

November 11, 2013

Dear Mayor Soglin, Parks Commissioners and Alders,

Thank you for your continued service to the residents of Madison. The leaders and members of the SASYNA (Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara Neighborhood Association) request your consideration for our concerns regarding the future of the North Plat that surrounds the Garver Building, as elucidated below. We are against the City Engineering proposal to construct a chemical engineering type phosphorous treatment system on the North Plat behind the Garver Building.

Please appreciate how much the community cares for both the Garver Building and the land that surrounds it. Neighbors use the land as a retreat, where dark sky and encounters with wildlife are still possible, where awe of natural phenomena can be experienced within the urban context, and where one can still feel like they are lost in the woods. Recent research about the medicinal benefits of wild space and forest canopy (Selhub, E. and A. Logan 2013; The New Science of Resiliency and its Clinical Applications, Harvard Medical School, 2013) confirm beliefs many of us have about our interaction with nature. City Engineering and other departments appears not to understand the value of such unique remaining undeveloped green space to our community.

The city of Madison and Parks Department have allowed the land to be treated much as the former feed mill owners did - as a dumping ground. The city uses the land as a dumping site for snow. The salt run off from that dumping has killed an entire row of trees. This year the Friends of Starkweather Creek will begin to document how that snow salt load affects Starkweather Creek, Lake Monona, and downstream systems.

In addition, the city uses the land as a staging site for the benefit of other public lands and parks, specifically Olbrich Gardens. Mulching activities have taken place on the site for many years, but the soil remediation properties of the mulch do not benefit the stressed soils on that site. Rather, the mulch is trucked off-site and the land is further degraded in the process.

We are particularly concerned that the proposal to construct a chemical engineering type phosphorous treatment system at the junction of the branches of Starkweather Creek, where wildlife encounter is greatest, continues the practice of utilizing this space as a dumping ground and staging ground. The chemical sludge, which includes aluminum, that is generated by that that type of system will need to be stored on-site, retrieved, transported, and disposed of elsewhere. The risk of flooding and accidental dispersion of that chemical sludge is a factor in our concern.

We request the Commission and Alders give careful consideration to the multiple options for bio-remediation systems. Research suggests that small-scale, bio-remediation prevention practices at the multiple sources of phosphorous runoff, combined with a network of bio-remediation installations of various types and sizes along the contributory streams upstream, is a more sustainable solution than an "end of the pipe" chemical engineering solution that has a known chemical sludge by-product with on-site storage and disposal issues (<http://www.evergladeshub.com/okeechobee/P.htm>).

We understand that the preponderance of the phosphorus load is in the Yahara chain, not Starkweather Creek. Further, Lake Mendota is the largest reservoir by a significant amount. If the city is considering an effective chemical engineering system, that analysis suggests such a system should be focused on the Yahara River between Lakes Mendota and Monona. The public space at East Washington Avenue Burr Jones Field could serve as a site for such an experimental system.

From <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/phs/phs.asp?id=1076&tid=34> (Center for Disease Control Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease registry): *The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) identifies the most serious hazardous waste sites in the nation. These sites are then placed on the National Priorities List (NPL) and are targeted for long-term federal clean-up activities. Aluminum (in some form, e.g., in compounds with other elements such as oxygen, sulfur, or phosphorus) has been found at elevated levels in at least 596 of the 1,699 current or former NPL sites. Although the total number of NPL sites evaluated for this substance is not known, the possibility exists that the number of sites at which aluminum is found may increase in the future as more sites are evaluated. This information is important because these sites may be sources of exposure and exposure to this substance at high levels may be harmful.*

The community treasures the North Plat for the wildness it adds to our lives, and we invite you as our representatives to share this land ethic and welcome a sort of placemaking in landscape use, reclamation, and design as part of the process of rejuvenating the site. We wish to partner with the city, University communities, Leopold Center and similar existing agencies, and centers for resiliency and education to apply adaptive reclamation and eco-mimicry practices that will benefit our populations.

Sincerely,

Lou Host-Jablonski, Chair

The Schenk Atwood Starkweather Yahara Neighborhood Association