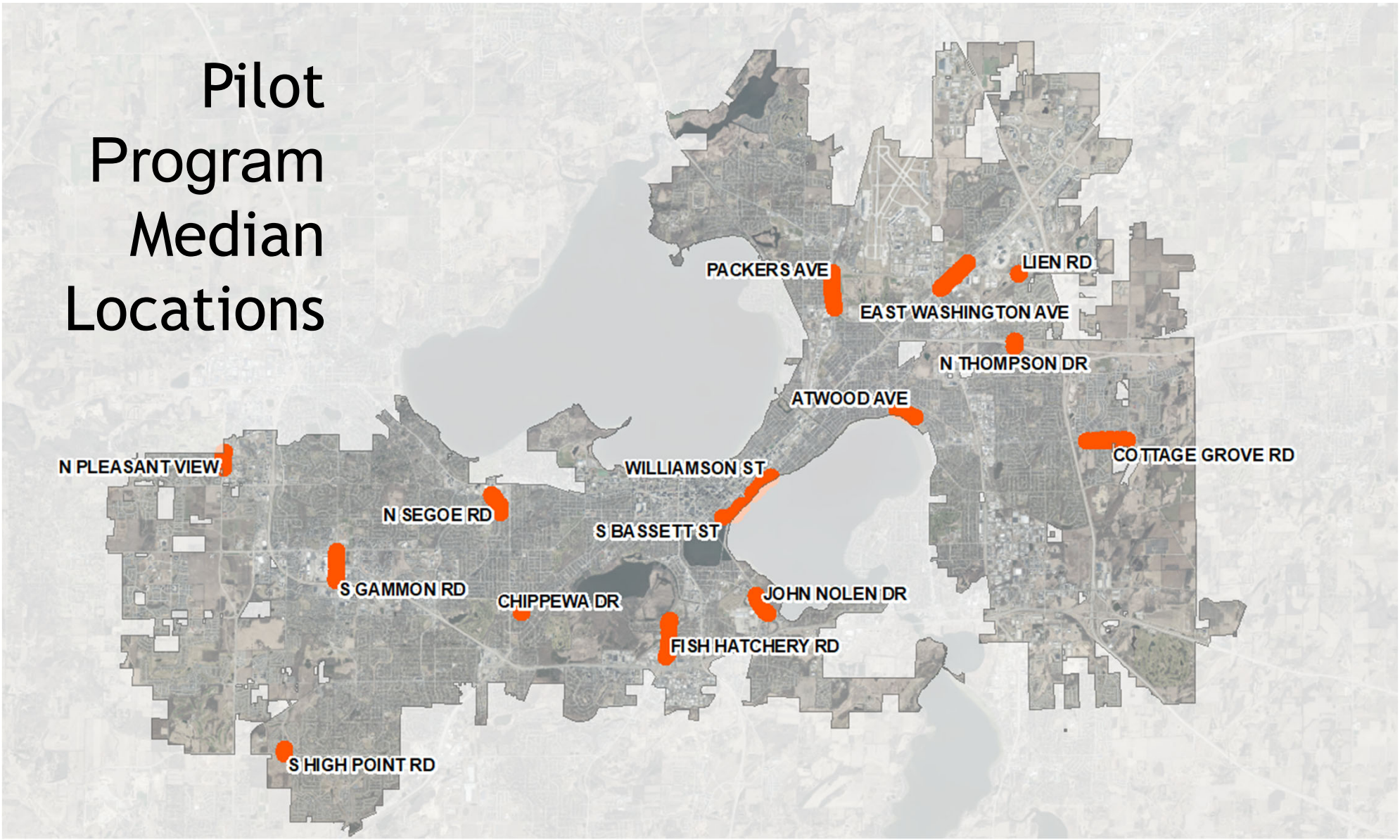
Pilot Program- Native/Low Mow Vegetation in Planted Medians

Pilot Program- Native Vegetation in Planted Medians

- Program Started in 2019 – the Goal was to establish native plantings that required minimal resources as an alternative to landscape beds and turf, by planting high density native plantings that could outcompete weeds
- **<u>~50 Medians Split Two Programs:</u>**
  - Retrofitting Existing Medians ~ 25
  - Newly Constructed Medians ~ 25
- Program Goals and Species Design Goals:
  - Plants must remain within vision hazard height restrictions
  - Ability to withstand drought, salt, sediment, soil compaction
  - Broadly acceptable aesthetic
- Different landscape design approach than traditional landscape beds to try to reduce maintenance.

Pilot Program Median Locations



Pilot Program Methods

- **Variety of Seed Mix and Planting Methods**
  - Low Mow Fescues, Low Mow Fescues in Combination with Short Pollinator Species, Short Grass Prairie Mix, Custom Native Seed Mixes
  - Different types of mulch and erosion matting
  - Tried Custom Native Plant and Grass Small Plants tolerant of clay and soil
  - **Installation costs from 2019-today are ~ $250,000 for seed alone**
- **Variety of Maintenance Methods:**
  - City staff – hundreds of hours with seasonal and permanent staff
  - Ecological Restoration Contracts – multiple years of contracts under ecological contracts through bidding process
  - Landscapers – also tried including maintenance under a bid contract for landscaping

Pilot Program Outcomes & Feedback

- More issues with **vision hazards** than conventional mowing
- Complex Maintenance Intensive and Require High Level Of Expertise for Traffic Median
  - **Trash**
  - **Dangerous**
  - **Lack of contractors willing to bid, and expensive**
  - **Staff resource intensive, staff spent hundreds of hours trying to establish these areas**
- Negative Community Feedback
- Not appropriate for wildlife habitat with high-speed vehicles
- Difficult to Establish

Pilot Program Outcomes & Feedback

Vision Hazards. As noted on the prior slide wet weather can result in rapid weed growth and difficult maintenance. In addition to weeds, even the plants we desire can grow quickly into a vision obstruction.

There are 2 primary types of this problem:

- Drivers making left turns with a planted median in front of them and often on a down gradient – the height of the plants can quickly obstruct drivers' ability to see on- coming vehicles (car to car sight – lower riding)
- Plant height can very quickly obstruct the driver's ability to see pedestrians (especially kids) taking refuge in a median, crossing a street. This population is the most likely to dart into traffic in this situation, making this even more dangerous.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Results

- **Not the right plant, for the right place.**
  - Too many environmental pressures. Native ecosystems and plants are great solutions for parks, stormwater infrastructure, raingardens, and other areas that have either less environmental pressures or more access to maintenance.
- **Only 2 of the 58 pilot medians has successful plant establishment, that's less than 3%. Not a solution for a sustainable, low maintenance landscape for traffic medians.**
  - One of the 2 current successful pilot medians is successful because it is across from Olbrich – maintained by horticulturists and has an underground irrigation system.
- **Unlikely to have future success as a low maintenance, sustainable option. High costs to install, spent over $250,000 for seed and plants in pilot period.**
  - High costs to maintenance due to significant environmental pressures maintenance on medians, and high level of native plant seed establishment and maintenance. Hundred of staff hours.
  - Increased dangers with both vision hazards and maintenance.
  - Community complaints throughout process on maintenance, concerns about vision hazards, and aesthetic.
- **Segoe Medians have been undergoing herbicide applications and mowing to reduce weed bed for native plants, but proposal today is to seed these with turf instead of prairie.**

Questions?