

## Alderman Backes Update

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Hey folks! It's been a bit. I've had a busy summer personally, and we have fewer meetings over the summer months, so there hasn't been quite as much to update on. But with the summer coming to a close and our council schedule getting back to normal, the time is right for a quick update.

I figure I should start with some of my highlights of the summer from around town!

- **Heritage Days:** The Heritage Days Parade was as well done as ever. From where I was sitting (close to the beginning of the route), it looked like it was well attended, and there were TONS of kids scrambling for candy. The diversity of acts and participants in the parade never fails to impress me for a community of our size. Well done to the committee for putting together another successful event.
- **Brat fry at the firehouse:** I wasn't able to make the first edition of this event last year, so I was happy to be able to make it with the kids this time. Great meal for a great cause (those giant tots were especially delicious). It was cool to see so many people out and about, AND to have my first encounter with Sam the Sasquatch! More on him later.
- **New mural:** In case you haven't noticed, there's another new mural going up in the 900 block of Milwaukee Avenue, and it looks gorgeous so far. This would be the third major mural going up on the street in the last year. I love it – give me all the public art. It's really helping to liven up our downtown and make it even more of a place people will want to spend time.
- **Beach days:** I'm not much of a beach person myself, but most of the rest of my family is. Every time I go down by Grant Park Beach on a nice summer day, I'm so taken aback by how much it's changed since I was a child. The volleyball courts, Ferch's, and a general level of cleanliness all are significant improvements from the 90s. That whole part of the park has really come a long way over the last decade.
- **Fourth of July:** This year, my youngest (3 year old twins) got to take in the fireworks for the first time, and it was great fun as always. The fact that the traveling beer garden always overlaps with the 4th in Grant Park is always an added bonus. Shoutout to SMPD's Officer Rodman for giving them a personal demonstration of the department's brand new drone!

## Sam the Sasquatch!

I'm sure there were a whole lot of confused people when the city announced the Sam the Sasquatch initiative.

I have to admit, when the idea was first posed to me, I was a bit confused as well. But there was clear energy and enthusiasm behind the campaign, and there was no doubt that it was a big swing. If it went as well as our branding partners thought it would, it could be a home run. So



with the Bucyrus Foundation generously sponsoring it, I (and the rest of the council) voted in favor of it.

Honestly, it's been better than I could have ever expected or hoped. The video packages put together were of outstanding quality, and they were genuinely hilarious. The announcements went viral almost immediately, and having those announcements on the very day of Sam's first public appearance (at the brat fry) was brilliant. I've seen so many photos floating around since then of Sam with people of all ages.

My kids loved him, by the way. Well, two of the three... one was a little anxious about the prospect of meeting him, hah.

While there have been some naysayers on social media (as is always the case about everything), Sam has overall been a massive hit, and the feedback I've received

has been almost universally positive to enthusiastic. It's a great breath of fresh air for a city that needed something fun and positive to embrace. And, it didn't cost taxpayers a dime.

Looking forward to seeing Sam out and about at more events in the coming months!

## Potential developments

If you've been keeping an eye on agendas for the city council and/or the plan commission, you've probably seen a couple significant developments showing up.

At **2318 10th Ave.**, there is currently an empty lot where a gas station used to be. This is the corner of Marquette and 10th, just kitty corner from my district boundaries. Currently there is a plan for a substantial mixed-use development to go in that spot; first floor commercial, with apartments above. The project is designed to be transit-oriented in nature; marketing will focus on proximity to the bus line especially.

Currently the council has given some of the preliminary approvals necessary for the developer to seek the necessary funding. We're some time away from having final agreements and approvals in place; it might not be until spring. But this is one that's been in the works for a

while, and the developer has been patiently working with the city to iron out a development plan that would work for everyone.

In the **former Bucyrus campus**, the remaining vacant buildings are once again the subject of potential development. You may recall a couple former proposals to turn these buildings into housing. Similar plans have once again been revived, with additional housing being proposed for creation along Milwaukee Avenue.

This project has not yet made it to the approval stage at the council level, so we're still in the early going here. Keep an eye on council and plan commission agendas if you're interested in coming and learning more.

In general, the absolute best way to learn about these developments as they're happening is to attend plan commission meetings. It's been a bit since I've been able to make one as I frequently have conflicts with their meeting times, but I will tell you that I always come away feeling much more knowledgeable about development in the city and armed with the information I need to make a decision I'm comfortable with when it inevitably arrives at the council level.

## **Looking forward to Doors Open South Milwaukee!**

This was my favorite event in the city last year, and this year it's scheduled for Saturday, September 7 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Here's the list of participants. Get to as many as you can!

- Caterpillar - 1118 Rawson Avenue
- First Congregational United Church of Christ - 1111 N. Chicago Avenue
- Holy Resurrection Armenian Church - 909 Michigan Avenue
- Masjid Al-Huda South Milwaukee - 1800 16th Avenue
- Max A. Sass & Sons Funeral Home - 1314 Manitoba Avenue
- Mill Pond Warming House - Mill Road & Oak Creek Parkway
- Schlaraffia Milwaukee - 500 Marquette Avenue
- South Milwaukee Fire Department - 929 Marshall Court
- South Milwaukee High School - 801 15th Avenue
- South Milwaukee Historical Society - 717 Milwaukee Avenue
- South Milwaukee Human Concerns - 1029 Milwaukee Avenue
- South Milwaukee Police Department - 2424 15th Avenue
- South Milwaukee Street Department - 910 Marshall Avenue
- South Milwaukee Wastewater Treatment Facility - 3005 5th Avenue
- St. Mark's Episcopal Church - 1314 Rawson Avenue
- Sts. Peter and Paul Polish National Catholic Church - 1308 15th Avenue
- Trinity Lutheran Church - 2507 5th Avenue
- Wulff Lodge - 215 Lake Drive

That's all for today, folks. Enjoy the remaining summer days!

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*If you have any comments, questions, or concerns, email Alderman Backes at [tbackes@smwi.org](mailto:tbackes@smwi.org).*