamson St. business and residential area.
2. The proposed plan will **narrow Williamson Street from 48 ft. to 44 ft.** from Blount St. to Baldwin St. This will provide more space for trees and more separation for pedestrians.

3. An **entry feature** is being proposed on the south side of Williamson Street **near Jenifer Street** subject to neighborhood approval.
4. **High efficiency LED light fixtures** are proposed for the street lights, and some poles will include outlets that can be used for events such as the Willy St. Fair.
5. The contract will also include **strict specifications for tree protection**, and the street and utility designs will be coordinated to maximize the number of street trees that can be planted.
6. **100% of the existing asphalt and concrete will be recycled.**
7. A **drinking fountain** is proposed to be installed near the bike path and sidewalk at the intersection of Riverside and Winnebago.

A major concern of the neighborhood is the undergrounding of the overhead utilities. To underground all of the lines in this corridor would be a major undertaking by MG&E and the other utilities on the poles, and that work will likely take several years to complete. It would also involve coordination with approximately 140 property owners who currently have overhead feeds to their properties. Modifying the feeds to each property could also prove to be quite costly for the property owners.

MG&E has committed their resources to undergrounding all of the overhead lines from Blount Street to Patterson Street in conjunction with the proposed 2011 reconstruction project. To help facilitate the undergrounding in the remainder of the corridor, conduits are to be installed with this project for future use of the overhead utilities. Installing the conduit now will help keep the future disturbance to the street reasonably limited.

Another major concern of the neighborhood is storm water management. The MNA has requested that the project infiltrate 25% of the storm water runoff. We do not have a proven cost effective way to infiltrate large amounts of water except for the use of rain gardens. The terraces on Williamson Street are too narrow for rain gardens however some are being proposed for side streets. Pervious pavements are not recommended for arterial streets and pervious sidewalk requires significant excavation and preparation under the sidewalk to condition the soil for infiltration.

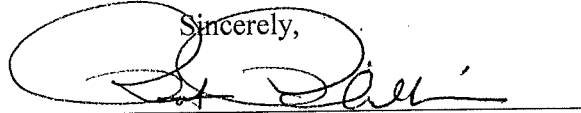
There has also been an interest in delaying the project one more year to facilitate more planning: The following should be considered when contemplating further delay:

1. The **project was already delayed one year** from 2010 to 2011.
2. Many of the water services to buildings are made of lead. The **DNR has required that these lead services be replaced in 2011.** In addition, it is not appropriate to continue to expose these property owners to a source of lead.
3. The project estimate of \$10,300,000 is a significant investment, utilizes the entire budget available and requires a \$1,300,000 budget amendment. **Providing additional funding will be difficult** in an out year and will need to be considered along with other requests City wide.
4. Both the **low cost of borrowing money** and the **extremely competitive nature of the bidding** that we are currently experiencing support going forward with this project at this time.

5. This project has incorporated a total of 20 "Green" initiatives and is an excellent project.

City Engineering will continue to work with the neighborhood to refine the current plan, and efforts to move forward on the undergrounding of the overhead utilities will continue. As construction nears, communication with the residents and businesses affected by this project will be vital to ensuring the success of the project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Phillips", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Robert F. Phillips, P.E.
City Engineer