

*5.8 Preliminary approval of vacation of two Bikeway & Pedestrian Easement & two Sidewalk Easements, located at 2200-2400 Block of Bethesda Circle*

Good afternoon Mayor Bochenski and City Council Members,

My name is Tony Hollingsworth, and I live at 2275 S 34<sup>th</sup> Street, Apt. 7. I appreciate you giving me the time to talk about the proposed vacation near Bethesda Circle, specifically Area A. I wanted to discuss some of the concerns that were raised during the Planning & Zoning Commission meeting on the 4<sup>th</sup> and explain some positives for the city retaining this easement.

Firstly, I'd like to talk about the concerns and posit some possible solutions. One major concern brought up was privacy and proximity to the Bethesda Townhomes. The path is about 20 feet from their back doors, but this isn't uncommon throughout the city and there are ways it can be mitigated. A prime example of a path being within that distance is along the Sertoma bike path. Many homes are within that distance, and I haven't heard of calls to get rid of that bike path. Just the opposite, it is a well-used path that I've heard and have experienced many positive things about. To help mitigate the concerns of Bethesda residents, I think the city could investigate constructing some sort of obstruction between the path and the residents. This could be a privacy fence or a small dirt mound with trees planted on top to shelter them from the path. Since it was mentioned a couple times that the city of the past made a mistake in not requiring the original developer to pave the bike path, this could be an opportunity to correct that mistake for the city of today. Another concern is that it is a path to nowhere that has caused people to cut through the northernmost Bethesda yard, and I had two thoughts on that. The first is that it shows, without the path even being paved, there is demand to use that path as the public, multi-use path it was intended to be. The solution shouldn't be to get rid of it because it currently goes nowhere but instead to make it go somewhere. Which leads to my second thought. The Birkholz development will be adding more than 100 new units just north of Bethesda and will have a park there. While they have said they don't have plans to connect to that path themselves, this would be a great connection point that the city could create. Another concern raised was the cost of this connection point over the coulee tributary. While a full pedestrian bridge could be expensive, the city could opt for something cheaper like a culvert that would still allow water flow but would be a more economical solution. A final concern was the existence of reasonable alternatives and the safety of children biking to the park or school. It was mentioned that this could lead to children drowning but there's no evidence that would be the case. Like previously mentioned, there is a similar path along the coulee that is well-used, and I haven't seen any news reports of increased drownings there on the Sertoma Path. On the

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topic of safety, it was mentioned there was a safe alternative using the bike path on the west side of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. Accessing the Birkholz development that way would require crossing 42<sup>nd</sup> twice with one of these crossings not being at an intersection. 42<sup>nd</sup> Street is a very busy road and, between the increased distance and decreased safety from the crossings, it's not a reasonable alternative.

Finally, I wanted to get into some of the reasons this is a perfect place for the city to increase its bike connectivity. The primary advantage is its location. The path, when paired with the Birkholz development, would create a much needed north-south path in the area. Currently there is an approximately 1-mile gap between 42<sup>nd</sup> street and the Sertoma path which this Bethesda easement nearly bisects. Another plus is that there are a large number of homes just south of this path between 40<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> streets which would be benefited by this connection. I believe keeping this easement and developing it would be in the city's best interest and would keep in line with its commitment to multi-modal transportation in Grand Forks. Thank you for your time!