

Two years ago, during my campaign for District 13 Alder, I began attending the Steering Committee meetings for the Triangle Monona Bay Neighborhood Plan.

During the steering committee process, city staff pushed for a return to the grid system originally in place on the Triangle when it was part of the old Greenbush neighborhood. Staff was intently focused in their call for more connectivity, defining connectivity primarily in terms of automobile access.

Residents pushed back, not wanting anything resembling a grid, worried in large part that adding automobile traffic into the Triangle would result in reduced safety and a loss of privacy. The final approved plan included just one new street, a north-south connection between Regent and West Washington. Residents reluctantly and with much reservation agreed to this street, concerned that it will invite use by drivers seeking a convenient shortcut through the Triangle. Bayview residents in particular have voiced concerns this new street would put the large number of children in their community at risk.

The proposed amendment would limit the northern half of the street, from Regent to Braxton Place, to pedestrians, bicyclists and emergency vehicles. This section could be built at grade, without curb and gutter or sidewalks, offering enhanced place-making potential and spaces for public art and creative landscaping.

Staff opposed this amendment, returning to the theme of connectivity. Quoting from the staff report:

Enhanced street connectivity will allow the Bayview Community Center to be more welcoming and accessible to the public, facilitate safe and efficient travel to housing for residents and visitors, provide opportunities for additional parking, and improve emergency vehicle access.

Allow me to note that Bayview residents have not clamored for this street as a means of activating the Community Center. Nor has this sentiment been expressed by the Bayview Foundation Board, on which I sit. In fact, I'm not aware of anyone on Bayview's leadership team suggesting vehicular access from Regent Street is needed to make the community center more welcoming.

It appears staff is projecting their own concerns onto Triangle residents, as evidenced by additional remarks in the staff report, and I quote:

While many people expressed concern over the possibility of a new street on the Triangle, some shared that it is difficult for visitors to get to their homes and that they wished there were more ways to get into and out of their neighborhood and that there was more parking for residents. Some additional input expressed during the planning process that the TMB SC and city agencies considered while drafting plan recommendations:

- The grid street pattern that the Triangle had over 60 years ago seemed to work better than the current layout of the Triangle; if we bring the street grid back, it could slow down traffic.*
- At least bring back a cross street to help better distribute traffic.*
- Possibly add one well-designed street that is safe for residents and provides good access and connectivity.*

Admittedly, I was not at every steering committee meeting. However, I have spoken to members of the committee and others who were intimately involved in the process. Those I've spoken to are consistent in their assessment that staff was not responding to community concerns in recommending this new north-south street, but rather it seemed staff sought to impose their concept onto the plan independent of community feedback.

The amendment allows for increased connectivity as staff defines it. Braxton Place would no longer function as a cul-de-sac. Vehicles would be able to enter the Triangle from South Park via Braxton or from West Washington via the new street.

The amendment also allows for increased connectivity as the neighborhood defines it. All along there's been a difference in how one defines connectivity. Staff defines it in terms of vehicular access. The residents define it in terms of human connectivity.

Limiting the northern section of the new street in between Regent and Braxton would provide additional recreational space for residents, adding a strong dose of health and safety considerations to a very diverse community. There are over 100 children at Bayview. The CDA apartments, likewise, serve a high-need population of elderly and disabled residents.

If we are in fact committed to framing our decision-making around sustainability and equity, we must stop emphasizing vehicular access over and above the needs and interests of our most vulnerable residents.

Thank you.

Tag Evers

DISTRICT 13 ALDER

CITY OF MADISON

(608) 424-2580

district13@cityofmadison.com

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