

Eastside News
Alder Report
Larry Palm, District 15

2009 City Budget

By now, the Mayor has introduced both his capital and operating budgets. Both have big impacts on your property taxes, as well as the school district, Dane County and MATC budgets.

I know many alders are distinctly aware of our current financial environment. Government is challenged to “do more with less.” More people are depending on our services, from Metro buses to get to work to neighborhood libraries for job skills and to use the Internet. By some measures, the Mayor’s budget offers some positives, and by others, some negatives. While the tax on the average home would increase 2.95% (below the increase in inflation and Social Security income), actual expenditures (money from property taxes and other sources that you pay directly and indirectly) would go up almost four times this amount, creating a structural deficit this is simply not sustainable over time.

So, as alder, how do I sift through the hundreds of pages of the City’s budget? It is simpler when I have a goal. This year, I continue to look at:

- Preserving essential services, such as police, fire, streets and sanitation and, for me, libraries.
- Keeping strong the necessary services that truly help individuals and enhance our quality of life, such as food pantries, health services, Parks and the Water Utility.
- Holding back on things that are less in demand because of the change in our economy. For example, fewer homes being built means less need for certain infrastructure improvements.

I truly appreciate the residents who have expressed to me what they’re interested in and concerned about. I know that public spending on the Overture Center and Monona Terrace continues to be a concern to many. I know neighbors often disagree with each other (and with their alder), but having these conversations about what is important to the city and its residents does result in positive changes.

The City budget process is pretty dynamic. Generally, during the three nights of discussion (this year, November 11, 12 and 13), a lot happens, and I make it a point to email residents at least once with the newest information. If you haven’t received an email from me and wish to, please contact me at lpalm@cityofmadison.com, and I’ll be sure to add you to my list.

Royster-Clark

Agrium, the owner of the Royster-Clark property at the corner of Cottage Grove Road and Dempsey Road, has requested permission from the City to demolish the plant and related buildings. The Madison Plan Commission will discuss this at their meeting on Monday, November 3, beginning at 6:30 p.m. in Room 201 of the City-County Building (210 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.).

While on the surface this seems like a good idea, a recent letter from the State of Wisconsin suggests there are potentially significant environmental issues with demolition of the building. The initial plan was to leave the concrete floor of the building so as to require any future developer of the site to return to the City for permission/approval for the further demolition. However, the condition of the concrete is not that good, and rainwater may be able to penetrate it and soak into the ground underneath, where materials we don’t want in our ground water may have collected.

At this time, the City is still looking through the various options to ensure that if demolition is approved, our environmental interests are met. A special demolition information Website has been established at <http://www.cityofmadison.com/planning/projects/demo/902dr.html>.

Eastside Dog Park

You are invited to a special “Eastside Dog Park” meeting on Monday, November 17, at 6:30 p.m. at Olbrich Gardens. This meeting is in direct response to certain eastside residents who do not want to go

to already-established dog parks, which they feel are too far from the east isthmus area. Parks Division staff is preparing information about which parks throughout the isthmus/near northside/near eastside are under consideration as potential “pocket” dog parks (complete with fenced, off-leash dog areas).

I have my reservations about the plan, given previous efforts to establish dog areas in existing neighborhood parks. If these plans interest you, please be sure to attend the meeting so you can share your voice.

Eastmorland Park

You might have noticed that work is underway to replace the bike path that loops from Milwaukee Street to Dempsey Road behind Woodman’s. This is part of the annual park improvement projects that have also repaved the basketball court at Eken Park and expanded the court at Lake Edge Park. In addition, the changes to the path finally resolve the ice issue behind Woodman’s that I felt was very dangerous and add a new opening onto the Woodman’s parking lot where it is safer.

Park safety is also a huge concern, especially during these unfortunately trying economic times. Please be extra aware at night, and contact 911 or the police non-emergency number (255.2345) immediately if you see something suspicious. While our parks are free and open for everyone, park users must still respect closing hours (no sleeping in the park at night) and adhere to legal behavior. In addition, Eastmorland Park is now a “no alcohol” park, and citations can be issued for any drinking in the park.

Aberg Avenue/E. Washington Avenue Interchange

Next year, the final pieces of the reconstruction of E. Washington Avenue at Aberg Avenue will begin. Vehicles will finally be able to make all turns with the addition of traffic lights at both interchanges. We also expect to be able to construct the second pedestrian bridge following Starkweather Creek from Washington Manor Park to the Bridge Golf Course, and there will be substantial changes on Aberg Avenue and Highway 30. Actually, a lot of the reconstruction will occur on Highway 30 to the S. Fair Oaks Avenue overpass. These areas receive a lot of traffic “abuse,” and the roads certainly look worn.

Milwaukee Street Bridge

You might know that the bridge over Starkweather Creek on Milwaukee Street has been taken out of service for replacement. Originally, the State of Wisconsin thought they could begin the project sooner, but complications with underground utility services prevented this from happening. I have now been informed that these issues have been resolved, and they will begin construction with an expected completion time of late November.

Other projects in the Starkweather Creek area have been slowed because of the anticipated bridge work, and once the bridge is finished, these pieces can fall into place.

Have a Great Autumn!

I hope that you get out and about during this marvelous autumn season. I encourage you to walk through your neighborhood, meet your fellow residents and take ownership of where you live. Only by getting to know your neighbors can you be fully informed of who is and isn’t supposed to be in the neighborhood. The more you know, the more you can inform the police and your neighbors if something isn’t right, and the more we can do together. Sadly, I hear far too often about groups of neighbors who talk amongst themselves about safety issues but don’t bring it to the attention of others. Call the police non-emergency number (255.2345), and let them know what you know.

As usual, if you have questions, comments or something you think I need to know, please contact me. I can be reached at lpalm@cityofmadison.com or 692.8416. Have a great fall!