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Dear Council Members,

Last year, members of our Hintgen neighborhood, including me, asked the city to not pour sidewalks here. We all had our reasons. Mine were mostly cost and climate related. In this 2026 budget, more sidewalks for our neighborhood, on streets that have very little traffic and are mostly dead ends, are in the budget. I believe these should be removed and the money spent on a more pressing issues. Especially given that the school in our neighborhood, which attracts almost all of the non-local traffic, will be closed soon, continuing with this project does not make financial sense. There are other less costly ways to promote safe spaces for people to walk and ride on residential streets that have been successful in other communities. I can provide examples if you are interested.

As I said, my main concerns are cost and climate action. Almost exactly six years ago, [the council pledged to reduce carbon emissions to zero by 2050](#) with stepped goals for the years between. By this year, we were to have reduced emissions by 20 percent, but a recent study showed that we are down only about 12 percent and most of that is due to actions taken by Xcel Energy.

This means a very important goal that was too little and too slow from the beginning is not being met at a time when we understand that the crisis is coming at us even faster than imagined. And, that July 2019 pledge foresaw that some projects would actually hinder our ability to reach these goals, so stated, "that all purchasing decisions that come before the Common Council for approval, which impact our goals of carbon neutrality and renewable energy, shall include a cost benefit analysis and a measurement of the contribution the purchase will have towards reaching our stated goals."

What has been done with this budget to recognize this missed goal and make up for lost time? Where are the assessments about purchasing decisions called for in the 2019 resolution? The 200 plus action steps in our Climate Action Plan are not moving forward fast enough because we seem to be mostly waiting for grant money and not looking at all budget and planning decisions in light of our action steps and goals.

As I wrote last year in my bid to have the sidewalks in our neighborhood put on pause, if we must have sidewalks, these ribbons of concrete are not the sidewalks we should have and they should not be prioritized over trees. As we know from the Renew the Block project, there are other, porous materials that can be used for paving. These should be standard (CAP Action Step W 3-1 Increase the use of permeable pavement and LH 4-3 Decrease impervious surfaces to mitigate heat island effects, especially in neighborhoods with a high proportion of vulnerable populations.). As we have seen from last year's sidewalk project in our neighborhood, the sidewalks actually can be routed to avoid removing existing and they should be where trees, planted and growing before this neighborhood was annexed into the City, provide shade and water management (CAP Action Step GS 1-8 Adopt a tree preservation ordinance ... and GS 1-9 Establish codes that minimize removal of soil, ground cover, native shrubs, and require planning on-site solar utilization in a manner that minimizes conflict with existing trees.)

I would like to know when will the climate action budget be produced? Where is the budget that prioritizes those action steps like TM 2-2 Increase bus frequency or TM 2-4 Provide transit passes to all youth, households with low-incomes,

and individuals with restricted mobility? Was anyone alarmed that we have failed to reach our intermediate carbon drawdown goal?

There's a great short story, written in 1950 by Ray Bradbury, called *There Will Come Soft Rains*. It takes place in the (then) near future and describes the minute-to-minute "life" of a futuristic house that automatically prepares breakfast for its family, announces the news, waters the lawn, and feeds the pets. But the house in the story exists and continues functioning in a world that has been obliterated by a nuclear attack. The people and pets are gone.

Some of the projects in this budget, including these sidewalks, remind me of that story. We are in and approaching a new world with new priorities and needs. We have to do things differently. Our neighborhood could be a model for how that could be done to save money, increase shade, reduce runoff, de-prioritize cars, re-prioritize humans, and prepare for the changes global warming is bringing.

I hope before passing the 2026 budget you will comb through it with climate action priority in mind. Find the places where projects will hinder our goals or where less costly, more climate-friendly solutions are possible. We can't keep doing things the old way. The old way has brought us to the brink of disaster.

Cathy Van Maren, La Crosse