

Alderman Backes Update

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Happy fall! The leaves are officially in peak color around town, and a quick walk or drive through Grant Park brings some gorgeous orange, yellow, and red hues. While summer will always be my favorite season, I do love this week or two of the season when the colors are exploding around us.

There's quite a bit of stuff to update on since I last wrote, so let's get to it! I'll start with our most recent council meeting, then hit a few other key topics.

Council meeting: 10/17/23

For the most part, it was a pretty straightforward council meeting this week. We are in budget season, so there was an approval for the revolving budget requests that were discussed in more detail at a finance committee meeting the week prior. Expect more to come about the budget as November arrives—the usual public hearing and approval will happen the week of Thanksgiving.

Here's a quick overview of the meeting:

- **Fire department presentations:** We got to see the annual awards to a variety of firefighters and paramedics for their heroic actions this past year. This is always a great moment to witness—the work these folks do for our community is incredible, and we are very fortunate to have such a strong and cohesive department. Chief Litchford then presented the 2022 annual report for the fire department, which highlighted many of the strengths of our department.
- **Finance:** The revolving budget proposals passed unanimously. In a 7-1 vote, the council approved a resolution to set fees for recycling and hazardous waste disposal, with Alderperson Briesemeister being the sole no.
- **Legislation and permits:** We approved a couple liquor licenses for new restaurants in town. El Local Restaurant II will be taking over at 800 Milwaukee Ave., and in news I'm very excited about, we have a Seafood restaurant (Seafood Shack) coming into the former Hickory Inn/Island Jam space. The owner, Tyseria Griffin, said she's hoping to open in November.
- **Public works:** The council unanimously approved new "No Parking" signs down near the yacht club, and the purchase of 400 new garbage carts for the city, as our supply was beginning to run low. These are the carts that community members can request if theirs get damaged.
- **Miscellaneous:** The council unanimously approved a new ADA ramp in right-of-way space in the 1400 block of Milwaukee avenue. Alderperson Pieper also brought a motion to increase wages for elected officials beginning in the 2024-2027 term. I was the only "no" vote on this—I personally did not like the optics of essentially voting on increasing our own salaries in a time in which there are frustrations in the community about

budgetary constraints resulting in cuts of services. While the increases are ultimately a negligible amount, my personal feeling was it's still money that's not being put toward other more important aspects of running our city, and even small amounts are beneficial.

PWPP discussion about historically problematic intersections

We had a fairly extensive Public Works and Public Property committee meeting before the council meeting. The largest item for discussion was some historically problematic and dangerous intersections in town.

I've personally had several people from the second district complain about various intersections in our neighborhood. One recent complaint came from a woman who lives on 9th Ave. near its bend into Edgewood, and specifically regarded people taking that bend far too fast. There have been other requests to investigate intersections like North Chicago and the Parkway, North Chicago and Oak, various intersections on 4th near streets like Marquette and Montana, and more.

We had an open discussion without a motion being on the agenda. We were able to read some community feedback that was emailed in, and did have one community member come in to speak and share his thoughts as well.

Ultimately, there were a couple steps we agreed to take. Mayor Shelenske and Alderperson Maas, who chairs the committee, agreed we would connect with the police department to get historical data about the most problematic intersections in town, and based on that data we would come up with a plan of action for tackling them.

We also talked about some initial ideas for steps we could try at some of these intersections, including stop signs with flashing LED lights, or the use of more of those orange flags on stop signs at problematic intersections.

Meanwhile, my primary point was that we need to be doing everything we can to enhance walkability (and cycle-ability) in this city. Our work with Downtown Strategies, a consulting agency that helped us target strategies for downtown improvement, really highlighted the importance of walkability in a city, not just in the city center but in as many areas as possible. We have decent ratings for walkability, but there's always more we can do.

Simply put, we should be making every effort we can to ensure our roads and sidewalks are safe for drivers, AND pedestrians, AND cyclists. Doing so makes this a safer and ultimately more attractive community for everyone.

Trick-or-Treat!

While I must say I'm going to miss having Trick-or-Treat on Halloween Night (it was a very cool, unique aspect of our community that attracted a ton of people from the region!), I am still very much looking forward to the event this Saturday.

If you intend to give out candy, please have your porch light on between 5 and 7 p.m. that evening! I've already purchased four large bags of candy myself—we've gotten massive numbers of kids come to our home since we moved here in 2016, and I feel like I somehow am always understocked despite getting more candy seemingly each year.

My own family will be sending a bat, a pumpkin, and a pterodactyl out on the streets. They're quite excited.

Stay safe and enjoy the festivities!

Upcoming budget meetings

As I alluded to earlier, there are going to be upcoming opportunities for members of the public come and speak about our next year's proposed budget. I encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity if you have any interest in municipal funding. Since I've been on the council, I can count on one hand the number of public comments we've had at these hearings.

The public hearing will be Monday, November 20 at 6:00 p.m. in the council chamber. Any South Milwaukee resident is allowed to come and make comments. Keep in mind, though, that in the public hearing format, it is unlikely you will receive a response from the council, as that could potentially result in a violation of open meetings laws.

The budget will then be put to a vote for adoption on November 21 at the normal council meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Interested in running for city council?

As you may know, all of us on the city council are up for re-election in the spring. If you've been considering running yourself, the time to make a decision is coming up quickly.

When I decided to run three years ago, I did so with little connection to city hall and with zero clue of where to even start. I didn't know anything about running for office. I was especially terrified of knocking on people's doors and talking to them. But ultimately it turned out to be a great experience, even if it was scary at first. I had a lot of really good conversations, and a fair number of those people are people I've continued to talk to during my first term.

Paperwork becomes available in December, and the filing deadline is early January to get on the ballot.

I know firsthand how daunting of a prospect this can be. If you're interested in running (yes, even if it's against me!), I'm happy to provide you with advice and encouragement.

I do intend to run for a second term myself, and look forward to going through the process again. This time it'll be a little less scary (but still scary)!

Enjoy the Halloween festivities, and get in those spooky movies and shows before the month expires!

If you have any comments, questions, or concerns, email Alderman Backes at tbackes@smwi.org.