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## Where's the Town of Madison, what's an 'attachment' and how will the city absorb it?

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Thirteen years ago, the cities of Madison and Fitchburg signed an agreement with the town of Madison that phased out portions of the town over a 20-year period.

Now, the two cities are proposing to move up the final attachment date to the end of this year — a timeline made unlikely due to the town's plan to review effects of an accelerated timeline in mid-January 2017.

Madison Mayor Paul Soglin argues that advancing the final attachment is a high priority because it could boost struggling neighborhoods in the area and that the town's scattered land use makes it difficult to develop an economic plan for the area. Fitchburg Mayor Steve Arnold said the town has posed development challenges for his city.

Town Chairman Jim Campbell said there are not compelling enough reasons to move up the attachment at this time.

“By and large, the stakeholders are telling us they think we should stick with the current agreement unless there are compelling reasons to do otherwise,” Campbell said in an email this week.

If all three municipalities cannot come to an agreement, the town will still be dissolved in 2022.

Here is what you need to know about the town of Madison, the attachment process and possible effects on the city of Madison.

### **What is the town of Madison?**

When Madison was founded as a congressional town, it covered 36 square miles of land that extended six miles north and south between County Trunk Highway K and just south of what is now the West Beltline Highway, and six miles east and west between Sherman Avenue and west of Whitney Way. But since the 1860s, pieces of the original area have been annexed or incorporated into the city of Madison, the village of Shorewood Hills and the village of Maple Bluff. Land north of Lake Mendota were transferred to the town of Westport.

Town governments govern areas of Wisconsin that are not included inside corporate boundaries of cities or villages. The town of Madison, which has a main office located at 2120 Fish Hatchery Road, is just one of the state's 1,255 towns and has its own police, fire, paramedic ambulance service, sewer, public works department and municipal court.

The town of Madison today comprises less than 3.9 square miles of land, including right-of-ways and bodies of water spread out over nine discontinuous areas, six of which contain the core territory of the town and are located on the city of Madison's south side adjacent to Fitchburg.

There is another separate 25-acre area of the town that is north of the city of Madison's downtown and adjacent to the Village of Maple Bluff. Two small town islands are located on the city of Madison's west side off of Schroeder Road.

The town's commercial, retail and industrial businesses are primarily located on Rimrock Road, Park Street, Fish Hatchery Road and the West Beltline. The University of Wisconsin's Arboretum and the Dane County Veterans Memorial Coliseum/Alliant Energy Center are the town's largest land holdings.

Within the town is a variety of diverse residential neighborhoods including single-family, owner-occupied housing, duplex units and affordable mobile homes and apartments. Rental housing accounts for 76 percent of the total occupied units in the town, according to 2000 Census data.

Many of the households and families living in the town are classified as low to moderate income compared to Fitchburg and Madison, according to census data. Town residents are generally younger than Fitchburg and Madison, with 48 percent of residents between 18 and 34 years of age.

### **What does annexation mean?**

Annexation is the statutory process for transferring lands from towns to contiguous cities and villages. John Witte, UW-Madison professor emeritus of public affairs and political science, explained the process as when one political entity assumes responsibility and political control over another political entity.

In this case the town is actually being attached to the cities of Madison and Fitchburg and not annexed.

“The difference here is we’ve always agreed to how it would occur,” assistant city attorney Doran Viste said.

Because the cities of Madison and Fitchburg have already entered into a cooperative plan, the annexation process is referred to as an attachment. The city of Madison also has agreements with the towns of Burke, Blooming Grove and Middleton.

A majority of the town will be attached to the city of Madison and two distinct areas of the town will be attached to Fitchburg, as stated in a cooperative agreement signed by the cities and town in 2007.

### **Why is the town being attached?**

The town and city of Madison have a long history of boundary disputes, including a state budget bill proposal from Madison to annex all of the town and a petition from Fitchburg to annex parts of the town contiguous to Fitchburg.

To put an end to boundary disputes and disagreements over the town’s future, the town, Madison and Fitchburg established an intergovernmental cooperation agreement in 2003 that scheduled the incorporation and eventual dissolution of the town for October 31, 2022.

### **When will this happen?**

While the original agreed-upon annexation date is about six years away, Mayor Paul Soglin sent a joint proposal from the cities of Madison and Fitchburg to Town of Madison Chairman Jim Campbell Aug. 11 proposing to accelerate the timeline to Dec. 31, 2016 or “as soon thereafter as statutorily possible.”

The boundary changes remain the same as originally agreed upon in the cooperative plan.

In response to Soglin’s letter, the Town Board has created a work group of the town’s department heads to evaluate issues related to early annexation, according to a statement from the town Aug. 24.

“The Town Board feels it is important to obtain input from various Town stakeholders, employees, taxpayers, residents and business owners,” the statement said.

The group is scheduled to report back to the Board Jan. 16, 2017 — 16 days after the proposed early annexation date — with possible recommendations.

Viste said 2017 would be the earliest a final attachment could occur if all municipalities agree and move through the attachment process, but that it can be “pretty political.”

“We're going to have to deal with the challenge eventually whether it's in 2016 or 2022,” Viste said. “The legal issues are pretty straightforward.”

### **What is the reason for the accelerated timeline?**

In the letter and at a Board of Estimates meeting Aug. 16, Soglin stressed distressed neighborhoods on Madison's south side and a lack of community services in the area as a reason to move up the timeline.

“The main thing is this, when we're looking at the poverty and the issues that have challenged the south side of Madison for so many decades, the town does not provide the level of service that we provide,” Soglin said.

Additionally, the city could gain more control over the redevelopment of the Alliant Energy Center if the town is dissolved and could possibly allow it to be included in a tax incremental financing district, providing more funds.

Right now, the city lacks resources and funding to help out the county, which is leading the charge on the Alliant redevelopment.

“We don't have the resources, and we don't have the authority to do any of the really heavy lifting that's required of a parcel that is absolutely vital to the economic future of the county and whole region,” Soglin said. “(The Alliant is) not in the city of Madison, and people forget that.”

Fitchburg Mayor Steve Arnold said he is on board with the accelerated plan.

“Looking at the neighborhoods that we get in Fitchburg and the services that we would want to provide for them and looking at the services the town is currently providing, I am concerned that if we wait until 2022 there could be some unanticipated problems (that) come up,” Arnold said.

He said the town is happy with the “status quo” but has created long term development conflicts for Fitchburg in the Southdale Neighborhood. Because of the town’s expiration date, Arnold said the town is “not really proactively planning for the future.”

Fitchburg Ald. Jason Gonzalez said the early annexation process should have been started earlier and said getting information from the town has been “frustrating.”

“The town has not cooperated,” Gonzalez said.

However, some in the town express frustration toward working with the city of Madison on this process. Town of Madison Police Chief Scott Gregory said Soglin has created an “adversarial” relationship instead of a collaborative one

“We have always been (Soglin’s) failure,” Gregory said of the town. “He doesn’t realize that bigger government isn’t always better.”

### **How will different departments be affected?**

Under the cities’ joint proposal to move up the timeline, all town employees at the time of attachment are assured a job with either the city of Madison or Fitchburg. The city of Madison will take 75 percent of town employees and Fitchburg will take 25 percent.

Town police officers and firefighters would need to pass tests to prove they meet Madison’s standards before being offered jobs with the city. Town employees who do not want to work for the the cities or who do not qualify for comparable employment will be provided with severance benefits.

If all three municipalities agree to the advanced timeline, a temporary zoning will be assigned followed by a detailed analysis and evaluation of existing zoning. The planning department will make a recommendation consistent with the city of Madison's zoning code.

The city of Madison's public works agencies, like parks services, will integrate the town's services. City of Madison Parks Superintendent Eric Knepp said the city is equipped to add the town's 11 acres of park land to the about 5,000 already in the city's care and an earlier attachment adds a benefit.

"Having that land within our system sooner, before the end of 2017, would allow that land to be a part of the overarching parks plan," Knepp said.

Madison's fire and police departments would face more challenges with the town's acquisition. Because of the area the city would be gaining, the Madison Police Department would need to add 18 officers.

That number is in addition to 40 the department has said it requires along with needs associated with the new Midtown Police District, Assistant Chief Sue Williams said at a recent Board of Estimates meeting.

She also said the new timeline would prove challenging as far as determining where to place officers acquired from the town.

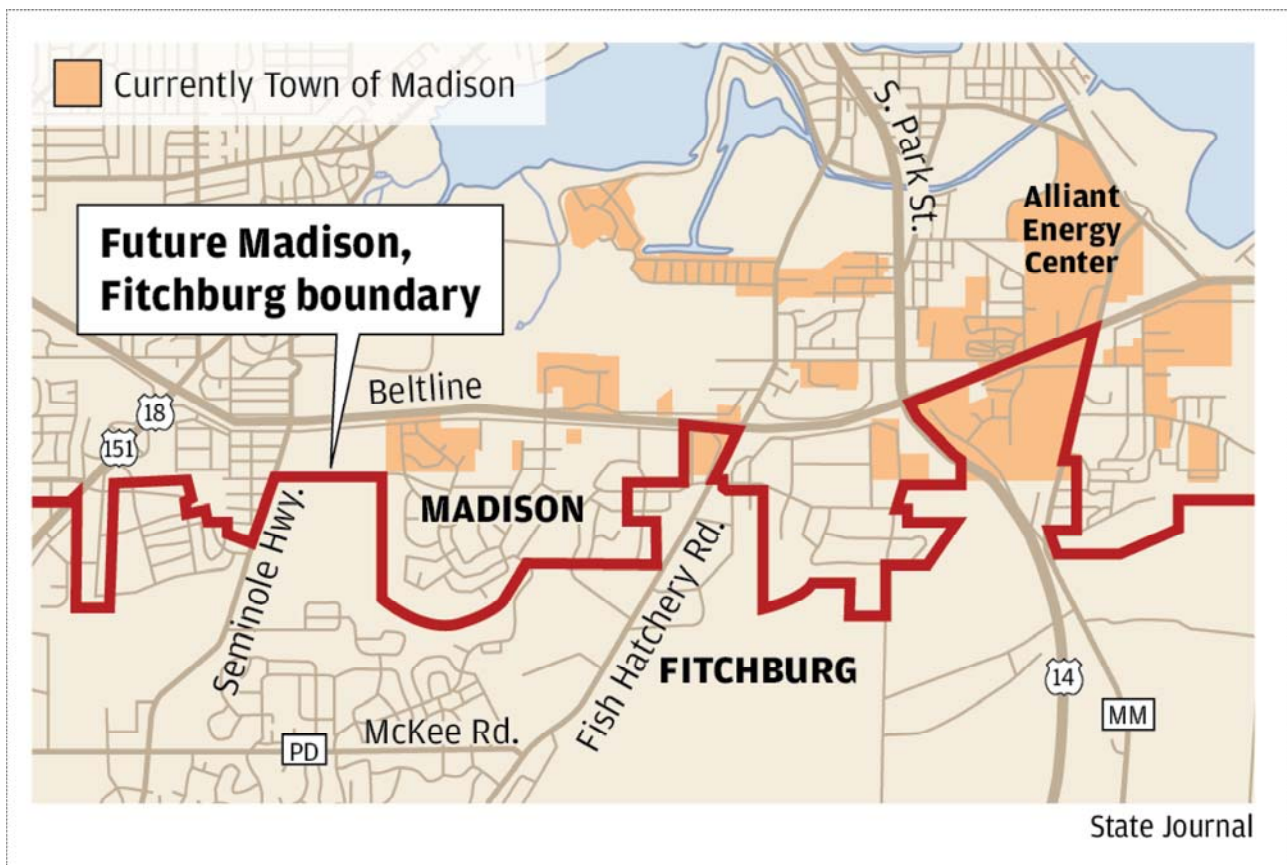
"I don't know where we're going to put them," Williams said. "We'll gladly accept and find a place for them. We might have to share lockers, who knows? We'll be very creative, more closets turning to offices and that sort of thing."

With the attached land, the Madison Fire Department would handle about 1,000 more calls each year and accelerates a need for a new ambulance and fire station. Assistant Chief of Administration, Laura Laurenzi said Fire Station No. 6 on Badger Road would be the most affected by the acquisition.

Once the attachment takes place, the Badger Road station would be the primary station covering the Owl Creek neighborhood, causing a problem with response times.

“We can't get to that area in less than about ten minutes,” Laurenzi said. “We know that we would immediately need upon that attachment that ambulance in service immediately and an additional fire resource, an engine or a ladder.”

Share your opinion on this topic by sending a letter to the editor to [tctvoice@madison.com](mailto:tctvoice@madison.com). Include your full name, hometown and phone number. Your name and town will be published. The phone number is for verification purposes only. Please keep your letter to 250 words or less.



## Abigail Becker

Abigail Becker joined The Capital Times in 2016, where she primarily covers city and county government. She previously worked for the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism and the Wisconsin State Journal.



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