



3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

In recognition of Vilas Park's role as Community park within the City of Madison Park system, the community engagement process sought to collect input from a diverse cross-section of residents representing many different races, ages, abilities and genders. A primary goal of the Vilas Park Master Plan was to seek feedback from voices that are not often represented within larger plenary efforts. An additional goal was to reduce the perception that those stakeholders living closest to the park have outsize influence on decisions made during the master planning process.

The community engagement process was carried out in three phases. Phase I was characterized by surveys, comment cards and intercept interviews which asked questions such as, "what do you love most about Vilas Park?" and "what would you most like to change about Vilas Park?" and is the focus of this chapter. Phase II involved a period of schematic master plan development where information gained from Phase I engagement was developed into concept designs. These designs were made available for community review and feedback before further refinement resulted in the development of a final master plan report as part of Phase III.

The overall engagement strategy for each phase was informed by the City of Madison's Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative (RESJI). Community outreach and engagement was accomplished through a mix of tools and approaches designed to encourage and amplify traditionally underrepresented voices. The goal was to ensure



Figure 3.1. Community Information Meeting June 26, 2019

Madison Parks Division

that the Vilas Park Master Plan reflects the interests and needs of all residents within the City of Madison. The process involved in-depth dialogues with both residents representing the nearby neighborhoods and residents from the broader community through meetings, workshops and small group conversations designed to be highly interactive and hands-on. A Resident Resource Group (RRG), was formed which included citizens and organizational representatives from the neighborhoods surrounding Vilas Park:

- Greenbush Neighborhood Association
- Greenbush neighborhood residents (not members of Neighborhood Association)
- Vilas Neighborhood Association
- Dudgeon-Monroe Neighborhood Association
- Burr Oaks neighborhood residents
- Friends of Lake Wingra
- District 13 Alder Tag Evers
- District 14 Alder Sheri Carter

A Community Partners Advisory Group (CPAG) was also formed and included representatives from organizations that have a vested interest through a common organizational mission, commercial use of the park, or are a non-residential neighbor of the park:

- Clean Lakes Alliance
- Edgewood College
- Wingra Boats
- St. Mary's Hospital
- Union Sportsmen's Alliance
- Mad City Ultras
- Access to Independence

An Interagency Staff Team comprised of City of Madison staff from Engineering, Planning and Traffic Engineering along with representatives from the Henry Vilas Zoo, UW Arboretum and SSM Health met during each phase of the project to review and discuss plan proposals. IAS meeting invitations were extended to Fire, Police, Metro and Park Rangers for consultation on questions that arose from public input or during team discussions to obtain information from and share the plan with those agencies. Regulatory agencies including the WI DNR, Army Corps of Engineers and Ho-Chunk Cultural Resources Division were also consulted on matters under their jurisdiction.

Focus Group sessions were held to seek input on the project from members of the Hmong, LatinX and African American communities were held at the Bayview Community Center, the Boys and Girls Club and the Badger Rock Community Center. Youth engagement came through the Madison Parks Division assisted The Friends of Lake Wingra in conducting an on-site planning session with students from Midvale Lincoln Elementary School. Additionally, Resident Resource Group members from the Greenbush and Vilas Neighborhood Associations developed surveys, which were shared with neighborhood associations near the park and each group devoted time during their respective meetings to focus on the project and discuss future needs and desires for Vilas Park. (Additional Details on Community Engagement can be found in the Benchmark Engagement Report - Appendix B)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PHASE I - INPUT

Opportunities for engagement in the project Phase I included a community input meeting, comment cards placed in the park, an online public survey, and on-site interviews conducted during observations. These opportunities were in addition to the RRG, CPAG, IAS and focus group engagements. Questions asked on comment cards, during interviews and in focus groups are summarized below. A discussion of the community input meeting and online public survey follow these questions.

Comment Cards:

1. What should the Parks Division keep in mind when planning for the future of Vilas Park?
2. Which of the following activities do you participate in at Vilas Park?
3. Please select current or potential amenities in Vilas Park that are most important to you.

On-Site Interviews:

1. What brought you to Vilas Park today?
2. What do you love most about Vilas Park?
3. What are your favorite activities?
4. During which season(s) do you typically visit Vilas Park?
5. Where do you typically enter Vilas Park?
6. Where are the top 3 areas you use at the park?
7. How do you typically access Vilas Park?
8. Have you ever used the shelter?
9. What would you change at Vilas Park?

10. What is missing or not working well?
11. Do you feel that Vilas Park is a safe and welcoming space? Why or why not?
12. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Focus Groups:

1. How do you use Vilas Park today?
2. What would make using Vilas Park more enjoyable overall?
3. What are the greatest strengths of the park today? What do you love most? What should stay the same?
4. What are the biggest challenges of the park today? What could be expanded or improved? Added or changed?
5. What would help Vilas Park best serve our whole community as Madison grows and changes?
6. Is there anything else that the City should consider as it moves forward?

In Phase I, meetings focused on understanding current park uses as well as desired uses of the park, exploring regulatory requirements and zoning, and discussing potential improvements and amenities that could enhance recreational experiences. The following information summarizes content and discussion from these sessions and describes major themes that emerged. These themes provided a basis for the development of concept plans for the physical spaces of Vilas Park.

COMMUNITY INFORMATION MEETING

The first opportunity for engagement with the broader community was at a meeting held on June 26, 2019 at the Vilas Park shelter. This meeting served as a kick-off to the park planning project and provided an opportunity to introduce the project team, describe the intent of the project, the anticipated timeline and the planning process, while also soliciting input from attendees at the meeting. There were seven stations with informational displays: environmental, historical/culture, community context, traffic, community input and “what is a master plan.” Participants could move between the stations and discuss the information with team members positioned at each location prior to the presentation. Following the presentation, attendees were invited to provide responses via post-it notes to questions centered around four topics. The topics and responses are summarized below.

Topic 1: What parks mean to you. What image, memory, place, or feeling first comes to mind when you think about time spent in a park (any park)?

There were 55 responses posted to this board. Nearly half (48%) of respondents said that open space and nature are what first come to mind when thinking about time spent in a park (Figure 3.1). The second and third most common responses were walking (13%) and ice skating (10%). These answers indicate that seasonal use is important. Kayaking, the beach and the playground were also among the responses. Many respondents specifically mentioned the lagoon, the historic bridge and the woodland borders at Vilas Park as areas where they have lasting memories.

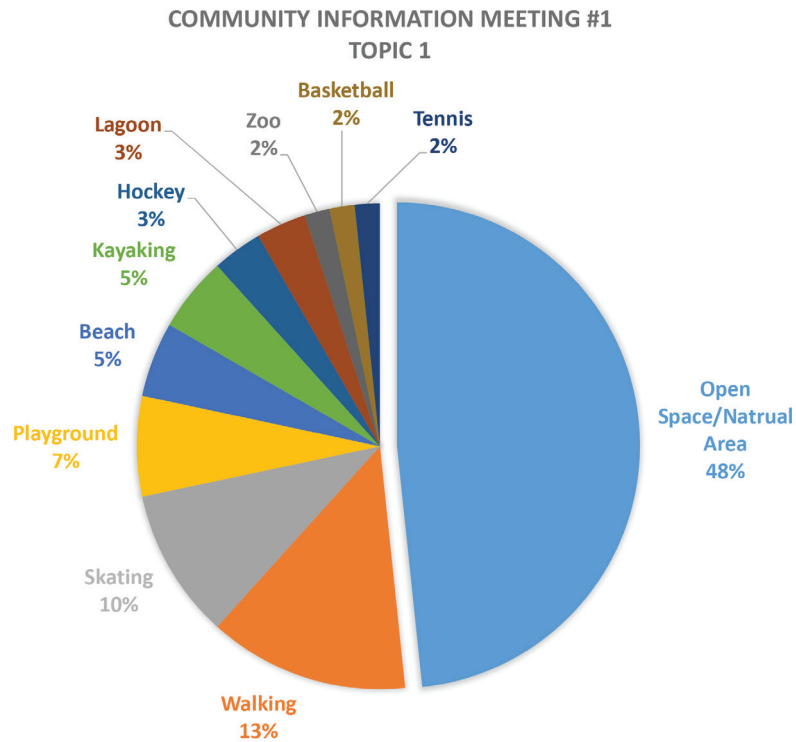


Figure 3.2. Community Information Meeting Topic 1 Results

Topic 2: What to maintain and enhance at Vilas. What 1 to 2 things do you love most about Vilas Park today? What draws you to Vilas Park?

There were 92 responses posted to the Topic 2 board. The highest percentage, 22%, answered that open space/natural areas are what draw them to Vilas Park and are what should be preserved and enhanced (Figure 3.2). This correlates with the high percentage of respondents who answered “open space/natural areas” under the Topic 1. Comments related to playgrounds received the next highest percentage (11%).

Specifically, respondents commented on the need to preserve the “Shoe.” Comments related to beach and lagoon enhancement are reflected within several categories in Figure 3.2, including ice-skating, lake access and management of geese. Although the responses are in individual categories, a theme is developing that points to ecosystem improvements for the park, which are centered on the lagoon and Lake Wingra.

Several participants described walking as a favorite activity in the park but added that they have concerns with traffic passing through on Vilas Park Drive. Suggestions from respondent’s discussion during the breakout time and in comments left on topic sheets included reducing traffic speeds and/or the amount of traffic on Vilas Park Drive.

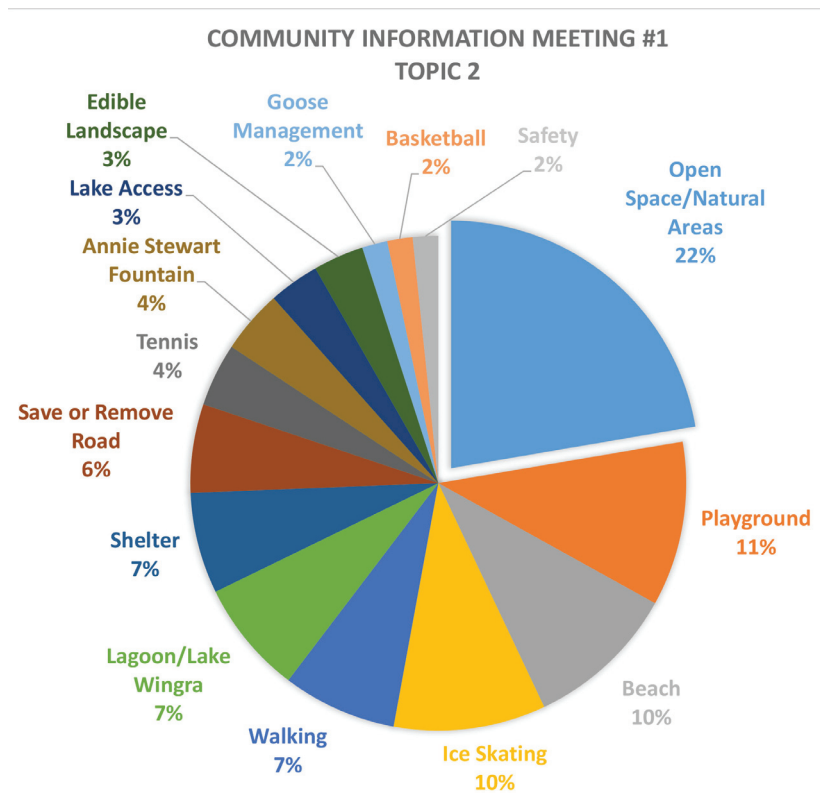


Figure 3.3. Community Information Meeting Topic 2 Results

Topic 3: What to improve at Vilas. What 1 to 2 things do you hope can change at Vilas Park? What is missing or not working?

There were 166 responses posted to the Topic 3 board. Allowing dogs in the park and/or creating a dog park and the issue of parking were the most common comments, both at 14% (Figure 3.3). The comments related to parking tended to focus on maintaining or reducing the current number of stalls throughout the park and condensing parking lots.

Like Topics 1 and 2, several comments mentioned cleaning or improving the quality of the lagoon and shoreline of Lake Wingra, which lends further support to the theme of ecosystem improvements. Respondents attributed the reduction in the quality of ice in the winter to the condition of the lagoon and its high levels of plant growth in the summer.

The words “parking,” “traffic,” and “road” appeared in 47 of the 166 comments. Many described concerns related to traffic on Vilas Park Drive. Some comments offered suggestions for improving traffic, such as reduced road width and separation of uses (i.e. bikes, pedestrians and vehicles). Traffic is an emerging theme from Topics 2 and 3, and also Topic 4 below.

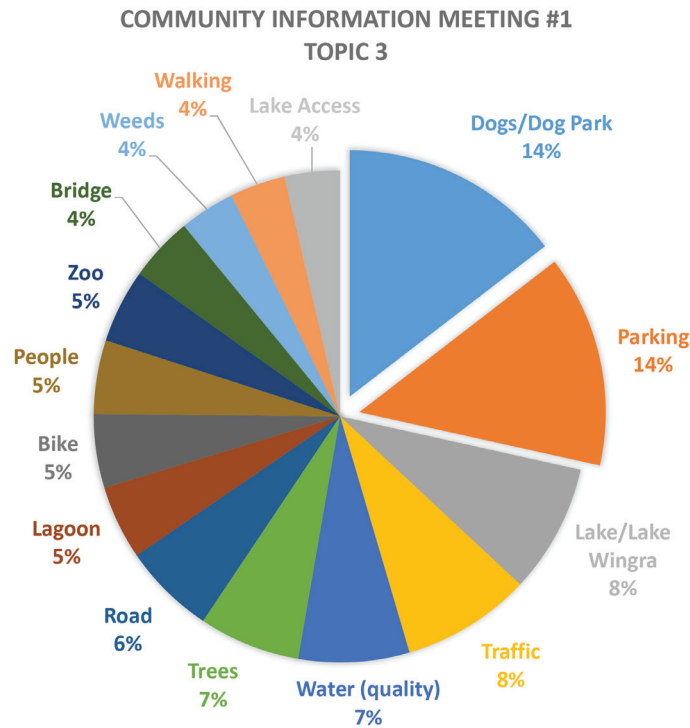


Figure 3.4. Community Information Meeting Topic 3 Results

Topic 4: Vilas as a community park. How can Vilas Park best serve our whole community over the long term as Madison grows? What values are important?

There were 60 comments posted to the Topic 4 board. Parking (20%) and modes of travel, including buses and shuttles (17%), were the two most common comments received (Figure 3.4). Many responses mentioned preserving existing parking stall numbers or reducing parking stalls in the park while providing more accessible paths and walkway connections. Access to the Madison Metro bus system was seen as important to making sure Vilas Park serves the whole community. However, some respondents did state that limiting buses to peripheral roads and allowing only short-term stopping points is highly desired.

The preservation and enhancement of the lagoon for ice-skating, green space, nature and trees were again common comments. The protection and improvement of the ecosystem of Vilas Park is an overarching theme from all four topic discussions.

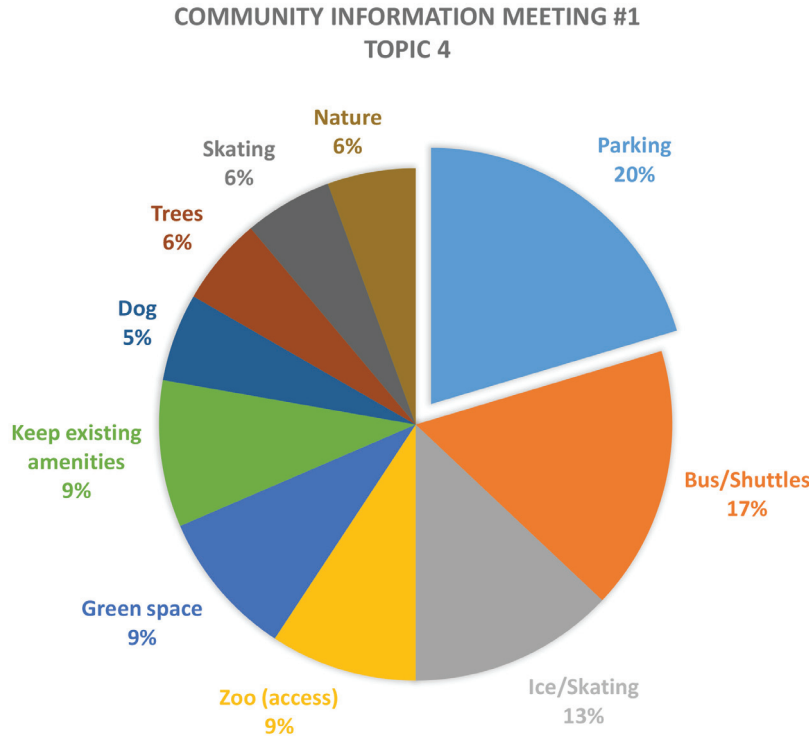


Figure 3.5. Community Information Meeting Topic 4 Results

COMMENT CARDS

From June 2019 through November 2019, comment cards were available at several locations within the park and were available at several local businesses and at Madison Public Library branches throughout the city. During this period, 45 comment cards were collected.

When asked to select from a list of activities they participated in, the top responses were walking (40 responses), ice-skating on the lagoons (30 responses), birding/nature viewing (28 responses), playground (26 responses), swimming (26 responses) and running/jogging (24 responses). See Figure 3.6 for more information.

Respondents were also asked what current or proposed activities were most important to them. From the list supplied, top responses were walking paths (23 responses), nature (20 responses), ice-skating (16 responses), playground (15 responses), beach (10 responses), open field (9 responses), swimming (8 responses). See Figure 3.7 for more information.

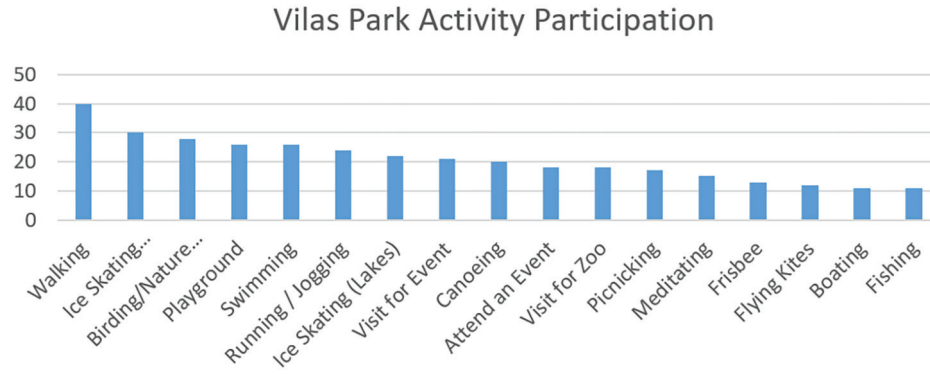


Figure 3.6 Vilas Park Activity Participation

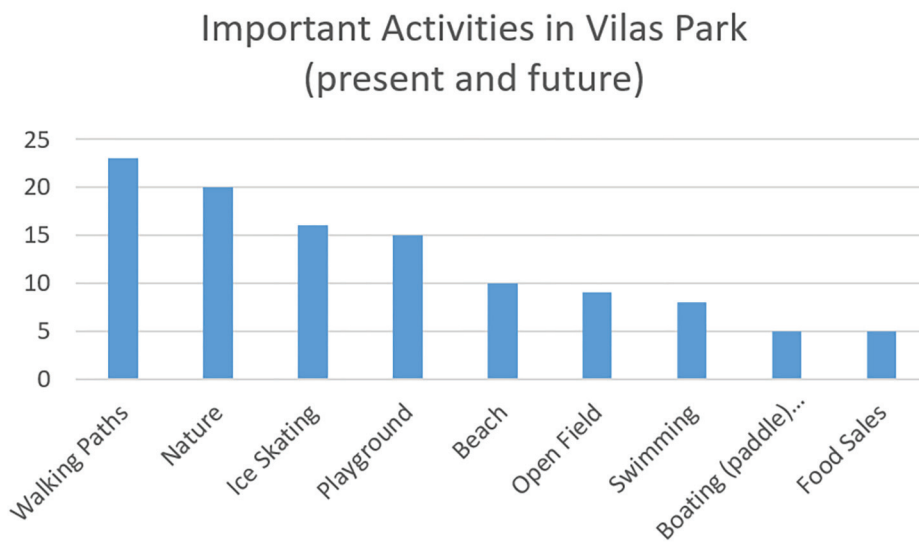


Figure 3.7 Important Activities in Vilas Park

An open comment question asked, “What should the Parks Division keep in mind when planning for the future of Vilas Park?”

Of the 45 comments received, 18 mentioned the importance of preserving or enhancing the natural environment within the park. These responses included:

- “Green space dividing street from Vilas Park - Preserve. No idle/no parking for busses on park streets. Preserve open space/walking space/greenway/lake access.”
- “Keep it friendly for the many birds, other animals - turtles, fish - that live in the area and/or pass through.”
- “Future rainfall - I realize it's a massive consideration but the rains for the past 3 years have taken large swaths of time and space from the park.”

Activities, including playgrounds, sports and special events, were mentioned 11 times. Additionally, comments about safety, including traffic, parking and crime, were mentioned in 9 comments.

ONLINE PUBLIC SURVEY

From July 2019 until the end of January 2020, a public survey was available through a link posted on the City of Madison Parks Division Vilas Park Master Plan Projects website. The distribution of the survey link occurred through postings on city social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter and a blog), as a City of Madison website news item and during the initial round of community and focus group meetings. The link was also shared through email blasts to several City of Madison listservs including Neighborhood Resource Teams (NRTs). The survey was written and revised with assistance from Access to Independence and the City's Division of Civil Rights to ensure that the wording of questions and answers were reflective of a diversity of users, as well as those with a broad range of physical and mental capabilities. A total of 496 responses were received to the survey.

It should be noted that the Vilas and Greenbush Neighborhood Associations conducted independent surveys, the results of which are not included in this section but can be found in the Resident Resource Group subsection of this report. The focus of the neighborhood surveys was different from the online survey in that questions tended to be specific to issues surrounding the park, such as traffic impacts, parking, and the area of the park known to the neighborhood as the Wingra overlook.

Overall, demographic information provided by respondents suggested that the typical survey taker was White or Caucasian (87%) and between 30-39 years old (26.6%), which is not a direct reflection of the City of Madison demographics. According to Data USA, the highest percentage of residents are between 18-24 years of age (see Figure 3.8). Although the relative percentages of age groups from the survey did not correlate exactly to Madison's numbers, the survey was able to obtain input from a broad range of ages, from persons 10 or younger up to 70 or older (Figure 3.9).

The US Census Bureau lists Madison as 78.4% Caucasian, 9% Asian, 6.9% Hispanic or Latino, 6.8% Black or African American and 3.6% reported two or more races. By contrast, 87% of survey respondents were Caucasian, 1% were Asian, 1.6% were Hispanic or Latino, 0.2% were African American or Black and 2.3% were from two or more races.

A majority of respondents indicated that they visit Vilas Park an average of a few times per week (44.5%) or an

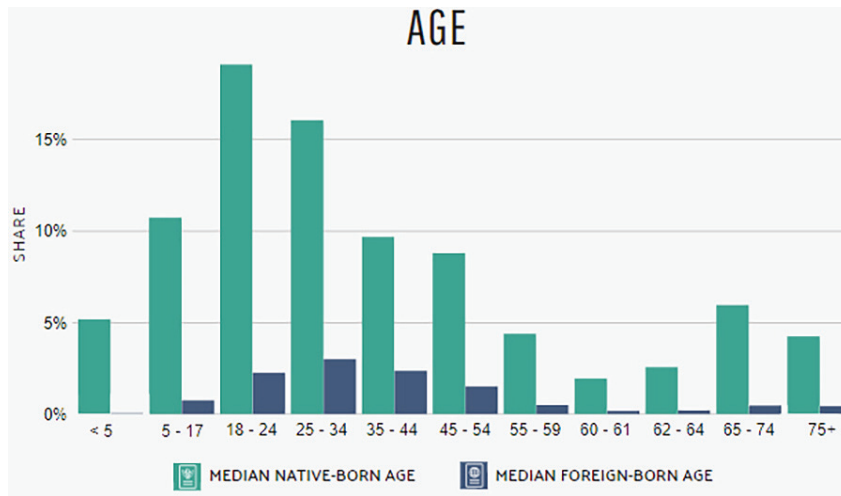


Figure 3.8. Madison Age Demographics 2017

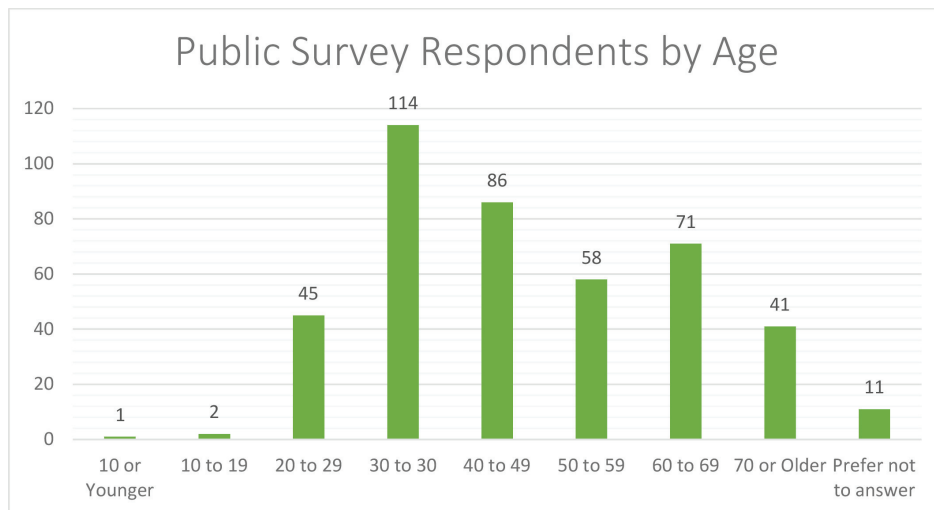


Figure 3.9. Public Survey Respondents by Age

average of once or twice during the season (40%). Of those people who visit Vilas Park, 94% said that they feel “safe and welcome” at the park. Several of the questions in the survey pertained to how respondents currently use the park. The survey asked, “Which of the following activities do you participate in at Vilas Park?” Out of 449 total responses to that question, the top activities were walking (75%), relaxing (62%), ice-skating (56%), playgrounds (51%), picnicking (49%), running and jogging (38%), birding/nature viewing (38%) and swimming (36%). Other uses like boating (34%), tennis (15%), basketball (5%), and volleyball (2%) are in less demand, but responses do show a need for consideration of those activities. See Figure 3.10 for more information.

The survey also asked about the perceived importance of certain amenities at the park. It asked, “What existing (if known) or potential amenities are important to have at Vilas Park?” The top ten responses, in order of preference, were walking, beach activity, ice-skating, open fields for games, playgrounds, the shelter,

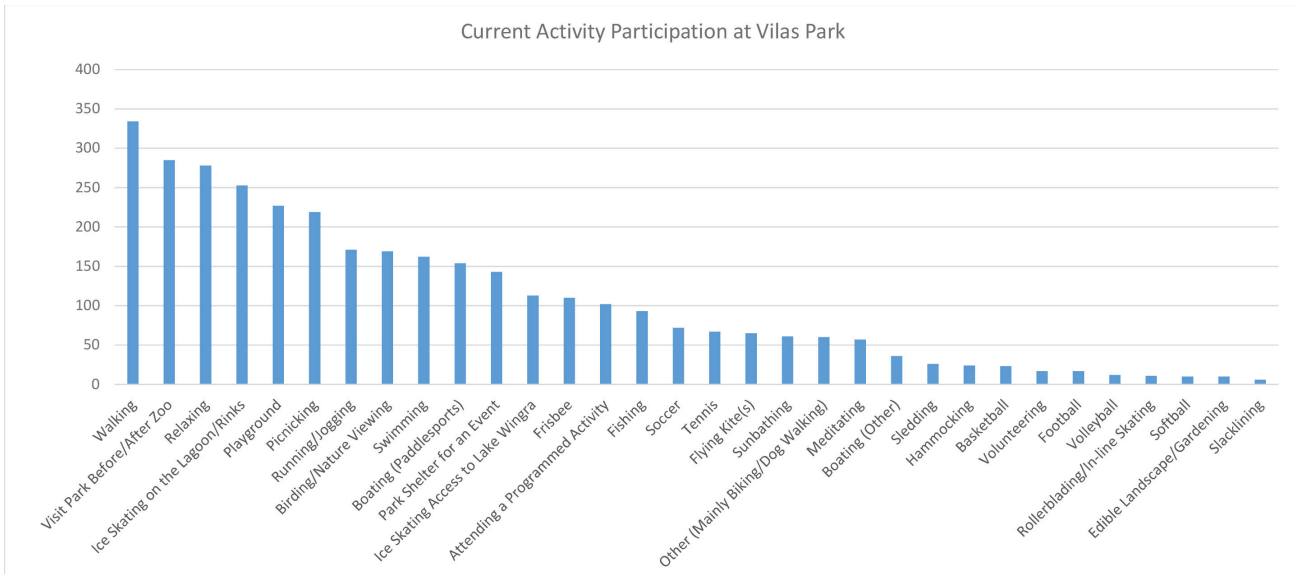


Figure 3.10. Current Activity Participation at Vilas Park

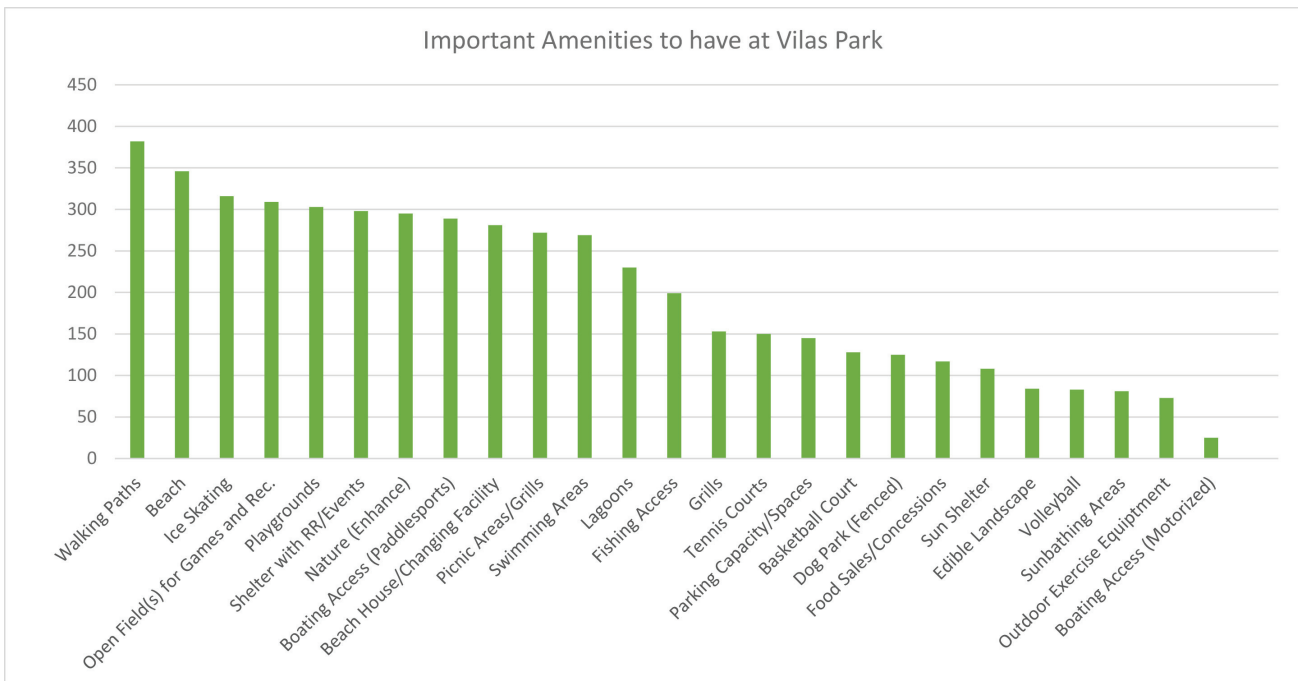


Figure 3.11. Important Amenities to have at Vilas Park

natural areas, access for paddle sports, the beach house and picnic areas (Figure 3.11). Additionally, a total of 32 persons with disabilities, including mobility-related, hearing-related and neurodiversity/Autism-related conditions, provided responses to the survey.

This survey lends additional support to the theme of improving the ecosystem in and around the park. Survey responses showed similar favor towards maintaining the natural amenities of Vilas Park as was seen in comments received at the community input meeting on June 26, 2019.

ON-SITE INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS

Observations and interviews began in June 2019 and were completed in May 2020. The park was divided into ten zones (Map 3.1) where observers monitored and recorded activities and the number of participants, specifically noting if users were alone or part of a group.



Map 3.1. Observation Zones

Site observations at Vilas Park occurred during four time frames: 5 a.m. to 11 a.m., 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., and 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. Each time slot observation occurred every month with the intent of capturing park use for a full year through all four seasons. A total of 40 observations of the park were taken. The data is broken into seasons to describe the activity as the weather changes and schools are in or out of session. Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the features within the park, other than trails, were closed starting mid-March and reopened in phases starting May 26, 2020. The zoo was closed from March 14, 2020 through July 2020.

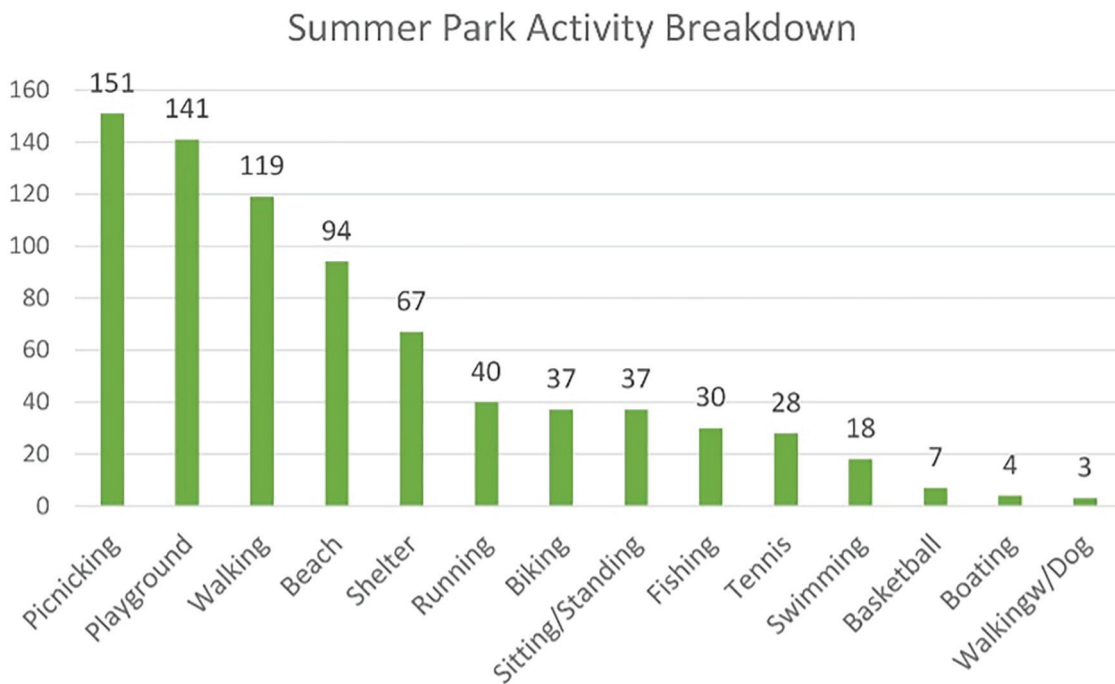
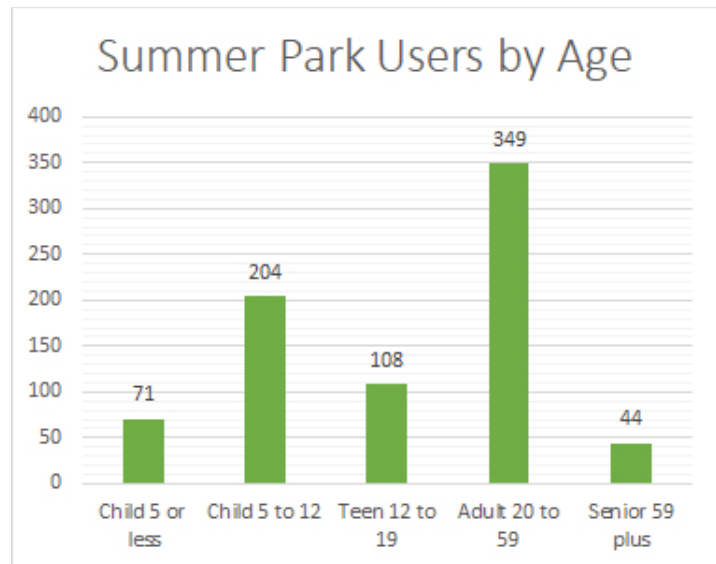
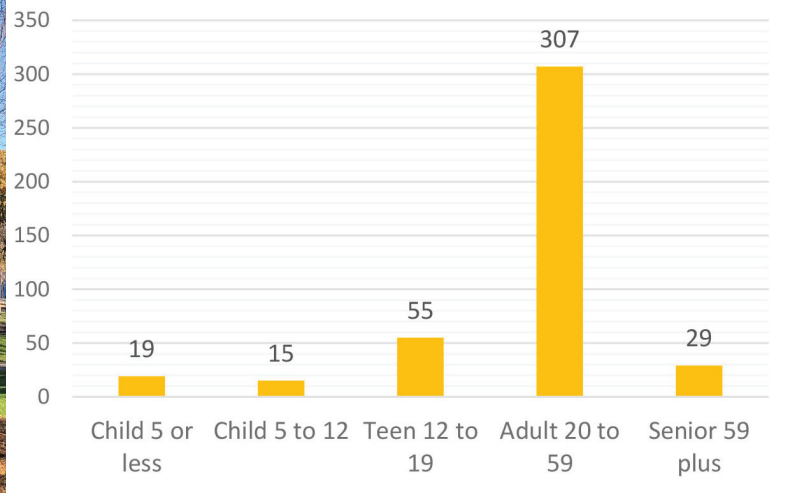


Figure 3.12. Summer Park Observation Results

During the summer months, June through August, the majority of use consisted of picnicking, using the playground, walking, using the beach and using the shelter. The summer park users tended to be younger, as can be expected with children and teens on summer break from school. See Figure 3.12 for a summary of summer month usage.



Fall Park Users by Age



Fall Park Activity Breakdown

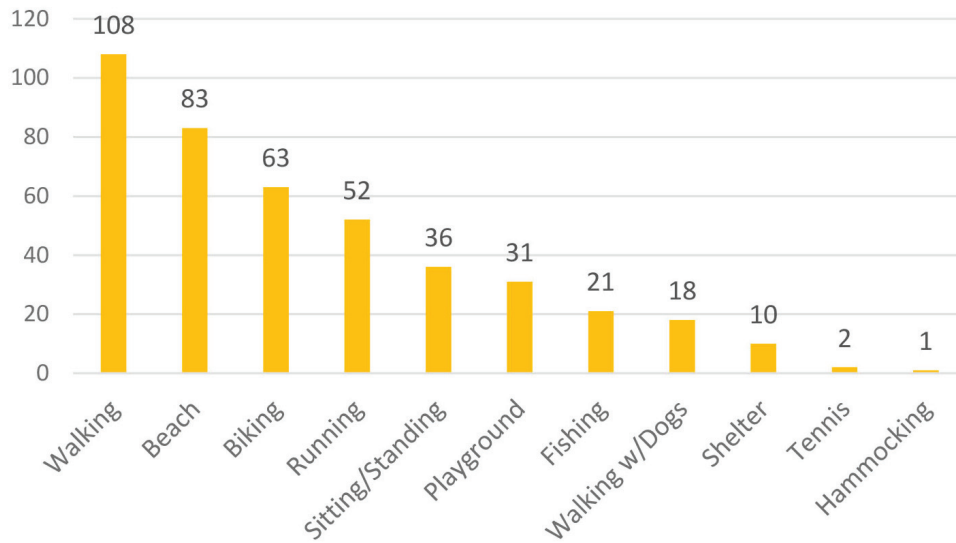


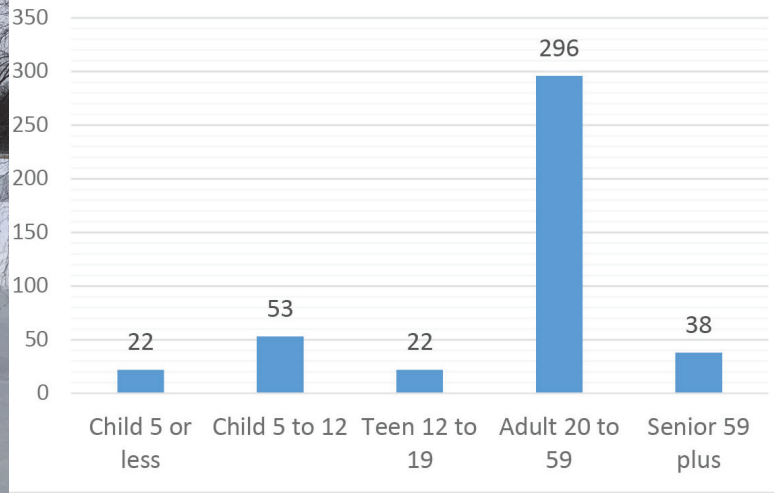
Figure 3.13. Fall Park Observation Results

With school in session in the fall, September through November, we saw the number of younger park users decline. The majority of users observed were adults. Walking, biking and running/jogging became the most popular activities (Figure 3.13). The beach was in use until mid-October when temperatures began to drop.

In the winter months, December through February, the earlier season uses, like running and biking, remained, with the addition of ice-skating/ice hockey, on the lagoon (Figure 3.14). The majority of observed winter users were adults. Walking was consistently at the top of park uses throughout the colder months, including people walking their dogs, despite dogs being prohibited in city parks at the time.



Winter Park Users by Age



Winter Park Activity Breakdown

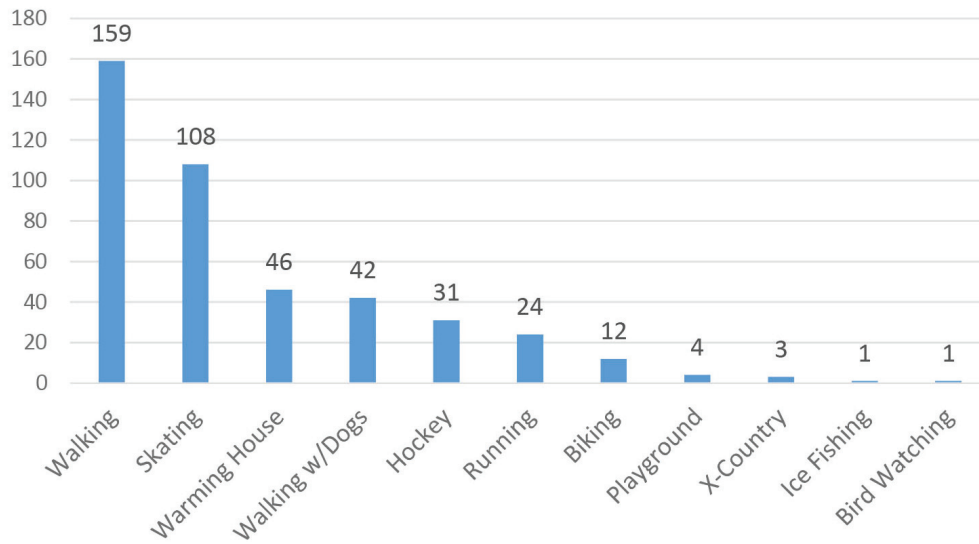


Figure 3.14. Winter Park Observation Results

MSA

When the park observations were being conducted, the City of Madison was reviewing and updating its policy on dogs. In March of 2020, a new ordinance was adopted relating to dogs on city property. Under the ordinance change, all city parks and greenways will now, except where specifically designated as dog-free, allow for leashed dogs. Also, in March, the State of Wisconsin issued the “Safer at Home” order to quarantine the public from the spread of COVID-19. Use of the park initially fell, likely due to uncertainties regarding whether to what extent contact with others, even outdoors and at a distance, could be considered safe, but rose quickly as outdoor open space became a respite from an extended stay at home.

March through May, observations were directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; the shelter, playground, basketball, beach and tennis courts were closed for use most of spring. However, during the same time period, walking, biking and running topped the list of activities due perhaps, to participants undertaking those activities being able to maintain 6 feet of distance from others, as was suggested by Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Playground use also was directly limited by the quarantine, their closure limiting activities in the park available to the youngest users. Adults between the ages of 20 and 59 made up the majority of park users once again, as they did in every season. See Figure 3.15 for spring park observations.

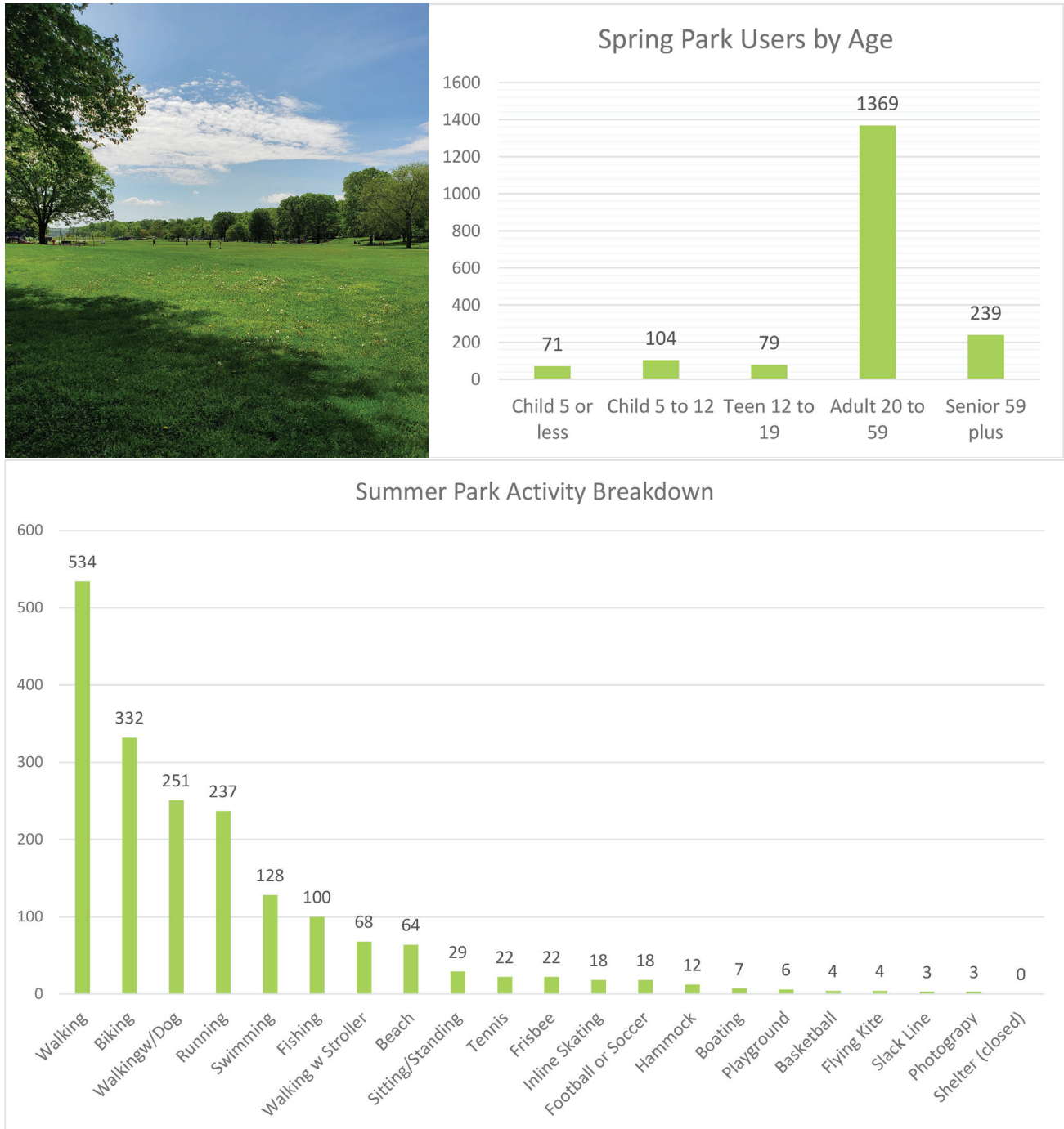


Figure 3.15. Spring Park Observation Results

Over the entire year of observations, 4,103 park users were observed. The highest use observed in the park by a large margin was walking. Walking was observed 1159 times, meaning approximately 28% of the number of people observed were walking. The second-most observed activity was the biking, at 542 observations, or 13%. The majority of the observed park users were estimated to be in the 20 to 59 age group with many families and small group gatherings supporting this majority. See Figure 3.16 for overall observations.

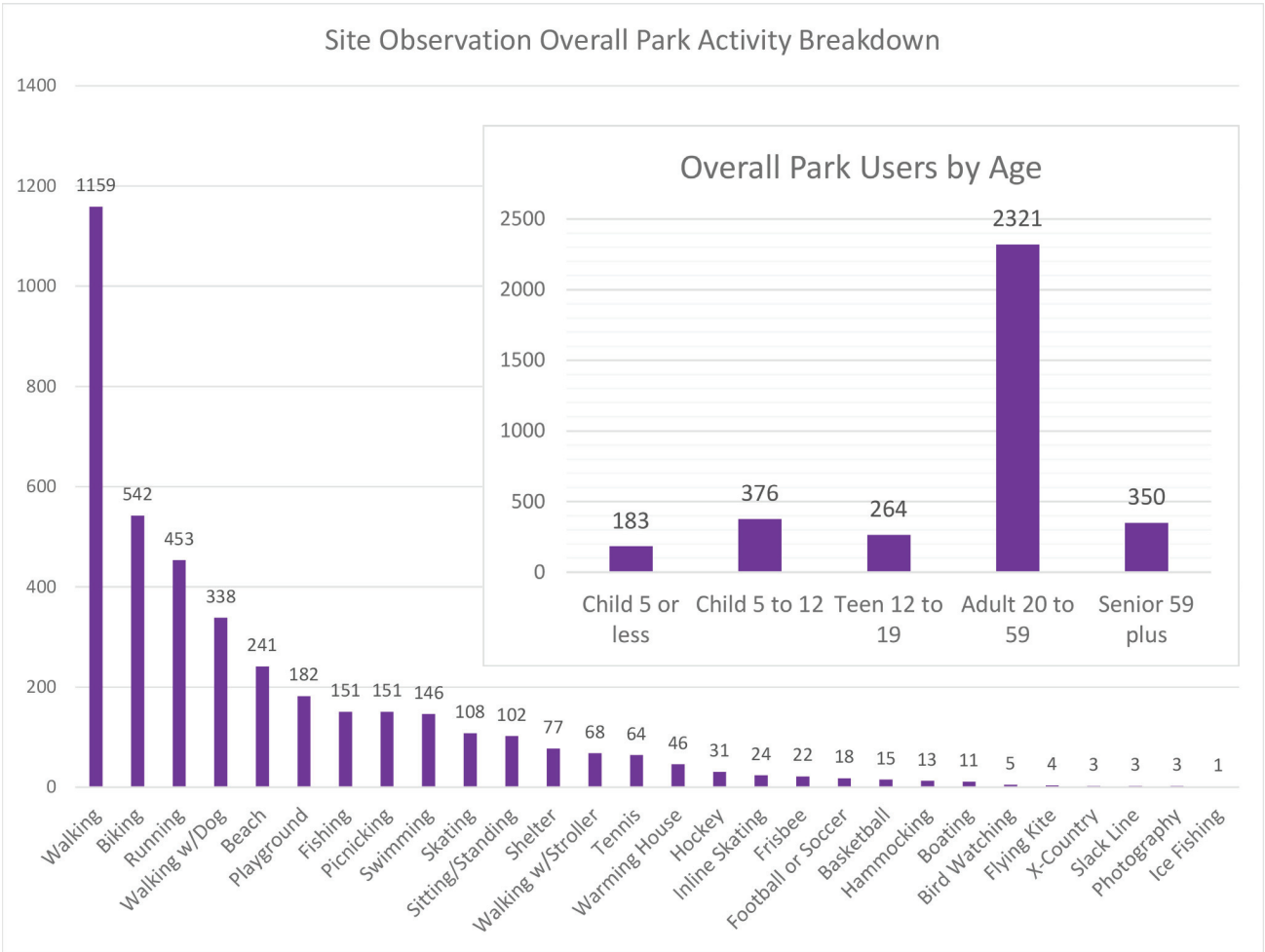


Figure 3.16. Overall Park Observation Results

The zones identified on the Activity Log Map for site observations were used to determine if certain areas of the park have more park users than others. The result shows that zone 8 of the map, mainly around the park shelter, recorded 27% of the total number of park users observed (Figure 3.17). The shelter is used both as a summer rental facility and the warming house for ice skating in winter. The zone around the beach followed with 16% of the total. Zone 7, the site of the mounds in Vilas Park, saw the least amount of observed use at 1%.

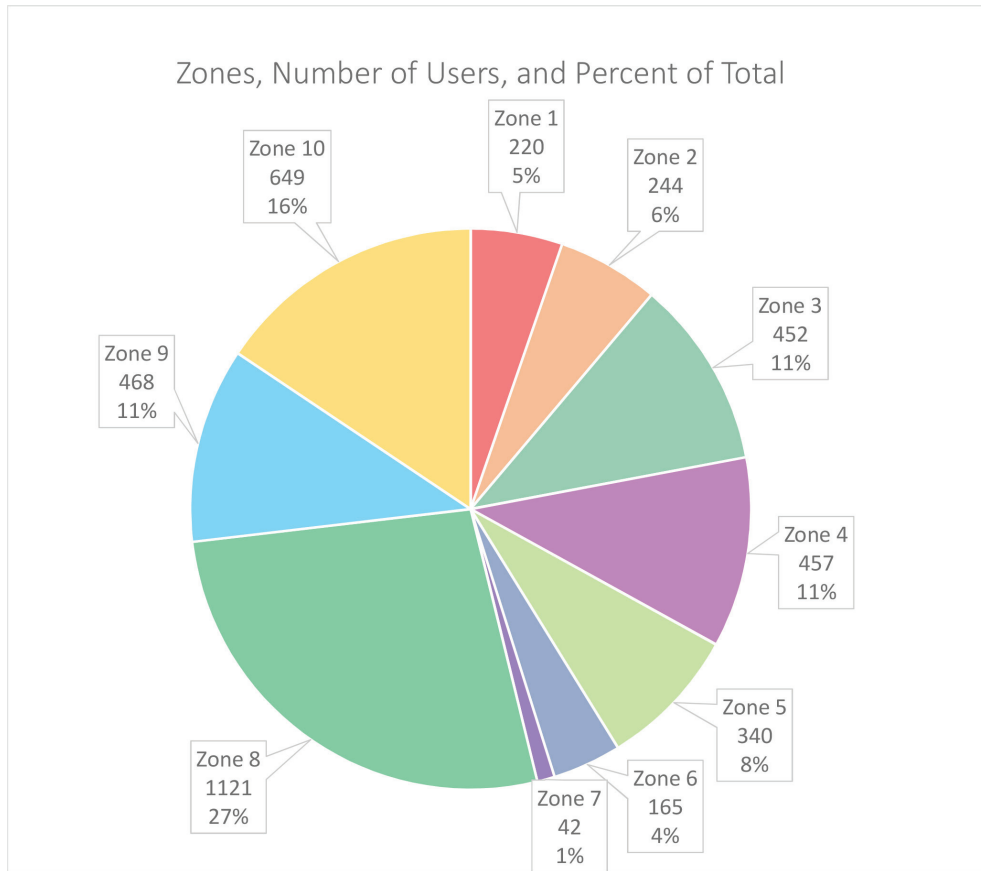
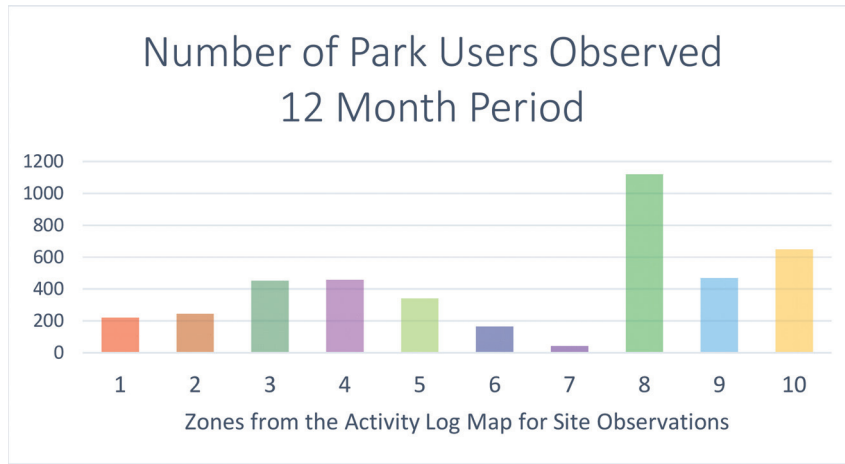


Figure 3.17. Park User Observations by Mapping Zone

In addition to observing activity within the park, intercept interviews were also conducted by the project team while on site. In these brief interviews respondents were asked several questions about how they were currently using the park and also asked about suggestions for improvements:

1. What brought you to Vilas Park today?
2. What do you love most about Vilas Park? What are your favorite activities?
3. What would you change about Vilas Park? (e.g.: shoreline, shelter, recreational amenities, etc.)
4. During which season(s) do you visit Vilas?
5. Have you ever used the shelter?
6. Do you feel that Vilas Park is a safe and welcoming space for everyone? Why or why not?
7. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
8. What is your age?
9. Do you identify as a person with a disability?
10. What is your zip code?
11. How do you identify your race/ethnicity?

A total of 36 intercept interviews were conducted between June of 2019 and January of 2020. Intercept interviews were stopped in February over concern about the spread of COVID-19. More than half of the people interviewed arrived at Vilas Park by car (Figure 3.18). Only two interviewees arrived by bus, highlighting that Vilas Park is several blocks from the nearest bus stop. Most interviewees liked Vilas for the natural setting of the park. Suggested improvements included access to Lake Wingra and the lagoon, updated restrooms, improved playground, added walks and benches, and more trees. When asked whether they felt Vilas Park was safe and welcoming, 86% (31) of the respondents said yes, they feel safe. However, 12 of those did add an additional comment such as “sometimes I get a little nervous in certain areas” or “it can be less safe at night.” One respondent also commented, “plenty of space for kids and other groups (sic) need more playground activities for disabled children.” The ethnicity of those interviewed is shown in Figure 3.19. Of the 36 people interviewed 61% identified as white. The intake sessions provided an opportunity for open dialogue on ways to improve park experiences from interviews with a diverse park user group.

How do you typically access Vilas Park?

(36 individual responses, 44 selections. Respondants could choose more than one option.)

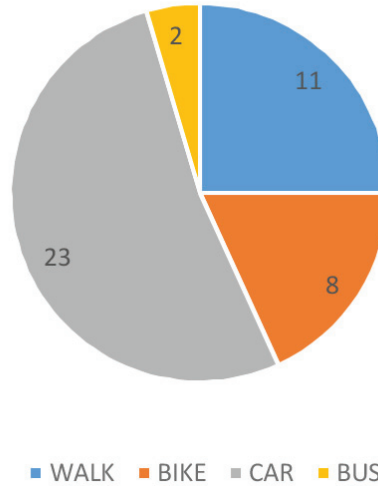


Figure 3.18. Mode of Transportation

Intercept Interview - Race Ethnicity

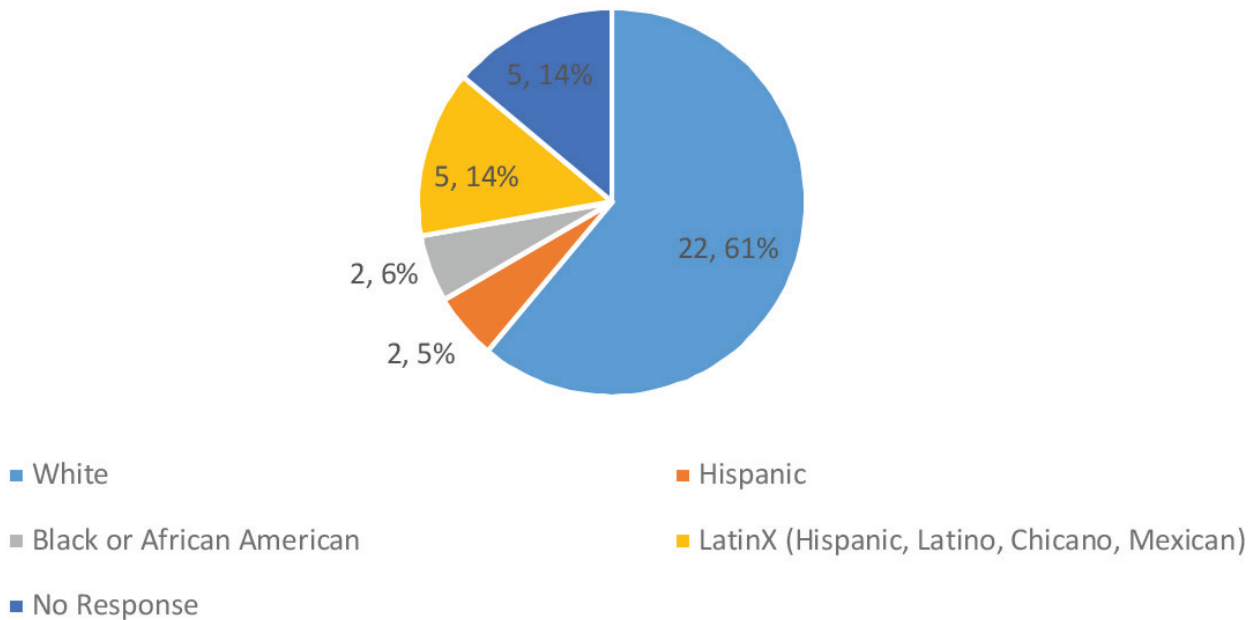


Figure 3.19. Ethnicity of Interviewees

STAKEHOLDERS

RESIDENT RESOURCE GROUP

The Resident Resource Group (RRG) met twice during Phase I and II and once as a combined session with the Community Partners Advisory Group (CPAG) to gather input on background information to support planning efforts of the park. The information presented included the history of the original O.C. Simonds plan and findings from other group discussions about desires for the park.

Participants in the first RRG meeting expressed concern for wildlife, particularly birds and amphibians. They identified limiting impacts to wildlife during any proposed improvements to the park as a priority. Similarly, there were discussions about the overall ecosystem and maintaining a viable natural open space. The protection of woodlands, the lagoon and other natural features of the park were important to the RRG.

The neighborhoods surrounding Vilas Park were also concerned about street parking and the amount of zoo parking overflow. The group felt that an important component of the master planning process was considering school bus traffic and parking issues.

Below is a list of key takeaways from the RRG meetings during Phase I:

- The park is attractive to a diverse population.
- The park is welcoming to people from outside of the area.
- The park is kid friendly.
- Retaining the character of the park is important.
- Open space, views and access to nature are important.
- Flexible space that allows for a variety of uses is important.
- The park should be suitable for recreation that does not require permanent structures.
- The city should upgrade and improve current space and facilities, including playground equipment, tennis courts and the shelter.
- The city should drain or fill frequently flooded and wet areas.
- The city should keep bathrooms clean, open and available for use.
- The city should avoid adding to the number of permanent structures, with the exception of new bathrooms with improved accessibility.

- Maintaining and improving the lagoon, vegetation and natural areas is important.
- There is strong support for expanding opportunities to connect paths and boardwalks to adjacent properties with the goal of creating a trail system around Lake Wingra.
- The city should not add parking to the park. The city should maintain or reduce the number of parking stalls in the park and improve access to public transit in order to reduce the need for parking.
- There is support for the idea of providing edible landscaping and public art in Vilas Park.
- There is support for the addition of a “Wingra overlook” feature at the upper level of the park.

During the first meeting, the Vilas and Greenbush Neighborhoods agreed to include a discussion of the park planning efforts at their next neighborhood association meetings. As part of that effort, representatives from the Greenbush Neighborhood Association developed and distributed a series of surveys that were shared with the Vilas Neighborhood Association and Dudgeon Monroe Neighborhood Associations. The surveys focused on topics of importance to the neighborhoods, including traffic, parking, pedestrian accommodations and protecting natural features.

The findings of these surveys are specific to interests within the context of their respective neighborhoods (Figures 3.20 and 3.21). While it is difficult to statistically connect answers received within these surveys to the questions from the Vilas Park Master Plan online survey, the information is beneficial to the planning

Below are features which have been suggested (in addition to the current playgrounds, playing fields, paths, etc.) for Vilas Park. What best represents your current view of each of these ideas?

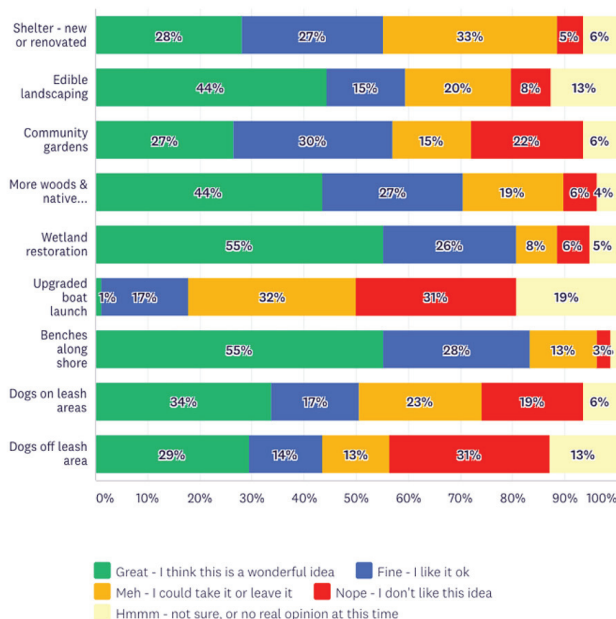


Figure 3.20. Greenbush Neighborhood Survey Responses

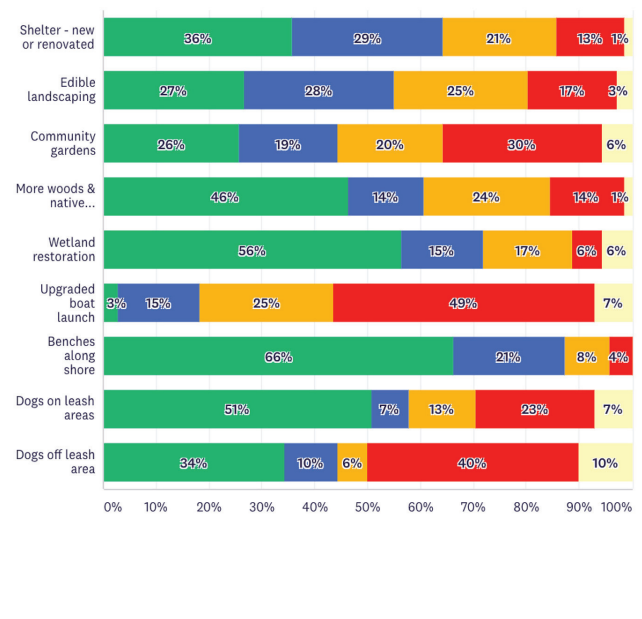


Figure 3.21 Vilas Neighborhood Survey Response

effort in that it represents the focus and concerns of the residents with the closest proximity to the park. One particular question asked what park features were important to people. The responses demonstrated the desire to maintain the natural setting of the lagoon, woodlands, and open meadow, which correlates to the information gained from the online survey and comment cards but differs from the responses received during intercept interviews, which tended to mention access improvements to the shoreline, increased pathway connections and improvements to facilities such as restrooms.

As you can see from Figures 3.20 and 3.21, 55% of survey respondents from the Greenbush Neighborhood and 56% of respondents from the Vilas Neighborhood supported wetland restoration; 55% and 66%, respectively, supported benches along the shoreline; 44% and 46%, respectively, supported more woodlands and native landscapes.

An additional theme that emerged from the Vilas and Greenbush Neighborhood Association meetings reflected concern about traffic and pedestrian interactions on Vilas Park Drive. This was similar to the comments received during the Community Input Meeting, on comment cards, during intercept interviews and from the Vilas Park Master Plan survey. Across the board, residents of these neighborhoods and parkgoers expressed strong concern for pedestrian safety throughout the park.

Additional information on the neighborhood surveys and detailed meeting minutes from the RRG can be found in the Appendix.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS ADVISORY GROUP

Community Partners Advisory Group (CPAG) members shared many of the same concerns expressed during the RRG meetings, the Community Input Meeting and within the online survey responses regarding traffic on Vilas Park Drive and the condition of the lagoon and Lake Wingra shoreline in its meeting during Phase I and II of the project. CPAG visions for Vilas Park Drive ranged from recreating the park and pleasure drive character (a road meant for leisurely park enjoyment in the early 1900's) to eliminating vehicular through-traffic all together, while enhancing bike and pedestrian access and safety.

CPAG members tended to identify with events in the park more strongly than the membership found on the RRG and they provided input on park use related to large group activities around the shelter and Lake Wingra shoreline. Additionally, a representative from Access to Independence provided insights and suggestions for accommodating users of different physical capabilities. One of these suggestions was to improve access to the

park via public transit. The CPAG also suggested adding more connections between the park and Lake Wingra with boardwalks, fishing piers and boat access to provide opportunities for anglers and water enthusiasts.

Below is a list of key takeaways from the CPAG meetings during Phase I:

- Accessible furniture should be provided, such as wheelchair accessible picnic tables.
- Consideration should be given to offering boat rentals or swan boats in the lagoon.
- Alternative uses should be found for the hockey rink in the summer (e.g., as a paved area for basketball).
- Use areas such as parking lots within the park should be consolidated to allow for more open space and natural areas
- The city should modify the ice-skating rink to be a loop around the island in the lagoon (the RRG also suggested this).
- Improvements should be made to the beach house that include separate shower/changing rooms.
- Native vegetation should be restored along the shoreline to improve water quality.
- Fishing piers and boardwalks should be added.

Additional information and detailed meeting minutes from the CPAG meeting are in the Appendix.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus Groups sessions were held with the Bayview Neighborhood Center, Badger Rock Community Center, LatinX, Youth Workshop with Boys and Girls Club Dane County with the specific intent on obtaining input from communities not typically represented through the larger community meetings and surveys.

At a Bayview Neighborhood meeting and bingo night with the Hmong community, participants had the opportunity to draw and or write input directly onto a Vilas Park site map. In addition, the participants held a group discussion focusing on six topics concerning the current state of the park and future considerations for the park's master plan.

Below are the key takeaways from the Bayview Community Center meeting:

- Main uses of the park by the Hmong community are swimming, fishing, biking, picnics, and playgrounds.
- Residents would like to see additional parking, better accessibility around the park and more public transportation options.
- Residents want to maintain access to the zoo and the lake.

- Residents support preserving wildlife habitat and adding edible landscaping.
- Residents support the addition of outdoor activity rentals, include a fishing pier, and the addition of more playgrounds.
- Residents want to stay involved.
- There is strong support for increased park-wide accessibility and the addition of cultural influences from divergent park users.

During the focus group session held at the Badger Rock Community Center, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions in a curated discussion. Takeaway from the meeting include:

- Park is mainly used today for swimming, fishing, biking, picnics, and the playgrounds
- Would like to see additional parking, better accessibility around the park, and public transport options
- Keep access to the zoo and lake
- Preserve the wildlife in the park and add edible landscaping
- Improve accessibility issues, add outdoor activity rentals, include a fishing pier, and add more playgrounds
- Keep the community involved
- Strong support for park-wide accessibility and cultural influences

A Youth Workshops were held with middle school-age participants at the Dane County Boys and Girls Club, Taft St. location. During the session, the workshop facilitator was Rob Franklin (Madison Public Library Youth Instructor), with assistance provided by the master plan consultant team. The consultants led a short overview of the park site and afterwards the participants conducted three activities as described below:

1. The Pic or Draw (POD) activity broke the group into teams to complete a recreation-based scavenger hunt of items common to Vilas Park. The participants drew on Vilas Park plans celebrating the many activities they enjoy, such as swimming, playground, and basketball.
2. The Park It exercise was designed for participants to showcase how they use the park system, as well as gauge what amenities and activities would increase the appeal of the park to youth. While some amenities were location-specific, others were more general desires that youth wish to incorporate into the park. Some of the amenities on their list that do not already exist in the park included food/refreshments, a flower garden, public art, fire pits, Wi-Fi, movies in the park, a petting zoo, splash pads, and a band shell.

3. The final activity, Southside's Got Talent was an opportunity to engage participants in the creation of stories, song and dance about park activities. Narratives revealed unique park preferences and included ideas for improvements related to the beach and basketball courts.

INTERAGENCY REGULATORY MEETINGS

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WI DNR), US Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) and the Ho-Chunk Nation Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) were all engaged in the planning effort during Phase I to provide regulatory input related to Vilas Park. Meetings focused on identifying current best practices per each agency's area of expertise as well as potential roadblocks or concerns related to permitting for future phases of the Master Plan build-out and on identifying sensitive cultural and natural resource areas that could be affected by park improvements.

The WI DNR and ACOE meetings specifically focused on permitting and regulations relating to modifications to the lagoon and the Lake Wingra shoreline. Both agencies agreed that dredging the lagoon could occur with appropriate permits in place. City of Madison Engineering staff helped coordinate testing services for the core samples taken from the lagoon by CGC, Inc. in February, 2019. Material sampling revealed elevated levels of arsenic, which is a fairly common contaminant found in sediment core samples in Dane County and PAHs (polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons), chemicals that occur in coal, oil and gasoline. Given this information, sediment material dredged from the lagoon would need to be managed at a landfill or other controlled fill site. All agencies suggested that if dredging activities were still desired, conducting dredging in winter would be advised to reduce runoff.

Below are key takeaways from the ACOE and WI DNR sessions during Phase I:

WI DNR

- Removing mowed lawn at water's edge and replacing with taller plantings could help reduce geese populations.
- Modification of the shoreline to include wetland forebays or other native vegetation could help act as a natural filter for runoff from park.
- Suggested best management practices for dredging operations:
 - o Silt curtains
 - o Dredging in two phases
 - o Dewatering before dredging

- o Diverting the storm inlet during dredging
- o Permitting may require justification for dredging and an alternatives analysis.

ACOE

- Any discharge (below plane of ordinary high water) from dredging operations in navigable waters of the United States would require a permit under section 404 of the Clean Water Act and section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1988. The type of impact that is proposed to occur determines what permit type is required.
- Modifications to the lagoon would require individual permits and reviews:
 - o Timeline for review is 120 days.
 - o A Class II public notice is required.
 - o Mitigation would likely not be required due to the goal of improving water quality.
 - o Applicable rules – National Historic Preservation Act, Sec. 106 and ACOE Small Navigation Project Study, Sec. 7.
 - o U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must review.
 - o All phases of dredging could be applied for and approved under a single permit.

THE HO-CHUNK TRIBAL NATION

The Ho-Chunk Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO), Bill Quackenbush was provided the presentation given at the CPAG and RRG meetings as an introduction to the scope of the Master Plan. He provided the following suggestions for the mounds and Vilas Park:

- Follow existing City of Madison Mound Management Plan regarding maintenance or disturbance, including the inadvertent discovery practice/protocol, around the existing mounds. A 25' management buffer is preferred.
- If neighbors are to assist in managing the mound, develop a release form to define guidelines and protocols.
- Consider using “dark sky” lighting within the park to protect the nighttime viewsheds of the mounds and other culturally sensitive sites.
- If replacement of the “dinosaur” playground equipment is required, the impacts due to excavating for the structure’s footings needs to be considered. An Archeological report/investigation will be required for any new disturbance in the area.
 - o The project would need to be discussed with the Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office as concepts are developed.
 - o Consider should be given to National Register designation and cataloging of the site.

CITY OF MADISON INTERAGENCY STAFF

At a local governmental level, interagency staff representatives from City of Madison Traffic Engineering, Parks (Ranger staff), Engineering and Planning Divisions, as well as representatives from the UW Arboretum, Henry Vilas Zoo, Metro Transit, Madison Police Department and City of Madison Fire Department met to review public comments and provide feedback and response on the feasibility of topics discussed and questions raised during the public meetings.

Below are key takeaways from the interagency staff meetings:

- Metro Transit: The closest transit stop is Route 4, which stops at Erin St. and Mills St. – better access along Erin Street could help without revisions to the route itself.
- Traffic Engineering: Vilas Park Drive closure is on the table but needs further analysis to determine the impacts on the neighborhoods and local road network.
- Henry Vilas Zoo: The zoo is aware that parking lots are used for Badger Games on Saturdays. The zoo feels that tailgaters are willing to pay tickets rather than find alternate parking. The Henry Vilas Zoo Master Plan and Strategic Plan are coming up for revisions in 2020. The zoo has user counts of 800,000 + per year.
- Fire Department: The existing Vilas Park boat launch is not necessary for servicing Lake Wingra for emergency purposes. The closure of Vilas Park Drive to through traffic would not influence EMS response times.

DESIGN DRIVERS FROM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As feedback from surveys and meetings accumulated, overarching themes began to surface. These themes addressed concerns, desires and goals for the future of Vilas Park. The themes are the basis for the development of concepts, and ultimately, the final Master Plan for Vilas Park. The themes are listed here:

MOBILITY AND SAFETY

- Improve pedestrian safety along the Vilas Park Drive corridor.
- Consider accessibility in design of new trails and park features.

ENVIRONMENT

- Improve lagoon water quality and shoreline access and aesthetics.
- Increase quality and size of natural areas within the park.
- Address stormwater issues in pedestrian areas.

COMMUNITY

- Continue engagement with neighborhoods and park users for improvements and programming changes.
- Provide space for local concerts or community events.
- Incorporate park's history into design and programming.

A PARK FOR EVERYONE

- Offer programmed active spaces for adults.
- Consider allowing dogs in some areas of park.
- Continue to offer amenities and activities that can be enjoyed year-round.

CONNECTIVITY

- Improve the interconnection between the park and Madison through increased multimodal options (i.e. public transit, bike/pedestrian trails, bike rentals, canoe/kayak access).
- Expand pedestrian connections within park.
- Improve wayfinding to alleviate traffic congestion during heavy traffic times.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PHASE II AND III - CONCEPTING AND MASTER PLAN

In Phases II and III of Vilas Park Master Plan development, concept plans were generated and a draft final master plan for the park was presented. The concepts and plans were presented to the RRG, CPAG, IAS, and focus groups for input and option preference discussions. These option preferences were not limited to concepts, but rather to specific site elements, like the shelter, tennis courts, parking lots, etc., within each concept. The goal was to identify highly preferred solutions for uses within the park to form a consensus plan. The findings from the Phase II and III engagement meetings are found in Section 6: Concept Plans and Section 7: Master Plan.

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