

Comments on Draft Pumpkin Hollow Neighborhood Development Plan

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October 29, 2007

Excerpts from draft Pumpkin Hollow Plan with recommended changes indicated:

TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL FEATURES

Topography

The topography of the Pumpkin Hollow planning area is generally gently rolling, with the northern half of the planning area sloping to the northwest and the southern half of the planning area sloping to the southwest. The elevation ranges from approximately 856 feet to 1,024 feet U.S.G.S. The lowest elevations are found in the Token Creek and Starkweather Creek basins. The highest elevations are found along subtle ridgelines west of Rattman Road. The greatest topographic relief is found in the area between Portage Road and Token Creek, and in the southern portion of the planning area south of Hoepker Road where there are a series of ridges, steep hillsides and valleys. Topography and other natural features are shown on **Map 3**.

Watersheds, Streams and Waterways

The Pumpkin Hollow planning area includes parts of three watersheds. The northern portion of the planning area is in the Token Creek watershed; the southern portion of the planning area is in the Starkweather Creek watershed; and a small area in the south~~west~~^{east} corner of the planning area is in the Upper Koshkonong Creek watershed.

Token Creek. Token Creek, one of the area's most significant water resources, travels through the northern portion of the planning area. The creek originates from an area of springs northeast of the planning area, and is supplemented by springs, tributaries and drainageways located along the creek basin. Token Creek flows to the southwest where it eventually empties into the Yahara River, providing up to 50 percent of the Yahara River base flow during the dry season.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

The Pumpkin Hollow Neighborhood Development Plan builds upon the significant natural features that already exist within the planning area, and incorporates them into the plan through recommendations for an extensive conservation area adjacent to Token Creek and a system of well-placed public parks that will provide convenient access to a variety of recreational opportunities and add significant aesthetic character to the neighborhood. The Plan also recommends creating and maintaining an open space corridor along the northern edges of The American Center to preserve the natural features in the area and provide a buffer between the large employment district and the planned residential neighborhood to the north.

Token Creek

Token Creek and its environs are among the most important and prominent open space features within the planning area. As described in the first section of the plan, Token Creek rises from a system of natural springs located in the southern portion of the Town of Windsor and extending south along the creek into the Town of Burke. Although Token Creek had been dammed at several locations and significantly degraded in past years, more recent public and private efforts to restore and preserve this resource have led to a substantial improvement in water quality. The creek supports naturally reproducing brown trout and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has been stocking brook trout.

In addition to the creek and its tributaries, the Token Creek valley contains numerous wetlands, including several which remain close to their natural state. Many former wetland areas had been altered in the past, most typically by draining them for agricultural uses, but some of these have now lain fallow for many years and are reverting back to a more natural condition---although not always with the most appropriate types of vegetation. The wetlands are bordered by other valley lowlands and uplands that include a mix of natural land, former agricultural land now reverting to a more-natural state, and active agricultural land. There are also attractive, heavily wooded hills and hillsides along the creek corridor that contain stands of mature, high quality trees. Together, Token Creek and its associated lowlands and uplands represent an exceptional opportunity to preserve a significant natural and recreational amenity at the very edge of the urbanized area.

Proposed Token Creek Conservation Area

To help ensure the long-term protection of this corridor, the Pumpkin Hollow Land Use and Street Plan identifies a large area adjacent to the creek as the recommended Token Creek Conservation Area. The proposed conservation area is located northeast of Token Creek Park, and generally encompasses the entire width of the Token Creek valley lowlands and portions of the adjacent woodlands, hillsides, and defining ridges.

The intent of this recommendation is not only to protect water quality in Token Creek and its associated tributaries and wetlands, but to create a conservation area large enough to include a significant portion of the surrounding upland as well. The hills, woods and open fields along this segment of the Token Creek valley provide an irreplaceable natural setting for the creek and its wetlands. They also are important environmental features in their own right, and are critical

for maintaining wildlife habitat and the complex ecological relationships that exist within a larger natural area. Current regulations require a minimum setback from designated streams and wetlands, but too often urban development is allowed right up to this limit. The required setback may help protect these resources from damaging stormwater runoff, for example, but the surrounding upland habitat may be lost and the natural beauty of the area severely compromised by the loss of adjacent upland fields and wooded areas.

Token Creek Park incorporates this diversity of natural features, and limited areas along the creek have been acquired by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, but most of the land between Token Creek Park and STH 19 remains in private ownership. Fortunately, the owners for the most part have been excellent stewards of the land; but development pressures in this area will only increase, and more active steps will need to be taken to ensure that this wonderful resource can be ~~enjoyed by~~preserved for future generations.

Creation of the recommended Conservation Area would also respect the tremendous land preservation and stream restoration efforts that have taken place north of the planning area. It is logical that these efforts have largely been focused on the northern (upstream) portion of Token Creek. This portion of the creek had been significantly modified from its original state through the installation of dams and channelization of the creek for agricultural and flood control purposes. Additionally, investment in downstream areas could not be protected from any negative impacts on the creek occurring upstream.

Efforts to preserve Token Creek have been spearheaded by land owners and area residents, and by community organizations and public agencies including the Token Creek Watershed Association, the Town of Windsor, Dane County, the Natural Heritage Land Trust and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. These efforts have resulted in the creation of the Token Creek Conservancy, which includes tracts that have been preserved through the purchase of land or conservation easements and the donation of land by generous property owners. Dane County and the Wisconsin DNR have largely provided the public funding. If the community supports the creation of the Conservation Area recommended in this plan, these successful efforts could be used as a model for implementing the recommendation.

The proposed Conservation Area covers the Token Creek Natural Resource Area identified in the Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan. As described in the Background Information section of this plan, Natural Resource Areas are larger corridors containing valuable natural resources recommended for preservation; and preservation within these areas is accomplished by acquiring land or conservation easements from willing sellers, and often occurs in cooperation with other units of government and organizations. Within the Token Creek Natural Resource Area, the Parks and Open Space Plan recommends that Dane County seek to acquire lands between Token Creek Park and STH 19. The Parks and Open Space Plan recommends that local governments and non-profit conservation organizations continue to work to preserve the lands from STH 19 east to the Millpond through dedication or acquisition, with potential assistance from the Dane County Conservation Fund. The Plan also recommends continued cooperation with WisDNR and other organizations on stream bank restoration and fish habitat improvement projects throughout the Token Creek corridor.

Discussions with County Parks Division staff have indicated that their highest priority would be preservation of lands along the Creek and the adjacent wetlands in the area. This is a narrower

focus than the Conservation Area recommended in the Pumpkin Hollow Neighborhood Development Plan. Wetlands are probably the easiest areas to preserve since they generally cannot be developed and therefore have less financial value. Preservation of recommended Conservation Area lands that are not wetlands will be more difficult, but is essential in order to create and preserve a large and diverse ecological community free from the physical and visual impacts of encroaching urban development. Developable uplands adjacent to preserved wetlands that are not included in the protected area are almost always eventually proposed for more intensive development, and it is recommended that appropriate conservation easements be sought on lands within the proposed Conservation Area that are not acquired in fee. Although the size or configuration of the Conservation Area proposed in the Pumpkin Hollow Land Use and Street Plan may be modified through subsequent open space planning, a large protected area is intended, and it is likely that assistance from several governmental bodies and conservation organizations will be required to fully implement the concept recommended in this plan.

Ultimately, however, successful preservation of the proposed Conservation Area will hinge on the land owners in the area. Their interests will largely determine the extent and configuration of the conserved area; whether it is owned by the public, remains in private hands, or a combination of both; and what mechanisms might be used to preserve the land. The current owners within this area have demonstrated that they are strong advocates for preservation of Token Creek, and all agencies and organizations interested in long-term preservation of the Creek environs are encouraged to work cooperatively with them to develop a conservation approach that will address both their interests and the public interests.

The recommended Conservation Area currently includes seven residential properties and a pet boarding business. The development on these properties is located close to STH 19, and all of them take access from that highway. The proposed Conservation Area also includes the back portions of two agricultural properties. While additional urban development is not recommended within the Conservation Area, the existing uses are generally compatible with the open space recommendation and are envisioned to remain. While it is recommended that appropriate easements or other mechanisms be sought to limit potential development on Conservation Area lands not included in any future public ownership, very low intensity uses similar to those that already exist could also be compatible with the open space conservation goal if sensitively designed. Under either private or public ownership, certain activities related to the performing arts, or uses such as an interpretive nature center, could be considered appropriate uses at the periphery of the conservation area. Selected uses of this type would take advantage of the beautiful natural setting, and might help visitors appreciate the significance of the area and the importance of protecting it for all to enjoy. Such activities, however, should be carefully managed to prevent unintended spillover impacts on the open space.

Most of the proposed Conservation Area is currently undeveloped, and is recommended to remain as preserved open space through acquisition of land or appropriate easements by public agencies or private organizations. It is not necessary (and may not always be desirable) to provide general public access to all parts of the open space area, however. ~~If~~ Where public access is provided, there may be opportunities for limited, low-impact recreational activities such as fishing, hiking, and perhaps biking. Activities that could have an adverse impact on the natural features are not recommended. Limiting the level of activity in the Conservation Area would also be consistent with its goal of preserving an extensive, largely undisturbed wildlife habitat within the urbanized area. Token Creek Park, which offers a wide range of recreational

activities, and future City of Madison parks, will provide the Pumpkin Hollow neighborhood and surrounding area with sufficient venues for more intensive recreational activities.

If a large portion of the proposed Conservation Area was successfully implemented, and public access to it was intended, an additional entrance to the open space area from STH 19 might be considered. It is recommended that private drives or public roadways in the conservation area, not cross Token Creek or its tributaries and wetlands, so alternative access to the open space from the north might be useful. Alternative access might also be provided from the east, somewhere along Portage Road north of Token Creek Park. Any additional access points or parking areas should be carefully located and planned to avoid environmentally sensitive areas and minimize their visibility from within the open space.

Token Creek Park

Dane County's Token Creek Park provides a variety of recreational opportunities to residents of the surrounding communities as well as to visitors from more distant locations. Facilities and activities available in the park include a campground and picnic shelters; playgrounds; fishing; hiking, cross country skiing, and equestrian trails; a disc golf course; and a dog exercise area. As the residential population in the Pumpkin Hollow neighborhood increases, usage of these facilities will also increase, but it is not intended that Token Creek Park serve all the general recreational needs of a growing urban population. That is the function of the planned City parks. The focus of Token Creek Park will continue to be on the current types of activities, most of which take advantage of multiple natural features within and adjacent to the park boundaries, and future City residents will also participate in these activities. If the park is expanded at a future time to include some or all of the recommended Token Creek Conservation Area, it is expected that the additional parklands will be primarily devoted to the conservation, restoration and enjoyment of the special natural features present here, and not for development of sports playing fields, for example, or similar recreational uses that could locate anywhere.

Regardless of other possible changes to the park, the County is interested in relocating the park entrance from its current location on U.S. Highway 51, to a new location along Portage Road. The park entrance was formerly located on Anderson Road and the Parks Division would like to revert back to that location. A paved entrance road still exists at Anderson road but is currently gated off. Because of the extensive wetlands north of the park and the Sommer Valley Circle subdivision directly to the east, the only feasible east side entrance to the park is along or near its southern boundary. While the former Anderson Road entrance may be the most practical near-term alternative, it may not be the best longer-term solution. When the entrance was on Anderson Road, nearby residents expressed concerns related to traffic, parking and other park activities. Modifications to the Anderson Road entrance, or a slightly different entrance location, might help mitigate some of these impacts.

One possibility would be to have the park entrance directly on Portage Road, rather than on Anderson Road. Portage Road will be an improved collector street with a median and would be an appropriate entrance point for a major park. Currently, the portion of Token Creek Park between Sommer Valley Circle and Anderson Road is used as a dog exercise area, but some reconfiguration of this activity to accommodate a new entrance drive should be possible. Another option would be to convert Anderson Road into a park entrance drive, and access the

properties at the west end of Anderson from the local street network developed to serve future neighborhood development south of Anderson Road. This option also would move the park entry out to Portage Road, but could not occur unless and until a suitable local street system is provided in the neighborhood south of Anderson Road. The Land Use and Street Plan (**Map 6**) illustrates an alternative that makes the current eastern segment of Anderson Road part of the park entrance drive. In this concept, a small relocation in the southeast corner of the dog exercise area is made to align the entrance with the proposed east-west “framework” street.

Proposed City of Madison Parks

One City of Madison Area Park and three Neighborhood Parks are recommended at strategic locations within the Pumpkin Hollow neighborhood. The park distribution generally reflects the distribution of the projected residential population when the neighborhood is fully developed, with the Area Park centrally located within the neighborhood. The recommended parks are located where they not only provide convenient recreational opportunities to the surrounding neighborhood, but where they also enhance the visual character of the neighborhood. The proposed park sites all have significant public street frontage, and will have high visibility to persons traveling along the neighborhood’s principal roadways. The park sites are also designed provide attractive “terminal views” at the ends of local street segments. These relationships are considered important, and are among the many small attributes that collectively will make the Pumpkin Hollow neighborhood an interesting and enjoyable place.

Area Park

An approximately 17-acre Area Park site is recommended adjacent to Portage Road near its intersection with Sommer Valley Circle. This location is also opposite a portion of the Token Creek Park dog exercise area. Area Parks are intended to serve an area within about a one-half mile radius and therefore contain many recreational facilities and amenities to serve a relatively large residential population. Future detailed park development planning will be needed to determine the exact park configuration and facilities, but conceptually, the Area Park might contain open playfields that can be adapted for soccer, fields that could also be used for baseball and softball, ultimate Frisbee and similar sports, tennis courts, basketball courts, a picnic shelter and a playground. The need for a parking area within the park will be partly dependent on the specific facilities developed and amount of on-street parking available. As noted above, the proposed park site has significant public street frontage.

Neighborhood Parks

Three Neighborhood Parks of about four acres are recommended to serve the recreational needs of residential sub-areas within the neighborhood that are more distant from the proposed Area Park. A proposed Neighborhood Park site is located on the Danielson and Peterson properties in the northern portion of the planning area; another proposed park site is located on the Hack and Yelk properties near the south-central portion of the neighborhood; and a third proposed site is located on the southern edges of the Orvick (Pumpkin Hollow Driving Range) and Porter properties south of Hoepker Road.

Neighborhood Parks provide facilities for active recreation, such as a playground, basketball courts, tennis courts and baseball-open field space, but are also intended to provide amenity and more passive enjoyment to the neighborhood through picnic areas, benches, and attractive