

Madison City Council Work Session Remarks, Smart Growth 201123

- - - SLIDE 1 (Cover) - - -

Good evening.

I speak tonight on behalf of the Madison Citizens Coalition and associated entities. I'd like to propose taking our growth management process to the next level.

Firstly, I highlight that this discussion is not about "no" growth, any more than it is about unfettered growth. It is about **smart** growth.

We currently have only **a single tool** for growth management, and that is our growth policy. This policy is a limited-scope tactical tool, and I submit we need a more strategic approach.

- - - SLIDE 2 (Schools) - - -

As you know, the policy was developed **specifically** to, per growth committee recommendation, "**scale back**" growth in order to mitigate the rapid overcrowding of our **schools**. Yet even with the policy enacted fully to its letter and intent, school growth has continued at the "**worst case**" scenario pace. Faithful adherence to the policy is the **only** thing that has kept us from capsizing the ship.

- - - SLIDE 3 (Fiscal Viability) - - -

As you are otherwise aware and heard abundantly during the election cycle, there are adverse impacts on other critical infrastructure and services as well. Traffic. Emergency services. The lack of a strategic community design. The fiscal negativity of residences. The attrition of promising commercial corridors. The effects of regional growth patterns.

We cannot afford to relinquish commercial opportunities and continue subsidizing housing developments at this pace. Residences are a fiscal negative, and we have priority "**must fund**" needs.

- - - SLIDE 4 (Traffic) - - -

We are experiencing a **staggering** increase in our traffic. But our road enhancements haven't kept pace. And our traffic models are flawed. For one example of many, peak traffic throughput was calculated based on artificially elevated travel speeds, since actual speeds were too slow to model. Therefore the staff's optimistic road capacity assertions supporting these proposed developments are commensurately flawed. The bottom line is that our roads **cannot** support **peak** traffic demands and remain inadequate to support this persistent growth.

- - - SLIDE 5 (Growth Policy Loopholes) - - -

Our growth policy doesn't address the multitude of factors you must consider. It is a one-trick pony, designed specifically to pace growth in a manner that would **mitigate school** overcrowding. If it doesn't mitigate the growth, then it doesn't work, and the other factors are relevant but not material.

- How many square feet of tree canopy must be protected before it trumps our need to protect the schools?
- Does the canopy need to be on buildable land to count, or does otherwise unusable terrain qualify?
- What percentage of unrestricted residential properties qualify as "infill" to an age-restricted community?

If we approve these proposals without objective standards, we may as well throw the policy out. We will have no legal basis to later deny any application without a legitimate lawsuit.

This is also a matter of principle. These proposals, particularly for Bellawoods, stretch the credibility of our policy and character. They do not honor the community's expectations for managed growth.

- - - SLIDE 6 (Smart Growth) - - -

Effectively **managing** Madison's growth, "Smart Growth", is a strategic **imperative**. Every current elected official except for two of you campaigned on a platform **priority** of smart growth management, and those two individuals campaigned for improved road and traffic infrastructure, fiscal viability, and sustaining our schools. You **all** advocated for the very issues that citizen's most care about.

“Effective”, “smart”, and “managed” growth means growth that is:

Strategic: End-state-oriented.

- It must be founded on a vision of what we want our city to look like at full build-out, based upon our brand identity and niche, and a supporting strategic plan that is driven not by time or coincidence but by trigger events that are synchronized.
- There must be a calculated mix and distribution of residential (high, medium, and low-density and income/cost dispersion), industrial, commercial, quality of life, and government services. We must objectively know what the right mixes are.

Measurable: Objective.

- It must be fact-based.
 - We need metrics to measure and calibrate growth.
 - What do we measure?
 - How do we measure?

Affordable: Fiscally neutral or positive.

- It must calculate the totality of discrete costs to our city and schools relative to clear offsets.
- We should seek a net gain but at minimum suffer no loss.
- Mitigations must be in place.
 - Impact fees.
 - Developer agreements.

Reliable.

- It must be clear and not revisit the same issue over and over. Plans and policies should not require revision with each new proposal.
- And, of course, it must be legally sufficient.

Timely.

- Land decisions we make now are essentially irrevocable – they lock in place our foreseeable futures.
- Decisions we make now have imminent second-order effects and may demand immediate solutions for growing school facilities, road networks, emergency services, and other requisite infrastructure and services.

- - - SLIDE 7 (Recommendations) - - -

Clearly the policy alone and as written is too vague, with ambiguities that demand continued reinterpretation. We need better. We need a clear, followable strategic plan and objective growth metrics.

But imperfect as it may be, right now the policy is the **only** growth management tool we have. We **deviate** from that policy at unnecessary risk to Madison's future.

Our growth policy lets us say yes where we need to say yes and no where we need to say no.

Right now we have a legal and ethical basis to say no. If we approve these proposals without objective standards, we will have lost that basis and any remaining value of the policy.

When conditions merit, it is not just our right to say no, it is our responsibility.

Thank you.