



Photo by Richard Hurd

To: MSA Professionals and City of Madison Parks  
From: Casey Hanson, Executive Director of Friends of Lake Wingra  
Date: February 17, 2021  
Re: Friends of Lake Wingra Comments on Final Draft Vilas Park Master Plan

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Dear City of Madison Parks and MSA Professionals:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the final draft of the Vilas Park Master plan. These comments are specific to the changes between the original draft plan and the final draft master plan. For brevity, this letter will not repeat our [other comments](#) (link at end of letter) that we submitted in December 2020, but we still support and advocate for them.

## Comments on Changes Between the Draft and Final Draft Master Plan

### Items we express gratitude for

Thank you for updating the community with your plans to include recommendations for further analysis of the lagoon. We also appreciate that the City is having exploratory conversations with St. Mary's to explore weekend parking options. These are two components we requested in our previous comments. Similarly, parking and the lagoon remain central discussion topics within the larger community throughout this planning process. Therefore, we wanted to say we see you taking action on these issues. Thank you.

### Removal of paths around lagoon

In the PIM#4, the summary of changes states item III will remove several of the proposed paths around the lagoon to reduce the amount of impervious surface. We would like to understand the decision making involved for this change. How will that impact accessibility and what alternatives are in place to insure accessibility? Does the plan include options like all terrain wheel chairs if paths are removed? Accessibility seemed to be a key request throughout the public engagement process.

### Increased maintained open space

The final draft also now states there's more maintained open space around the lagoon (item V in PIM#4 presentation) compared to the draft. How will that impact the geese movement at the lake? Geese are a large contributor to water quality issues at Vilas due to *e. coli* from droppings. With the proposal of additional shelters/picnic areas near proposed increased maintained open space we want to ensure that the goose problem will not get exacerbated. Regardless of what rules are in place, feeding waterfowl with picnic crumbs is not an uncommon pastime. We are not suggestion to deter communal gathering. We are suggestion the plan lists potential problem areas that could benefit from further discussion so



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we can identify authentic compromises. This could happen for all park features and serve as a great way to document and honor the existing conversations that occurred throughout this process. The plan can offer them a placeholder for future discussions.

### Cost/Benefits of Changes

Our understanding of the major reason for removing the paths near the lagoon (item III) was due to concern over impervious surface. However, with these paths natural areas were also in place to help absorb surface runoff. Now in the final draft, natural areas are replaced with increased open maintained space. Without having technical data to compare the two options, it seems like that negates the change of removing the paths and the latter option isn't necessarily any more advantageous from a runoff perspective. In making this final change, how were those cost benefits assessed in terms of stormwater improvements?

### General Comments

#### Incorporate language that clearly expresses flexibility in design and park features

We strongly encourage flexibility in the interpretation of how park features get implemented. This comment is not in reference to the color of a shelter or the slope of the roof. It is in regards to the general process of how the design is influenced for different park features.

We acknowledge and appreciate that some components of the master plan have avoided language that puts "all the eggs in one basket." We would like to see this enhanced. For example, our understanding, from conversations with those in the community, is that further archaeological analysis is needed to inform respectful placement of certain park features. Based on the findings of these analyses, what is proposed in the final draft plan might not be possible without some major conflict. Will the plan offer guidance for if conflicts like this happen?

Similarly, the land surrounding Lake Wingra has a rich history. Contributions and recommendations from the HoChunk deserve public acknowledgment, consideration, and clear opportunities for the public to understand these recommendations and why they might be important. We feel this could be improved moving forward.

#### Commit to developing a robust engagement framework for implementing the plan

This recommendation originates from our December 2020 comments and we feel it deserves another mention. Spicing up the antiquated public engagement framework of input-output type of feedback and decision making could allow for better discussions, conflict resolution, and consensus building between draft and final versions of designs.

The original language from our December 2020 comments is below.

1. Redesign the public engagement process when implementing major features of the Vilas Park Master Plan

Because of the interconnected tradeoffs among park features and because the master plan does not dive deep into technical analyses of all park features, such as lagoon management, **we strongly recommend redesigning the public engagement process for implementation of the master plan, especially for major features like the Vilas Park Drive redesign or lagoon management.**

Slow, effective, and transparent public engagement provides the most reliable way for equitable community buy in. Our participation in the resident resource group, and from conversations with various residents, highlighted several opportunities to enhance clear and effective public engagement processes. We want to avoid having the community feel like they are trying to board a ship after it's already disembarking. **We recommend the City commits to working with some of the stakeholders to formulate a satisfactory public engagement process before any project kicks off or RFP is released for key park features throughout the implementation of the master plan.** Doing so will also address concerns about having consistent and clear explanations about the tradeoffs of different design features. The lagoon in particular is a topic that has made many wary about the validity of the master plan.

Link to December 2020 Friends of Lake Wingra Comments:

[https://www.lakewingra.org/download/management\\_plans\\_and\\_reports/vilas\\_park\\_master\\_plan/Vilas-Park-Master-Plan-Final-Comments-Draft.pdf](https://www.lakewingra.org/download/management_plans_and_reports/vilas_park_master_plan/Vilas-Park-Master-Plan-Final-Comments-Draft.pdf)