

## JOINT STAFF REPORT

June 3, 2022



PREPARED FOR THE TRANSPORTATION POLICY AND PLANNING BOARD, PLAN COMMISSION, AND COMMON COUNCIL

**Subject:** Amending the City of Madison Official Map to establish mapped reservations for future Streets and Highways in the City of Madison consistent with recommendations in the adopted Oscar Mayer Special Area Plan

**Legistar File ID #:** [69519](#)

**Prepared By:** Planning Division, Traffic Engineering Division, Engineering Division, and Parks Division Staff

---

This memo was prepared to address several specific issues that were raised at the March 29, 2022 Common Council meeting related to official mapping on the former Hartmeyer property and other affected properties. It also provides some background on the proposed official map amendment given the turnover on the Common Council during the process (only four current members were on the Council when the Oscar Mayer Strategic Assessment Report was adopted in 2019, and just eight were on the Council when the Oscar Mayer Special Area Plan was adopted in 2020).

### **Background**

As a response to the closing of the Oscar Mayer facility in 2017, the Common Council formed the Oscar Mayer Strategic Assessment Committee to explore how this key location in the city could be positioned for the greatest long-term benefit to the community and region. Their report was adopted by the Common Council in 2019 and provided the framework for the Oscar Mayer Special Area Plan that was adopted in 2020. That Plan balanced many competing interests in implementing the objectives of the Oscar Mayer Area Strategic Assessment Report and Comprehensive Plan. This included providing an ample amount of future open space given the anticipated number of new housing units. It also included providing new streets to ensure this important infill site is well connected internally and to surrounding areas.

Earlier this year, following engagement with area property owners and with sponsorship by District 12 Alder Abbas, staff prepared an Official Map amendment (the Original Alignment- see Map 1) and associated rezoning of the former Hartmeyer property consistent with the adopted Oscar Mayer Special Area Plan. During the adoption process for the Original Alignment, Ald. Abbas proposed a Substitute Alignment (see Map 2) that arose from meetings he facilitated between a potential developer and local advocacy groups. The primary goal of these meetings was to maximize the size of the proposed open space that could easily be proactively rezoned to the Conservancy District, while accommodating a potential affordable housing development project. The Common Council has referred the substitute Official Map amendment to the Transportation Policy and Planning Board (TPPB) and Plan Commission for consideration. While staff believes the Substitute Alignment could support a *technically feasible* new internal street network, the Original Alignment is preferred by Planning, Traffic Engineering, Engineering,

and Parks staff. Staff requests careful consideration of the issues outlined in this memorandum by the TPPB and Plan Commission as they prepare their recommendations, and ultimately by the Common Council leading up to their June 21 decision.

### **Railroad Crossing**

***Staff believe that the Original Alignment for the Official Map amendment best addresses geometric and safety issues to support future approval for the relocation of the Roth Street railroad crossing.***

The Oscar Mayer site and the former Hartmeyer property are the two largest development sites in the plan area, with a total size over 90 acres. Establishing linkages between these primary sites (and destinations within them) is essential to fostering a vibrant and livable mixed-use center as called for in the Strategic Assessment. To ensure that the area is well connected for pedestrians, bicyclists, automobiles, and potential future transit routes, Roth Street is proposed to be officially mapped as the east/west connection through the area. The Roth Street railroad crossing is proposed to be relocated to the south (the current crossing would be vacated). Currently, Roth Street crosses the railroad tracks from the west near the rear of a large building on the Oscar Mayer site. Although plans for the future of the Oscar Mayer site are still evolving, due to the substantial and costly infrastructure used to construct that facility, it is not an economically viable choice for demolition, and will likely remain on site for adaptive reuse. Through several years of process, including working cooperatively with the owners of the Oscar Mayer site, there is only one viable crossing location. That location is shown on the Original Alignment as well as the Substitute Alignment.

Staff believe this relocated Roth Street crossing is critical to unlocking the future potential of the area and supporting new residents with multi-modal connections, though it will require approval of the Office of the Commissioner of Railroads. To that end, staff sought the counsel of a consultant the City has engaged numerous times who has a long history of working on railroad issues, including crossings, throughout Wisconsin. The consultant's strong opinion was that using the alignment for Roth Street as shown in the Original Alignment provides the highest likelihood of obtaining necessary approvals compared to the Substitute Alignment, which involves a street crossing from the east and forming a "T" intersection with Huxley-Ruskin.

The Original Alignment also provides better accommodation on safety and operations for pedestrians, bicycles, and future potential transit use, due to simplified geometrics and reduced conflict points.

### **Environmental Corridor**

***The adopted Plan and the Original Alignment protect the highest quality natural features on the site and will follow all requirements from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.***

Per a memo from Mike Rupiper, Deputy Agency Director/Director of Environmental Planning with the Capital Area Regional Planning Commission:

*“A question has been raised regarding how the recent mapping of environmental corridor may affect the City’s plan recommendations, proposed zoning, and proposed street network for this area. That question is specifically addressed in items G.1 and G.4 of the adopted policies and criteria for environmental corridors, which states that, It is not the intent of the environmental corridors to prevent or obstruct necessary expansion or construction of transportation facilities intended to serve areas outside of the corridors or needed to maintain or improve the continuity of those systems which meet the criteria set forth in NR 117 (Shoreland-Wetland Protection). In other words, as long as the WDNR grants wetland permit coverage for any wetland impacts associate with the construction of the proposed street layout, the affected areas would be removed from the mapped environmental corridor at the time of their permitting and construction.”*

### **Potential Archeological Site**

***Staff does not believe the Original Alignment will impact known or suggested archeological sites and will consult with an archeologist during any street construction projects and follow all requirements from the Wisconsin Historical Society.***

Concerns have been raised about the possibility of a future street being planned and constructed with impacts on a potential site of archeological significance. Staff sought clarification on this issue as early as 2019 from the Wisconsin Historical Society and more recently received an email from James M. Skibo, Ph.D. State Archaeologist, which stated, based on available information:

*“...no compliance related archaeological investigations are required prior to any development. Our office has received inquiries about a small parcel of the land just south of Roth St. where there is a cluster of older oak trees on a slightly elevated rise. I did a brief visit to the site and there is a small, linear mound-like rise. I should note that this feature was not in original site boundary, which was drawn liberally based on Brown’s notes. The feature does not show up on LiDar, as do most mounds. Could it be a highly eroded linear mound that has escaped discovery? I think it is unlikely but we cannot rule it out. An investigation by a qualified archaeologist, however, should be able to determine quite easily whether it is a pre- contact cultural mound. That would resolve the issue and keep any development of the property from inadvertently disturbing a burial mound.”*

Importantly, the closest edge of the future street right-of-way shown in the Original Alignment is approximately 100 feet from the perimeter of the referenced “slightly elevated rise”- which will be included in the planned open space.

### **Trees**

***Staff believe that the size and configuration of the future open space established by the Original Alignment is appropriate and preserves all important natural features.***

The Original Alignment preserves the stand of mature, high-quality Oak and Hickory trees just south of Roth Street. Several members of the public spoke to the importance of these trees during the Oscar Mayer

Special Area Plan process, and the Original Alignment was carefully coordinated to further protect these trees.

Another tree line extending north from the end of Ruskin Street is mostly comprised of Box Elder and Cottonwood trees, with an understory of predominantly Buckthorn. The Original Alignment of Ruskin-Huxley would go through part of this area, and the remainder would become part of the future City-owned open space. After hearing concerns about the elimination of these trees for a future street late in the official mapping approval process, several Parks Division and City Forestry staff visited the site to evaluate the trees, and determined that many of the trees are dead or dying, with many either leaning over or already fallen. If the property were to be conveyed to or purchased by the City for a future park, Parks staff would remove all of the Buckthorn understory, and would likely need to remove at least 70% to 80% of the trees, as they would be considered a hazard. This is due to their condition (dead, dying, leaning or hollow and at risk for coming down on their own.) The percent of trees removed may, in fact, be higher - this is a conservative estimate. In any case, a realignment of the future street to preserve this stand of low-quality trees is impractical, since the vast majority would need to be removed.

### **Joint Staff Recommendation**

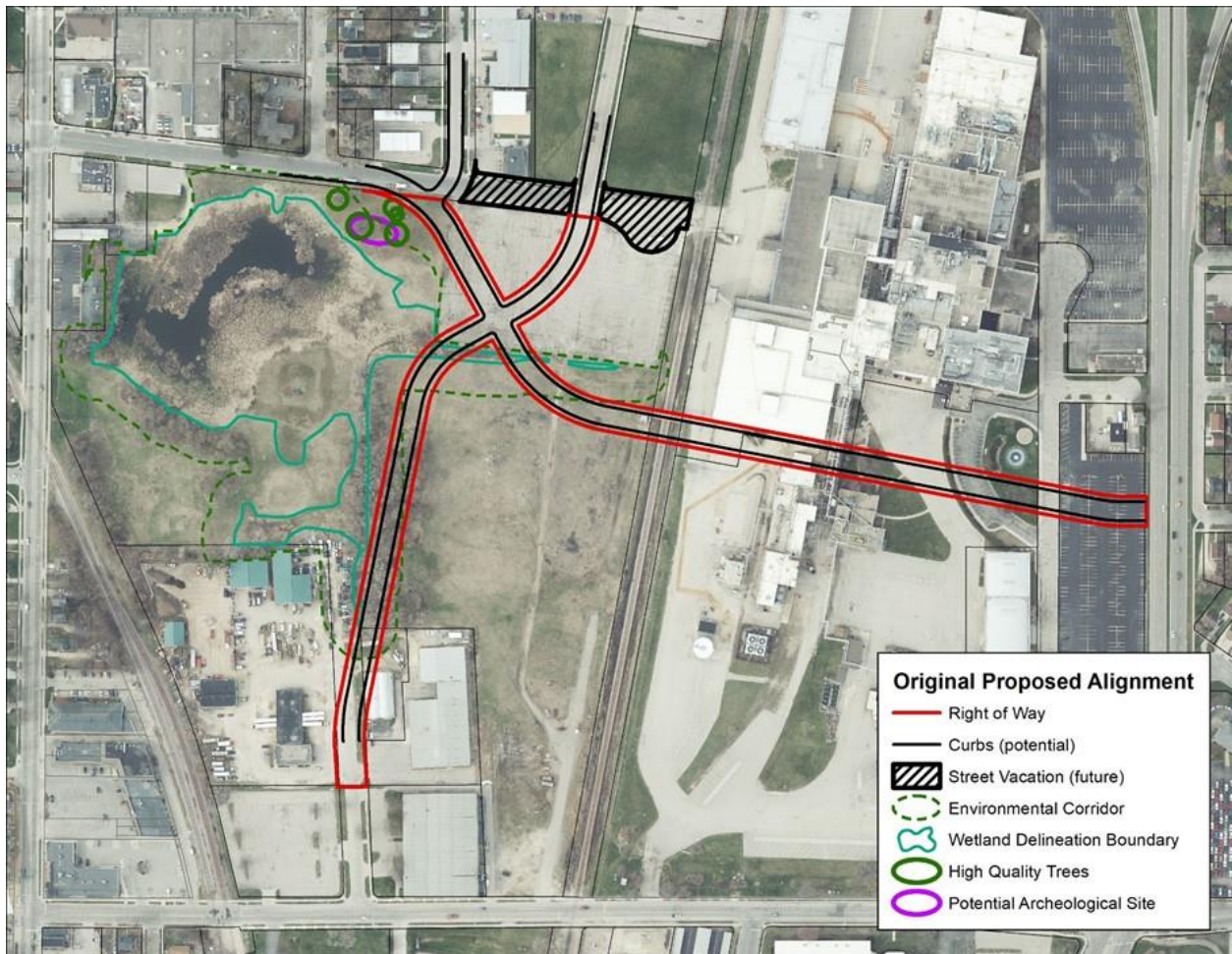
At the request of the District 12 Alder, staff from the Planning, Traffic Engineering, Engineering, and Parks Divisions have explored alternatives to address the concerns above. While one of the possible alternatives – the Substitute Alignment - is technically feasible, staff do not believe that it is the best option for the long-term future of the area. While the Substitute Alignment would result in a slightly larger area imminently rezoned from “Industrial-Limited” to “Conservancy”, and could accommodate a range of housing and development options recommended in the Plan, it falls short of the Original Alignment, which is consistent with the Oscar Mayer Special Area Plan as adopted by the Common Council in August 2020 after lengthy debate.

Specifically, when compared with the Original Alignment proposed for the Official Map amendment, the Substitute Alignment:

- would *weaken* the City’s likelihood of obtaining approvals for a critical future relocation of the Roth Street railroad crossing to provide multi-modal connectivity through the site
- is suboptimal for safety of future bicyclists and pedestrians moving through the site, and suboptimal for accommodating potential future transit through the site
- is not necessary to accommodate an environmental corridor designation
- is not necessary to accommodate any potential archeological sites
- would avoid a portion of a low-quality stand of trees, the vast majority of which would later need to be removed anyway for safety purposes associated with a future park

Therefore, staff recommend that that the Common Council approve the Original Alignment as an amendment to the Official Map.

**Map 1: Original Alignment – Official Map Amendment**





**Map 2: Substitute Alignment - Official Map Amendment**

