

From: [Karen Bassler](#)
To: [All Alders](#)
Subject: Benches at the Social Justice Center
Date: Friday, January 30, 2026 9:38:48 PM

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

The city is demanding that the benches outside the Social Justice Center on Willy St. be removed immediately.

I have no words adequate to convey the absurdity of demanding that benches donated by the Madison Community Foundation, and named in honor of true Madisonian leaders like Nan Cheney and Gene Farley, and located at the SOCIAL JUSTICE CENTER be removed because people use them.

This is discrimination, classism and a waste of city resources. I am by the SJC every day and see people gathered, talking, sharing resources, resting and bothering nobody.

We need MORE not fewer community spaces that are free and open to all.

Someone must educate city staff on the true meaning of DEI, compassion and humanity.

Allow the benches to stay, to provide respite, community and humanity.

Karen Bassler

From: [Nick Berigan](#)
To: [All Alders](#)
Subject: benches
Date: Wednesday, February 4, 2026 5:33:52 AM

Some people who received this message don't often get email from nberigan@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

I got a notice from Brenda Konkell about the initiative to remove benches from the space next to the social justice center. It seems that these benches are considered by the city as nuisances. Brenda noted the ridiculous effort to remove benches from State Street in the past.

This is some ridiculous social engineering stuff. People need to sit once in a while. All kinds of people. Ones without homes, ones with armloads of stuff they just bought in a nearby store, ones with kids who need to get them to chill out. People like me who are aging and just need to catch our breaths once in a while.

Stuff like this is why we don't go down to State Street anymore. It seems that to be comfortable down there, one needs to be buying stuff from one of the stores. Social engineering sucks on State Street. Let's keep it off Willy Street for as long as we can please.

Nick Berigan
Marconi Street

--

nb
[channel](#)

From: [Erica Colmenares](#)
To: [Mayor](#)
Cc: [All Alders](#)
Subject: Social Justice Center Benches and Little Free Library/Pantry
Date: Thursday, February 26, 2026 10:19:50 AM

Some people who received this message don't often get email from ericacolmenares@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Dear Mayor,

I am writing to urge you to reconsider the Social Justice Center's permit denial. This denial is make-work that distracts an organization providing vital community work.; It will not solve the problem that was brought to the city's attention through a neighbor complaint. In fact, from what people who are familiar with how the area is used, things may be even worse. Seems like we can do better.

Thank you,

Erica Colmenares

From: [Katrina Gray](#)
To: [All Alders](#)
Subject: Social Justice Center- benches and pantry
Date: Saturday, January 31, 2026 8:37:28 AM

Some people who received this message don't often get email from kgray@uwalumni.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Please stop the forced removal of benches and pantry from the Social Justice Center terrace. As we know, logically and historically, removing resources does not actually improve problems. These pieces are cherished pieces of Madison's recent history and they are an example of the ever-dwindling public spaces.

Two of the benches were donated from the "Boombox the Wasteland" event that took place at Union Corners when there was nothing there - 15 years ago. The benches we have were donated by the Madison Community Foundation and Hinckley Productions. They have been there for 15 years.

One bench is a memorial bench honoring the late Dr. David Deci who was on the board of the International Street Medicine Institute and Director of the Office of Medical Student Education at UW-Madison in the Family Medicine and Community Health Department. The bench is located next to the rock with a plaque that honors Doctors Linda and Gene Farley. Gene made the sculpture in the picture. The piece was donated in honor of Nan and David Cheney who were co-founders and major donors to the Social Justice Center. All 5 people have since passed.

Removing these items from the terrace, that were placed here to honor 5 of the fiercest advocates for Social Justice that I have known is absolutely heartbreaking to me personally. To do it in an effort to get homeless people to stop hanging out here is more than ironic given the life's work of these fine people.

In requesting the immediate removal of the benches, the city writes "The benches are similar to an "attractive nuisance" in that they attract and invite individuals to occupy the benches and congregate in the area for long periods of time." as well as "allowing the benches to remain would provide incentive and physical infrastructure for prolonged stationary use of the terrace. The history and existing conditions make it reasonably foreseeable that allowing the benches would result in continued and potentially escalated nuisance activity in the area"

When middle class people sit on a bench, its call "placemaking". When homeless people do it, its called a "nuisance". That is the very definition of discrimination - in this case discrimination based on homelessness as a protected class.

Finally, one last point, the city asserts that "The terrace is not designed or intended to function as a passive gathering area". I believe this area has been exactly that since the 1970s. This is the former site of the Willy St. Coop. I remember being told that they had tables and chairs in this area for customers and staff to hang out . . . er . . . passively gather. I believe this terrace has served that purpose for nearly 50 years.

Katrina Gilliam
2138 Oakridge Ave
608-239-4478

From: [Spencer Hess](#)
To: [All Alders](#)
Subject: Benches
Date: Monday, February 2, 2026 12:18:48 PM
Attachments: [Screenshot_20260131-090937.png](#)

Some people who received this message don't often get email from spencerchess@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Hello,

As a Madison resident for 18 years, I am sad that these small pieces of history are being eliminated.

Parks are for everyone not just for the right kind of madisonians

Thanks,

Spencer Hess
301 crestview Dr, Madison, WI 53716

otherwise?

Dr. Dave Deci
Dr. Gene Farley
Dr. Linda Farley
David Cheney
and our dearest Nan Cheney
iPresente!

Calling on current community activists to stand on the shoulders of these fine folks that have made our community better in so many ways and continue the struggle for social justice like those who are honored here!

Stay tuned for how to help. You can contact allalders@cityofmadison.com and ask them to stop this and attend the Board of Public Works meeting when they hear our appeal.



City says this "attractive nuisance" must go!

From: [noreply](#)
To: [All Alders](#)
Subject: [All Alders] Social Justice Center
Date: Friday, February 6, 2026 9:34:47 AM

Recipient: All Alders:

Friday, February 6, 2026 – 9:34am

James Homann

He/him

1938 n Cambridge Ave

Milwaukee, Wisconsin. 53202 Yes, by email. jamesnhomann@gmail.com All Alders Social Justice Center Good morning Alders,

I am a long time Milwaukee resident with family and friends in Madison. On the bus ride in to work today I read that the City of Madison has ordered the Social Justice Center to remove its benches and close its food pantry, as they are somehow producing criminals and "negative behavior" (as described by a City official). On one hand, this article was a funny read. Imagine wasting the City's time, money, and energy trying to prevent people from sitting down in public. In our current political world, I'm sure there are more pressing issues for the City to work on than benches. On the other hand, I was deeply distressed by this news. Food banks do not create crime. Seating does not create crime. Material conditions like hunger, poverty, and cyclical violence create crime. Capitalism and exploitation are the sources of crime in America, not charity. It's pitiful that the City of Madison is going out of its way to prey on Madison's most vulnerable people, instead of addressing the conditions that put these people in need in the first place.

Why does the City describe being poor or being houseless as "negative behavior"? Nobody is choosing to be poor and hungry day after day. If Madison is serious about making decisions based on Victorian-era beliefs, why not go all the way and open a workhouse where people can build character by breaking rocks all day?

I am curious as to why this bench order was ever taken seriously, so I do hope to hear back from you soon.

James Homann

From: [noreply](#)
To: [All Alders](#)
Subject: [All Alders] Removal of Memoriam Benches
Date: Saturday, January 31, 2026 7:57:08 AM

Recipient: All Alders:

Saturday, January 31, 2026 – 7:56am

Rhiannon Jenkinson
he/they
3701 Susan Lane

Madison, Wisconsin. 53704 No, do not contact me. All Alders Removal of Memoriam Benches Earlier today I learned how the food pantry at the Social Justice Center must go according to the City of Madison. Which is asinine and frankly, targeted, in itself. Then, I learned they are requiring the removal of three benches. Two of the benches were donated from the "Boombox the Wasteland" event that took place at Union Corners when there was nothing there - 15 years ago. The benches we have were donated by the Madison Community Foundation and Hinckley Productions. They have been there for 15 years.

One bench is a memorial bench honoring the late Dr. David Deci who was on the board of the International Street Medicine Institute and Director of the Office of Medical Student Education at UW-Madison in the Family Medicine and Community Health Department. The bench is located next to the rock with a plaque that honors Doctors Linda and Gene Farley. Gene made the sculpture in the picture. The piece was donated in honor of Nan and David Cheney who were co-founders and major donors to the Social Justice Center. All 5 people have since passed.

Removing these items from the terrace, that were placed here to honor 5 of the fiercest advocates for Social Justice that I have known is absolutely heartbreaking to me personally. To do it in an effort to get homeless people to stop hanging out here is more than ironic given the life's work of these fine people.

In requesting the immediate removal of the benches, the city writes "The benches are similar to an "attractive nuisance" in that they attract and invite individuals to occupy the benches and congregate in the area for long periods of time." as well as "allowing the benches to remain would provide incentive and physical infrastructure for prolonged stationary use of the terrace. The history and existing conditions make it reasonably foreseeable that allowing the benches would result in continued and potentially escalated nuisance activity in the area"

When middle class people sit on a bench, its call "placemaking". When homeless people do it, its called a "nuisance". That is the very definition of discrimination - in this case discrimination based on homelessness as a protected class.

This is nothing new, remember when they removed the philosophers stones art from the top of State St.? A colossal waste of taxpayer dollars. Remember Soglin's freaky obsession with removing benches on State St? To what end? So people are forced to sit on the sidewalk, and then people complain about that too? I thought the city has moved past this phase 10 years ago
...

Disabled people rely on public seating like benches being available and easily accessible

nearby. Losing these means less money being spent in the community & spent on Amazon. Also it affects small businesses & less socializing with our neighbors.

Finally, one last point, the city asserts that "The terrace is not designed or intended to function as a passive gathering area". I believe this area has been exactly that since the 1970s. This is the former site of the Willy St. Coop. I remember being told that they had tables and chairs in this area for customers and staff to hang out . . .er . . .passively gather. I believe this terrace has served that purpose for nearly 50 years.

Does this look like a nuisance to you, attractive or otherwise?

Dr. Dave Deci
Dr. Gene Farley
Dr. Linda Farley
David Cheney
and our dearest Nan Cheney
¡Presente!

The city is so focused on demonizing and controlling the homeless population they don't bother to think about the rest of us who may want and need benches. Whether it be to simply relax with friends in a pretty place or to have a moment of rest so you can walk farther without pain. Spending money to remove benches and seating areas because you're afraid it may increase the amount of homeless people in the area is such a stupid waste of taxpayer money. Consider spending it on helping the homeless and disadvantaged population to not be on the streets instead?!

Sincerely,
A Disappointed Madisonian

From: [Mary Kateada](#)
To: [All Alders](#)
Subject: Social Justice Center Concerns
Date: Monday, February 9, 2026 12:46:10 PM

[Some people who received this message don't often get email from marykateada@gmail.com. Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification>]

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Madison Common Council & Mayor Rhodes-Conway -

I am writing concerning your recent actions in regards to the Social Justice Center on Williamson Street -

- the demand to remove the bench

- the demand to remove the small food pantry

They appear rather ridiculous in light of everything that you could be and should be focusing on in our beloved city.

What nerve has the SJC struck? They serve people IN SERIOUS NEED. And shouldn't that be some kind of bottom line in every decision made?

I'm confused. I care. With all due respect.

Mary Kateada

From: [Brenda Konkel](#)
To: [Mikolajewski, Matthew](#); [Board of Public Works](#)
Cc: [Tucker, Matthew](#); [All Alders](#); [Mayor](#); [Davila, Sydney L.](#); [SJC Board of Directors](#); [Staff](#); [Yogesh Chawla](#); [Sanon, Reuben A](#); [Okeefe, James](#); [Lim, Sarah](#); [Anya Firszt](#); [Dray, Steven](#); [Rhodes, Linette](#); [Del Lorensen](#); [Hannah, Jennifer](#); [Patterson, John](#)
Subject: Appeal of Social Justice Center Privilege in Street Permit Denial
Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2026 6:44:47 PM
Attachments: [Privilege in Streets Appeal \(1\).pdf](#)

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Attached please see our appeal of the decision of Economic Development Division Director Matt Mikolajewski denying the Social Justice Center Privilege in Street Permit. The letter says we can appeal to the Board of Public Works and with this letter we are doing so.

The letter did not indicate who to send the appeal to. I have included the email address that appears on the BPW agendas as well as Economic Development Division Matt Mikolajewski and people who have attended other discussions with us at the Social Justice Center.

It is our sincere hope that we can continue to work on the root causes of homelessness with City of Madison Departments and Divisions in a meaningful, solution oriented way. Removing (or moving 20 feet to the east) a little free library/pantry and some benches will do nothing towards solving the underlying issues and will have unintended consequences, moving us further from the solutions we all seek.

We are looking forward to continued productive conversations with the City as we all know the issues around the Social Justice Center will just repeat themselves throughout the city in the upcoming months when the new shelter opens with strict population caps, forcing 100 - 150 people currently using the men's shelter to sleep on the streets with extremely limited other solutions. The costs to the city to continue moving people from place to place would be better spent elsewhere and we hope you all agree and will continue productive conversations around solutions.

Brenda K. Konkel, Treasurer, Social Justice Center
on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Social Justice Center.

Brenda K. Konkel
Executive Director, Madison Street Medicine
1202 Williamson St. #101, Madison, WI 53703
brenda@madisonstreetmedicine.org
(608) 676-7826 x 4, 2
she/her/hers



Appeal Letter to Board of Public Works



Home to:

Madison Street Medicine	Madison Community Cooperative	608 Arts
Interpreters Cooperative	Madison Workers Cooperative	Madison InfoShop
IWW - Madison	Madison Mutual Aid Network	Madison Area DSA
Family Farm Defenders	Wisconsin Books to Prisoners	Progressive Dane
Interpreters Coop	LGBTQ Books to Prisoners	Jewish Voices for Peace
Veterans for Peace	Common Good Bookkeeping Cooperative	

1202 Williamson St., Madison, WI 53703
frontdesk@socialjusticecenter.org

socialjusticecenter.org
608-227-0206

To: Board of Public Works
CC: Alder Davy Mayer, Supervisor Yogesh Chawla
From: Board of Directors, Social Justice Center

- President - Kyle Wienke (Wisconsin Books to Prisoners)
- Vice President - Enzo Ciarletta (Tenant Resource Center)
- Secretary - Maple Epp (Madison Community Coop)
- Treasurer - Brenda Konkel (Madison Street Medicine)
- Stephanie Rearick (Madison MAN)
- Kristin Mathews (Community Member, Volunteer)
- Lisa Nunez (608 Arts)
- Bryan Davis (LGBTQ Books to Prisoners)
- Steve Herrick (Interpreters Coop)
- Hannah Renfro (Tenant Resource Center)
- PJ Chamberlain (MadWorC)

Re: Appeal of Privilege in Streets Denial
Date: February 26, 2026

INTRODUCTION

We are in receipt of the letter dated January 27, 2026 from Matt Mikolajewski, Director of the Economic Development Division where he informed us our Privilege in Streets permit was denied. That letter states **“The art is allowed to remain, but all other items named in the application shall be removed upon receipt of this letter.”** It also informs us of the right to appeal, which we are doing with this letter.

Written comments in the application include some items in the terrace. However, the map, which was a required part of the application, shows everything existing in the terrace, per the instructions we were given via email. The letter only addresses a few items, including the benches, little free library/pantry and art. We have attached a copy of the application including the map which includes many other items in the right of way (bike rack, kiosk, garbage cans, rain garden and perhaps mural and lighting). We write today to clarify the intent as to the items not mentioned by Director Mikolajewski and appeal the findings in the letter.

More importantly, it seems this action is being taken to eliminate homeless persons who live in the area. When one does not have a home, there are many struggles. Where does one go to the bathroom? Where should one sit? Sleep? Eat? Legally exist? Without a home, many activities are forced to be performed in public and subject to complaints from neighbors and tickets from the police department. Which is problematic for people throughout the entire city. The city as a whole spends an inordinate amount of money to move people around through efforts of the Police, Fire, Parks, Engineering, Community Development and other departments. We

expect the number of people using our streets as a home to increase significantly in the next year. We had a 35% increase in single persons experiencing homelessness since 2022 and the number of people who can't get into shelter when the men's shelter opens will increase the number of people on the streets as it will have a cap of 250 people and there have been nearly 400 people staying there this winter during the coldest nights.

The Social Justice Center has been working to coordinate efforts to figure out where people should go, so the Police, Fire, Parks, City staff and outreach workers are sending a consistent message. But the issue remains, we have no place to tell people to go. If the City and County, or for that matter the entire nation, cannot solve these issues, it is unreasonable to expect the Social Justice Center to do so or continue to be a part of the system further oppressing people with nowhere to live.

Secondarily, several of the items that the city is asking us to remove are memorial items for people who have passed away. Moving art that has been in place for 20 years, benches that have been in place for 15 years and the little free library/pantry that has provided the community with approximately 10,000 pounds of food per year and has been there for 6 years will not address any of the issues above, because the fact remains that for many, there is no legal place to go. And while we are expected to tell people to leave the terrace, no one can answer where we should tell people to go.

Moving these items will not solve homelessness, will not remove people from the neighborhood and it certainly does nothing to address the increasing numbers of people who are homeless and will not be able to get into shelter. Instead, moving these items merely makes the lives of people experiencing homelessness in this neighborhood less comfortable and less convenient.

BACKGROUND

The Social Justice Center purchased this property from the Willy Street Coop in April, 2000. At that time we acquired building permits to renovate the property as well as in 2008 a permit to fix the drainage pipe from the roof. Since that time we have had several additional permissions granted by the city for various improvements to the property and surrounding area, including our murals.

In January 2025, after repeated individual conversations with neighbors, the Marquette Neighborhood Association and area businesses, we reached out to the police department to see what their concerns were. Our efforts to resolve issues January - July 2025 are outlined in this [July 2026 letter to the Mayor](#) which culminated in a request to meet with the Mayor and various city departments that frequently answer complaints involving our unhoused neighbors. That request to meet was not approved, instead we were told by Sam Munger, the Mayor's Chief of Staff:

“Dear Ms. Konkel and SJC Board Members – thank you for the detailed letter outlining your concerns. We certainly agree that we would like to see the dispute between the Social Justice Center and its neighbors resolved collaboratively so that the SJC can continue its important work and residents' concerns are addressed.

My understanding is that there is a meeting scheduled for tomorrow between SJC leadership and MPD staff including Captain Hartmann to discuss the complaints. That sounds like an excellent next step toward making progress on the situation, and I look forward to hearing the outcome of that meeting.”

To which Brenda Konkel, one of our board members replied:

Thanks for your response, but respectfully, we need more than a meeting with the police department, the city is working at odds with itself and we are caught in the middle.

More importantly, I certainly hope that the Mayor's office doesn't see homelessness as a policing issue. We've worked hard to decriminalize homelessness in this city and I hope we aren't going backwards, especially with Trump's latest executive orders. I hope this progressive city can put our minds together and find a better way. Unfortunately, this is just a sign of things to come, especially when the men's shelter opens and only can take 250 people when we know there were 400 in the shelters over the winter. 150 people aren't going to disappear. In fact, if trends hold, that number will increase.

I hope we can do better.

That email went unanswered.

Our efforts to work on issues collaboratively with the City have been one-sided and all remedies to issues have been placed on the Social Justice Center. We have continued to do those things which we reasonably can, but most recently our efforts have been answered by:

1. Building Inspection Order for weeds and plantings that are too tall
2. Building Inspection Order to remove items in the terrace
3. After we met with the Police Department and Assistant City Attorney Jennifer Zilivy on August 5th we received a [letter from the City Attorney's office](#) about "nuisance activities" at the Social Justice Center.

The first building inspection report we were aware of was regarding weeds and the height of the plantings in the terrace. Working with Building Inspection, we remedied that order within a week or two.

The other building inspection report was to remove the items in the terrace. We remedied that complaint, which we did not receive via mail until July 28, 2025 when we paid \$50 and applied for [Street Terrace Permit](#).

[Show on Map](#)

Showing 1-1 of 1 | [Download results](#) | [Export](#) | [Add to collection](#) | [Add to cart](#) | [Copy Record](#)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Date	Action	Record Number	Record Type	Address	Status	Description	Project Name	Short Notes
<input type="checkbox"/>	07/28/2025		ENGTER-2025-03522	Street Terrace Permit	1202 Williamson ST, 1, Madison WI 53703 United States	Online Submittal			

On September 16th, Building Inspector Matt Tucker informed Brenda Konkel that we applied for the wrong permit which was "not approved/placed on hold".

On September 17th, 2025 we applied for a Privilege in Streets Permit and we paid \$750. The application was deemed complete on the date they received the check and we were notified on September 22 that they received the check. However, the map we submitted, multiple times (9/17, 10/28, 10/30 and 11/12), was finally deemed sufficient for circulation on 11/13. We heard nothing until January 27th, 2026.

The letter summarizing our meeting with the Police Department and Attorney Zilavy demanded that we "take immediate and concrete steps to eliminate or at least reduce the nuisance activity". When we inquired about what was required, they said it was merely a summary of our meeting with the police department. Follow ups included discussions about our lighting and we changed the timing on our lights. We heard nothing further from Attorney Zilavy after those interactions in the month following the letter. We have since also installed a camera for our parking lot.

Since that time we have continued efforts to reach out to the city. SJC scheduled a meeting with the mayor's office, Parks Department, Police Department, Community Development Division, Alder Davy Mayer, Supervisor Yogesh Chawla, community businesses and the Marquette Neighborhood Association. It has been over a year that we have been reaching out to find mutually agreeable solutions and work collaboratively with the City. Unfortunately, the city has taken an adversarial and enforcement approach instead of working together with us to resolve issues. We have now scheduled a smaller meeting with CARES, Police and Community Development to continue working on solutions. We will meet on the 26th, the date of this letter.

We believe we have acted in good faith, complied with reasonable requests, complied with building inspection orders and come to the table in a collaborative spirit. We recognize the answers to the issues we are facing throughout the City are not easily solvable. However, homelessness is a protected class in the City of Madison and we should not be putting the burden of society's issues on those most marginalized in our community.

ITEMS IN THE TERRACE

We are writing to clarify that the following items are not to be removed despite the wording in the letter: "The art is allowed to remain, but all other items named in the application shall be removed upon receipt of this letter." We presume that does not apply to the following:

1. Rain Garden
 - a. Approved by the city in 2008 when we had to tear up the side walk to fix the pipe that diverts the water from the roof into the rain garden
2. Bike Rack
 - a. This was installed by the city with the reconstruction of Williamson St. and encourages gathering as people come and go from parking their bikes.
3. City Garbage Cans
 - a. These garbage cans have been in place for 15 years or more and move around a bit according to need. They were placed there by and emptied by the city.
4. City Kiosk
 - a. This kiosk was in place prior to 2000 when we purchased the property. This kiosk also encourages gathering in the area as people put up posters and read them.
5. Mural and lighting
 - a. As we have a zero lot line building we are writing to clarify that the mural, approved by the Landmark Commission in 2010 is not to be removed.

The following items have been in the terrace for 15 to over 20 years.

1. The [larger art sculpture by Gene Farley](#) was donated by [Gene](#) and [Linda Farley](#) in 2004 in honor of [David](#) and [Nan Cheney](#) who were co-founders of and major donors to the Social Justice Center. The art has been there since 2004 and it was dedicated to the Cheney's in 2006. It has been in place for over 20 years and honors 4 people who were fierce social justice advocates and have made our community a better place in countless ways.

Gene Farley was a man of many talents. In addition to being the founder of the Farley Center for Peace, Justice & Sustainability, a family physician and Chair of the UW Department of Family Medicine and being active in



many progressive groups, he enjoyed creating large metal sculptures and drawing what he called doodles.

There are a total of 17 sculptures at the Farley Center with another one in front of the Social Justice Center in Madison, WI and one in Golden, Colorado.

2. The simple wooden benches have been in place for nearly 15 years and were donated from the [“Boombox the Wasteland”](#) event that took place on the Union Corners property in June 2011. The benches were donated by the Madison Community Foundation and Hinkley Productions.



The little free library/pantry is addressed below.

ARGUMENT

A. Applicant can meet requirements, should be approved. No standards for denial. The Privilege in Streets ordinance, Madison General Ordinance 10.31 has no stated standards for approval. It merely explains when the Director of Economic Development Division shall not recommend it in 10.31(2)(a).

The Director of the Economic Development Division or their designee (Director) **shall not recommend that the privilege be granted unless the applicant shows that the requirements of this section will be satisfied, and that applicable ordinances, resolutions and Board of Public Works and Plan Commission policies will be complied with.** If the Director recommends approval of an application for a privilege in streets, the Director shall inform the applicant in writing of its recommendation and the conditions of approval. Following concurrence of the applicant with the conditions of approval, the Director, in cooperation with the City Attorney, shall prepare an agreement, setting forth the requirements and conditions under which the privilege in streets is permitted. Following execution of all the documents by the applicant, the required documents are to be executed by the Director, who shall monitor the payment of the annual fees in the event they are not collected as a special charge.

The Director of the Economic Development Division did not allege that we would not meet these requirements. We believe we will meet the requirements of the section and the city letter does not include a statement of which requirements we will not meet.

B. Factually inaccurate allegations, lack of due diligence in investigation. Reasons stated in the denial letter are factually inaccurate or have little or no relation to the items in the terrace.



1. Little free library/pantry. The Social Justice Center [little free library/pantry](#) was installed during COVID when the building was closed in order to provide food to the community since we couldn't run our indoor food pantry. It is supported in partnership with the [Willy St. Coop](#). In July it will have been serving our community for 6 years. Providing over 10,000 pounds of food per year for those in need.

The city ordinance allows little free libraries in the terrace area. This pantry contains a little free library. Little free libraries require neither an application nor annual fee. As the library has been there for 6 years in a highly visible area of the city, where the city picks up garbage weekly, we believed we were in compliance with the ordinance. We were unaware of any violation until the building inspection order late last summer. We had been meeting with the city for months and there was no mention of the violation or the ordinance during that time. While the preference not to have the items there has been raised by neighbors, the allegation that it was in violation of the ordinance was not raised in our multiple discussions with the city about issues on the property.

- a. **Oversight.** In the section of the where the little free library/pantry was denied, it alleges, without investigation or speaking with the Social Justice Center to verify the allegations, that it is "not monitored", lacks operational oversight and we provide "no" oversight, routine inspection, food-safety oversight, oversight of perishables, expired or recalled items, consistent stocking or restocking and cleaning.

This is unfounded. We are unclear how they drew this conclusion or what they based it on. The pantry is stocked daily Monday - Friday, and in this process we are providing oversight, inspection, monitoring and, when needed, cleaning. We regularly check for expired or perishable items. The Social Justice Center as well as one of our tenants Madison Street Medicine are partners with Second Harvest Foodbank and we both have taken food safety trainings and get regular notifications about recalled items. In addition to the outdoor pantry, the Social Justice Center has a Second Harvest approved pantry that is open Monday and Friday afternoons. Madison Street Medicine has a mobile pantry for people sleeping outside. As such, both are monitored annually for compliance with their best practices. While this little free library/pantry is not connected to Second Harvest Foodbank, we utilize many of the best practices and guidelines that we learned through that program.

- b. **Congregation.** The letter further alleges that the little free library/pantry encourages congregation. That is not our experience. People often make brief stops to visit the pantry, either to provide food or other items, or get food and other items. We are not aware of people congregating near the pantry due to the food and other items the pantry provides. People may congregate in the area for many reasons (bike racks, kiosk, lighting, etc), but it is not due to the

little free library/pantry structure itself. People typically visit briefly and then move on. Removal of this little free library/pantry will not reduce congregating in this area.

- c. **Public Health concerns.** The letter further alleges the Public Health inspected and found concerns. We never received any communication from Public Health. One of our tenants Madison Street Medicine is a partner with Public Health Madison and Dane County. Public Health staff have frequented the building on multiple occasions, along with Madison Street Medicine volunteer doctors, nurses and other professionals. None of them have raised concerns about the little free library/pantry. Surely if there was such a concern, we would have been notified and been asked to correct any issues by these professionals.
- d. **Relocation not a solution to issues identified.** Finally, the solution the city suggests is that we place the little free library/pantry onto our property, which will be a mere 20 feet away, where it would be legal. The argument that food storage and food exchange is not an appropriate use of the right-of-way is not addressed in the letter, just stated as fact without support. The conclusion that a little free library/pantry is a public health, safety and welfare risk based on its location in a right of way is inconsistent with their conclusion that “If the Center desires for such an item to exist, it shall be placed on private property, not in the public right-of-way.”
- e. **Unclear Ordinance.** Given that the little free library/pantry has been in place for 6 years and it was only after months of discussions with the city they brought it up, we believe it is not clear that the ordinance was meant to restrict such a structure in the right of way. Little free libraries are allowed, and this little free library/pantry should be allowed to continue.

Allegations of inadequate oversight are not based in fact. Congregating on public sidewalks and property is not related to the little free library/pantry structure, its part of being houseless and having no legal place to exist except in public. Public Health concerns were not brought to our attention and relocation will not address the concerns allegedly caused by these items being in the right of way. The conclusion drawn in the letter is based on inaccurate facts and irrational cause and effect logic. For these reasons, we ask that you overturn the denial of the little free library/pantry which is a lifeline for many in the community, both housed and unhoused.

2. **Benches.** We believe removing the two benches mentioned above as well as the [Dr. Dave Deci](#) memorial bench will result in the opposite impact the city is hoping to achieve.



- a. **Sitting and placing items on the sidewalk.** The chief complaint related to the benches appears to be about people sitting on the sidewalk and placing their belongings on the sidewalk. Removing the benches will only increase with the removal of the benches as people will have no place to sit or put their items except the sidewalk.
- b. **Attractive Nuisance.** The city asserts that the benches are “similar to an attractive nuisance” causing noise, trash, illegal drug use, alcohol consumption, disorderly conduct, encampments, and public urination and defecation adjacent to and on Social Justice property. Removing

benches will not impact any of this alleged behavior. In fact, it would likely move any such activity onto the sidewalks and closer to the neighbors who make the complaints and exacerbate any issues that exist with the neighbors.

- c. **Lack of oversight. Lack of due diligence in investigation.** The city alleges that this “attractive nuisance” is exacerbated by lack of oversight of the area. Again, we are unclear how they drew this conclusion or what they based it on. The allegations that there is “no staff supervision or oversight of this area by the Center and no resources available (e.g. restrooms) for those occupying the benches” is simply untrue. There are over 25 staff and volunteers that are in the building daily Monday - Friday between the hours of 9am and 8pm and have oversight of this area. All the organizations combined have over 100 staff and volunteers that are in and out of the building on a regular basis. To say we have no oversight of the area is simply untrue.
- d. **Restrooms.** Additionally, we offer one of the only restrooms in the area that is available to the public that doesn’t require a purchase to use it, except when the bathroom is open April - October blocks away in McPike Park and at the Willy St. Coop. Surely we can’t be held responsible to offer restrooms for free to the community 24/7 when area businesses and even our parks cannot do so.
- e. **Police Calls.** Another allegation is that the people who sit on the benches have caused a significant amount of police calls to the area. We meet every other week with the Madison Police Department and they report there has been a significant improvement in the area and have not asked us to address any issues since last August.
- f. **Unrecognized efforts and results/unintended consequences.** The city alleges that the “history and existing conditions make it reasonably foreseeable that allowing the benches would result in continued and potentially escalated nuisance activity in the area and obstruction of the public right-of-way.” This statement gives no recognition to the changes to policies and procedures the Social Justice Center has made to address concerns over the past year. Unfortunately, some of the changes the City asked us to do, had unintended consequences. Banning people from the building and telling people that they can’t sleep on our private property resulted in people being on public property and in the neighborhood where we have no authority to address issues.
- g. **History of the terrace.** The city asserts that “The terrace is not designed or intended to function as a passive gathering area” however this ignores 50 years of history. The terrace has been a gathering area since the 70s when the Willy St. Coop opened. Seating for patrons was placed on the terrace long before the Social Justice Center purchased the property.

1202 Williamson St, 1970s. Peace Protest.



- h. **Inconsistent statements.** Lastly, the city states that “There is at least one photo of an individual using the area near the benches as a bathroom.” and uses that as a reason for denial. However, they also state that “Individuals using the parking lot as a restroom are not necessarily users of the benches, however, the benches are near the parking lot and serve as an invitation for people to stay, congregate and ultimately engage in illegal or unsafe behavior.” It’s unclear to us what the city is asserting with the relation the benches play to the restroom issue.

The public benefit of benches clearly outweighs the alleged activity that is illogically associated with the benches. From a social justice perspective, we had expected that since Mayor Soglin is no longer in office, that the city’s discriminatory quest to remove benches because homeless people sit on them was discontinued. Many elders, disabled, tired mothers, bus users and pedestrians utilize public benches as a respite. This is a clear accessibility and equity issue and we are providing a service that the City is not. These benches serve as essential infrastructure for a welcoming city and thriving business district. Removing benches merely displaces people with nowhere to go, with likely unintended consequences of pushing people to the sidewalks and deeper into the residential area. Furthermore, there is no evidence that suggests that bench removal improves public safety.

To make a public bench an “attractive nuisance” seems to fly in the face of many city placemaking policies. It seems “placemaking” is a desired outcome, unless it attracts people without homes. Homelessness is a protected class in the City of Madison and to exclude uses based on this protected class is discriminatory.

For all of the above reasons, we ask that the Board of Public Works reverse the denial of allowing the benches in the right of way.

CONCLUSION

The city has failed to make its case that all of the allegations of activities around the Social Justice Center are attributable to the little free library/pantry and benches in a right of way. That is not the issue here. The issue is there is no legal place for people without homes to exist. There is no place to go to the bathroom. That people without homes have to do everything that housed people do in their houses, in public spaces.

The City, through Assistant City Attorney Jennifer Zilavy has tried various means to remove homeless people first from the Social Justice Center property itself and second, when unintended consequences resulted from our compliance, from around the Social Justice Center area. The city then wrongfully blamed the Social

Justice Center and the environment around it for their presence. We have continued to engage with the city despite initial demands to have 24/7 security, put up cameras, remove the public health vending machines, put up no trespassing signs and have staff and volunteers in the building carry id cards so police would know they could be on the property and more. All these things would not change the fact that people have no legal place to legally exist or go to the bathroom. Asking us to remove items that allegedly attract homeless individuals to the area sets a troubling precedent and leads to illogical conclusions. Many people experiencing homelessness gather near the Social Justice Center not because of terrace furniture, but because the area is well lit and populated as well as being close to many services (Luke House, Beacon, Wilmar, SJC, etc.), which makes it feel safer. If we follow the logic proposed by the city “removing features which attract people will deter congregation”, then that reasoning could just as easily be applied to the lighting at the SJC or long standing neighborhood services. Taken to its logical extreme, this argument would suggest removing the lighting and services as well, which is obviously an unreasonable and counterproductive outcome.

As a result of neighbor complaints, police initially asked us to ensure people were not sleeping on our property. When we successfully removed people from staying on our property, the neighbors then complained that there were people adjacent to our property in the city terrace where we have no authority to enforce rules. When the Police Department illegally ordered people off the terrace, they moved to the park. When the Parks Department asked them to move, they came back to this terrace. Leaving us with the question, where should we direct people to go? This would have been the same outcome with or without the little free library/pantry, benches and art.

Our little free library/pantry was started during COVID due to the need, and stood as an example of what can be done more recently when the federal government did not make food stamp payments. Many people throughout the nation provided food to neighbors in need through various forms of a little free library.

Benches are best practices, they contribute to placemaking, assure accessibility and increase equity for seniors and people with disabilities and others who need a place to rest. Homelessness is a protected class in the City of Madison and it seems that these benches are being removed to discriminate against people without homes.

Removal of a little free library/pantry and 3 benches is not going to address the behaviors the city is trying to address or solve the issue of homelessness and the growing number of people who will be outside when the new men’s shelter opens.

We are heartened that the City recognizes its broader responsibility to address needs and invest in appropriate infrastructure. We applaud Alder Davy Mayer’s advocacy for timed locks for earlier bathroom access and look forward to the bathrooms opening again in April. However, this is a year-round issue, and particularly problematic between the hours of 10pm and 6am. In the meantime, we, unlike many other businesses, allow the public to use our restrooms Monday - Friday 9am - 3pm.

The Social Justice Center and its member organizations will continue to try to work with the City to address issues in this area. This year, we renewed our efforts to try to resolve issues and called a meeting with the Mayor’s Office, Police Department, Parks Department, Community Development Division, Marquette Neighborhood Association and other stakeholders. On January 23, 2026 we met with the group to once again ask, if you don’t want people hanging out, where do you want us to tell people to go? We all, collectively, know there is no answer to this and agreed to continue meeting. We also know that we collectively waste an inordinate amount of time, effort, energy and ultimately money asking people to repeatedly move around the city with no satisfactory end result. In short, we are managing homelessness instead of solving it, and we are doing a poor job of managing it, putting the burden on a protected class, those experiencing houselessness.

We hope we can, as a community, find solutions, but relocating 3 benches and a little free library/pantry to private property is not the answer, particularly when they will just be moved 20 feet to the east.

We respectfully request that you find that we have met the very limited requirement of the ordinance and that you overturn the denial of our permit with regard to the little free library/pantry and benches based on the above arguments.

Application



APPLICATION FOR PRIVILEGE IN STREETS

- Property address: 1202 Williamson St. #101
City Assessor's Tax Parcel No. 071007228177
Legal description: (continue on reverse side if necessary)
ORIGINAL PLAT, AKA FARWELLS REPLAT, BLK 201, SE, 127.5 FT OF LOT 18.
- This application to the City of Madison, pursuant to Section 66.0425 Wisconsin Statutes and Madison General Ordinance 10.31 is for a privilege in streets consisting of the following item(s) to be encroaching into the public right-of-way:
3 benches, art, little free library & food pantry

Please include a drawing OR email of a legible PDF of the proposed structure(s) with dimensions or square footage for each, as well as a site plan map (at a discernable scale) that illustrates the proposed location of the encroaching structure(s) in relation to the owner's property. (Failure to include drawings or surveys will be cause to return this application without action.)

- Applicant (Property Owner): Social Justice Center Inc.
Mailing Address: 1202 Williamson St. #1

Phone Number: 608-345-8720
Email Address: brenda@madisonstreetmedicine.org or operations@socialjustice center.org

IN MAKING THIS APPLICATION THE UNDERSIGNED IS AWARE OF THE FOLLOWING STATUTORY AND CITY REQUIREMENTS:

1. Any privilege granted by the City shall be on condition that the applicant shall become primarily liable for damages to persons or property by reason of the granting of the privilege and applicant will be required to furnish a certificate of insurance evidencing existence of general public liability and property damage insurance in minimum limits of \$1,000,000 per occurrence with the City being named as an additional insured.
2. The applicant shall remove the encroachment or obstruction upon ten (10) days written notice by the City of Madison.
3. A non-refundable application fee of \$750 shall accompany this application. The check should be made payable to the City Treasurer and mailed or delivered as directed below. In the event the application is not approved or the conditions of approval are unacceptable to the applicant, the applicant may appeal the rejection or conditions to the Board of Public Works, within 30 days of notification of the committee's decision.
4. A minimum annual fee of \$500, or a greater amount as determined by the assessed land value of the square footage of the encroachment, shall be charged for the privilege of using the street right-of-way.
5. In accepting the privilege, the applicant waives any and all right to contest in any manner the validity of City of Madison Ordinance 10.31 or Sections 66.0425 and 182.0175, Wisconsin Statutes, or the amount of compensation charged by the City of Madison.
6. The applicant may be required to comply with additional conditions as may be imposed as a condition of approval.
7. Application does not guarantee approval.

Dated this 17 day of September, 2025.

OWNER OR AGENT

Brenda K. Konkol

(Signature)

Brenda K. Konkol

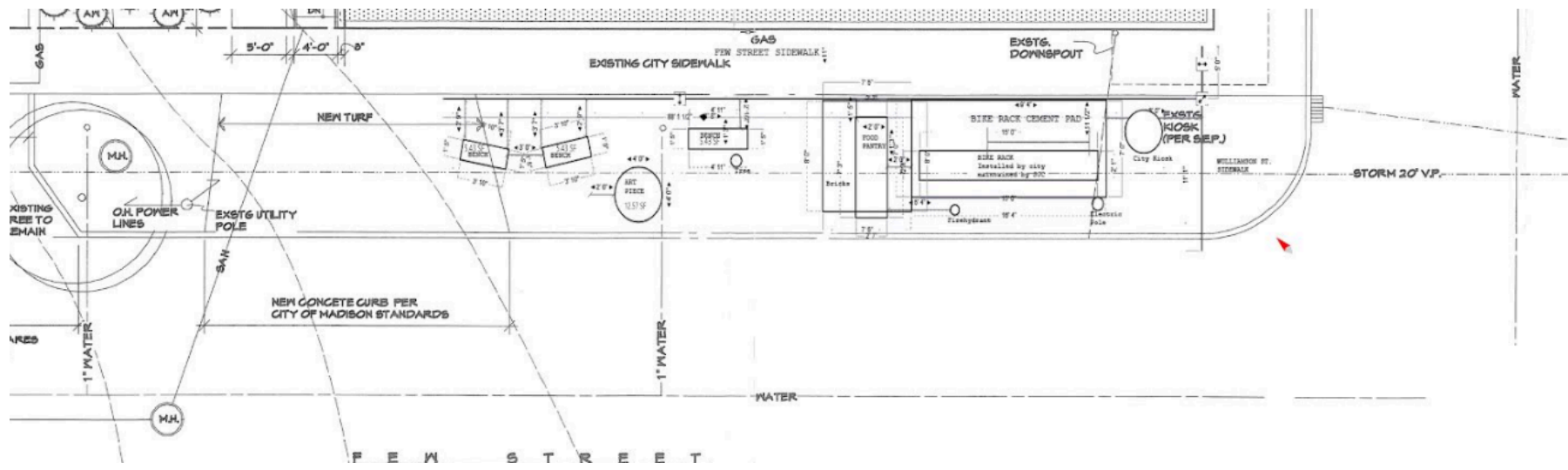
(Print Name)

Mail: City of Madison
Economic Development Division
Office of Real Estate Services
Attn: Jenny Frese
P. O. Box 2983
Madison, WI 53701-2983

Email: jfrese@cityofmadison.com

Deliver: City of Madison
Economic Development Division
Office of Real Estate Services
Attn: Jenny Frese
215 Martin Luther King Jr., Blvd., 3rd Flr.
Madison, WI 53703
(mail drop located outside secured entry)

Map



From: [Edward Kuharski](#)
To: [All Alders](#); [Mayor](#)
Cc: [Brenda Konkel](#); [Kacy Zander](#); [Brian Benford](#); jschlueter@dchs.com
Subject: Throwback to the days of segregation - today in our fair city.
Date: Saturday, January 31, 2026 9:02:02 AM

Some people who received this message don't often get email from ekuharski@aol.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Dear Alders and Madam Mayor, It has come to my attention that the City of Madison has initiated another shameful effort to further harass our houseless neighbors and frustrate the work of the Social Justice Center to provide a few patches to our tattered safety net. See the linked post from Brenda Konkel, and my comments below.

I must say, as an architect and planner working to make our city and beyond a world that works for everyone, that this is in direct contravention of every principle of design justice and blatantly discriminatory. I urge you all to stand up and oppose this and other ham-handed efforts to paper over our shame for having inadequate and unequal policies and practices for those who lack a lease, title or mortgage (or often simply are not white).

I urge you all to put in place policies and procedures that seek to give aid and comfort to our most vulnerable and traumatized citizens, to give substance to the good words that the Mayor just shared regarding our work to resist the authoritarian assault on our civilization and our people, instead of expending public resources to make peoples' live worse. Especially in light of the city reducing the city's provision of minimum shelter options (Dairy Drive and a reduced-capacity Men's Shelter).

For starters, we need to establish a minimum of 3 additional Tiny House Villages as developed by Occupy Madison, Inc. (I designed Villages 1 & 2), and to fund them with no strings attached.)

I am happy to talk further with any and all of you about constructive solutions and focusing our city efforts to promote cost-effective and democratic models to counter the relentless toxic effects of late-stage capitalism. This is a moment not to waste.

Warm regards, Ed

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1BGqnfftqb/>

This harks directly back to the days of 'legal' segregation, when vagrancy laws were used relentlessly to deprive people of color of their civil rights, right to assemble, right to use public facilities on an equal basis as white people, and more. This is an outrage. To initiate this terrible violation of civility and equality at this time when unity of all people is vitally needed to oppose the authoritarian assault on all of us is beyond shameful. It is foolish, selfish and legally indefensible. Laws & regulations that presume future prohibited behavior are unconstitutional - in the same category as "prior restraint" on free speech and the sanctity of the fourth estate.

And the people targeted are disproportionately people of color, same as it ever was. Compare this to the

sometimes excessive granting of public right-of-way for use by bars & restaurants (see 100 block of King Street, for example) and the hypocrisy is amply evident. Observe the behavior of some of the patrons of these establishments on any Bucky game day to underline my point.

**Edward Kuharski, Architect, AIA, ALA, LEED AP
GREEN DESIGN STUDIO**

405 Sidney Street
Madison, WI 53703
608/469-5963 mobile
ekuharski@aol.com

"The best way to predict the future is to help create it."

From: [Eva Lewandowski](#)
To: [Mayor](#); [All Alders](#)
Subject: SJC benches and pantry should stay
Date: Friday, March 13, 2026 3:26:45 PM

Some people who received this message don't often get email from elewandowski@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Dear Mayor Rhodes-Conway and Madison Common Council,

I am very disappointed in the city's recent decision calling for the removal of benches and the free outdoor food pantry located outside the Social Justice Center (SJC) on South Few Street. I think these are extremely important neighborhood resources that need to stay, and I ask that the city allow the SJC to keep them in their current location.

There is a misconception that the benches and pantry are used only by homeless individuals, and specifically by homeless individuals who engage in inappropriate behaviors. That is simply not true. I lived in the neighborhood for many years until December, and I know firsthand that the benches and pantry are used by all sorts of people, housed and unhoused, including many long-term members of the neighborhood. The vast majority of folks use these resources respectfully and create no trouble at all.

As a disabled person who cannot walk long distances without resting, I routinely sat on the benches to rest before and after going to Willy Street to do my shopping. When I could no longer work and didn't yet have an income stream, I stretched my grocery budget by walking around the corner to the pantry. Once I became financially stable again, I started dropping off donations three times each month. In all the years I did this, I was never harassed or endangered by anyone. In fact, I had many wonderful conversations with pantry users and heard over and over again how many people in the neighborhood benefit from 24 hour access to food with no barriers- no forms to fill out, no travel, no communication needs, no restrictive hours- just free food available to anyone at anytime.

I know that there are sometimes a small number of people outside the SJC who don't behave respectfully, but I cannot fathom why the city wants to punish an entire neighborhood by taking away valuable resources because of the unrelated actions of those few individuals. Why hurt all the people, housed and unhoused, who just need a place to rest or a little extra food? City leaders should be actively trying to support those of us who are most in need, not shutting down resources that help us.

Please keep the pantry and the benches in place for everyone who needs them. Thank you for your hard work.

Eva Lewandowski

From: [Maple](#)
To: [Board of Public Works; All Alders; Mayor](#)
Subject: BOPW -Agenda Item: 22 - Opposition
Date: Wednesday, April 22, 2026 1:59:07 PM

Some people who received this message don't often get email from maplekjepp@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Hello,

I am writing to convey my disappointment with the decision made by the board of public works, regarding the appeal by the SJC to the city's denial of their privilege in streets application. I watched the meeting in its entirety as it happened and couldn't believe how disorganized it was. The city did not follow its own agenda protocol that was shared with the SJC board ahead of time, and testimony was given on the city's behalf that did not have anything to do with the ordinance in question. City personnel could not even figure out what "oppose" or "support" meant in people's registration for the meeting, due to the wording the City used. So, to be clear, I have registered as "opposed" to the city's denial of the SJC's application.

It seems that the city is scapegoating the SJC, blaming the City's ineffectual handling of Madison's houselessness problem on the SJC instead of taking responsibility for the fact that there is no place for folks to go. The fact that there is indeed no where to send people without a home has been agreed by all parties during a collective meeting hosted by the SJC and attended by various City, neighborhood, and community members.

I hope that in the coming weeks the City will take serious steps to address this issue, for the sake of everyone in our community. I hope for meaningful repair between all parties involved in this matter, and a positive way forward. That is up to the City at this point, to direct resources towards short and long term solutions.

I have been active in Madison's cooperative housing community for nearly 20 years, and am a member of one of the founding organizations of the SJC. It is an important building and community space, and it deserves to be respected as such.

Agenda Item:

22

92771

Approving the written decision of the Board in the appeal regarding the Privilege in Streets Application Denial for 1202 Williamson St

In cooperation,

-Maple

From: [M Meloy](#)
To: [All Alders](#); [Martinez-Rutherford, Dina Nina](#)
Subject: Do not remove the benches for social justice advocates
Date: Saturday, January 31, 2026 11:07:27 AM

Some people who received this message don't often get email from mbmeloy@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Hi, Alderperson Martinez-Rutherford and Alderpersons of Madison

I am concerned about the removal of three benches in the city of Madison donated by the Madison Community Foundation and Hinkley Productions. These are benches that have been on this property for 15 years. Benches are to honor or in memorial for several fierce social justice advocates. I had the privilege of knowing one of these advocates, Dave Deci, MD. I knew him as a wonderful and strong advocate for rural medicine and serving the underserved.

Benches are a welcoming site to those who need a rest, want to spend some time in their own reflection/thoughts, or who want to connect with others. Benches are inviting and send a message of belonging. Madison is a city of belonging, connection and including all.

These benches including others should NOT be removed. You have the responsibility to stop this and attend the Board of Public Works meeting to hear the appeal.

Thank you,
Mandy Meloy
804 Glenview Dr
Madison WI 53716

From: [Joni Mitchell](#)
To: [All Alders](#)
Subject: Do not move benches honoring Dr. Deci
Date: Saturday, January 31, 2026 9:15:37 AM

Some people who received this message don't often get email from joni.mitchell@wisc.edu. [Learn why this is important](#)

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Please keep benches etc in honor of Dr. Deci just where they have been in Madison. They are not a nuisance. They are honoring folks for social justice.

Joni Mitchell
702 Herndon Drive, #102
Madison

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone
Get [Outlook for Android](#)

From: [Keri Robbins](#)
To: [All Alders](#)
Subject: Action requested - prevent removal of the benches honoring social justice advocates
Date: Tuesday, February 3, 2026 9:40:45 PM

Some people who received this message don't often get email from keri@uwalumni.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Dear Alderpersons of Madison,

Please do NOT allow the removal of three benches in the city of Madison donated by the Madison Community Foundation and Hinkley Productions.

These benches honor the legacy of incredible individuals, who were fierce social justice advocates, including Dr David Deci. I had the privilege of knowing Dr Deci when I worked alongside him for 8 years in the UW School of Medicine and Public Health. I came to know him as a wonderful and strong advocate for street medicine and serving the underserved. His efforts were focused on helping people most in need of compassion --- a focus that deserves our ongoing tribute through public recognition and affirmation of this compassion as a shared value in Madison.

Benches are a welcoming site to those who need rest, want to spend time in their own reflection, or who want to connect with others. Benches are inviting and send a message of belonging. Madison is a city of belonging, connection and including all.

These benches should NOT be removed. Please honor your responsibility to those in the community who care for the well being and health of ALL residents, and stop this offensive removal of the benches, in particular the one that honors UW-Madison faculty member Dave Deci's legacy in our community as a compassionate caregiver to the disenfranchised and disadvantaged.

Thank you,
Keri Robbins

Local community resident and longtime 30-year employee of the University of Wisconsin-Madison

Home address: 2743 Pheasant Run, Cottage Grove WI 53527

Keri Robbins | (608) 692-7830 | keri@uwalumni.com

Connect with me on LinkedIn and Facebook as Keri (Shotola) Robbins

From: [Amy Skaife](#)
To: [All Alders](#)
Subject: Please do not remove the benches at the Social Justice Center
Date: Tuesday, February 3, 2026 11:10:02 AM

Some people who received this message don't often get email from amyskaife@yahoo.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Dear Alderpersons of Madison,
I am writing to you regarding the removal of three benches at the Social Justice Center in the city of Madison, donated by the Madison Community Foundation and Hinkley Productions. These benches honor social justice advocates from our community. I had the privilege and pleasure of volunteering with one of these great individuals, Dr. Dave Deci as part of the Madison Street Medicine Team.

Dave was a passionate activist for unhoused individuals. I find it ironic that these benches that represent the very comfort and inclusion that Dave worked for our homeless neighbors are being targeted and considered a nuisance. Removing benches does nothing but further erode the dignity of our neighbors.

Please consider this when you hear the appeal at the Public Works Meeting. All of your neighbors deserve a place to rest.

sincerely,
Amy Skaife

From: [Ashlee](#)
To: [All Alders](#)
Subject: Benches
Date: Friday, February 6, 2026 8:19:03 AM

Some people who received this message don't often get email from ashlee@uwalumni.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Hello,

I've come to learn of the removal of benches near the Social Justice Center for the sole purpose of not wanting homeless people to use them. Did we not already go down this road of nonsense and waste with Soglin? Shame on all of you!!! You focus on nonsense like this, because you aren't capable of any real - meaningful change. What an embarrassing thing to be a part of. Stop the stupidity.

Ashlee Stone