



Midtown Neighborhood Alliance

July 25, 2024

Dear Members of the City Plan Commission,

I am writing to you today on behalf of the Midtown Neighborhood Alliance, representing the residents of our diverse and vibrant Midtown neighborhood. It is with great concern that I address the proposed Growing MKE plan currently under consideration. Our community members have not been effectively engaged, nor have they been given adequate opportunities to truly voice their input. This lack of engagement is particularly troubling given the profound impact that zoning recommendations will have on our neighborhood. Therefore, I urge you not to proceed with a vote on this plan at this time.

Effective community engagement is crucial in urban planning. It ensures that the voices of those who live in, work in, and contribute to our neighborhoods are considered and respected. Unfortunately, the engagement efforts for the Growing MKE plan have been insufficient, leaving many residents—especially those from marginalized and underrepresented communities—feeling excluded and unheard. This concern is not unique to Midtown; several other neighborhoods most impacted by this plan have voiced similar concerns.

The importance of including marginalized and underrepresented voices in zoning plans cannot be overstated. Communities like ours often face systemic barriers and are disproportionately affected by zoning decisions. Our perspectives are vital in creating plans that promote equity, social justice, and sustainable development. Here are several key reasons why it is imperative to include these voices in the zoning process:

- 1. Equitable Development:** Marginalized communities frequently experience disparities in access to resources, services, and opportunities. Inclusive engagement ensures that zoning decisions address these disparities and promote equitable outcomes for all residents.
- 2. Cultural Preservation:** Our neighborhoods are rich in cultural heritage and diversity. Effective engagement with underrepresented communities helps preserve this cultural fabric, ensuring that zoning decisions respect and celebrate the unique identities of our neighborhoods.
- 3. Community Empowerment:** Inclusive planning processes empower residents by validating their experiences and expertise. When community members feel heard and valued, they are more likely to support and participate in the implementation of zoning decisions.



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4. **Sustainable Development:** Zoning plans that incorporate the insights and needs of marginalized communities are more likely to be sustainable in the long term. These plans are better aligned with the real-life experiences and priorities of residents, leading to greater community buy-in and long-term success.

5. **Social Cohesion:** Engaging all residents fosters a sense of belonging and social cohesion. It helps build trust between the community and planning authorities, reducing resistance and conflicts that can arise from top-down planning approaches.

The current engagement process for the Growing MKE plan has not lived up to these principles. Many Midtown residents were unaware of public meetings or unable to attend due to inconvenient scheduling and lack of accessible formats. Outreach efforts did not effectively reach all segments of our diverse community—particularly the residents of the most affected communities—resulting in a narrow and unrepresentative sample of input. This failure to engage residents meaningfully undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of the plan.

Furthermore, zoning recommendations cannot be blanket recommendations. Each neighborhood has its unique characteristics, needs, and challenges. A one-size-fits-all approach fails to recognize the diversity within our city and the specific context of each community. For instance, what might work for a rapidly gentrifying area may not be suitable for a historically marginalized neighborhood struggling with disinvestment. Therefore, zoning plans must be tailored to address the unique circumstances of each neighborhood, ensuring that they promote equitable development and do not exacerbate existing inequalities.

As the Midtown Neighborhood Alliance, we have a deep understanding of our community's needs, aspirations, and challenges. We believe that a truly inclusive engagement process should include the following components:

1. **Proactive and Diverse Outreach:** Utilize various communication channels, especially local organizations with established trust and cultural understanding, to effectively reach and engage all residents, ensuring meaningful participation that represents community needs and perspectives.

2. **Flexible Participation Opportunities:** Schedule meetings and engagement sessions at different times and locations to accommodate and prioritize the varying schedules of the community. Provide virtual and other alternative participation options to increase accessibility and reach a broader audience.



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3. **Collaborative Workshops and Focus Groups:** Organize workshops and focus groups that allow residents to actively participate in the planning process, share their experiences, and co-create solutions. These sessions should be co-facilitated by local and community leaders and residents, trained professionals, who can ensure that all voices are heard.

4. **Partnerships with Community Organizations:** Collaborate with trusted community organizations and leaders to facilitate engagement and ensure that marginalized voices are included. These organizations have established relationships and can help bridge gaps in communication and trust.

5. **Transparency and Accountability:** Clearly communicate how resident input will be used to shape the plan and provide regular updates on the planning process. Ensure that feedback is publicly documented—with the fullest transparency and clarity—and that there is a mechanism for residents to see how their contributions have influenced the final plan.

The neighborhoods most impacted by the Growing MKE plan have voiced similar concerns about the lack of genuine engagement. It should be the residents and communities most affected by these zoning changes driving the conversation and the ones most engaged in ways that are authentic and accessible to them. We must ensure that their voices are at the forefront of this process, not sidelined or overlooked.

By taking these steps, we can ensure that the Growing MKE plan reflects the diverse needs and aspirations of all Milwaukee residents. This approach not only promotes equity and social justice but also enhances the overall quality and sustainability of the plan.

In conclusion, I urge the Community Planning Commission to delay the vote on the Growing MKE plan until a more robust and inclusive engagement process can be conducted. It is only through genuine and meaningful community engagement that we can create a plan that truly serves the best interests of our city and its residents. Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Betty D. Glosson
President, Midtown Neighborhood Alliance