



## PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT

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To: December 9, 2016

To: Plan Commission

From: Mark Opitz, Assistant Planning Director

**Re: Seeking Guidance on Policy Issues for Updating the Transportation Element of City's Comprehensive Plan**

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Since the adoption of the 2006 comprehensive plan, traffic volumes along Middleton's major streets have continued to increase, the City has added several miles of bike lanes and shared use paths, Metro Transit has expanded service west of the Beltline, and all hangar sites at the airport have developed. The current comprehensive planning process is an ideal time to assess progress since the adoption of the 2006 plan, reevaluate issues, and revise goals to help guide future investments in the city's transportation network.

This memo identifies the substantive policy revisions being proposed in the draft update of the Transportation Element chapter. In consultation with the City's planning consultant, Vandewalle & Associates, I have prepared several maps to illustrate existing conditions and future opportunities. I would welcome any feedback you have to help planning staff complete a draft of the chapter prior to the next public hearing on the updated comprehensive plan.

### **Road Network**

Map 3: Road Network Plan identifies the functional classification of existing streets as well as major future routes that the City has officially mapped.<sup>1</sup> A few routes deserve specific mention:

- **Belle Fontaine Blvd.:** This map and the map maintained by the Madison's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) identify this route as a minor arterial. When the Misty Valley subdivision was initially proposed, the City approved and officially mapped a route design that will ultimately consist of a four-lane road with a median, bike lanes, broad turning radii, and limited intersections and driveways. The road will eventually connect the intersections of Parmenter/Schneider and

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<sup>1</sup> The Wisconsin Department of Transportation classifies public streets and highways in Wisconsin cities according to one of four classifications: principal arterials, minor arterials, collectors, and local streets. Used to describe roads based on their function, this classification system describes a network that channelizes traffic flow and defines how an individual street segment should serve traffic in that network. This system influences street design issues such as road width, turning radii, and pavement thickness as well as signalization and access management.

Highway Q/Oncken Rd. This design is comparable to Airport Road/Century west of Parmenter, Parmenter Street north of the roundabout, and Allen Blvd. Arterial roads (whether classified as principal or minor arterials) on the west side of the metro area are commonly spaced about a mile apart; the mapped alignment of Belle Fontaine Blvd. ranges from 3,500 ft. to 6,000 ft. from Century Avenue. Until full build-out of the area occurs, the route will remain a two-lane road (as it currently is through the Misty Valley / Middleton Ridge subdivision). But it is prudent to anticipate and plan for the future character of the road. It is important to note that both the City and Dane County have identified and mapped a separate corridor to the north, along County Highway K, for a future North Mendota Parkway (NMP). It would be entirely incompatible with City and regional planning for Belle Fontaine Blvd. to be allowed to function as the NMP.

- **Future collector road north of Northlake:** Extend road east into Community of Bishops Bay (CBB) to establish a better street grid. The road would be approximately in the same location as an existing driveway and temporary road used by construction contractors. A four-legged intersection with Highway Q would help facilitate the provision of efficient transit service so that buses have more than one way into and out of a subdivision (see Transit section below). Although this short road connection is not identified in the CBB Master Development Plan, I have discussed this matter with both Terrence Wall and Dave Grosse, neither of whom opposes this linkage in concept.
- **Whittlesey Road—Graber collector route:** Replace the collector route designation of Whittlesey—Algonquin—Spring Hill—Graber (which currently carry an average of 400 to 800 vehicles per weekday) and instead designate the planned extensions of Whittlesey and Graber Roads as a collector route (depicted as a dashed green line). The existing collector route has very low traffic volumes and doesn't function nearly at the same level as Branch Street, High Road, etc.
- **Designate rest of Parmenter as a collector route:** Staff considers Parmenter St. between Elmwood and Westfield (near High Point Road) to function as a collector route. The MPO's current functional classification map indicates that the two blocks of Parmenter west of Westfield Rd. is a collector route along with the Westfield/Longmeadow corridor.

## Bicycling

Map 4: Bicycle Network Plan shows both existing conditions and proposed future expansions to the bicycle network. Intended to serve as the update to the City's 2009 Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan, this map includes the following:

- Bike lane and path facilities updated to reflect existing conditions (the City has added several miles of marked bike lanes and paved paths over the past seven years).
- The removal of planned bike lanes from Century Avenue east of Allen Blvd. (the existing right-of-way is too narrow).
- The addition of bike lanes along N. High Point Road, John Q. Hammons Drive south of Greenway Blvd., Laura Lane and the connecting block of Donna Drive, and Bishops Bay Parkway.
- The identification of certain streets with sharrows (bicycle stencils that indicate that bicyclists may "share the road" by taking the full driving lane) to provide route

connectivity. These tend to be streets where it would be either undesirable or not necessary to add bike lanes. For example, Elmwood and Franklin Avenues provide suitable alternate routes to University Avenue, between Parmenter and Branch St./Maple St. Elmwood, in particular, is a popular corridor for bicyclist commuters traveling between Madison and Greenway Center. However, adding bike lanes along Elmwood would require the removal of on-street parking along one side of the street. This would exacerbate the shortage of parking in downtown Middleton and near Parkwood Plaza.

- The addition of a paved path along Pheasant Branch Road, north of Whittlesey, and the re-alignment of the proposed east-west paved path so that it stays north of the County-owned portion of the conservancy. (This shift was requested by a member of the Friends of Pheasant Branch. It should be noted that Dane County does not have a policy opposing paved paths in the conservancy.)

These revisions reflect the Regional Bicycle Network Plan adopted by the Madison Area Transportation Planning Board in 2015 as well as feedback provided by the City's Pedestrian/Bicycle/Transit Committee. **At least two key policy questions remain:** How to provide a paved (red or orange) route along the Pheasant Branch Road corridor, and whether northeastern neighborhoods are adequately served with a paved path along Century Avenue.

- **Pheasant Branch Road / west side of the conservancy:** Several bicyclists have indicated they feel unsafe bicycling along this scenic but narrow road, which is one of the metro area's popular "urban escape routes" because of its direct access to lightly traveled rural roads. The Regional Bicycle Network Plan adopted by the MPO in 2015 identifies Pheasant Branch Road as needing a "new or improved on-street facility" based on traffic volume, speed, roadway cross-section (or) other characteristics. At the same time, that plan indicates that "improvements may not be feasible or practical due to competing needs for sidewalks, terraces, parking and other right-of-way constraints." To address this gap in the City's paved bicycle network, I have identified the following policy options:
  - **Option 1:** No changes (continue accepting the status quo).
  - **Option 2:** Add sharrows along Pheasant Branch Road in its existing configuration, with no widening. (However, some bicyclists have indicated they don't ride along the road because of limited width and sight distances.)
  - **Option 3:** Widen the road to add bike lanes between Old Creek Road and the northern city limits. (This would entail the removal of numerous trees and therefore reduce the overhead canopy. In 2003, the Middleton Common Council formally went on record opposing road widening.)
  - **Option 4:** Construct a paved, parallel path along the western edge of the conservancy between the intersections of Whittlesey Rd./Pheasant Branch Rd. and Century Ave./Branch St. The path could be located either alongside the existing unpaved path or on a separate alignment, or the existing path could be paved in conjunction with the construction of a new unpaved path. (Over the years, there has been vocal opposition to having paved paths in the conservancy. One benefit of this option is that the parallel unpaved route could then be restricted to pedestrians-only, which would reduce potential trail user conflicts, including with people who are hearing-impaired. Another

important benefit of having a paved path is that it would provide better conservancy access to people with limited mobility.)

- **Northeast Middleton Connector:** The City recently received a \$268,000 Transportation Alternative Program grant to construct a 10 ft. wide path along the north side of Century Avenue, between Branch St. and the signalized intersection of Highland Way (to or from which bicyclists can use streets or private drives to travel between northeastern neighborhoods and the rest of the city). Path construction is programmed for 2019, assuming no unexpected or insurmountable issues arise during the design and real estate acquisition process. Some residents have indicated this connection will not sufficiently meet the needs of bicyclists and others who need or want an all-season connection (such as people traveling to Northside School, which serves much of northeast Middleton).

## Aviation

In 1998, when the City contemplated purchasing Morey Airport, the Common Council adopted a resolution stating its intent to limit the airport's primary runway to 4,000 ft. Since the airport's reconstruction in the early 2000s, all hangar sites have been developed, and there have been inquiries about the possibility of making further airport improvements.

Earlier this year, the Airport Commission reviewed the aviation component of the 2006 Comprehensive Plan chapter and unanimously recommended the inclusion of language in the revised Transportation element supporting the study of a potential runway extension of the primary runway to 5,000 ft. The Commission recommends inclusion of the following language:

The City should update the airport master plan (which entails conducting an environmental assessment) so as to ensure that the airport continues to balance economic development and environmental goals. Specifically, this planning process should:

- Survey the business community and others to document demand for airport improvements to help justify potential improvements.
- Evaluate the potential extension of the primary runway to 5,000 ft. given that corporate aircraft insurance companies often cite this threshold as a minimum requirement for an aircraft to use the runway, particularly when the runway is "contaminated" by rain, snow or ice.
- Study options for upgrading the crosswind runway from the existing turf strip to better accommodate small aircraft during windy conditions.
- Address the feasibility of developing a new cluster of hangars on the east end of the airport, north of Runway 10/28.
- Analyze potential impacts to nearby land uses and the environment.
- Identify a realistic schedule and financial plan to support airport improvements.

Upon completion of the master plan and environmental assessment, the City must update the Airport Layout Plan (ALP) that is on file with the Federal Aviation Administration and the Bureau of Aeronautics. The ALP serves as a critical planning tool that depicts both existing facilities and planned development for an airport.

Having a current FAA-approved ALP is a prerequisite for securing a grant for airport development. As an airport sponsor, the City of Middleton is obligated by grant assurance to keep its ALP up-to-date at all times.

As part of the airport planning process, the City should work closely with the BOA to secure Federal discretionary funding (as occurred with the original airport project) to undertake any major project identified in the master plan and ALP. In the event a land acquisition opportunity arises prior to the availability of Federal funding, the BOA could provide interim assistance with land acquisition through its land loan program.

Does the Plan Commission endorse having this language added to the Transportation element?

### **Transit (future bus service and potential connections with Bus Rapid Transit)**

The 2006 Plan reflected regional planning efforts to develop commuter rail service between Middleton and Madison. Unfortunately, the “Transport 2020” planning effort was subsequently discontinued. Since then, transit planners have turned to Bus Rapid Transit as the means for enhancing transit service in key transit corridors. Through a regional, collaborative planning effort, initial BRT route corridors have been identified. Although Middleton would not be directly served by one of the initial BRT routes, some of the City’s bus routes would be adjusted to align with the BRT’s West line. As part of their current effort to develop Regional Transportation Plan 2050, MPO staff have prepared a Future Planned Regional Transit Service Network map that identifies potential future all-day service, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) routes, and Regional Express service. These concepts have been incorporated into **Map 3a: Transit Network**, although you will note that I have further refined the concept by bringing routes into the planned Community of Bishops Bay Town Center. Also note that the map recommends establishing Park & Ride locations near the Allen/Century intersection (near Middleton Springs) and near the University/Deming intersection (where the City has previously attempted to secure a Federal grant to establish an intermodal transportation center).

As mentioned previously, planning staff is seeking the Plan Commission’s guidance on these and any other policy matters you feel should be addressed in the Transportation element of the comprehensive plan. The maps and text associated with the Comp Plan project can be reviewed at: <http://www.ci.middleton.wi.us/index.aspx?nid=366>