

Dave Ripp, Chair
Dane County Park Commission

Dear Dave:

We join in expressing our warmest thanks to Dane County for its continued commitment in the 2022 county budget to the shared cost of a multi-use recreational bridge linking Dane and Sauk Counties over the Wisconsin River at Sauk City. We also write today to respectfully request that Dane County, as a means of accomplishing its goal of a multi-use regional trail, proceed to establish a project partnership with Gateway to The Driftless Inc. for the purpose of expediting development of the Dane County part of the trail between Middleton and Mazomanie and Mazomanie and the Wisconsin River.

Gateway to The Driftless, a Wisconsin 501c3 nonprofit corporation, is a Northwest Dane County regional economic development initiative of the villages of Cross Plains, Black Earth, Mazomanie, and other public and private partners. Established in 2018, the Gateway organization supports our local communities in pursuing:

- A sustainable path from our area's agricultural heritage to future quality of life
- Ongoing recovery from the historic floods of August 2018
- Resilience to the local economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and
- Long-term regional alignment in pursuing responsible growth and broad-based economic opportunity.

In 2021, an economic impact study of this proposed regional trail system by UW-Extension, in partnership with Dane and Sauk counties and Gateway to The Driftless, found that by connecting Madison, the Black Earth Creek recreational corridor, Ice Age Trail, Lower Wisconsin State Riverway, Great Sauk Trail, Devil's Lake State Park, and other major state trails, the 60-mile trail system is expected to be the busiest trail in the state, enjoyed year round by a broad and diverse area demographic and readily accessible to a population of 15 million residing within a three-hour drive.

The study's projections of this trail system's substantial local and regional potential economic benefits were based on historic data and did not reflect the unprecedented high usage of state and county outdoor recreation facilities as a social effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and the greater preference Americans have recently expressed for car-based trips, outdoor recreation, and travel to nearby destinations. If current trends become permanent factors driving usage of public outdoor recreation facilities, including the regional trail, its potential economic benefit could exceed the study team's expectations. We believe this regional multi-use trail system is key to a brighter post-COVID future for our communities and the region.

We appreciate Dane County's longtime support for the regional multi-use trail through Res. 72 08-09, the Parks and Open Space Plan, the \$1 million matching fund for trail corridor acquisition, and previous co-sharing of the costs of feasibility and preliminary engineering studies of the Wisconsin River bridge. We also welcome the County Executive's strong encouragement for the unprecedented collaboration among units of

government and nonprofit organizations to make this shared vision a reality. We regard Gateway to The Driftless as our willing and able community partner in this vital enterprise and as the appropriate regional hub organization for development of this trail system in NW Dane.

We understand that establishing the project partnership we strongly support would be subject to terms mutually agreed to by Dane County and Gateway to the Driftless and that Gateway to The Driftless is prepared at the county's request to submit, on behalf of our communities, a proposed memorandum of agreement for consideration.

We look forward to continuing to work with Dane County to make our communities a better place to live. Please contact Christopher Long, Gateway to The Driftless Board Chair, if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Village of Cross Plains

Jay Lengfeld, *President*

Mike Axon, *Interim Administrator*

Village of Mazomanie

Gary Harrop, *President*

Peter Huebner, *Administrator*

Village of Black Earth

Mitch Hodson, *President*

Shellie Benish, *Administrator*

Gateway to The Driftless

Christopher Long, *Board Chair*

cc:

