

Date: May 12, 2022

From: Kristen Slack, City of Madison Resident

Re: Agenda Item #71282

To the Members of the Board of Public Works:

Last night's (May 11th) meeting was a perfect example of why the "community engagement" process is completely broken at The City. It demonstrated two things:

- 1) There is no space for clarifying inaccuracies in the discussion that follows public input, and there were some large inaccuracies put forth.
- 2) Community engagement really is irrelevant.

Inaccuracies:

- Jim Wolfe was asked by a BPW member to talk about the Capital Ave. street end and the concern raised by a member of the public about the unnecessary hardscape being installed. The community member talked about the asphalt path from the end of the planned road to the lake. It is that path that was being identified as completely unnecessary, but Jim talked about the road that ends with the last driveway, not the path.
- Jim also said earlier in the meeting that the reason for the paved road at the Capital St. end was to make clear to the public that it was a space meant for everyone. This is absurd. There are seven street ends that dead end at the lake along LMD. Most are situated between two houses and give the (false) appearance that they are a driveway or part of someone's lawn. Of all the street ends, Norman Way (at the public beach entrance) and Capital Ave. are the least likely to be confused as a driveway or personal property. People are down at the end of Capital Ave. all the time, fishing and putting in kayaks, etc. It's a short enough street end that people can see the clear green space by the lake, unconnected to anyone's property on either side, from LMD. There is zero need for an asphalt path there to "clarify" the public use space.
- Jim also mentioned that "only one" resident requested a permeable sidewalk. In fact, no one was aware they were supposed to ask. I personally have been on the lookout for communication from the City about this, and have not seen it. Totally possible that I missed it but apparently so did 25 other people on an email exchange after the meeting. We were also told in one of the City's "public information" meetings early on that the cost of a permeable sidewalk would be at least 5x the cost of concrete and the total expense would be on the homeowner. This is what most everyone here still thought until more recently, when we learned that the costs would be no different to homeowners; and the word has not had time to spread.

- Jim mentioned in his overview that at the Ad Hoc meeting with him and Daniel Olivares, the committee requested that rain gardens were kept free of sediment. In actuality, the question to them was how do we maximize the benefit of certain rain gardens for catching sediment instead of it going to the lake? We have received no answer on this.
- Keith Furman said he has “never heard” of a requirement that a resident group needs to have a formal affiliation to be allowed to meet with the City about a project like LMD, implying that...we made this up? Why on earth would we go through the trouble as a neighborhood of organizing an Ad Hoc Committee of the neighborhood association if we were not told this was necessary? In fact, Chris Petykowski, Principal Engineer for Streets and Path Design, told us that in order for The City to *work with* a resident group, it had to be a formalized entity. He mentioned as an example that he works with neighborhood associations on various projects. So, we organized a special committee of our neighborhood association, voted into existence by a special election of all SHNA members.
- Keith claims that the evidence demonstrating how the LMD project was treated as “special” is that Jim Wolfe has spent hundreds of hours on it. The extent of the opposition that has arisen from this project is a symptom of terrible leadership on Keith’s part, and *that* is the reason Jim has had to spend so many hours on it. Members of this Board seem to defer to alders, even when they have acted with hostility toward residents, harassed residents, and lied in public forums about things residents have said. All of this has been shared with you before. A truly effective leader would have worked WITH his constituents on a major project like this in a proactive, professional, and authentic manner. Yes, you may not always achieve the outcome you are seeking, but you would feel heard and respected, rather than belittled, dismissed, and shamed. It is that treatment that has created so much anger and frustration among residents. And it isn’t just this neighborhood, other neighborhoods in District 19 have reached out to us to complain about the same treatment by Alder Furman. This type of feedback should concern you.
- Keith has framed the pushback on the LMD project as “all about sidewalks”. This is just one example of how he has failed to work with residents who bring a wealth of expertise around the environmental concerns on this project, most prominently related to stormwater management and the deteriorating conditions of the lake and Well 14. If he had done so, he would have even a marginal grasp on the breadth and depth of our arguments related to concerns about environmental impact. He has resorted to simplifying our numerous communications about these concerns to a “not in my yard” argument against sidewalks. Only Alder Halverson seemed to understand that a very different argument was being made. Perhaps he is the only BPW member who read the documents submitted by the Ad Hoc Committee. Leadership is hard work. Underhanded misrepresentation is easy.

- The Ad Hoc Committee has indeed met with The City (Jim and colleagues) twice. Jim paints this story as one where there was actual listening happening on the City's part, and input incorporated into the ultimate plan. This is not the case as the Ad Hoc Committee continues to just be told "no" or "we don't know". The input from the Ad Hoc Committee has not made any meaningful difference.

Community Engagement Irrelevant

- For members who claim they are supporting the LMD plan as is because of concerns about accessibility, you apparently have no interest in considering the input from our neighbors with mobility limitations, including those with visual impairments, who do not support the plan that emerged. This belies your commitment to accessibility, because you are marginalizing the very voices that should matter the most. If you don't care about their informed opinions, then there is nothing about "community engagement" that could ever matter, and these meetings and your votes are simply rubber stamps on whatever The City wants to do. Your Chair patronizingly lectured us on the importance of community engagement and how encouraging it was to him to see it happen on this project. All we have learned is that it is a waste of time because it quite literally does not matter. The overall message was that you know best and we are all merely a hurdle to get past.
- Lastly, the comments at the end of this segment of the BPW meeting from BPW members, joking about residents (in general) for pushing back on their alders were very telling. I suspect that some of you have not even read the Ad Hoc Committee's thoughtful and expert-informed report on the LMD project. Jim may have spent hundreds of hours on this project. The collective efforts of residents in this neighborhood represent thousands of hours. All. Due. To. Terrible. Leadership.