

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you tonight.

I am coming to talk about my support for participatory budgeting as part of a process, not as an end result; and, it's an idea that I believe is just a bit ahead of its time in the Madison/Dane County areas.

It seems that participatory budgeting is something that could happen after we've taken our time and developed community leaders from within the challenged communities - working with informal leaders within our communities and helping them develop the skills and abilities, such as: deep listening, how to be results oriented, customer focused, developing vision, mission, goals, effectively working on a team and/or getting work done through others, conflict transformation, how to ask good questions, make high-quality decisions, how to be a well-respected and trusted leader and great communicator.

These skills and abilities will serve them well as they move into fully participating in a meaningful way in city processes like participatory budgeting. I just don't think we're there yet.

I would like to propose that instead we think about putting funding into grassroots community development and building community leaders and for that matter building real community from the inside out. This is a strategy for change that I have personally been a part of and seen work in Madison over the last three decades. I've witnessed positive changes in Wexford Ridge, Northport Packers, Allied Drive, East Madison, Vera Court, when neighbors got involved in the community through board development and membership, support/youth/parent groups being formed, community members becoming volunteers and/or holding paid positions within their neighborhood.

In 1983 I moved my young family into Kennedy Heights, a then, low-income neighborhood on Madison's north side. From the outside the community looked quiet, quaint, a nice place to raise a family. What I learned shortly after moving in that was a façade; the community had a big drug problem with an open air drug market, several apartments were known for prostitution (one being a close neighbor), people doing what they wanted at all hours of the night and day with little to no repercussions; and, a management team that felt helpless. So, I and four other neighbors, Carol Hughes, Fernando Hernandez, Ann Lehman and Jane Goray, people you have probably never heard of, dug in and started talking to neighbors about change and enlisting others to help make change. And, over the first seven years we slowly but surely saw change happening before our eyes.

My family ended up living there for fifteen years before moving into our home just blocks away from KH almost 20 years ago. And, we are still involved in the neighborhood; my husband is the neighborhood board president today.

Now, I tell you all of this because neighbors made the difference, I'm sure that you had not hear of any of us – we were informal leaders, we didn't have name recognition, we weren't power players, we were people who quietly and diligently worked for change in our neighborhood. And, we changed the face of the neighborhood collectively and got many other neighbors involved in the change making.

Granted, we worked alongside the likes of Jim Stickels from the YMCA, Ada Deer from the University, people from PICADA, Briarpatch, DHS and a newly forming JFF in the latter years. And, I had many allies, teachers and mentors from the City; people like, Bruce Newton, Enis Ragland, Lori Wendorff, Jule Stroike, Monica Host, Mary O'Donnell, people who cared about what we were doing, and, cared enough to help show us, teach us and let us do it on our own and learn through the process... this is where I cut my teeth on grassroots organizing, saw the power in it, and came to understand it as a way to make lasting and sustainable change.

Since those days I've had the opportunity to see grassroots organizing working in communities like Vera Court, with Big Mamma, Darlene Horner, Northport Packers with the likes of Jackie Thomas, Darbo back in the day with Dianne Johnson, and many others. Today it's the change-makers like Alfonso Flores in WP, women's group participants at Lussier and Allied, Jackie at Northport Packers...

So, what I believe is that we need to focus on helping to educate and support our informal community leaders, help give them a real voice that can affectively make changes that mean something, changes that will stick.

In 1989, (after 6 years of community organizing in KH), a then, younger Mayor, Paul Soglin, along with Alder Roberta Kiesow (who also taught all 3 of my bio children) paid a surprise visit to Kennedy Heights on a warm summer evening. The Mayor walked the neighborhood with me and several other neighbors and asked us, "Where are all the people at?" And we immediately understood the question he was asking - where are all the trouble makers? And we very proudly responded that through a lot of hard work by community members and allies we had changed the culture of the neighborhood and people didn't hang out like that here anymore. What you

saw was people bar-b-q-ing, kids playing on the playground; it became pretty idealic for a low-income neighborhood.

Now, don't get me wrong, there is no magic potion for this change and the outcomes ebb and flow. It's not sexy work, it's hard, slow-going, door-to-door, get-to-know-your-neighbors kind of work; but, it has a long-term pay off of making sustainable change from the inside out. It's work that grows community leaders who learn valuable skills that can serve them, their families and community for a lifetime.

And, the work is on-going – it's not a bandaid approach, it's not a one-time fixes everything. I know that even my beloved KH has skirted the Mayors "challenged neighborhood list" from time to time, but, I don't believe we've made it back on the list. I'd live there today for sure.

So, I hope that you will join me in exploring putting this funding into grassroots community organizing for change; giving community members and residents of struggling communities across Madison the power they deserve to affect change in their own lives. And, I see participatory budgeting being a part of the process down the road.

Thank you...