

southern wisconsin
BIRD ALLIANCE



City of Wauwatosa

February 5, 2025

Re: Proposal for an ordinance to create Section 24.09.120 of the Wauwatosa Municipal Code

Dear Mayor McBride, Mr. Archambo, and Mr. Wilke,

On behalf of Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance, I am writing in support of Alderman Meindl's proposal for an ordinance to create Section 24.09.120 of the Wauwatosa Municipal Code, establishing bird-friendly building requirements.

Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance (formerly Madison Audubon) is a science-based conservation organization representing 3,000+ members and countless more citizens who support our work to protect Wisconsin's natural resources, including its invaluable bird species. Our organization understands the importance of birds to our economy, community, and well-being, as well as solutions needed to address the many threats birds face.

The City of Wauwatosa provides important habitat for wildlife and birds throughout the year, but especially during spring and fall migration. The Menomonee River and surrounding green spaces offers critical green space within the larger urban complex of the greater Milwaukee area. The number of bird species recorded in the Wauwatosa stretch of that river alone is over 150 migratory and resident species. The abundance and diversity of birds in the Wauwatosa area is something to be celebrated but also requires protection.

The problem of bird-window strikes is well-known, with peer-reviewed scientific literature estimating as many as a billion bird deaths every year in the United States. Our volunteer-led citizen science program in the Madison area, Bird Collision Corps, done in partnership with UW-Madison, Dane County Humane Society's Wildlife Center, and many area businesses since 2018, confirms that one of the deadliest obstacles migratory and resident birds encounter in the area is reflective and transparent glass on buildings. This is a phenomenon that neither needs further study nor debate. It is a major problem – which, very fortunately, is quite preventable.

Employing bird-safe design, and including the use of bird-safe glass, significantly reduces bird collisions. The data are also very clear on this. This is why cities as large as New York City are implementing requirements for bird-friendly glass, most of which are even more stringent and comprehensive than those being proposed by Alderman Meindl in Wauwatosa, and which we helped pass in Madison (2020) and Middleton (2024).

Critics of bird glass often cite concerns over their effects on the view through the glass, but bird-friendly glass solutions are designed to be minimally obtrusive when glass includes a pattern baked or etched into the glass (called "frit") during the production stage. Even post-production window treatments are often not noticed or people seeing them are satisfied knowing their purpose. Following application of a 2x2" dot grid to the Ogg Hall glass connector at UW-Madison, we documented a 90% reduction of window collisions. We also surveyed Ogg residents and visitors to ask their opinion on the dots. Prominent decals placed near the connectors provided a QR code linking to survey questions. Of 27 responses received, all either said they do not notice the dots (41%) or found them aesthetically pleasing (59%). No respondents were bothered by their presence, and 100% of respondents stated that they would be happy to see dots on more windows where bird collisions occur.

Another common complaint by opponents of bird-friendly solutions, or any change that requires improvements to building practice, is associated costs. Others are more qualified to discuss these claims. However, typical cost analyses do not factor in alternative and likely more severe costs incurred by retaining the status quo. Allowing thousands of birds to die from window strikes in Wauwatosa every year means real, sweeping, and immeasurable costs to the city and its residents. These costs come in reduced economic benefits brought by birds through tourism and birdwatching, the latter of which is a multi-billion-dollar industry in the U.S. They come through loss of invaluable ecosystem services of pest control, pollination, and nutrient cycling which birds provide for free and which are irreplaceable. And they come through significant costs to the mental and physical health of Wauwatosa residents, with scientific data clearly demonstrating the multiple health-related benefits birds provide to people. Studies also show that bird diversity is positively correlated with property values. The costs of losing birds far outweigh any potential increased building costs.

The widespread human-caused problem of bird-window strikes is both very significant and very preventable. It has been happening for decades and without action now will only worsen with future costs borne by Wauwatosa's residents. Passing these simple bird-safe glass and design standards is an important step toward a vision of living, working, and thriving in a more sustainable, healthy city.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and for considering this important step.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Matthew Reetz", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matthew Reetz, Ph.D.
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