

CITYZINE

south madison



based on interviews
between borealis
& peer queers living and working in
south madison wi

featuring photography by gina gomez

SOUTH MADISON PLAN:

In Fall 2019, the City of Madison began working on an update to a portion of the 2005 South Madison Neighborhood Plan. This is a 10-15 year look into how we shape the future; according to the City, this plan is intended to address issues that are relevant to the community and determine how best to achieve them. The City will be welcoming the Town of Madison into its municipal boundaries on October 31, 2022. This plan will work with the Town of Madison government and its residents, businesses, and property-owners to plan for its integration into the City.

WHAT IS CITYZINE?

This zine contains excerpts from interviews that Borealis conducted with peer queers in and around South Madison in 2020 and early 2021, and it follows the *Cityzine: Mifflin Concept* project undertaken throughout 2018 and 2019. For this project, Borealis asked LGBTQ+ interviewees to describe their hopes for South Madison planning. Throughout these interviews, it has become clear that residents are uncertain about the planning process and would prefer to give input that spans City departments or initiatives—they want a neighborhood plan that looks expansively at the total picture of community well-being, interrogating the underlying assumptions made when rolling out these plans and not stopping a conversation when it seems to creep past the purview of City planners. Gentrification, housing, childcare, vacant lots, employment, and police surveillance were frequently recurring themes. Many found it upsetting for the City to describe how population growth will impact housing needs in the future when houselessness is already a problem in our communities—whether or not more people move here. To put it another way, most interviewees wanted to use the conversation to discuss a broken system rather than the specifics of a particular neighborhood plan. Many participants were interested in imagining community control of the land and directly democratic decision-making rather than decision-making by distant representatives or developers. Some version of the phrase, “I’m not sure if this falls under neighborhood planning, but wouldn’t it be great if...” came up multiple times throughout these interviews. “We’re learning so much from this COVID-19 pandemic,” said one resident. “Why can’t we wait a little longer before making decisions about this neighborhood plan?”

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SOUTHSIDE PRIDE PHOTO SERIES BY GINA GOMEZ

“The shoot takes place mainly around The Village, Burr Oaks Senior home, the mobile home park and the local area surrounding. When I was a kid, I spent quite a bit of time in this area. I remember getting donuts at Lanes, hanging out at Centro Hispano and creating art, taking classes at MATC, using the library to study. This area is pretty remarkable; it holds so much culture, so much vibrancy and a whole lot of community love. The beauty of Burr Oaks Senior housing is made all the more stunning by the area surrounding it. I have the great privilege of being good friends with some of the best performing artists and local leading activists in Madison. These amazing folx were kind enough to model for me for this shoot. Dana Pellebon, Jessica Witham, and Andi Janeway are all local professional performers, teaching artists, and activist leaders within the theatre community and Madison at large. It was Dana who told me about the incredible Black Thought Wall at The Village on Park [shown on the cover]; it was amazing to see with my own eyes. Photographing Dana and Andi writing on the Black Thought Wall was really an honor. This piece of Madison is so important and so vital because it brings with it a love of community. I also filmed these amazing folx having fun, because this area of Madison is breathing with life and beauty! It is a fun area to be in. Within the Mobile Park Home area, lives the Mediterranean Hookah Lounge which birthed many an actor here in Madison. It’s one of the places many in the theatre community frequent because of the great vibe and stellar karaoke nights. This was the area of Madison, this loving community that helped me open myself up to opportunities. And it still surprises me with how remarkable and beautiful it is. This is what Southside Pride looks like.” - Gina Gomez

GINA GOMEZ is a performer, artist, and playwright with 20+ years of professional theatrical experience. Gina has always been fascinated by photography and began a photography journey after receiving a DSLR camera a few years ago.

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Cityzine was originally called Citizen Cityzine. The name of this project has been updated to better reflect all of the experiences of the people living in our communities, whether or not their citizenship is recognized, and to remove potential barriers to participation. It is telling that most participants chose to have their names anonymized as a condition of participation.

WHEN THINKING ABOUT CITY PLANNING IN SOUTH MADISON, WHAT ARE YOUR BIGGEST CONCERNS?

“City planning seems like the place to really build a creative neighborhood and a neighborhood that is safe, but talking about safety with people who make the decisions feels kind of dangerous. Like, I want to be able to go to parks and send my kids there without worrying about shady deals, but I also don’t want to worry that they’ll be murdered by a police officer. So my biggest fear is saying what we need but having it taken the wrong way.” -A.



“My biggest concern is rising costs of living. I kind of feel for people who work for the City. We’re looking to you to help facilitate or make a lot of big things happen, and it’s sometimes hard to tell how much power you have or where the power lies. Like, does the power truly lie with the people? Who is lobbying against rent control? I know we don’t really have the budget to purchase large areas of land, or land bank, or decide who is developing where—or do we? Seriously, what is in the power of the City to just listen to us and do and what is going to be up to neighborhoods to shout from the rooftops? Maybe I need

to see some kind of flow chart to understand how things could work to give people more control over the land. Community land trusts seem more affordable to own homes, but who and how can that kind of thing get going in a big way? What would need to happen to mess with land banking by the City? What’s the story on inclusionary zoning? Maybe my second biggest concern is where and how community members can be educated on our options.” -J.

“I’m wondering if the City planners have any kind of influence on the things that concern me. How do neighborhood plans influence policing, or the cost of rent, or the empty storefronts? I have to believe they’ve got some kind of power, but I did listen in on this one meeting and now I’m wondering how we can work with planners to play some kind of long game. How does zoning an area a certain way have a long term effect on that area? It seems like a lot of opportunity, but I’m unclear about which decisions will be the right chess moves to get what we want . . . My biggest concern is my own confusion.” -D.

“I’ve heard some things about our population increasing because of certain kinds of corporations in the area or people thinking Madison is a cool place to live, and that we need to have infrastructure for the increase in population or housing needs. But we already have pretty big housing needs, which you can tell just by the people who hang out on the sidewalks or bus stops by necessity, and so I’m concerned about how we’re tackling that issue for the people who live here now. I think the City can get creative if they want to . . . my biggest concern is that the way the City communicates is telling us who really matters here, and that’s a scary thought.” -K

“I’m not sure what the City has control to help with, but figuring out a way to fill those empty buildings with businesses owned by people of color, by people who have grown up in the neighborhood, by queer people—I don’t know what it would mean, more visible business incubators? Or incentives of some kind? I would feel more faith in the process if I saw people’s housing needs get met and more proactive measures to support the growth and success of the people making a life for themselves in the neighborhood.” -A.B.

DESCRIBE AN IDEAL NEIGHBORHOOD IN TERMS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU.

“Isn’t there a kinda cramped mobile home park that is in Town of Madison, or South Madison, or about to be? I heard something about that place not meeting certain zoning or code requirements, and I feel worried that those people might need to find another place to live or something. I think an ideal neighborhood would look out for each other and be ahead of the game in terms of solving these kinds of housing problems before they’re right in our faces. Housing is more important than zoning logistics.” -D.D.

“It’s tough because I’m definitely imagining my ideal neighborhood in terms of what I’ve already seen in South Madison . . . some of the sidewalks are rough and I’ve seen kids bolt across South Park in a way that feels dangerous. At the same time that I want to prioritize sidewalk access for people who use it, I want to make sure we’ve got room for some super fast buses and lots of room for bikers . . . I’m not sure that access to all parts of South Madison are safe to navigate by bike. So my ideal neighborhood would prioritize all the ways people navigate their neighborhoods without sacrificing any of them . . . I think [this] means continuing to prioritize bussing—but I also think the neighborhood should be walkable and have cleared sidewalks . . .” -C.

“I’ve heard some things about community land trusts but am honestly not 100% sure how they work. I think some kind of solutions for affordable housing would be great, but do I want to see a new non-profit take up shop in South Madison? Something controlled by the people who live there would be ideal.” -G.

“I think we have a good start with features like Villager Mall, but it’s kind of become a place I don’t go to a whole lot. I wonder if there are ways that community centers or gathering areas can be scattered more throughout South Madison and be solid places for our kids to hang out, or even for us adults to spend time. The library serves that function [for me] right now but I think having more options would feel good for families.” -A.Y.

HOW DOES AN IDEAL COMMUNITY—OR SOUTH MADISON—KEEP ALL OF ITS MEMBERS HEALTHY AND SAFE?

“Fix the bike lane situation. It’s kind of unclear on some of the quieter streets if I can or should just be biking in the middle of the road, and it’s straight up frightening to bike on South Park St.” -D.D.

“Keep us housed. I don’t know anybody who isn’t worried about losing an affordable place to live. Ban evictions. Like, just get rid of that concept. Make sure the apartments and housing are going to be good for the people living there now, so as we get older and older, our homes are safe enough and easy enough to get into and out of that we can stay where we are.” -Y.

“Focus on early childhood. We need affordable childcare that we feel really confident about. And it would be even better if we had lots of options to choose from. What can the City do to encourage more of that?” -H.

“This stuff feels basic at a certain point, but I know it can be hard to maintain it like we want. We need ice-free walkways, cues from signs and the general street layout that prevent teens and kids from running across scary-fast streets, or that slow traffic down. Make sure buildings are all accessible. Is there a way to help make older buildings more accessible for people in walkers and wheelchairs without being a huge cost to small businesses, landlords, or families?” -J.F.

“The Badger / Cypress area seems pretty important between the elementary school, Centro Hispano nearby... I wonder if all those intersections are super safe, though? With bus loading, people trying to cross the streets, car traffic. I think that could all be made a little smoother and safer.” -G

WHO SHOULD OPERATE AN IDEAL NEIGHBORHOOD AND MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT ITS FUTURE?

“Not some random developer. Relationships between developers and the local community, and with the business owners in the area, are so, so important. There are people working to make a name for themselves and to have a strong business . . . but I’m worried that they might get lost in the mix when we’re working on all these moving parts for a neighborhood plan.

I want us to encourage more business in the area but I want that business to be by people who have lived there or are building a life in the area.

I want more people to come to South Madison for their fun and shopping and all that, but I don’t want that to make it so appealing to developers that people living there need to move out for the super wealthy folks. Or come at the cost of supporting strong neighborhood centers and services and reasonable rent.” -I.

“I’d say the people. But we need the resources to understand what is already within our power and what is already within the power of planners or other City folks. So, if the City puts together a neighborhood plan with recommendations for the future, which of the outcomes that we want are dependent upon residents to act in some way? Which ones are determined by whoever wants to develop in South Madison? Some clearer supports in understanding community action would be helpful. I think people should feel empowered, but we shouldn’t pretend that there isn’t institutionalized power available to help make these requests happen faster. And by requests, I mean really stable housing options, green options, clear and accessible sidewalks, celebration of diversity in small business owners, safe roadways, childcare options, a quiet performance venue nearby, easier or faster bus options with fewer transfers, that kind of thing.” -A.G.

WHERE/HOW/TO WHAT SHOULD A COMMUNITY ALLOCATE ITS SHARED FINANCIAL RESOURCES?



“My brain just went to the idea that it would be nice to be able to work within walking distance of where I live. So if we could pool our brains and cash together to create that kind of system, that would make a big difference.” -R.

“I’d say start with the people most in need of support. Like, if there are going to be issues with Town of Madison joining South Madison, do we need to figure out what’s going on near Primrose Lane or the mobile home area? Along Park Street, do we need to figure out a way to prioritize community voice and family needs over developer desires? What about the people who are houseless? Start with stabilizing housing and food and then continue improving the quality of life for people rather than future companies in the area. I know it’s complicated, like companies might equal jobs, but I think there’s a way we can show what we care about through our policies and our budgeting . . . I think putting groups like Urban Triage, Progress Center, and Centro in charge of distributing rental assistance funds would be a good step in reaching the people who really need that assistance. In the long term, eliminate rent.” -T.

“... Wait, do we have shared financial resources? Or do we act like the City’s resources are shared? The City’s not the devil, there are definitely good people making things happen, but on the whole it could take more responsibility for the kind of development it encourages.” -R.

WHAT MAKES A NEIGHBORHOOD AN EXCITING PLACE TO LIVE, OR A PLACE YOU'D WANT TO BELONG?

“Not to be negative, but I think that it would be exciting to see more options for grocery stores with fresh foods, or like a performance venue that is not obnoxiously intrusive in daily life—it gets pretty loud and crowded [by the Alliant Energy Center], and I don't really know how much local stuff is happening there or if I'm allowed to go lay on the grass. But I'd love to see more green space that is open to families and people who want to spend time there. And if I could count on my rent to not go up so far that I have to move, that would be pretty exciting. Just a bigger focus on the people living in the neighborhood than on the businesses that want to come in would be exciting.” -R.

“This might sound kind of trivial after all the other stuff we talked about, but I'd love to see some kind of health or fitness centers. Not like something that costs a million dollars, but if there's a way that we could have more community gyms that feel good to be in and are maybe free to access, that would be a place I'm excited to be in. Just like with food or housing, I think having free options for people isn't some special accommodation. It's our right to feel good and be cared for no matter what we can technically afford.” -G.



“A community that makes sure we can keep living here affordably and that we're also not going to get flooded out. I'd be excited to see a plan that talks about how the neighborhoods might look, how much they'll cost to live or work in, and also how the plan lays out expectations to be good to the land and environment at the same time as far as stormwater drainage or development's impacts on the environment or prioritizing gardens and that kind of thing. I'd love to see the experts make some kind of plan that is holistic like that.” -A.B.

“I think everyone knows that the southside is full of diversity. The southside is also good at taking care of each other, and I'd like to see development reflect that . . . Places to access regular healthcare and education, affordable childcare. Maintaining our places of worship and bringing in more ways to make art and garden and do all the things communities do. We've had a lot of this over the years, but we need to keep it going through some major moves of trust. Folks want to grow their roots here, and we make that happen through secure housing first, in my opinion.” -B.H.M.

WHAT DOES SOUTH MADISON LOOK LIKE IN TEN YEARS?

“In ten years, we would be done talking about affordable and accessible housing. It would just be that way. Madison College students could live in the neighborhood, single-family homes would be well taken care of but the rent would be affordable for us as we age in the neighborhoods. Families could afford to live in the neighborhood, have access to parks no matter where they live in South Madison, and wouldn’t even be worried about gentrification. Big families could live there, single adults could live there, and people wouldn’t have to play the moving-around game to find lower rent. In ten years, we wouldn’t be panicking that large property owners are taking all this property and making things unaffordable. Maybe by then we’ve got rent-to-own arrangements. We would be less concerned about people who are homeless in the neighborhood because everyone would be in stable housing.” -T.R.

“Ten years from now, we’ll be over putting money into arming our deadly police force and we’ll be putting resources into cultivating people’s connection to the land—both to make living here more affordable but to truly connect us to what gives us fresh food, where we play, what keeps us hydrated, what gives us power, what gives us a sense of belonging. We’ll focus on liveability alongside the land in a precious and valued way.” -J.J.

“We would be playing in green parks and not worried about our kids running into a busy street. Our older relatives would live nearby or with us, and they can get into and out of homes with ease. Our cousins have thriving businesses nearby, and there are free services and community resources all over the place. The neighborhoods cater to people who’ve been trying to make it work in Madison for a long time.” -R.C.

“I heard something about a Center for Black Excellence and Culture, and I’d like to see that thriving by ten years from now.” -R.



HOW CAN WE VALUE AND RESPOND TO THE HISTORY OF A PLACE WHILE DESIGNING FOR ITS FUTURE?

“The way I understand it, there’s a lot of history of immigrants moving to South Madison in our past, and unfortunately there is an intersection with public government that doesn’t shed a lot of hopeful light on what is possible in this process for new development. But I want to be proved wrong, you know? Black folks, Italians, Jewish people lived over in Greenbush, right? So there’s all this movement and it’s all kind of descending on the Greenbush community, and it was a poor neighborhood but it was bustling. How I understand it is that there was a public program that came through trying to get rid of slums. So houses got bought up and people kinda scattered around town. It seems like it kind of destroyed the neighborhood, but the flipside I guess is that some longstanding institutions stepped in—but probably that’s by design—to support the neighborhood with services and housing. I’m thinking of spots like Bayview, which are one of the dopest spots in town at this point . . . But it doesn’t ignore the fact that at a couple points in history, people have been displaced by one thing or another and then kind of “saved” by the same institutions that ruined the neighborhoods. So I guess I’m glad the southside has this immigrant story unfolding, but it’s kind of putting the responsibility on individuals who are systematically uprooted to tell y’all how to handle us. If there are urban renewal projects of the past in this place or right next door that totally changed the shape of the area and moved people out, what’s the point in asking us what we want? Are we gonna get moved out? I think the way to bridge these two worlds is maybe considering who resources are going to. If you’re going to be developing, think about how land is acquired for public use and whether those decisions are controlled by current residents. And consider how renters get a say in land use. Like, instead of representing us through some info gathering, and then decisions get made by a smaller group, maybe there is a way to more directly offer say and control of the state of the southside. Improvements should be

decided on by people who live here. Or we’re gonna have a situation where all these beautiful southside folks are going to have to scatter again and it will all be in the name of development for our own good. Am I making sense with this thing? . . . Did I mention that I want more ways for renters to make decisions? It seems like upholding super outdated systems for only landlords and wealthy to make decisions about the area. I’m almost nervous being asked to remember the past, but am a little optimistic that city folks want to learn from that history. You all are saying you want to protect long time residents, and I want proof.” -T.B.

“If you want to go way back, and we should, this whole city needs to come to terms with the fact that we’re on occupied Ho-Chunk land. South Madison planning shouldn’t be immune to considering this, and I hope that every neighborhood plan attempts to address this history. Maybe I’d ask if Native people are a part of the planning process? What is their vision for the future of this land? Is there a way to incorporate Native guidance on land use or prioritize land back arrangements?

And this is a related thought but wasn’t a lot of South Madison marshland? So I’m wondering why certain things are deemed more important than others, why I don’t hear as much about how to handle the natural snowball effect of developing on this kind of land. What are floodwater plans? How do we respect the watershed? Respecting the multicultural vibrance of South Madison should also take into consideration the diversity of life that we should want on this land we inhabit. I know there are housing crises that need to be solved, but we have to be proactive about keeping the land healthy, or this whole place will become difficult for people to inhabit long term. It’s about a relationship. And where did I start? I think we need to honor Native leaders’ visions for this place, because they understand where it all started from.” - K.C.

“When thinking about urban planning, consider whether people who most need housing are the ones moving into new developments, or if the neighborhood is becoming closed off to people who need it most.” - I.

HOW CAN WE VALUE AND RESPOND TO THE HISTORY OF A PLACE WHILE DESIGNING FOR ITS FUTURE?

“I once heard that, collectively, South Madison residents speak over a dozen, maybe dozens of languages. There are immigrant families, and I think the citywide stamp of this being a diverse neighborhood is all kind of true. And the shape of that has changed throughout the City’s history, and I think the City has kind of been a part of changing that shape. So I think that designing for its future should mean making it safe for all these folks to live here. I think certain groups are really looking out for us here—Badger Rock, Freedom Inc, Bayview, Centro Hispano, Urban Triage—and I’d like to see control by and for people coming through groups like this and also non-non-profit leadership, you know, like community voice not associated with a non-profit, because [non-profits] and the City might be kind of limited in what they can say and advocate for. I guess what I feel is that we should design for the people who currently live here and maybe consider people who live in Madison but don’t have homes. I don’t want to see design work that plans for building homes for wealthy people who want to move here. Focus on folks living in South Madison, focus on folks in shelters and tents and couches, and use all our resources to design a housing secure community. It sounds like other people have told you this, but housing really is the first order of business. Then food and healthcare.” -P.

“If you value the history of a place, you look at the moments in the past when people have been pushed out. People are afraid that development on the southside will mean pricing us out of our spots and repeating history. Think about who owns which properties and what kind of power that has. I think I heard that there are a lot of Latino homeowners in South Madison? But I think there are a lot of white homeowners, too, and given that the southside’s pride often comes from our diversity, what’s that about? We need to look at the whole picture . . . Do not repeat history. Don’t evict us. And I think there are a lot of evictions.” -B.H.M.





“Look at the total infrastructure. We’re in a pandemic and lots of people can’t access the internet. Can the city update its priorities to match the times? Is the internet considered a utility that the City can distribute and make accessible to everyone? Can we prioritize public transit? In terms of looking at our history, I’d say we should look at the specific needs of each neighborhood. Who lives there, what do we need, how do we make it happen by absolutely prioritizing the living people in an area over who might want to show up there later. Prevent gentrification by meeting folks needs affordably. Or fuck affordably—just meet our needs and do your part to value us all as people with families and lives that deserve supporting. Encourage non-profits and social service agencies to the extent that they empower residents and not treat us like charity cases. Support Black- and Brown-owned businesses that will turn around and hire residents. Design with all that in mind.” - A.C.

“I’m really glad that you’re asking us these questions outside of black and white survey data. You can’t really capture fear when talking about which street signs to clean up or intersections to re-work. We are living with the uncertainty of what will happen next, and we have a history that is informing us that changes, for better or worse, might be heading our way. We already know that they’re definitely going to impact Towne of Madison.” - K.C.



“If there are changes or requests that you’re hearing from residents and people who spend their days in South Madison, I hope that the City will do everything in their power to make those things happen, whether or not they feel like they are within the purview or realm of neighborhood planning. We are at a tipping point that can prevent southside gentrification. Being thoughtful about our relationship to police, setting up internet access for everyone, focusing on the needs of renters who are being priced out, figuring out how to create safe housing situations for people who don’t have a place to live. I don’t know what the City thinks their job is, but I am looking forward to reading plans that break outside of the box and work to set new expectations for what it means to imagine a healthy neighborhood. Start with what matters most—the land, the people—and work from there.” -R.C.