

June 19, 2017

Dear TORC Members,

I am sorry that I am unable to attend tonight's meeting to speak in person. I had intended to attend the last meeting as well, but I have been experiencing vertigo over the past week, which is making it hard to get around. So I am sending a written statement instead.

I support the current version of the draft Leg. File 46249 Second Substitute, being discussed tonight.

First of all, as a member of the Racial Equity Team, I support the inclusion of racial equity language and the streamlining of committees, both of which are groundbreaking for the City of Madison.

As our RESJI Team emphasized, we need to name race in our ordinances to ensure that our goal and work of creating greater racial equity is crystal clear, and that this focus is not lost in a blur of vague, uncentered consideration of "equity" in general.

Experience shows us that we need to keep our focus on race, if we intend to effectively address disparities affecting people of color. (Experience also shows us that when we do this, other equity issues will be addressed as well.)

And consolidating committees and simplifying committee structure, is a good start towards making City government more accessible and understandable to all residents.

We could take this even further, by providing transportation and child care subsidies to residents who would like to participate in committees but who have limited resources.

We could also create guidelines for such things as length of committee meetings, and how they are conducted. Who among us can afford to attend a meeting with no predictable end time, or with no estimated time for consideration of certain agenda items for individual registrants?

At any rate, I hope this proposal will serve as a model, and that the City will continue to streamline its committee structure, and reduce the number of committees and meetings (roughly 90-100 per month).

At this point, I'd like to switch gears and express some thoughts as a resident of the city and as a former City employee.

The number of committees and how they are run not only impacts access to government. It also impacts where we apply City money and time.

I am proud of the fact that the City of Madison wants to hear from its residents. However, is an overabundance of committees and meetings the best way for the City to spend its time and money? Could some of these resources be better spent on other needs in the city?

Which leads me to my next point: I prefer that we not immediately move towards hiring a Director of Transportation, which would be unnecessary and costly. I prefer that we wait and see.

Madison has a population of 245K. Dane County has a population of 516K. We are nowhere near the size of cities who typically employ Directors (such as Seattle, a city of nearly 700K and a greater metro area of 3.7M, or Portland with a similar population profile.) Even with anticipated growth, it will be a long while before we reach those numbers, if ever.

Furthermore, we have only so many arterials and collectors in a limited amount of space. We have only so much room to balance the needs of all transportation modes and users. What new insight would a Director bring to this reality, that we haven't already considered?

I think our current Transportation staff does a devil of a job to weigh the needs of all the different transportation modes and users, as well as the needs of the larger region with Madison at the economic and governmental center of it.

I think the City has more urgent priorities, where money could be better spent than creating a new, costly position.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments, and for allowing me to participate in the work of the Committee over the past months. It has been a real pleasure, and a highlight of my time with the City.

Best regards,

Anne Benishek-Clark  
Resident of District 3  
And former City employee and RESJI Member