

# South Street trail expanding

Some residents along street not happy with project

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A proposed trail extension project to a future YMCA site in the City of Lake Geneva is not expected to begin until spring 2024, but city officials said they are still under the gun for addressing concerns related to the project.

City officials plan to extend by about 1.5 miles the South Street bicycle trail, which runs near Badger High School and Lake Geneva Middle School.

But some residents who live along South Street have expressed concerns regarding the project including tree removal, potential water runoff, possible traffic concerns and the width of the trail, which is set to be 10 feet.

City officials are set to discuss the project again during the June 27 public works committee meeting.

The trail would lead to the future site of a new Geneva Lakes Family YMCA campus, located near the intersection of Highways H and 120.

The trail also is set to be extended west along South Street and end at Lake Shore Drive, leading to Big Foot Beach State Park.

The City of Lake Geneva has received an \$835,316 transportation alternatives program grant from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to help fund the project.

Plans and specifics regarding the trail extension are set to be addressed in fall 2023 and the project is scheduled to begin in March 2024.

## Residents express concerns and start a petition

Carol Brady and Shelley Rowell, who live along South Street, have started a petition and obtained about 50 signatures from residents who have concerns

about the proposed project.

The petition is asking city officials to make the trail less than 10 feet and to remove fewer trees from the area.

Brady said she is concerned with the width of the path. She said she initially was told that the path would be between three to four feet wide and about six to eight feet of her property would be taken for the trail.

She said she has since learned that the grant the city has received requires the trail to be 10-foot wide and that more space could be taken from her property and her neighbors' properties.

"I was a little shocked to find out that it went from this to 10 feet," Brady said. "So instead of taking six to eight feet of property, now they're taking 16 to 18 feet."

Rowell said she moved to the South Street area in February and was initially told that a path or a sidewalk was going to be constructed along the street, but Brady later informed her that it would be a multi-use trail, which was a surprise to her.

"We were actually really excited about that because we got a couple of dogs, and we like walking the dogs," Rowell said, "then Carol came to my house and explained everything, and I'm like, 'No way, really?'"

Rowell said she is concerned about the trees that will be removed from the area to make way for the trail. She said some of the trees are about 250 years old.

"It's a beautiful street," Rowell said. "It's the canopy of trees."

Rowell said it currently is difficult for her to back her vehicle out her driveway, because it is difficult to see oncoming vehicles with the hill in the area. She feels the trail would make it even more difficult for her and her neighbors to back out of their driveways.

"I'm backing out and there's a car, so you put a bike path in there not only do you have cars, you got bikers," Rowell said. "In my opinion, it's an accident waiting to happen. It's dangerous."

Brady said she is concerned about the safety of the children

who play in that neighborhood and the people who would be using the trail.

"You can imagine a kid coming down on a roller blade or skateboard on that hill, and then I back out," Brady said. "That's just my property. You got 16 houses on that street."

Brady said she also is concerned about potential water runoff and drainage issues. She said the project is set to include curb and gutter that will funnel water into a storm sewer system, but there will be more water coming onto people's properties with the 10-foot trail and removal of the trees.

"Now you're replacing the ability of nature to absorb the water through grass," Brady said. "Now you're going to cover it up with 10 feet of asphalt."

Rowell said while obtaining the signatures for the petition, several of the residents were not aware of the project.

"The day we went around to the houses nobody really knew what it was about," Rowell said. "Everyone was like, 'Yeah, we want a sidewalk.' I told them it was not going to be a sidewalk, it was going to be a 10-foot, asphalt path. Then, they were like 'What?'"

Brady said she is not against the project completely, but she would like the trail to be less than 10 feet and for less trees to be removed.

"This petition was not asking the city to disband or to not do anything," Brady said. "It was for them to consider an alternative that could save as many trees and as much space as possible."

## City officials discuss project and concerns during meeting

Members of the city council's public works committee discussed the project May 23.

Public Works Director Tom Earle said the city could reduce the width of the trail to eight feet for short distances, according to grant specifications.

"We're not exactly sure what



STEPHANIE JONES, REGIONAL NEWS

The South Street multi-use path, shown here next to Big Foot Beach's border, is set to expand. Some neighbors are concerned about the amount of space it will take from their yards.

short distance means," Earle said. "We're trying to get clarification on that. As far as the grant itself, it's a 10-foot path."

Alderwoman Mary Jo Fesenmaier said the entire path does not have to be connected.

"In other words, the bike path does not have to be together with the walking path," Fesenmaier said. "So there are some options to be able to change, and obviously price will be a factor in that."

Earle said city aldermen should address issues regarding the trail extension in the near future because the design engineers are currently developing plans for the project.

"Right now, the design committee has their marching orders and they're marching," Earle said. "We're running on a very tight schedule as far as changing anything now, and there may be a big issue with that. We have dates we have to comply with as far as the DOT and the federal government are concerned."

Fesenmaier said she would like the city to continue to meet with residents to address their concerns and would like the public works committee to have a joint meeting with the park board of commissioners to discuss detailed plans for the project.

"I would like the committee, at this point, to lay out options so

we know what is actually possible and that we're using resident input into that," Fesenmaier said. "Even though it's city property, it's still in their front yard. That's their view, and there are concerns with tree removal and with storm water retention. I think citizen input is very, very important. I would like to look at all of the options that are possible."

Earle said even though the trail extension is not expected to begin until March 2024, it does not give the city much time to make changes to the project.

"That is not a lot of time in this world," Earle said. "We do what we're asked to do, so some committee needs to direct us and we will work from there."

Brady agrees that the city does not have much time to address her and her neighbors' concerns.

"It seems like a long way off. It's really not, so there needs to be time to make adjustments and changes," Brady said. "I'm assuming it will take a year or more to plan, so maybe it's going to be starting late 2023 or 2024. But this year is almost half over, so we got to keep moving."

Brady said she plans to attend the June 27 public works committee meeting to express her concerns.

"So that will be an opportunity to speak," Brady said.

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