

City of Madison
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL
Correspondence

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TO: Madison Plan Commission

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SUBJECT: Staff Response to LRTPC Recommendations on the Proposed Amendment to the Mid-Town Neighborhood Development Plan

At their October 20th meeting, the Long-Range Transportation Planning Committee recommended adoption of Resolution ID 24017, amending the Mid-Town Neighborhood Development Plan, contingent upon inclusion of several specific recommendations intended to improve connectivity within the amendment area and to adjacent neighborhoods. Staff from Traffic Engineering, Engineering, and Planning have reviewed the LRTPC recommendations and offer the following response for consideration by the Plan Commission and Common Council.

Creating good transportation connectivity within and between the new neighborhoods at the urban edge as they develop is an important City policy, and staff appreciate the Committee's interest in advancing this policy by proposing additional roadways and pedestrian/bicycle paths within the Vetter property amendment area. However, after careful review, staff cannot recommend most of the LRTPC proposed changes. Some are just not feasible, given the topography and physical characteristics of the amendment area, and the existing and planned highway improvements and projected traffic volumes on the adjacent roadways---particularly County Highway M. Some, while they may create an appearance of improved connectivity on the plan maps, would actually add little practical convenience to the neighborhood, given the development pattern and proposed uses within the amendment area, and the alternative routes that would be available to most destinations. More detailed staff comments are provided below.

General Comments

In evaluating the potential to add new streets or pedestrian/bicycle paths to the recommended Land Use and Street Plan, the actual potential benefits in terms of traveler convenience have to be balanced with the physical impacts of the additional facilities and their initial and continuing cost. In most cases, staff feel that the recommended additional streets and paths will not be utilized to an extent that justifies the physical and environmental damage to the neighborhood resulting from the necessary roadway grading and the removal of a large number of very nice existing trees, the increased amount of impervious surface, and the costs of construction and ongoing maintenance---including repair, snowplowing, etc.

Staff believe that the street and pedestrian/bicycle path system recommended in the current proposed amendment provides good connectivity and a convenient route to most destinations. The **attached map** illustrates updated staff recommendations which address some of the concerns indentified by the LRTPC. An aerial photograph and a natural features map are also attached.

Hawks Landing Subdivision

Staff also note that this neighborhood as a whole does not have the high degree of connectivity recommended generally in City plans because the Hawks Landing subdivision and golf course sits right in the middle of it and interrupts many of the most useful street linkages. This subdivision was annexed to the City as an alternative to having the whole area develop within the Town of Middleton, but its design is more reflective of Town development standards than of Madison's. As the lands surrounding Hawks Landing have developed, land use and street patterns more consistent with City planning recommendations have been created, but direct connectivity through the heart of the neighborhood, either "east-west" or "north-south," remains limited by the Hawks Landing development pattern. As a consequence, the benefits from interconnected streets within individual developments often do not provide similar benefits to overall neighborhood connectivity.

Existing Greenside Park

In order to preserve existing significant natural features, including interesting topography and high-quality woodlands, a City park was created at the eastern end of Greenside Circle. If the Vetter property were developed with residential uses, additional parkland would have been added to the east--both to preserve lands with similar natural attributes immediately adjacent to the existing park, and to provide open parkland that could be developed for active recreation. Because the future land use on the Vetter property will be employment rather than residential, expansion of Greenside Park is no longer proposed. However preservation of the natural features just east of the park is proposed by incorporating them into the recommended wooded buffer area along the west boundary of the future research park.

Nelson Crossing

As adopted in 1999, the Mid-Town plan illustrated a street connecting Nelson Crossing with the 80-acre Vetter property. The streets and land uses shown on the original Mid-Town Plan (which was actually adopted as an amendment to the High Point-Raymond Neighborhood Development Plan) were highly conceptual and intended primarily to "fill-in" the area around Hawks Landing with a plausible pattern of future uses. The illustrated street had to follow a circuitous route to the north to circumvent the Hawks Landing Golf Course, and also to provide access into the 25-acre woods on the Vetter property, which was proposed for residential development. Staff never were very comfortable with the initial concept and consider the current proposal that would preserve the woods more compatible with the natural features of this part of the neighborhood. Staff believe that the proposed pedestrian/bicycle path from Nelson Crossing through the edge of the woods and into the 80-acre development site provides adequate connectivity for access by residents in the Nelson Crossing area and that a full street connection for motor vehicles is not needed.

Additional Comments on the LRTPC Recommendations

The Long Range Transportation Planning Committee's recommendations are listed below along with City staff response and recommendation regarding specific LRTPC proposed changes.

(1) Both of the "potential" pedestrian/bicycle path locations shown as dashed red lines on the draft Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities map should be included--that is, extend the path from Greenside Circle east through the research park property, and also extend the east-west path at the southern boundary of the research park property all the way west, to connect with the north-south path between Nelson Crossing and Greenside Circle.

Staff did not feel that both of these path segments were needed since either would serve to connect the proposed north-south path between Nelson Crossing and Greenside Circle with the major pedestrian/bicycle path in the central greenway, but both paths were shown as "potential" paths on the draft map to get input on which of the two segments would be more desirable. Rather than construct both paths as LRTPC proposes, however, staff recommend that only the path extending east from Greenside Circle should be implemented. The southern path shown with a dashed line along the south property line is not considered necessary since other off-street or on-street routes are available.

(2) Implement a pedestrian/bicycle path from Silkwood Trail to the east, through the research park property, to connect with the north-south research park street or north-south pedestrian/bicycle path; investigate the potential to extend a new local street at that location.

A path extending east from Silkwood Trail would be located only about 135 feet south of Valley View Road, which is planned to have both sidewalks and on-street bicycle lanes. Silkwood Trail is also not far from the connection into the Vetter property from Ancient Oak Lane to the south. With these alternatives available, staff do not believe that creating another connection that would be entirely north of the developed uses in the research park would add any meaningful utility to the transportation network in the amendment area.

(3) Implement a pedestrian/bicycle path from the eastern terminus of Ancient Oak Lane, to the east through the research park property, connecting through to CTH M/Pleasant View Road and across to Prairie Hill Road; investigate the potential to extend a new local street at that location.

Because this is a very long block, staff agree that extending the pedestrian/bicycle path from Ancient Oak Lane all the way east to provide a more-direct connection to CTH M/Pleasant View could be beneficial---for accessing future transit service along CTH M, for example. However, staff do not recommend that that this path extend across CTH M/Pleasant View or connect with Prairie Hill Road.

Prairie Hill Road is too close to the roundabout at Valley View to provide a street crossing or to install a traffic signal, and this would be a very dangerous, uncontrolled pedestrian/bicycle crossing. CTH M currently has about 22,000 vehicles per day, and is projected to eventually reach about 45,000 vehicles per day. The City recently constructed two underpasses across CTH M/Pleasant View (at about \$500,000 each) north of Valley View Road to provide a safe way for pedestrians and bicyclists to get across this major arterial.

To provide a better safe route across CTH M from the amendment area, it is intended to direct pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle traffic to the planned intersection of CTH M with the new north-south road through the planned research park. At this location, a traffic signal can be provided without interfering with the operation of the roundabout or with the major CTH M/Mid-Town Road intersection to the south. To increase convenience and safety for pedestrians and bicyclists crossing CTH M at the signalized intersection, staff also recommend that a short pedestrian/bicycle path segment be constructed on either side of the signalized intersection (note that the alignment of planned future streets east of CTH M will be revised so that the primary through street intersects with CTH M opposite the street from the Vetter property amendment area.)

For similar reasons, City staff also feel that adding an additional street out to CTH M would be less safe than directing traffic down to the signalized intersection. As noted above, the proximity of the roundabout precludes extending a second street connection across to Prairie Hill Road, or east of CTH M at another location; and a partial intersection could not be signalized. While a “right-in, right-out” limited intersection might be possible, staff believe this would be more hazardous than the proposed controlled intersections and would not add meaningful convenience to the planned street network.

(4) Implement traffic calming design features and infrastructure on the north-south street running through the research park property.

It is not anticipated that traffic calming will be needed on the north-south street at this time. The City has an established policy and procedure for requesting and evaluating potential traffic calming measures should the need arise in the future. However, roadway design features that also provide traffic calming effects, such as median segments at intersection approaches, can be considered as detailed plans for these streets are prepared.

(5) Study a new local street connection from Nelson Crossing, north to Ancient Oak Lane, along the western boundary of the research park property.

Staff believe that construction of a roadway between Nelson Crossing and Ancient Oak would be very detrimental to the physical character of this part of the neighborhood. The street would need to go through the Vetter woods (whose preservation is an important component of the University Research Park proposed development) and require removal of a large percentage of the existing trees along the western edge of the amendment area---which are also recommended for preservation. The relatively steep topography in parts of this area would require additional cutting and filling and increase the amount of environmental disruption. A street along the western edge of the Vetter property would provide no useful access to property since parcels in the proposed research park will be oriented to the central north-south street and greenway. A second street this location would, however, create many undesirable double-frontage lots.

The proposed pedestrian/bicycle paths will provide this more-direct connection for pedestrians and bicyclists, including children going to the elementary school, and these will be maintained as year-round paths.

(6) If the recommended pedestrian/bicycle path extensions are implemented in the near term (i.e., at Silkwood Trail, Greenside Circle and Nelson Crossing), ensure that sufficient right-of-way is provided so that these paths can be converted to local streets in the future.”

Because staff do not recommend building these connections as full streets now or in the future, we do not recommend reserving the additional right-of-way along the recommended pedestrian/bicycle path alignments for future street expansion.