

To: Urban Design Commission  
From: Lisie Kitchel, Carrie Rothburd, Charlene Sweeney  
Re: South Madison Plan Update  
Date: November 17, 2021

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The Urban Design Commission has a responsibility to consider adjacent properties with relation to the proposed height of structures. We object to the 12-story building limit proposed along John Nolen Drive adjacent to Turville Conservation Park, Olin Park, and the Olin Triangle, and the 8-story limit along Wingra Creek indicated on the city's proposed height map for the SMP update. This objection is based on the following:

- 1) **The city has well-established requirements for building heights stepping down to existing uses. Buildings in close proximity to the Olin Triangle are not more than 2-3 stories in height.** Allowing up to 8 and 12 stories in their midst is not in keeping with this practice.
  - The newly developed "The Marling" housing project on the Yahara River at East Washington Avenue is four stories and doesn't dominate the river.
  - The enjoyment of Wingra Creek and the bike path will be compromised by having 8 stories abutting the Wingra Creek Parkway.
  
- 2) **The 12-story height limit along the John Nolen Drive corridor, adjacent to Turville Point Conservation Park and Olin Park, is objectionable** from a naturalist perspective.
  - Friends of Olin-Turville parks has this to say about the integrity of the untouched beauty of these parks:

What special places will be saved as the population of Madison grows in the years to come? Will Olin and Turville Parks remain to be the natural areas they are now or will yet another proposal come along to replace the natural beauty with man-made structures? **Maybe we should try to build up the blighted areas and other underutilized areas of the city that we have already stripped of their natural beauty and strive to preserve the few natural areas that remain. If we can work together to protect and nurture these remaining natural areas to the highest degree possible, future generations will surely thank us.** Turville Point Conservation Park lies along the migratory route of birds. Putting 12 stories adjacent to the park virtually assures an increase in bird strikes.
  - The bird glass ordinance proposed by the City cannot be implemented or enforced to decrease bird strikes at this time.
  
- 3) **The process by which the height map and plan for the Olin Triangle was not consistent with the South Madison Plan process, as authorized by the Common Council.** The height map was calls for 12 stories along John Nolen and the easterly end of Olin Avenue and the changed land use for the Olin Triangles were presented fait accompli at the last of the South Madison Plan meetings at the end of September with no opportunity for citizen input.
  - This South Madison Plan process calls for "ample opportunities" for citizen input in developing the South Madison Plan.
  - The city's process for creating a building height map for portions of the Williamson Street corridor provided no opportunity for public input.
  - Bay Creek neighbors, who are the closest neighbors to the Olin Triangle and John Nolen and Olin corridors, were not part of any South Madison Plan discussion sessions, and so have had no opportunity to comment on the last-minute additions to the Plan.
  
- 4) **Planning staff has said that the height map and proposed changes to Land Use on the Olin Triangle were developed to support the Alliant Energy Center's Destination District Vision & Strategy.**
  - Neither this Vision Statement nor the Master Plan has been approved by either City or County.
  - The Plan Department's staff has indicated that its review process does do not consider unapproved plans.

# Help Protect Olin Park & Turville Point Conservation Park

To: City of Madison

The draft South Madison Plan Update, as currently proposed by the city of Madison's Planning staff, was introduced to the city's Common Council on November 2, 2021. Subsequently it will be reviewed by various city commissions and return to Council for a vote of approval on January 4, 2022. This draft plan recommends changes for the John Nolen Drive and East Olin Avenue corridors. The plan includes a height map for all of South Madison. It revises the city's land use map for the "Olin Triangle," which is bounded by Wingra Creek, John Nolen Drive, and East Olin Avenue, and is home to the Wonder Bar.

These proposed changes, which set the stage for redevelopment that supports the Alliant Energy Center's "Destination District Vision & Strategy," could have potentially detrimental impacts on Olin Park, Turville Point Conservation Park, and the Wingra Creek parkway and bike path. (The "Destination District Vision & Strategy" has never been officially adopted by either Dane County or the city of Madison.)

Proposed changes include:

- Buildings of up to 12 stories alongside John Nolen Drive adjacent to Turville Point Conservation Park and Olin Park
- Buildings of up to 12 stories where the Olin Triangle borders John Nolen Drive and East Olin Avenue
- Buildings of up to 8 stories where the Olin Triangle borders Wingra Creek Parkway
- Reassignment of the Olin Triangle's designated land use from Employment to Regional Mixed Use.

We, the undersigned, appeal to the city of Madison's Common Council to:

- Protect and preserve South Madison's parks and open areas, especially important in a Conservation Park.
- Revise the proposed height map to respect the impacts of new development on the surrounding natural areas and adjacent neighborhoods
- Investigate the impacts of the proposed height map and change in land use for the Olin Triangle on nearby natural areas and adjacent neighborhoods
- Instruct the city's Planning staff to call additional South Madison Plan Update community meetings with citizens to:
  - Allow reconsideration of staff's proposed height map and land use changes along the John Nolen Drive and East Olin Avenue corridors
  - Solicit public feedback on these last-minute additions to the draft plan prior to final submission, in keeping with the Common Council's approved participatory process for the South Madison Plan Update.

## Why is this important?

The draft South Madison Plan Update's height map for the John Nolen Drive and East Olin Avenue corridors and proposed new land use for the Olin Triangle will likely have profound impacts, including potentially negative impacts on Olin Park and Turville Point Conservation Park, two of Madison's "natural gems:" including:

- Altering the view from within the parks and from points all around Madison
- Increasing bird strikes along an important migratory route due to the amount and height of building glass
- Compromising the uses and enjoyment of Olin Park and Turville Point Conservation Park and the Wingra Creek parkway and bike path.

Signed by 253 people:

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**From:** [Olivia Williams](#)  
**To:** [Urban Design Comments](#)  
**Subject:** 11/17 Agenda Item 3: South Madison Plan  
**Date:** Tuesday, November 16, 2021 3:59:08 PM

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Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Hello Urban Design Commission,

I first want to say I am very impressed with pieces of this plan and the intentions behind it. In particular, I am happy to see community wealth-building and anti-gentrification highlighted as goals of the plan, with community land trusts (CLTs) mentioned as a strategy for ongoing housing affordability. I represent the Madison Area Community Land Trust, but I also have been involved in the field of CLTs as a researcher for a number of years, and I was initially drawn to CLTs for both of these reasons and see CLT homeownership as one of the best ways to address the two simultaneously.

The primary area I would like to see changed in the plan is the single-family zoning in the Thorstad Area. If offering a significant number of long-term affordable owner-occupied homes is a goal of the plan, multi-family condos in a CLT would be very suitable for that site. Most of the units within the Madison Area CLT currently are condo units, and we find that condos are a great option for low-income homeowners because they are easier to upkeep, create more connections between neighbors who can support one another, and tend to be lower-cost than detached single-family homes. Especially in the costly construction market, shared walls and exteriors will reduce building costs and allow for a greater number of units, serving more people than detached single-family homes would. In light of recent zoning changes across Madison and the need for more housing units, it seems clear that there is a need for greater density in the Thorstad site. This site is also close to downtown, and sits along prominent bike routes and the future BRT line, and it could be a good location for people to live with reduced dependence on cars. Having more units, particularly if they are affordable, could allow for *more* ownership options within the Southside, which was cited as a goal of the plan.

Furthermore, the plan asked for increased financing of CLTs and other shared equity housing options, which I see as the only way to retain affordability in a gentrifying market. Shared equity housing can help people get into homeownership, gaining equity to buy on the conventional market later if they choose. CLTs and other shared equity housing models have proven to be a [stabilizing](#) form of homeownership, [reducing the risk of foreclosure by 90%](#) and allowing for [individual wealth building opportunities](#) that are much closer to conventional homeownership than to renting. Furthermore, the retention of land in a community land trust means the land and any public subsidy put into the land remains protected for community benefit for future generations, which is why [CLTs are considered a community wealth-building strategy](#) rather than merely an individual wealth-building strategy. With prices rapidly on the rise in Madison, more [permanently affordable housing is needed](#).

As this plan is being revised, I encourage a stronger approach to affordability that might include requiring particular sites such as the Thorstad Area to be affordable to particular incomes and/or utilize a shared equity housing model. While I know we cannot implement Inclusionary Zoning in Madison, the South Madison Plan could more strongly emphasize affordable housing as a planned development type for particular sites.

Thank you for your consideration,  
Olivia Williams

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OLIVIA R. WILLIAMS (they/she/Dr.) | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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