

July 30, 2017

I regret that I am unable to attend the final public hearing related to the installation of a sidewalk on our block. You cannot measure the importance of our concerns about your decision by the lack of testimony at this hearing because there are just three families (and properties) impacted by it. I would like to provide some information that may not have been shared with you.

One day a few months ago flags appeared on our lawns with no explanation. Neighbors asked each other if they had any information on why they had been placed and none of us knew. It required a call to our alderman by Vicky Franchino to begin seeking an answer. When I inquired (at a meeting about this sidewalk at the Sequoia Library) as to why the city neglected to keep the residents informed when the process began, I was told by a female representative in the engineering department that they were under no obligation to do so. That was an unusual answer, so I suggested that such information for the property owners would have been both helpful and respectful.

I'm certain you are well aware that ours is an old Madison neighborhood. Our house was built in 1950 and is likely about the age of the others on our block. So, sidewalks have not existed on this block for 67 years. These three properties are built on a hill with old landscaping that includes mature plantings and yards that have fairly steep grades. I mention this because those realities complicate the installation of the sidewalk.

I made clear at the meeting at Sequoia that I appreciate the need for us to provide a means for compliance with the accessibility needs of pedestrians on Chippewa Dr., and agree that the construction of a sidewalk is important. I do not agree that the sidewalk must include a terrace of 8 feet, 4 feet, or even 3 feet as each negatively impacts the existing landscape of this short block on this dead end street. My neighbors, the Franchino family, are bearing the brunt of the costs of this walk and the engineering of the walk requires the widening of their driveway, removal of an existing retaining wall, and the removal and rebuild of their garage overhang. Some of that work would be mitigated by the reduction of the sidewalk terrace size.

For the Beamsley's property on the corner of Chippewa and Cherokee, the three foot terrace will require the removal of significant plantings—so much so that it would dramatically impact their property. They would like, as all of us would, the reduction of the terrace to two feet. Such a change would not negatively impact the utility of the sidewalk for the purpose of accessibility in the neighborhood and compliance with ADA standards, nor would it create an unsafe path to and from Thoreau Elementary. It would, however, adhere more naturally to the landscape of this old neighborhood and the steep grades of the properties impacted by this installation.

I have been involved in two conversations with the engineering department about the sidewalk plans for our block: one at Sequoia Library, and one on our block so Department of Engineering staff could see what they proposed vs. what we were advocating. Our neighbors on the other side of Chippewa were opposed to any sidewalk and successfully advocated for it to be placed on our side of the street rather than their own. As I said, I am an ADA advocate and believe in our obligation to ensure safe travel to all community members. However, any walk through the Nakoma neighborhood exposes the variety of off

street paths, from no sidewalk to no terrace to the largest 8 foot terrace. In addition, I recently returned from Oakland, California, where I stayed in a neighborhood similar to ours but larger and with more traffic. Due to the controversy over terrace sizes for our sidewalks I took note of what I saw there, and in that old CA neighborhood I saw the same thing, no terrace, to one foot, two foot, and up to 8 foot terraces—clearly constructed based on the landscape and grade in each block. All options were quite accessible and safe—just like the existing variety in Nakoma.

I would like to believe that this decision will be made based on what is best for the unique features of our neighborhood and its needs, in addition to the benefit of the three families whose properties are impacted by this decision. I am prepared to send any other documentation you require to make an informed decision, including additional photos of this very short block. Please let me know if that would be helpful.

Thank you for your consideration of our request that the sidewalk that is constructed here be one with a two foot terrace to conform to the attributes of our properties—in particular the steep grade of our yards and the mature plantings on this lightly traveled dead-end block—and still provide the off street path that is safe and accessible for Nakoma residents and visitors.

Laurie Laz
837 Ottawa Trail
Madison
laurielaz@gmail.com
608-219-0621