

**From:** [Bauman, Robert](#)  
**To:** [Lee, Chris](#)  
**Subject:** FW: About the grove adjacent to Marcus Center  
**Date:** Friday, April 05, 2019 9:59:34 AM

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**From:** Arijit H Sen [mailto:sena@uwm.edu]  
**Sent:** Saturday, March 30, 2019 9:24 PM  
**To:** Bauman, Robert  
**Cc:** Arijit H Sen  
**Subject:** About the grove adjacent to Marcus Center

Dear Alderman Bauman,

This email is about the Dan Kiley grove adjacent to the Marcus Center and the furor over its redesign. I live in Milwaukee and hence I felt it necessary to write to you directly to address this issue. As a practitioner, researcher, scholar, and teacher of architecture and urban studies since 1987, I feel that my opinion around urban design may be of some use to you.

While much conversation has been generated around the designer's legacy and the falsely diversionary argument around the health of trees (trees can be replaced!), I have been bothered by two less discussed issues that I feel are of equal importance.

1. The quality of the new design. The new garden is, simply put, a substandard design. Urbanity is all about density. (<https://gehlpeople.com/approach/>) The area around Marcus Center suffers from the mal-effects of 20th Century urban renewal when buildings were torn down to create wide streets, mega blocks, and flatlands. The roads are wide and the urban scale in this area resembles that of suburban and rural settlements. This openness is an anomaly for a city unless it is a park such as Lake Park or Washington Park. The old grove is not a building and hence it doesn't contribute to a continuous "urban wall" that we may observe two blocks south of this area. Nevertheless the grove does mediate the massive architecture of the Marcus Center and the open flat landscape of Kilbourne Avenue. I am essentially asking you to imagine a cross-section across the Intercontinental hotel, Kilbourne Avenue, the grove and the Marcus Center. You may then visualize the open flatness of this space and see the way the current grove produces an intermediate scale that relates the street to the building in a sophisticated way. The new design seems unaware of this singular principle of urbanity — scale — and it enhances the "missing tooth" character of this block. The architectural view of the new design is disingenuous too, because it shows a birds-eye view. It does not show a perspective from the eye level of a pedestrian. From the view point of the pedestrian this new flat lawn would be open and windy like a prairie. Imagine walking along this path with untempered strong frigid gusts coming across the river on a cold fall evening — is that an urban experience?
2. Another issue that bothers me, perhaps more than the aesthetics of the design, is about the lack of public participation and public discussion around this design. Public-private partnership doesn't mean that the public gives up all claims, ownership, and design of common grounds. From experience, I know that it is tedious to have a public participatory process for design. Yet it is necessary to sustain our democratic civic values. So yes, we can consider a changed design — but that consideration should come from the grassroots, should involve the public, should integrate the needs, point of views, aesthetics, and values of those who own this land — the citizens of Milwaukee.

I hope you will be able to consider the two issues listed above, as this project comes to the city administration for approval. I hope we don't let go of our civic values simply for expediency, patronage, and power.

Regards,  
Arijit Sen, Associate Professor of Architecture and Urban Studies; University of Wisconsin  
Milwaukee