



To: MSA Professionals and City of Madison Parks
From: Friends of Lake Wingra Board of Directors
Date: May 20, 2020
Re: Friends of Lake Wingra public comments on the Vilas Park Master Plan Workshop Concepts

Summary

The City of Madison Parks Division released a survey sharing three concepts for the Vilas Park Master Plan. The concepts focus on general park features and amenities. The master plan itself will guide park modifications over the next 15 to 20 years. The specific designs, details, and public engagement processes for each change will occur later. For this survey Parks will use public feedback on these preliminary concepts to create the final master plan for Vilas Park. The Friends of Lake Wingra Board of Directors shares their comments on the draft concepts below.

Comments Regarding Vilas Park Concepts

Shelter Location

No comment.

Vilas Park Drive

FoLW preference: Concept B

Maintaining through traffic will continue to disturb the tranquil experience cyclists, walkers, runners, and families seek when visiting Lake Wingra. It negatively impacts the character of the park and the safety of park users. **Removing through traffic on Vilas Park Drive will significantly enhance park users' experience** with the southern portion of the park, which is also closest to Lake Wingra and offers the best scenic views and nature viewing.

Lagoon Management

FoLW preference: An alternative to A,B,C

- **Ice skating**: According to feedback from our strategic planning process in 2018, about 1 in 4 people who visit Lake Wingra participate in ice skating during the winter. It is a favorite past time at Vilas Park Lagoon and **groomed ice skating should remain an available** option for park visitors in the winter.
- **Wetlands**: All three concepts show the use of wetlands and forebays. We have serious concerns about transitioning parts of the park or lagoon to wetlands without acknowledging tradeoffs or clarifying certain general design requirements. With that said, we do support the opportunity to find a more productive use for poorly graded and frequently wet areas of the park. Our concerns relate to the following:

- **Without careful design and planning, constructed wetlands and wet ponds can become significant sources of phosphorus.** Phosphorus is one of the three main areas of concern in the Wingra Watershed Management plan. FoLW would like the master plan to avoid potentially creating another source of phosphorus that could offset the reduction efforts the community and City of Madison are taking. See attached article summarizing a three-year study about wetland restoration at the UW-Madison Arboretum.
- **The creation and maintenance of artificial wetlands (and wet ponds) is difficult.** Cattails, reed canary grass, and other invasive species will eventually overrun the wetland areas. Resources required to prevent invasive species overrunning the proposed wetlands would be significant. We acknowledge that any restoration of any kind will require resources to maintain it.

We recommend:

- **Continue to enhance existing riparian buffers and transition existing wet areas of Vilas Park to native wet meadow and mesic prairie plantings.** This would also help prohibit the movement of geese from land to water.
- **Continue to prioritize features like elevated boardwalks** to deter unstructured traffic flow through the wet meadows.
- **Explain to the greater public the environmental tradeoffs** of using wetlands at Vilas Park compared to other best management practices (BMPs).
- **Look at additional BMPs to treat stormwater before it reaches the Lake. Explore the possibility of dredging areas of the lagoon,** and use dredge material to modify grades in the park.

Playground Layout

No comment.

Southern Parking Lot Layout

FoLW preference: An alternative to A,B,C

Friends of Lake Wingra supports removing Vilas Park Drive and understands that means parking will need to concentrate at gateways to the Park. We feel significant opportunities exist to provide a reasonable amount of parking without using waterfront property to do so.

The amount of impervious surface so close to the beach and lake in Concept B concerns us. It will impact the character of the lake, the ambiance of the beach, and there are regulatory and stormwater management issues that don't seem to be addressed. We acknowledge that existing City/County agreements may dictate surface parking quotas in the short term. We would recommend enhancing the parking opportunities near South Orchard Street and also encourage the City of Madison to progressively assess future parking demands and brainstorm unique ways to satisfy parking during peak periods, such as shuttles, parking garages, or a potential partnership with St. Mary's on weekends.

North Parking Lot Layout

Friends of Lake Wingra supports the modified north parking lot entrance and pedestrian gateway.

Amenities

- The **tennis courts are widely used** and should remain in the master plan.
- Picnic areas are unclear in existing conditions and the master plan can **enhance picnicking opportunities** while staying mindful of the picnic-geese connection.
- Non-motorized boat use remains high at Lake Wingra due to its tranquility and no-wake rules; **non-motorized access should be a priority** while considering ways to promote and minimize risk for aquatic invasive species.
- **Multi-use paths are highly desirable.** Our strategic planning outreach in 2018 identified about 76% of people who visit Lake Wingra enjoy walking along the lake and about 37% exercise along the shoreline.

Favorite 3 Features / Features Not Shown That You'd Like to Include

- Removing Vilas Park Drive
- Creating wet meadows instead of wetlands/forebays
- Prioritizing multi-use pathways throughout the park

Anything Missing From the Concept Plan

Future Parking Demands / Trends

Friends of Lake Wingra would like to see the master plan consider ways to **adapt and anticipate future transportation trends as it relates to parking**. The life and death of strip malls provide us with an example of how once vibrant attractions can become dilapidated and underutilized, ultimately impacting the character of a neighborhood or park. If credible sources forecast changes that might not necessitate parking lots of this magnitude over the next 20 years, we think it judicious to include some type of transition plan for parking at Vilas Park. One suggestion is for the City of Madison to consider alternatives to satisfy peak parking demand, such as exploring a weekend parking partnership with St. Mary's. Approaching parking in this mindset also further enhances park users experience at Vilas Park, by providing a park secluded from the city.

Lighting

The master plan should include commitments to use **dark sky best practices for any lighting** required in Vilas Park. This would help safeguard terrestrial and aquatic biota from the effects of urbanization and also reduce the impact on the neighborhood. The Edgewood Stadium process serves as a reminder for how sensitive an issue this is for community members. Proactively addressing this topic will help show goodwill toward the community.