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## Evaluation of the Life Sciences District Master Plan<sup>1</sup>

To be successful, any Life Sciences District Master Plan must solve two questions:

- (1) What is the core value that city planning seeks to protect, and how does the present plan relate to this value?
- (2) What is the central problem that limits entrepreneurial growth in eastern Wisconsin, what must be done to solve that problem, and how does this plan relate to that problem?

This critique of the Life Sciences District Master Plan (LSD-MP) is requested by Ms. Paulette Enders, Development Director of the City of Wauwatosa, following the public meeting at Wauwatosa City Hall on February 7 and subsequent discussions on February 9 and March 22.

### Summary

Unlike Wauwatosa's many good plans, the LSD-MP plan is deeply flawed. It envisions roads to transport UWM staff who don't want to disrupt work to travel across town for poorly understood entrepreneurship that no venture firms effectively support. LSD-MP fails to recognize or solve underlying problems that limit Milwaukee-area Life Sciences entrepreneurship. In an attempt to solve mid-term budget problems created by sub-prime mortgage fraud and misguided State policies, this plan will diminish home values – 70% of this community's tax base – and human values that confer long-term stability. Public TIF financing of LSD-MP will foster low-value disordered growth, creating long-term obligations with limited or no mid-term benefit. It will aggravate, not fix, budget problems. Similar growth has gravely devalued comparable communities. Selling this deeply flawed plan to the public will be hard. Action section 4.2 tucked in at the plan's end eliminates obligations for future public review,<sup>2</sup> making milestones meaningless, and making this plan particularly dangerous.

### Relevant personal training and experience

I'm conversant in the core ideas of city planning, having studied works of Paul Goodman, Jane Jacobs and Lewis Mumford, and having watched the ideas of city planning being used or ignored in development of the New York – Washington corridor, Madison WI, and Houston TX. My perspective of the Life Sciences District may be unique. I moved here as a professor at the Medical College of Wisconsin. I chose to live in Wauwatosa in part because it is comparable to communities where I was raised: South Orange and Maplewood NJ. I lived in rental housing when I first moved here. Later, as co-inventor of smart bandages and related health information systems, I founded BioKey LLC. For over twenty years I've been a life sciences entrepreneur. I was studying computers and engineering at UWM when the Life Sciences District plan was implemented over the opposition of UWM faculty. I know the entrepreneurial incubators in this area and their problems.<sup>3</sup> I'm broadly trained in ecology and the life sciences, and value our parks and the natural world. Foremost, I'm a resident, home-owner and citizen of Wauwatosa.

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1 City of Wauwatosa, Milwaukee County, Milwaukee Regional Medical Center, Graef, Nelson-Nygaard, and Sasaki. 2017. "Wauwatosa Life Sciences District: 2016 Master Plan, Final Draft." City of Wauwatosa. <http://www.wauwatosa.net/DocumentCenter/View/3941>.

2 Actions... section 4.2, page 145: "Create a Quasi-independent, not-for-profit development organization..."

3 For an introduction to such problems, see: Mitra, Sramana. 2013. "The Problems with Incubators, and How to Solve Them." Harvard Business Review. August 26. <https://hbr.org/2013/08/the-problems-with-incubators-a>.

### **Critique: the Life Sciences District Master Plan (LSD-MP)**

I strongly support planning when practical, and growth where appropriate. This critique doesn't apply to parts of the LSD-MP that relate only to the non-parkland Mayfair area, which might become necessary and which I haven't reviewed. The City of Wauwatosa and the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center (MRMC) seem to have managed conversion of the powerhouse for MRMC well, with benefits to both. The LSD-MP looks more problematic. Breakup of the County Grounds was first promoted to the public to foster regional economic growth through life sciences entrepreneurship. As Jim Price wrote,<sup>4</sup> the LSD-MP suppresses this entrepreneurial foundation in favor of a simple real estate grab at the expense of our parks, related property values and quality of life. His views are supported by recent approval of high-priced, short-occupancy, low-value apartments in the middle of public parklands, instead of the research park that first justified breaking the County Grounds.

Wauwatosa has problems related to infrastructure risk and life sciences entrepreneurship; but LSD-MP will obstruct solution of what Prof. Josh Lerner, Head of Entrepreneurial Management at the Harvard Business School<sup>5</sup>, teaches to be the dominant problem limiting entrepreneurial growth: accepting the wrong money.<sup>6</sup> From what I know of Milwaukee venture finance, he's right. Until this problem is fixed, no local entrepreneurial research park can survive. This plan inverts the problems of entrepreneurship and infrastructure growth, creating infrastructure that degrades our community's core values while impeding entrepreneurship and growth that could benefit our community. The plan appears to be public cover for low-grade apartments and disordered growth at the expense of the public good.

### **Core Value of City Planning**

The central point of city planning as taught by Goodman, Jacobs and Mumford, is that building should be constrained and shaped to promote the public good, giving particular importance to easy access to nature in sufficient reserved open space. Wauwatosa's real estate value is founded, to a substantial measure, on its proximity to the County Grounds and its associated parks, which function roughly similarly to the globally recognized value of Central Park in Manhattan, or to the lesser-known value of parklands such as the South Mountain Reservation<sup>7</sup> in adjacent New Jersey, which anchors real estate values of cities comparable to Wauwatosa, such as Summit, Millburn, Maplewood, and South Orange.

Once an urban area is developed, taking reserved parkland and developing it destroys the larger value parks created in surrounding area in the first place. LSD-MP is framed as civic planning for a public good; what it does is give away, with no public benefit, our public good – access to nature that has stabilized Wauwatosa for all its ninety year suburban history.

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4 Price, Jim. 2017. "Is UWM's Innovation Campus on Life Support?" Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. February 11. <http://www.jsonline.com/story/opinion/2017/02/11/price-uwms-innovation-campus-life-support/97795670/>.

5 <http://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/profile.aspx?facId=9961&facInfo=pub>

6 i.e. money from the wrong sources. Prof. Lerner made this assertion both in private conversation and in his core graduate text: Lerner, Joshua, G. Felda Hardyman, and Ann Leamon. 2005. *Venture Capital and Private Equity: A Casebook*. 3rd ed. New York: Wiley.

7 "South Mountain Reservation." 2017. Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=South\\_Mountain\\_Reservation](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=South_Mountain_Reservation).

This is not speculation. Look to other metropolitan areas to see results of good plans that preserve public parks, as opposed to bad plans like the current one, which revokes a public good of park reserves and risks public credit to enrich at public expense an inside few. Consider Manhattan and Central Park. Does excluding private apartment buildings, or limiting roads in Central Park impede the growth of Manhattan? No, that's ridiculous. That urban truth remains true for suburban areas, such as Wauwatosa, whose surroundings have already been developed. Natural reserves in communities comparable to Wauwatosa enhance and sustain real estate and community values. Retention of parkland is a fundamental determinant of community value, in theory and in practice. Disrupting parkland consistently destroys adjacent community value. Such disruption here is a profound betrayal of the public trust. Growth of real value depends on – requires – public parks, which like libraries, serve public good and belong in the public domain.

Wauwatosa must choose between two options:

(1) Accede to this LSD-MP: Aid degrading private development in our defining public space. Destroy a pillar of our community's tax base and human value in a manner that subverts entrepreneurship. Destroy a public good we now own for unrealizable promises, squandered credit, and foreclosed public recourse.

(2) Focus on real growth, not facades: Recognize and promote the public interest, in hospitals, libraries, schools, fire and police protection, science and medical research and entrepreneurship, roads only where truly needed, and – yes – parks: protected lands that promote a public good, maintaining the values of our properties and our community, and enriching our lives.

Very truly yours,

*/// Ed Sternberg ///*

Ed Sternberg

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