

**Re: West Area Plan Sauk Creek Greenway All-Abilities Bike Paths –
Follow-up to Dec. 13, 2023 Transportation Commission Meeting**

Dear Transportation Commission Members,

Friends of Sauk Creek thank you for carefully considering our community's feedback regarding the proposed bike path through the Sauk Creek Greenway. We especially thank you for your recommendation to city staff to seek alternative locations for bike paths. We want you to know how grateful we are for the respect you have shown us in reading our emails and considering our input.

The Friends of Sauk Creek ask you to modify the West Area Plan to remove all reference to the Sauk Creek bike path and, alternatively, to prioritize the existing High Point and Westfield Roads as 'all ages and abilities' paths. These two major bike paths already connect to key areas (BRT, library, schools, pool, shopping). A path through the Sauk Creek Greenway does not add any destinations. It will take hundreds of hours of city staff time to implement and entail significant cost that will be paid for by all Madisonians in their taxes and water bills. It will disrupt our neighborhoods for years, irreversibly disturb wildlife habitat, destroy mature trees, all in complete offense to this city's objective to fight climate change.

Since we did not have a chance to respond to comments made by city staff at your recent meeting, there are five points we ask you to consider when the final draft of the West Area Plan comes back to you for your approval. They are:

1) There is no gap in bike connectivity in this area.

- There are 11 bike routes in the 2.5 mile stretch from Gammon Road to Pleasant View Road.
- Westfield Road and High Point Road (identified in the 2015 MPO Bike Plan as primary and secondary paths) already connect to key areas (BRT, Library, Schools, Pool, Shopping). The proposed greenway path does not ADD any destinations.
- Street calming was recently added to Westfield Road which addressed safety concerns.
- The need to cross driveways was mentioned as a drawback to using High Point or Westfield Roads. Yet, the majority of bike paths in Madison are on roads with driveways and are used safely every day. This is not a compelling argument to ignore convenient, plowed bike paths on High Point Road and Westfield Road.
- The 2015 MPO Bike Plan indicates that off-street paths should be located "where they are most useful for transportation and cost effective" (i.e. locations that supplement rather than duplicate local street systems). The proposed bike path does not do that.
- There are already existing off-street ADA-compliant nature paths within blocks of the greenway.

- 2) All-abilities bike paths in the Sauk Creek Greenway will create unnecessary costs.
- By simply making changes to the roads that already function as bike paths in the Sauk Creek neighborhood, the city would avoid spending significant taxpayer dollars on redundant planning and construction. Bicyclists in our organization urge the city to instead use this money to fix other identified gaps in the West Area bike network.
 - The terrain in the Sauk Creek Greenway is hilly and ADA-compliant all-abilities bike paths cannot be built as easily as staff suggest. In fact, an East-West path running through Walnut Grove Park and the woods would need to traverse a bluff. Forcing an all-abilities bike path under these conditions would necessitate multiple switchbacks to achieve a 5% grade as required by the ADA, causing further decimation of the forest and added project cost. Adding impervious surfaces will impede water absorption and exacerbate the risk of flooding and erosion.
 - The city's Engineering Division has started the Sauk Creek Greenway Corridor Project to address flood mitigation in area neighborhoods. Yet, plans for all-abilities bike paths proceed irrespective of this project. Residents question why city planners would suggest an intrusive bike path for the creek area before the renovation of the creek has even been designed.

3) The planning division makes it difficult to find answers to questions and does not communicate in a timely way about constant changes being made to their bike path proposal.

- In materials for the May 4, 2023 memo from West Area planners to the Planning Commission, Sauk Creek all-abilities bike paths are not even mentioned.
- At the May 10, 2023 meeting at Lussier Community Center, one city representative pointed to a map and told us that there were no plans for a bike path.
- Then, a bike path proposal publicly emerged on a map in a subsequent public meeting in July 2023 with little explanation.
- The plans advanced at an Aug. 2, 2023 meeting as North-South and East-West all-abilities bike path options appeared on planners maps with small arrows without explanation. Community members had to hunt to find the meaning of those arrows.

4) Planners have misrepresented plans for the bike path and survey results in which a clear majority of residents oppose the bike path.

- Planners have overblown the importance of all-abilities bike paths in Sauk Creek in the complex and expansive West Area Plan.
- Survey results offered by the city planners in support of the bike path, referred to a few *general* comments from the more than 30,000 residents of the West Area Plan and understated the strong opposition by those who live near the creek or who use the nature trails.

- It has been repeatedly misrepresented that "If this [the bike path] is not in the West Area Plan, it cannot be considered in the future." Yet, our neighborhoods have opposed bike path proposals since the late 1990s and considerations for a bike path continue to emerge without inclusion in a comprehensive planning document.
- In reply to a question by Commissioner Robbie Webber, Ben Zellers, a city planner, indicated he had no evidence that residents have requested the bike path. Rather, he commented *generally* that in the entire 5,600 acre west area of Madison, with its 30,000 residents, *some* people favor more bike paths.

5) City Planners have minimized and marginalized community engagement.

- There has been overwhelming opposition to a bike path in the Sauk Creek Greenway shown at every community engagement meeting. Yet, this has not slowed city planners in their efforts to continue to advocate for and enhance plans for a bike path. Planning appears to be spearheaded by bike advocates, who show little regard for protecting trees and Madison's precious remaining tree canopies.
- Renee Callaway, the city's bike coordinator, said that the bike path was discussed at the Nov. 6 Sauk Creek Corridor kick-off meeting. Yet, the ground rules established by the city at the start of the meeting required that attendees *not* discuss the bike path. The 100-plus neighbors packed into the room who opposed the bike path were only able to make their points by addressing the bike path plan in defiance of the ground rules. Community residents further disagree with Ms. Callaway's description to you that there was successful engagement at this meeting. Media reports of the meeting more accurately refer to the anger and frustration of the participants.
- Residents submitted more than 80 letters and petitions with 340 signatures opposing the bike path for your recent meeting. Many of these opponents live near the woods, use it regularly or have environmental and safety concerns. Only one resident sent a letter in support of a bike path and that person lives on the far east side.
- While we appreciate the call for "enormous caution and study," city officials give us the impression that once the West Area Plan, with inclusion of a bike path, is approved by other commissions and the city council, a bike path will be a priority for the planners, regardless of tree loss, destruction of the tree canopy in the greenway, and immense opposition to the path.
- The Sauk Creek community continues to be given the impression that a bike path in the Sauk Creek Greenway is a "done deal", that city officials are just going through the motions of engaging the public with the intention of steamrolling through with plans for a bike path. Residents do not consider the process to include true engagement. Instead, we have observed dismissive behavior, with one city spokesperson saying in media interview that we were not listening, or that we are disregarding cards from the city. These claims were made despite resident attendance at many, many meetings, in addition to in-person meetings

in city officials' offices and with the mayor, phone conversations, intensive FOIA searches, scrutiny of city websites on the bike path issue, and email conversations with city employees. The Sauk Creek community has put forth extraordinary effort to become educated and informed in an effort to be heard and participate meaningfully and helpfully.

We strongly encourage you to visit the creek area for a tour and we will volunteer to guide you so you can see for yourselves the terrain, resources and problem areas in the greenway.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our requests.

Friends of Sauk Creek

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