

February 23, 2023

Dear Mayor, Common Council and Plan Commission:

My name is Steve Sokolowski and I am the Manager of Planning and Zoning for the City of Sheboygan. In addition, I am a city employee who lives in the City of Sheboygan. My family and I reside at 1820 N. 29th Street which is one of the properties that physically abuts the Sheboygan Area School District (SASD) property that you are considering to potentially amend the City of Sheboygan Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map and City of Sheboygan Zoning Map. The decision you make regarding these requests will impact my property and the neighborhoods surrounding this parcel for years to come and your decision will certainly impact and influence whether I will continue to reside in the City of Sheboygan.

The SASD property (Parcel # 59281631481) is a very beautiful piece of property within the City limits. This property provides valuable habitat and a home to many species of animals which include deer, sandhill crane (who mate and migrate every year), many species of birds, hawks, turkeys, pheasant, ducks, geese, owls, the occasional eagle, fox, various species of small mammals, many species of amphibians, etc. Many who are preparing to have their young this spring as they have done every year in the past.

The property owners that surround this parcel of land are very fortunate to have such an amazing piece of property to spend countless hours appreciating the beauty and the wildlife activity that takes place every day on this property.

On behalf of the citizens of Sheboygan, the Plan Commission and Common Council adopted the City of Sheboygan Comprehensive Plan in 2011. Based on that, it is important for today's Common Council and Plan Commission members to understand that the previous council and plan commission approved this property to have a comprehensive plan designation of "Public Parks and Open Space." What does that mean? It means that previous council and plan commission believed that this property's long term land use designation should be public parks and open space. My neighbors and I agree with the previous council and plan commission position and strongly encourage today's council and plan commission to maintain this position.

The City of Sheboygan Comprehensive plans states the following about the Public Parks and Open Space land use designation:

This future land use category includes park and public open space facilities devoted to playgrounds play fields, trails, picnic areas, public golf courses, and related active and passive recreational activities and conservation areas.

In fact there are several Natural Resource goals, objective and policies adopted in the Comprehensive Plan that state the following:

- Preserve natural resources and advance community sustainability for the benefit of present and future generations.
- Protect environmental corridors from new development by directing land development away from steep slopes, natural areas, drainageways, critical infiltration areas and floodplains to prevent future conflicts.

- Embrace a concerted initiative to become more sustainable and energy conscious community.
- Preserve environmentally sensitive lands by directing new development away from mapped environmental corridors and isolated natural areas.
- Cooperate with the WisDNR to protect wildlife habitat, particularly rare and endangered species.
- Identify open space lands that are important to the overall quality of life in the community and take measures to assure their conservation.
- Ensure the provision of sufficient number of parks recreational facilities, and open space areas, with opportunities for all ages and physical abilities, to enhance the health, welfare of City residents and the City's appeal to visitors.
- Explore opportunities to enhance parks.
- The Comprehensive Plan identifies areas on this property as wetlands and states that these areas are important for aquifer recharge, ground water and surface water quality improvement and wildlife habitat.

The City of Sheboygan Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan adopted by the Common Council in March 2016 states (Section 1.1 Purpose and Scope):

- The primary purpose of the Outdoor Recreation Plan for the City of Sheboygan is to guide the preservation, acquisition and development of land for park, recreation and related open space purposes to serve the recreational needs of the population.
- “Parks and recreational planning have become an essential part of comprehensive and community planning.....They also serve as important habitats for urban wildlife and as laboratories for environmental and conservation education.”
- Section 3.2 Special Use Park/Conservancy Area – Areas of open space that cannot be measured by a quantifiable standard because of their unique and diverse contributions to the community. Examples of Special Use Space Areas are varied but can include those lands that accommodate passive or special recreational activities as well as land that have been protected for their environmental significance or sensitivity and provide limited opportunity for recreational use. Examples of that latter may include....., environmental corridors or isolated natural areas, wildlife habitats, areas of rare or endangered plant and/or animal species, prairie remnants and restoration areas.

All of these Natural Resource goals, objective and policies adopted in the Comprehensive Plan and the Outdoor Recreation Plan strongly relate to the parcel we are discussing today and are reasons why the “Public Parks and Open Space” future land use designation should be maintained.

The organization most responsible for this situation is the Sheboygan Area School District (SASD) who could make this go away instantly. What is most disappointing is the lack of vision shown by the Superintendent and the SASD Board of Education regarding the future use of this property.



All you hear about today is STEM and going green. The fact that the SASD superintendent and board of education does not recognize the opportunity that this piece of property provides for increasing students interest in STEM and going green is unfathomable.

Many are concerned about our children and the lack of interest and/or difficulty they may have in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) programs. Often times these subjects can be difficult and challenging to many students especially when it is strictly book learning in a classroom. However, if you took examples of classroom book learning into a living laboratory, teachers could show students how these subjects can actually be utilized in the field. It is likely such a living laboratory would generate more student interest in these STEM subjects and with that interest the possibility of increasing grades in these challenging subjects.

This property offers SASD educators and students the opportunity to teach and learn about these fields not only in the classroom but in this amazing living laboratory whether such a school would be elementary, middle, high or all of the above.

Imagine the ability to teach and learn the following subjects from a school on this property:

- Agriculture and Horticulture – land previously used as the Hmong Gardens; soils that produce quality fruits, vegetables, plants and flowers.
- Natural Resources Conservation – protection of existing species and how to create a better habitat for existing and potentially even new species to inhabit these lands.
- Environmental Science and assessment – flora, fauna, wetlands, woodlands, habitat, water quality, etc.

- Hydrology and Engineering – How such improvements can be done to handle large floods but can also be done in such a way that beautifies the property or provides new public use like the City storm drainage pond at the southwest corner of 29th and Saemann – can be used for flood prevention but could certainly be improved for better wildlife habitat with public access (not fenced to keep humans and animals out).
- Biology and Chemistry – What is the biology of the species who live here and how do the impacts of City life impact the chemistry of the land (winter salt, fertilizers, etc.)
- Geology and Geography – soils, wetlands, native flora and fauna.
- Ecosystem Management – Watch with improvements to the property how the habitat improves over time or are there issues negatively impacting the land that require problem solving skills to address and enhance over time.
- Computer Science and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) – using these technologies to specifically identify key habitat areas, nesting grounds, wetlands, etc.
- Math and Statistics – Keeping track of animals who make this land their home and have their young. Those animals that migrate through and studying this overtime....is it improving, why?
- Psychology – The positive feeling of placemaking and helping habitat who cannot help or speak for themselves. Or providing these types of spaces to students who may not have access to such an amazing piece of property which is good for their mind, body and soul.
- Veterinary – helping injured animals.
- Green Energy – consideration of wind, sun and geothermal energy sources to heat, cool, energize, light, etc. the school.

We all talk about the climate change, habitat destruction and species extinction; the contamination of air, water and soil; the spread of toxic chemicals, the progressive loss of habitats that species need to survive and reproduce. We all talk the talk but do we walk the walk - rarely do we ourselves act. Here is that opportunity. The SASD has the opportunity to be proactive in teaching future generations these subjects and why they are important.

In addition, the SASD could work with higher educational facilities like University of Wisconsin-Green Bay-Sheboygan, Lakeland University, Lakeshore Technical College and or others to offer college credits for students interested in majoring in these fields at these universities. How wonderful that this property could strengthen our community, educate our children and maybe even make these universities more enticing to those from Sheboygan as well as to those from outside the area.

Imagine a child growing up and starting grade school at the same time that a fawn is born and then advancing through school and studying this fawn and how it grows over the years and eventually has its own fawn. Watching how the sand hill cranes migrate through and have their young on this property and within a matter of months watching that young crane become the size of an adult and how this happens on this property year after year. How the habitat could be improved over the years by removing invasive species and providing native plants that offer improved habitat for the creatures and clean the wetlands.

The SASD already is seeing nature program schools at Maywood, Story Book Gardens and other Charter schools. Parents today have various options to select where their child will attend school, having such a nature school could really influence parents to select such a SASD school to educate their children.

Or we could have a hospital with apartments and homes for the elderly on this property. I think the answer is clear and on behalf of my family and neighbors we ask that you deny all six of the ordinances before you this evening with regard to changing the comprehensive plan designation and rezoning the property. It is unfortunate that the SASD has put you in this position but we ask that you do the difficult task of denying this request so that the SASD can take the time to come up with a new and much better vision as to how best to utilize this amazing piece of property.

On behalf of my family and neighbors, we appreciate your time, your willingness to read and digest this letter and to carefully consider the decision before you today.

Sincerely,

Steve, Dawn, Savana and Steven Sokolowski

Steven Sokolowski
Dawn H. Sokolowski
Savana Sokolowski

















