

From: Si Widstrand <[REDACTED]@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, September 3, 2019 9:48 AM
To: Knepp, Eric <EKnepp@cityofmadison.com>
Subject: Comments on the Urban Forestry Task Force

To: Madison Board of Park Commissioners
Re: Report of the Urban Tree Task Force

Dear Commissioners:

I commend the work of the Task Force and support the resolution accepting their Report. They have identified and explained many significant issues for our urban forest. I worked for Parks from 1973-2008 so I have some background on these issues.

I agree with Superintendent Knepp's comments of 8-29-19, so I won't repeat all of those. Some additional thoughts:

The report used available data, but that data does not adequately address the differences in tree canopy for different land uses and zoning areas. Lack of canopy coverage often occurs because it's undesirable, due to wetlands, airports, etc. New neighborhoods developed in cornfields will not have good canopy for decades even though an adequate number of young trees may have already been planted.

Overall, I think the public and private planting of our low-density residential areas is very good, so we should give ourselves a little more credit. 40-50% canopy seems a reasonable goal for these areas, allowing for people who prefer some sunshine on their properties. Getting reasonable goals for other land uses will require more detail on what trees currently exist, how more can be added, and some consideration of the cost and benefits of different solutions.

There is definitely room for more trees in the park system, but placing them is not as easy as it might seem. We've already had some problems with ash replacements being planted in view corridors, some views planned at least as far back as the 1950s. Since 2016 I've been working with Parks staff to identify some of these that I am aware of. Planting significant numbers of new trees in the large older parks will require thoughtful landscape planning for new clumps or forests of trees rather than trying to fill in every available opening.

Hundreds of acres of full-canopied woodland have also been preserved on City land over the last 70 years. These multilayered canopies provide exceptional benefits for CO2 storage and oxygen production in addition to providing other benefits. But these woodlands also need more maintenance and restoration than they receive. Adding trees to parkland should be considered comprehensively, considering all canopied areas, maintenance needs, cost-benefits, etc.

However, a quick fix of planting more trees in parks does not solve the more serious tree deficiencies in a few neighborhoods, in dense urban developments, and in heat islands. Establishing canopy goals for specific types of land uses would be more useful than a city-wide goal for very different situations.

I like the revised resolution that asks a staff team to develop more achievable budget proposals to address these problems. Those could be in the form of pilot projects that address specific areas of concern. Such projects could gather more focused data, and result in better cost-benefit assessments. Projects might include a tree-deficient residential neighborhood; a developing higher density mixed use/ commercial area; etc.

Private removal and replacement of dead ash and elm may become a bigger problem than has been anticipated. Removals are expensive, and the expense to remove and replace might be a burden for affordable properties and some neighborhoods. This seems like an ideal public-private partnership project, raising private funds to help residents, who may be deterred by the cost, to plant trees that will benefit all of us.

Simon Widstrand

■ Branford Lane East, Madison 53717