

Willow Drive car ban pushed

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By Joe Schoenmann

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A short stretch of road where a bike-to-bike collision took the life of a woman last fall should be closed to vehicles, a university panel believes.

A subgroup of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Campus Planning Committee will recommend closing Willow Drive to motorized vehicles, except those used for safety or maintenance.

Thomas Vale, a geography professor and member of the committee, said bicyclers, walkers and joggers would have more room to roam if vehicular traffic were banned from the narrow road.

"By eliminating one type of user, cars, there is more room to better serve the other users," he explained.

Sigrid Leirmo, 34, a UW-Madison biochemist, died of head injuries after she collided with another biker, Gerald Paulson, 50, on Willow Drive last Oct. 29.

Police reports said both bicy-

Biker's death prompts call

clers zigzagged, but ended up slamming into each other. Leirmo was not wearing a safety helmet; Paulson was.

Willow Drive borders Lake Mendota, stretching from the lakeshore dormitories to Picnic Point. A barrier blocks most of the road to vehicular traffic. The accident occurred on an unblocked section which winds around a point near Willow Beach.

Vale's subcommittee talked to campus police and those who have used Willow Drive recreationally. Leirmo died on a piece of road that has historically caused problems, they discovered.

"This has been talked about in the past not because of safety

concerns, but aesthetics. It's at the point now, however, where all the users are concentrated into a single piece of pavement," Vale said.

Vale anticipates resistance to the idea from those who have enjoyed driving on the road in the past — "especially people who remember a time when they were in school here and think of it as a place to drive by and reminisce," he said.

But the time has come, he suggests, when too many people are looking for that same feeling in too small a space.

"There's just no way we can figure out how bikers and pedestrians and automobiles can be adequately separated on that piece of pavement," he said.

The full Campus Planning Committee will meet at 8 a.m. Thursday on the 14th Floor Conference Room of the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation building.