

May 29, 2005

Michael King  
Division Director  
Community Analysis and Planning Division  
Dane County Department of Planning and Development  
30 West Mifflin Street, Suite 402  
Madison, WI 53703

Re: Public Comment Revising Verona Urban Service Area Boundary

Dear Mr. King;

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the May 8, 2005 Dane County Community Analysis and Planning Division staff analysis of the City of Verona Urban Service Area extension request (Staff Report). I offer my comments from the perspective and knowledge base of my multiple roles as Chairman of the Town of Verona Open Space and Parks Commission, Town of Verona Plan Commission member, member and past chair of the Dane County Tree Board, member and past chair of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Urban Forestry Council and farm owner/resident of the Verona Sugar River Valley. My concerns are limited to a portion of the SW amendment area and the S amendment area.

Specifically within the SW area, I am concerned about the environmentally important forest remnant Staff Report refers to as "a publicly owned woodland area known as Stewart's Woods." This historically significant woodland was noted by the Dane County Tree Board during our county-wide inventory of the diminishing forest resource for its significance as a remnant forest well-placed near a major population area. The WDNR Urban Forestry Council recognizes the value of such strategically located remnant forests for their major environmental contributions including rain water interception, storm water retention, water purification, summer heat reduction, surface wind diversion and wildlife habitat. The opportunity for regional community aesthetic and recreation contributions are unique due to its proximity to the state Military Ridge Trail.

Staff Report referring to flood plains, wetland and this woods states that “these features are proposed for inclusion in environmental corridors.” However, Mr. Kamran Mesbah at the May 25 public hearing stated land could later be removed from the environmental corridor designation opening it to development. Staff Report under section 9 Conclusion and Staff Recommendations states “The issues that lack adequate detail at this stage of planning include. . . potential for the presence of threatened and endangered species in Area SW.” Unfortunately, “threatened and endangered species” was not intended to include this rare, historically and environmentally important remnant forest.

The importance of this woodland and the long-standing desire to protect it and its passive recreational potential are well established in the following facts:

1. In a letter to Jim Mueller, Dane County Parks Planner, dated 11/13/2000 (exhibit 1) the Town OSPC requested that Dane County Parks include the remnant forest and other Town features in the revised County Parks and Open Space Plan.
2. It is included in the Town of Verona Open Space and Parks Plan adopted 1/2001, “The OSPC recommends that the following natural resources and land features be protected and preserved in the Town of Verona . . . DOT property northeast of the Verona bypass containing a native hardwood forest remnant (see exhibit 2, page 4).
3. A letter and map dated 10/01/2001 (exhibit 3) were sent by the Town of Verona OSPC to Dane County, City of Verona and Town of Verona government officials declaring the goal to “Acquire, in partnership with the City of Verona, the native woods on WDOT land north of the Verona bypass and west of Hwy 69 for preservation as a wooded park.”
4. There have been numerous communications with DNR and DOT representatives regarding the transfer of DOT land north and south of the Verona bypass with a letter from the DNR dated 7/24/2001 as an example (exhibit 4).

In a 2001 joint meeting of the Town of Verona Open Space and Parks Commission and the City of Verona Parks Commission it was resolved to jointly apply for a state Stewardship grant to purchase Stewart’s Woods from the DOT converting it to a passive use park to guarantee its protection from fragmentation and development. Regrettably, there was no successful follow-up to that intention. However, conversion of this woodland to a park is consistent with the City of Verona Parks and Open Space Plan quoted below:

“The first step in the recreation and open space planning process is to establish goals, objectives and policies that serve as the basis for all subsequent planning efforts. . . the development of goals, objectives and policies form the basis for subsequent development and open space standards since they represent the basic values and needs of the community. With the above mentioned factors in mind, the following set of goals, objectives and policies has been developed:  
...protection of natural areas including wetlands, wildlife habitats, lakes, woodlands, open space and groundwater resources  
...preserve key natural and cultural resources of Verona in permanent open space

...provide a safe, healthful and visually pleasing environment to enhance the quality of life for all Verona residents  
...to preserve natural features and conserve natural resources associated with Badger Mill Creek watershed for the benefit of the community  
...preservation of pristine lowlands, waterways, marshes, and adjacent contributing uplands, including woodlands, in their natural state should receive special attention to ensure their maintenance as wildlife and fish habitats, as natural drainage areas, as areas for passive recreation and outdoor recreation and as reservoirs for storm water.”

My concern with amendment area S is its timing and potential impact on the well-being and orderly development of the entire Verona Sugar River Valley. The unique environmental sensitivity, abundance of remarkable archaeological, cultural and scenic landscape features plus potential for regional recreational use is well recognized at the federal, state, county, city and town levels as noted below:

1. In 1997 the WDNR's Upper Sugar River Initiative used United States Environmental Protection Agency Clean Water Act grant money to inventory and plan for the protection of the watershed (exhibit 5).
2. Additional federal grant money was used by Dane County to assist the Town of Verona in land use planning. As part of the Shape Dane Initiative UW Madison Professor Richard Chenoweth conducted a survey in which Town residents unequivocally stated their top preference (91.8%) for environmental protection during development planning (exhibit 6). In recognition of its innovative local land use planning, this grant funded project within the Town of Verona was one of only six projects in the United States to receive a prestigious award from the National Partnership for Reinventing Government.
3. Within the entire county, this area has the highest concentration of environmental features within the Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan.
4. The Town of Verona's Comprehensive Land Use Plan, approved by the County, makes protection of the Verona Sugar River Valley and Badger Mill Resource Area an overriding priority.
5. The Natural Heritage Foundation has formed a partnership with the Town of Verona, The Upper Sugar River Watershed Association and Capital Water Trails to protect the Verona Sugar River Valley and its recreational potential (exhibits 7, 8).
6. International riders on the Iron Man bicycle route passing through the Valley have written rave reviews of the unmatched scenic and environmental beauty of the area.

Staff Report (page 9, paragraph 4) states that area S drains to the Sugar River and the Badger Mill Creek. It is also adjacent to the Badger Mill Creek Resource Area as defined in the Town and County Parks and Open Space Plans. To fully understand how development here will impact the remainder of the Verona Sugar River Valley it is, in my opinion, first necessary to complete a policy-driven development plan for

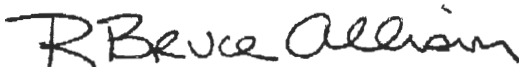
the entire Verona Sugar Valley with input from the wide variety of above-mentioned stakeholders and interested residents and public. That has not been done.

After the annexation of the Epic land nearly 5 years ago the Town and City of Verona agreed to co-operate on planning but to date that intent has not been fulfilled. Serious discrepancies exist between the Town's future use plans for the Verona Sugar River Valley and the City's land use plan that places additional roadways and a commercial industrial park along the environmental corridors (exhibit 9). If the Town and other Valley stakeholders were to persuade the City that impervious surfaces, thermal loading, noise and congestion associated with commercial industrial parks were inconsistent with preserving the Valley's environmental and recreational attributes, then how would that change affect preexisting plans for nearby area S?

Bringing the City of Verona and Town of Verona together, perhaps facilitated by the County Executive's office, would, in my opinion, offer the best opportunity for an intelligent, comprehensive development plan fully addressing the complex, irreplaceable regional contributions of the Verona Sugar River Valley. Such a request for active County participation in planning for this area is consistent with what I and others have been seeking for sometime (see 5/10/2004 letter to County Executive exhibit 10).

In summary, my concerns are that the amendment request and staff recommendations as it relates to a portion of area SW and area S have not adequately addressed the mitigation of the potential adverse impacts of the proposed development on 1) the long-term preservation of Stewart's Woods and 2) the co-operative, comprehensive planning and protection of the Verona Sugar River Valley ecosystem.

Respectfully submitted,



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CC: Kathleen Falk  
John Volker  
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