

MEMORANDUM

To: City Council

From: John S. Weidl, City Manager

Date: December 17, 2024

Subject: Starin Road Closure Proposal

Members of the Common Council,

Thank you for your continued discussion on the proposed closure of Starin Road. I also want to recognize and thank staff for their thorough analysis and thoughtful recommendation to keep Starin Road open. After reviewing the data and feedback, I support staff's conclusion.

The proposed closure of Starin Road would result in significant impacts on traffic and the community. During school sessions, the roadway would be closed for approximately 94.87% of total workweek commute hours, leaving commuters to rely on alternative routes during critical peak travel times. Annually, this equates to the roadway being closed for roughly 25.34% of the total hours in a year. These closures would disproportionately impact local residents and businesses by increasing traffic congestion on Main Street and Schwager Drive while adding wear and tear to these already busy corridors.

Further, Staff's recommendation to keep Starin Road open is well-founded. The closure trial increased traffic volumes on Main Street and Schwager Drive, creating congestion and potential safety risks without fully addressing the pedestrian safety concerns cited as the rationale for the closure. Additionally, input from Public Works and Police Department staff highlighted operational challenges and increased risks associated with emergency response times and roadway maintenance during the closure.

However, if the Council wishes to further explore this proposal, I strongly recommend a longer, non-permanent test period and a structured approach to planning, cost-sharing, and formal agreements.

I recommend the following steps to ensure a comprehensive and equitable approach:

1. **Longer Test Period:** Extend the closure for a longer, non-permanent testing window (e.g. six months) to better assess the long-term impacts on traffic patterns and safety. Adjustments to the closure boundaries should be considered, based on

staff feedback, to align more closely with pedestrian traffic patterns and safety concerns.

2. **Formal Cost-Sharing Agreement:** The City and University must enter into a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that clearly defines financial responsibilities. This should include:
 - **Capital Costs:** The University should cover all capital costs associated with installing the necessary infrastructure, including barricades, electrical systems, and signaling for emergency vehicle access without human intervention.
 - **Annual Maintenance:** The University must proportionally share annual maintenance costs for that portion of Starin Rd. with the City. This includes routine upkeep such as crack sealing, curb and sidewalk repairs, etc.
 - **Long-Term Milling and Paving:** The University must also share in the substantial, multi-million-dollar costs of future milling and repaving required when the roadway exceeds its useful life.
 - **Cost-Sharing Principle:** The cost-sharing framework must reflect the fact that the road will be closed primarily for the University's benefit during peak weekday commuting hours and most workweeks. Proportional costs should be determined on a per-hour basis to ensure an equitable distribution of financial responsibilities.
 - **Right-to-terminate:** The City should retain the right to terminate the agreement at any time, with notice.
3. **Legal Review and Compliance:** As the proposal involves potential payments from the University to the City, legal counsel must be involved to ensure compliance with state laws. Past experience, such as the termination of the MOU for dispatch services, underscores the importance of adhering to strict processes that may require approval from state departments.

In summary, I support the staff's analysis and recommendation to keep Starin Road open. However, if the Council decides to move forward with this proposal, a longer test period is essential to evaluate long-term impacts. During this time, we must establish a comprehensive legal and financial framework to ensure City taxpayers do not bear the burden of a change that primarily benefits the University's pedestrian population during peak workweek commuting hours. This framework must include cost-sharing for maintenance and full payment for infrastructure installation.



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Thank you for your careful consideration of this matter. I look forward to your discussions and staff is committed to supporting the Council's direction with a structured, methodical, and equitable approach.

Best, - JSW

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John S. Weidl". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

John S. Weidl
City Manager, City of Whitewater