Mathew Sloan

South Madison has been ignored for so long for whatever reason. Either because we have been expanding at the edges and our resources have been focused on putting roads in and stuff out there, or we've been focused on downtown.

In city government, my sense is that the squeaky wheel really gets the grease. And at the very simplest level, if the street department doesn't know there is a pothole they don't come out and fix it. Clearly there are bigger issues on the south side. But I can't call "streets" and have them come out and put in businesses or take care of some of these problems. And your average citizen doesn't know. Do they call the streets, do they call traffic, do they call the city engineer, do they call the mayor, do they call their alder? The system we have, the alder is mainly an ombudsman, a person to funnel information.

I grew up in rural California in a dying logging town. I spent most of my youth on welfare as did everyone in town. I grew up during the Reagan years when I heard a lot of talk about welfare queens and those sorts of things. Growing up in a town where everyone was on welfare, I didn't see any welfare queens. All I saw was a bunch of poor, white, rural folk who didn't have jobs. It seemed very normal.

One of the things that's interesting is the ward we are sitting in right now is the only ward in the city which didn't go for the mayor, the only one in the city.

We don't often see people turn out to go to meetings. Frankly, I don't blame them. I think there is a different way of doing politics here, and probably one that's more successful for folks here because they are probably not able to access city government in the way my constituents over in Vilas do, get on their e-mail and bing something off to the mayor and she'll respond.

My district is roughly, the boundaries are Monroe Street, Regent Street, John Nolen Drive, and Town of Madison down here to about Buick Street. It includes the Triangle, it includes the Brittingham neighborhood, Bayview.

I tend to think of South Madison as anything south of Monona Bay. I think it's somewhat more problematic when we look east or west because Arbor Hills for example, they don't call themselves southsiders. And Broadway-Simpson, for all intents and purposes you need a boat to get over there. In the city's geography, that's further problematic because we're a city that only thinks east-west. South Towne isn't even actually in the city, it's in the Town of Blooming Grove.

We are a society intent on drawing lines. So I looked at the Isthmus 2020 plan. Now, we all joke that we can see the isthmus across the lake, but we have no idea why we are being included in this plan because we really see our interests allied more with the south side. We don't have much in common with downtown. Take the Town of Madison. One of the key difficulties to get anyone to pay attention to South Park Street is the fact that the Town of Madison has an entire block of Park Street, and you know it because the speed limit changes. So I think we have on the south side in some sense kind of a fractured identity.

One of the things we learn in sociology is you can't talk about race without talking about class. Likewise, you can't talk about class without talking about race. But by virtue of our housing policy, where we accept Section 8 and where we don't, where we put public housing and where we don't, we tend to concentrate people. And maybe we are not concentrating them based on race. We are doing it on class.

There are 20 alders in this city. Each of us has one-twentieth of the city, or about 10,000 people. My district has half of the public housing, over half. One-twentieth of the city has over half of the public housing in terms of about 400 units. And then we are somewhat surprised about the problems which ensue?

Bram's addition and Capitol View next to it are about 60 to 65 percent minority. Bay Creek,
Greenbush, and the Vilas neighborhood are all about 80 to 90 percent white.

Down in the Broadway-Simpson neighborhood where the city has put $14 million into Monona Shores essentially to move people out to put up nice condos, apartments. That was rape economic renewal for the people who live there. I would really like to see economic development which invests in place as well as people.

Genesis Development Corporation is a good example of marrying places and people. They want a business incubator on the south side. Take over private property, improve it, bring in local folks who want to be entrepreneurs. Teach them what it means to build and run a business.

People are complaining about drug trade occurring in the open, or speeding, or people littering. And they always follow that comment with, if this were happening in University Heights the city would come in and do something about it. And it’s true. The Vilas neighborhood is well organized. I can tell you, get a pothole, get a branch down, a liquor license application, I get calls. Those people are organized and they will not tolerate certain things. I don’t get that so much from here. I think in some sense that folks here have been let down because they have called and nothing has happened. I really see as one of my jobs to convince them that they don’t have to tolerate it. They were talking about not wanting to let their kids go out and play in their front yard because of what’s happening on the streets, and I said we really need to call the cops whenever that happens. We really need to call the cops. And they said, they just don’t come.

In the last race, I raised $6,000. My opponent raised I think $9,000. We were by no means the top either. There was a lot of money spent. That creates another problem for democracy.

There are probably 6,000 people in my district of voting age. Of that, probably 4,000 are registered, and of those about 1,800 to 2,000 vote. And it’s a district that has one of the highest turnouts in the city.

I’m very interested in seeing businesses that serve neighborhoods. The city is actually very fortunate in the amount of economic development tools it has, but it takes a rocket scientist sometimes to access them, and then to find people who want to start businesses and hook them up with this money.

They are taking East Washington Avenue, which is in essence Park Street, it’s the same highway, but they’ve got a plan because East Washington is “a gateway to the city.” I don’t know about anyone else, but when I drove to Madison I drove down Park Street. I think the key is the squeaky wheel, to make sure the city knows that Park Street deserves the same sort of planning expertise that other streets get.

The key really has to be that we don’t want to raze things and put up strip malls. That’s the complete anathema to what I think we want in this city, or this neighborhood. Every eight or nine years the city says let’s do another plan for South Madison. The last one was a vision of strip malls. And it’s just horrific. Fortunately, like all plans before it, it just got put on the shelf and no one did anything with it.

Following the census in 2000 we’ll redistrict again in 2003. I’m very concerned with the way the districts are growing. The downtown districts are going to start looking very strange, pushing out. I would like to see this district include more of South Madison.

When you drive between the Beltline and West Washington, you’re in Alderman Bruer’s district until you get to Buick, and then you’re in the Town of Madison until you get to Wingra Creek and then you’re in my district. So I can’t work too much on South Park below Wingra Creek despite the fact that I’ve got all these people here who are a lot more interested in the Villager Mall than they are in the Jiffy Lube.

There’s a lot of passion out there, and I think there’s a lot of vision. But the key point is getting people to invest in that vision and see it as possible.