



Photo by Richard Hurd

To: City of Madison Board of Park Commissioners
From: Casey Hanson, Executive Director of Friends of Lake Wingra
Date: March 8, 2021
Re: Friends of Lake Wingra Comments on Vilas Park Master Plan

Dear City of Madison Board of Park Commissioners:

Thank you for reviewing the Vilas Park master plan and all of the public comments submitted. We appreciate the time and resources you invest into making our community have outdoor places we can visit and appreciate. While we have several suggestions at a fine-grain level for strengthening the plan, we'd like to suggest a few broader topics for you to consider when you discuss the plan. We also would like to express gratitude for things that occurred throughout the process.

Items we express gratitude for

- The formation of stakeholder groups to participate in the process
- The planning team's efforts to update the community with plans to include recommendations for further analysis of the lagoon
- The City's effort to have exploratory conversations with St. Mary's to explore weekend parking options. Parking and the lagoon remained central discussion topics within the larger community throughout this planning process
- The decision to remove through traffic for Vilas Park Drive

Issues worth addressing moving forward

Acknowledge Lake Wingra's past with the Ho-Chunk

The land surrounding Lake Wingra has a rich history. We feel making the contributions and recommendations from the Ho-Chunk as it relates to this plan more public and transparent is important. We are not suggesting anyone is hiding this information; however, we realize that we can all do better in adjusting our lenses of how we view the past, handle the current conversations taking place, and approach the future.

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 over the life span of a master plan.



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We acknowledge and appreciate that some components of the master plan will avoid language that puts “all the eggs in one basket.” We would like to see this enhanced. To provide context, here are a few examples:

- From our understanding, further archaeological analysis is needed to inform respectful placement of certain park features to avoid degrading effigy and burial mounds. What have the Ho-Chunk said about these potential problem areas, what informed the ultimate decision?
- Friends of Lake Wingra understands that this is a master plan and so the lagoon did not undergo extensive technical analysis. We recommend that management of the lagoon be one of the first park features to receive funding for implementing, or further technical studies regarding proposed changes to the lagoon. When the lagoon heavily influences other park features, like the location of the shelter and parking accessibility it would be unwise to invest in those other park features until we collectively have a better understanding of how the lagoon will be managed.
- Parking and transportation trends will likely change over the lifespan of the master plan. Will the City consider ways to adapt and anticipate future transportation trends? Can the City identify creative ways to improve accessibility within the park? Can unique solutions avoid potentially underutilized parking and further degradation to the land throughout the next couple of decades?

To summarize, what is proposed in the final draft plan might majorly conflict with what further studies tell us. If these conflicts arise, will the plan offer guidance, suggest priorities, and offer an acceptable degree of flexibility? Will it be preventative to avoid prescriptive changes down the road? We realize the city can't foresee every situation; however, we can be prepared for some of these larger issues.

Commit to developing a robust engagement framework for implementing the plan

Every relationship's communication style whether romantic, professional, or community-based could use a tune up every now and then. We refer to the method, not the person. Maturing the outdated 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.

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.