

To: Transportation Commission
From: Betty Chewning
Date: 2/23/2022
Re: Separating the Bike Path Options from the Atwood Reconstruction Plan

First, thank you for your service. I was on the Parks Commission for 10 years and had the honor to be chair for a bit. Since then, I've also been on the SASY Council on and off for many years and am currently the Transportation Committee Chair. I write you now not as a SASY Council member, but as a park user, member of the community who biked a LOT (to and from the university for decades) including part of the winter. As a mother, and recently a grandmother, and user of Olbrich Park I am thinking about Mr. Olbrich's donation of green space for the hard working people of the east side. I have 3 main requests.

1. I request that you separate the bike option decision from the Atwood Reconstruction plan. Go ahead with the Reconstruction Plan, but we have insufficient analysis and considerable conflict over what is the best bike path plan. To rush this unnecessarily is dangerous.

Last night many of the Olbrich park users at the Atwood Reconstruction Information meeting warned that Options 1 and 3 were dangerous for park users. In contrast, bikers don't think these options are dangerous at all. We need much more informed and careful thinking about what seems to be a political decision rather than a clearly reasoned decision. I asked Madison Park Planner Ann Friewald if there were any other Madison park like Olbrich Park where bikes speed down a hill into the park and potentially could cross the width of the park between a playground and a soccer field. This is what would happen if options 1 and 3 are chosen. She said no. There is no other park in Madison like Olbrich I this regard. As you know she developed the original plan #2 presented to the city council. She kept the bikes on Lakeland so that as they sped down the hill, they stayed on a narrowed Lakeland remnant path to efficiently get to Atwood, as they have done for decades. However, powerful biking lobbyists fought it and said they had spoken with the community. They wanted their path plowed in winter and Ann Friewald's plan did not plow by the sledding hill. Our path # 4 allows for the bikers to have a plowed path by using Welch and Oakridge streets rather than the park. I might add cars cannot turn from Atwood left onto Oakridge so that makes Oakridge safer for bikes than I have heard discussed by City Engineering. The Schenk Atwood Starkweather Yahara (SASY) Association was never consulted or involved in any conversations about the path when the bike lobbyists intervened. Since the SASY community is a heavy user of the park we have a great deal of insight about what are the diverse users and uses year round of the park and how to protect these users's safety.

2. We strongly ask that a neighborhood meeting be held with the SASY Neighborhood and Neighborhood Association since the park is in our area.

Both the Parks Department and the Park Commission were told that the community had been involved, however, no one visited our neighborhood association which is quite active. Not one meeting was held specifically with our SASY community after 2017. We have insights as heavy park users which can help the Parks Department come up with a safe plan. Many people have commented that they are shocked how the process of selecting a bike route seems political. I know Madison can be better than this. A few of us were told by people in Eastmoreland 2 days before the October Parks Commission meeting that 2 new bike options had been added (1 and 3), and Park Commissioners would pick an option that night. I went to simply ask that the Park Commission delay their vote until SASY could be included in a meeting. At that meeting, Alder Foster urged the Parks Commission to vote for #1 and #3. He did not want to

wait. I was not able to provide any information since I had only 3 minutes to speak. The commission voted for #3. Above is an attachment of #3 showing how it overlays the structures and activities of the park. The Engineering Department did not present this to the Parks commission. I do not know if anyone before has put this type of map together. Yet how can safety be assumed if you don't know what is use of a space? Please look at it carefully and see what you think about use and danger.

3. Please acknowledge that the bike route polling survey on the City Engineering Zoom meeting site is biased and decisions should not be based on it.

I am a social scientist and professor at the University of Wisconsin -Madison. I have been director of two research centers and am on the Board of the UW Survey Center. A survey is only as good as its sample and its survey questions. City Engineering sent card invitations to its mailing list for the Atwood Reconstruction. Andy Zwiag reported in an email to me that, "the mailing was sent to portions of the SASY, Eastmorland, Lake Edge, and Glendale neighborhoods". When I raised this issue, city staff acknowledged that it is not a scientific survey. I would be happy to provide more details about what it is not. In response to this concern which I raised last night in the meeting, Chris Petykowski asked the new Alder Grant Foster if the invitation to last night's meeting had been sent to the SASY list serve. Alder Foster, who we were assigned due to redistricting on Jan. 1 2022 said yes it was. However, if so, many did not receive it including me. Only in the last few days did Mike Barrett take the initiative to send out an email and many people did not get it. He is not on the SASY Council. Most people in our district did not know about the survey, did not know about the meeting and were not therefore represented in the discussion or polling. Instead, the bike interested Atwood Reconstruction followers were over-represented along with people already represented by Alder Foster who lives in Eastmoreland and are familiar with his blog. Our district barely knows his name let alone his blog. When asked last night if he would help have a meeting with SASY, Alder Foster said he would not. I cannot imagine our former alder Marsha Rummel saying that in a meeting. Never. We request a neighborhood meeting in SASY and ask you to delay decisions about the bike paths until there can be a good exchange of ideas about the bike path options. The Atwood Reconstruction Project which can be discussed separately as Chris Petykowski acknowledged last night.

Olbrich Park has become a safe haven during Covid as the "safe place" to go with little toddlers, young children, soccer game players, frisbee throwers, drum circles and dancers (weekly), fisher people, watercraft storage users, contemplative walkers along the lake edge, runners, dog owners with a variety of frisky ones, picknickers, winter and summer solstice celebraters, sledders, users of the playground and restroom and even weddings when another spot couldn't be found. It's not a large park actually. It is about 12 acres which is less than Brittinham Park for example. It's just that it is very efficiently and safely used as an all too precious green space across all the seasons. We have people from MNA and the south side who share this space happily. From small babies to older adults in wheel chairs talking to the fisherpeople on the dock, everyone is welcome and safe no matter how frail or vulnerable.

The built environment is increasingly cited as important to the mental health of a city population and parks are an enormous factor in this. Please separate the vote on the Reconstruction from the bike paths. Too many politics have sullied the process with not enough respect for planning expertise and insights from community based experience with Olbrich.

In closing, I recommend that the Transportation Commission support the excellent planning of City Engineering on the Reconstruction of Atwood Project and simply disengage from the bike path debacle to allow the Park Department planners to work objectively and without pressure on the bike path.