

Dec. 12, 2023

Dear Boards of Park Commission and Transportation Commission,

I oppose the **ill-conceived bike paths** created by Ben Zellers, a city planner, and Renee Callaway, the city bike office representative, and described in the recent memo by planners to prepare you for your Dec. 13 meeting on the West Area Plan. Those bike paths, which are woven into the West Area Plan, cannot **ethically** be considered by city agencies until Engineer JoJo O'Brien finishes the difficult task of detailing her plans to reconstruct the creek, which the city has ignored for decades. Approving even the concept of bike paths is premature. **Please immediately remove the Sauk Creek bike path plans from the West Area Plan.**

Sauk Creek neighbors like me support the cleanup of the creek for flood control. Many of us are bicyclists. Our primary concern is **the city's flagging commitment to the environment**, and I will let my neighbor, Michael Notaro, director of the UW-Madison Center for Climatic Research, testify to the importance of those issues for you and our other city agencies. Please see his statement.

City planners will show you the following, which contains **misleading information**.

## Sauk Creek Greenway



- ~ 150 acre block
- Bounded by two parks
- Important potential link in All Ages and Abilities bicycle network
- Plan show path connection going back 30+ years
- Strong neighbor opposition to shared-use path (dangerous, crime, preserve tree canopy, unneeded, doesn't connect to anything, wildlife, runoff, cost, noise, maintenance)
- General support for more safe bicycle connections in the planning area



**First**, neither neighbors nor environmental experts have requested or supported this bike path. It is a plan sprung on neighborhoods in a sparsely attended meeting in July 2023, just five months ago, not 30 years ago. **Our research shows that is not accurate that we or you should have known that the city was planning this bike path for 30 years.** We are concerned about the

quality of other data the planners have given you. Many neighbors in the Sauk Creek neighborhood have vivid memories of how the bike path conversations went in the past 30 years. We have documents that show:

- **The Park and Open Space plans do not apply to the Sauk Creek Greenway.**
- **The 2000 MPO Bike Plan said a Sauk Creek path was listed as a third priority given that “suitable on-road routes exist.”**
- **The 2015 MPO bike report said there is not a bike gap in the neighborhood, and it 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.**

**Second**, while the city staffers may have had **conversations for 30 years ago among themselves**, the earliest we can find records of the unneeded Sauk Creek bike plan is the MPO report in 2015, eight years, not 30 years, ago. **Just because the city planners have been thinking about this for 30 years, if that is accurate, doesn’t mean that a bike path has had official approval for that amount of time.** Neighbors in the area who have lived here for decades say that they were never contacted about a bike path. This means there was no engagement and thus no community conversation that the city laws require.

**Third**, no other neighborhood or Greenway is called out in the West Area Plan and we were told planners were using Sauk Creek as **"an example"** and we were assured that the city was **not advocating for this specific piece of land to get a bike path.** The planners’ misuse of its reference to the All Ages and Abilities bicycle network flies in the face of steep grades in the entrances to the Greenway that far exceed **Americans with Disability Act** requirements of less than about 5 percent grade. This is what's dangerous with this plan.

**Fourth**, our deep concerns about the environment are not captured in the slide above and we are cast as an eccentric group of small-minded people who do not care about **inclusiveness** when we live across the street from one of the largest Indian communities in Madison, which regularly uses the Greenway for hiking and family walks. There are two apartment facilities, one on Tree Lane near High Point and one on Tree Lane and Gammon, where diverse people live. There are no barriers to enter the Sauk Creek area and the city welcomes all people there. During COVID, they came in droves.

**In short**, this is a proposal coming only from **a few planners who are bicycle advocates** and not from any other place. The neighbors oppose it for **very good environmental reasons**, which the planners won’t even acknowledge. They discount the Creek’s undeniable role in sending clean water sources to Lake Mendota, which can happen if the trees remain, the creek banks are shored up and the filtering qualities of the Pheasant Branch Watershed are enabled. Our biggest concern is climate change and the negative effects on the environment for all residents of Madison. If the city cuts down many of **the 5,500 trees** to bring in machinery on the **steep grades** to build an asphalted bike path, we will have lost the leaves' indispensable ability to absorb carbon emissions and Canadian forest fire smoke particulates. The damage to the greenway will limit the woods' ability to cool the city and provide habitat for ancient vegetation,

history for Native Americans, and an ecosystem that allows birds and small creatures to support the land.

We want to help city officials balance the many values of its different constituencies and we are baffled why the city planners ignore environmental concerns in **this era of a climate crisis**. They have **evaded us**, been **rude** to us, told us we had no right to give them feedback and surprised us on many occasions with new plans for the Greenway for which we had **no engagement**. This is **NOT the Madison I came to love** during my years at UW-Madison and my subsequent tenure as the first female editor of the Wisconsin State Journal starting in 2004.

I do not live on Sauk Creek. I live on a very steep service road that has many dogwalkers and hikers and they do not scare me. What frightens me is **a cadre of city officials who can't connect the dots** between **indiscriminate tree removal** in one of the city's last large woods and the **inevitable noxious plumes from Canadian forest fires and much hotter summers** that could forever make **our city inhospitable** to healthy American life.

Thank you,

Ellen Foley