

**Alder Report
Larry Palm, District 15
Eken Park Gazette**

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.

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.

Eken Park

You might have noticed that work is underway to replace the basketball court with a new basketball court. This is part of the annual park improvement projects that have also added the improved bike path at Eastmorland Park (behind Woodman’s) and an enlarged basketball court at Lake Edge Park.

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. A few weeks ago, I contacted the Police Department and the Parks

Division because of a massive amount of graffiti on our new playground equipment. It didn't look like traditional gang graffiti, but it was definitely sad to see someone spend so much energy to damage our playground equipment. 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.

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.

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!