

sent via email

June 2, 2015

To: Members of the Madison Common Council

Re: My Opposition to the Portage Avenue Apartments

As an active member of the Friends of Starkweather Creek, I recently learned the status of this project. I have read the online Planning files and watched the entire video of the 5/18 meeting that I was unable to attend. I toured the site with Friends board members on 5/28 and share their concerns. I usually support high density, and there are many places where it works well. I'm sure that Mr. Wall would build and manage this as a high-quality project, but I think it's too big for this site. At this late date, my only option is to oppose the project.

I am a westside Madison resident, so my opposition is based on city-wide concerns. I oppose it because it crams too much development up against this Starkweather tributary creek and wetlands. The process has not adequately considered the current environment of the site or the future drainage improvements that may be needed. This is not a platted lot. It is a new greenfield development that should have an environmental review by Madison citizens before approving a development plan, rather than relying on other agencies to do all of the environmental review after we have already approved a plan.

Density. At face value the proposed development north of the creek is almost 3 times more dense than shown for that area in the adopted Comp Plan. I think the Plan staff and Commission have been far too generous in allocating a density that is out of character with the surrounding land uses. For the upland north of the creek, the Comp Plan allows a maximum of 15 units/acre. That 6.5 acres of net developable land yields 98 units, so the proposed 284 is almost 3 times greater.

Although the City is not obligated to provide additional density for the 4 acres of undevelopable upland south of the creek, it may wish to do so. This could yield 16-40 units per acre to add 64-160 units, for a total of 162-254 units (still not 284).

Allowing Density for wetland acres? No density should be allowed for the 4 acres of creek and wetland. The City usually requires dedication of such a major drainageway, as it was shown in the Hanson Road Plan. It appears that dedication was not required primarily to allow more units to be added for the wetland acreage. This sets a terrible precedent for future City development of all the poorly drained land in the Starkweather and Door Creek watersheds.

This property is supposed to be a transition from medium to low density. The attached map clearly shows that it will look like the largest and densest development in the area. The City is clearly not obligated to approve 284 units on this site, but has calculated density in such a way that it appears to meet the Comp Plan requirements. We are choosing this density and I think that's a mistake.

No Plan for Drainageway Improvements. The Engineering staff has indicated that it may be difficult to get permits for any work in this drainageway. It is a meandering stream that

silts up, then erodes its banks in heavy runoff. The future of this stream has not been addressed, so the development cannot claim to solve any downstream problems.

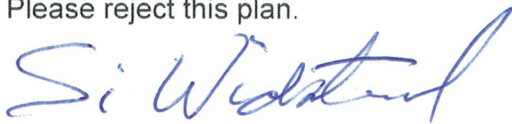
No Plan for South of the Creek. It is not appropriate to count the drainageway and wetland as useable open space, as has been done. Most of the useable open space is on the upland south of the creek. The developer has not proposed any access, landscaping, restoration or use of this open space. The City has generously volunteered to build a bike trail bridge crossing at some undetermined future date to provide them access to it.

The Best Bike Path Location? I strongly support the bike path across this property to a future under/overpass. But the proposed location squeezes it into the required wetland buffer and requires removal of mature oak trees. Perhaps there are better alternatives with a different plan.

Lack of Environmental Site Assessment. The previous issues highlight the lack of information on the current environment of the site, and lack of public discussion of the impacts of development. I found no staff or developer report on existing vegetation. The Friends of Starkweather Creek only arranged for a site visit on 5/28. I know of only one City staff who has walked the site from Portage Road to the Interstate, and I wonder if any of the Alders or Plan Commissioners have.

In summary, I'd like to stress that this is a greenfield development that has not been adequately reviewed. There are a lot of unanswered questions. I wouldn't want this process or this result to happen in my District. I think most of your constituents would not want it in your Districts.

Please reject this plan.

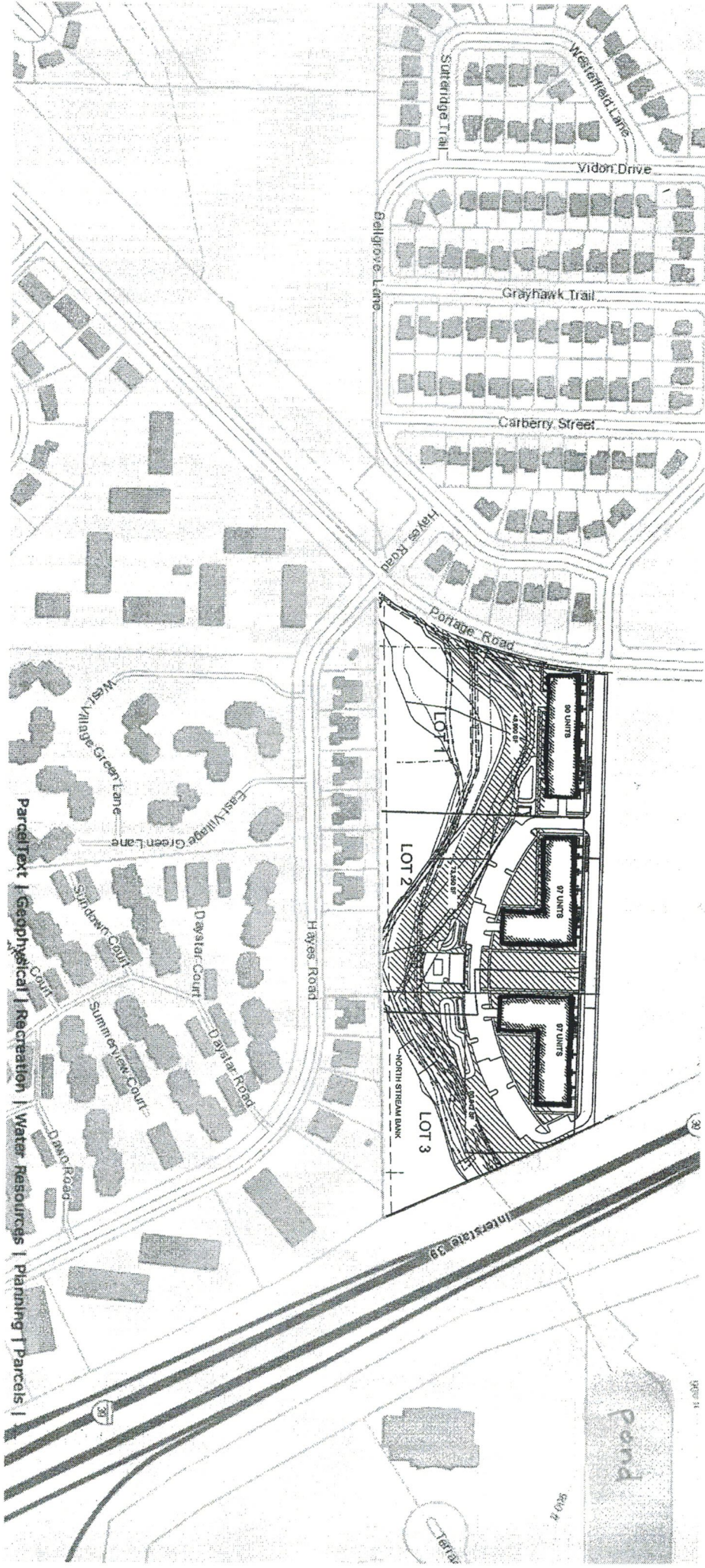


Simon Widstrand
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cc: Mayor's Office
Heather Stouder, Planning Staff
Terrence Wall

Map attached

Portage Road Apartments



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