



2016 Great Taste of the Midwest Park Commission Proposal – April 13, 2016

Summary

The Madison Homebrewers and Tasters Guild (MHTG), the organizers of the Great Taste of the Midwest, seeks to accommodate a broader range of ticketed guests at the event which is held annually at Olin-Turville Park on the second Saturday in August. This would result in an increase in the number of persons in the park by approximately 2,000 to a total capacity of 10,000 people in the park for the event. In addition, traffic management and patron safety would be significantly improved by closing off public access to the Olin-Turville boat launch on the second Saturday in August.

Introduction

The Madison Homebrewers and Tasters Guild is a nonprofit 501(c)(4) organization, which was created “to aid and educate members in the appreciation and legal production of fermented malt beverages, including those brewed at home and those brewed commercially.” Significant organizational effort over the course of each year goes into producing The Great Taste of the Midwest beer festival. The Great Taste of the Midwest is organized entirely by club member volunteers who receive no monetary compensation and with additional volunteer support provided by community partners. We are justifiably proud of this event. It is a massive undertaking and is a highlight of the summer for visitors and brewers from around the country. It has become a destination event that has even attracted international interest.

Born out of a desire to provide Madisonians and visitors the opportunity to taste craft beer from local and regional ‘micro’ breweries long before ‘craft beer’ was popular, The Great Taste of the Midwest is now celebrating its 30th year. It has evolved into one of the premier beer festivals in the country, providing ticket holders the opportunity to sample beer from approximately 150 different breweries from around the Midwest.

Since its move in 1995 from Olin Terrace near the capital to Olin-Turville Park, the current venue’s setting and view of downtown Madison have become iconic and recognized as the home of the Great Taste. Our patrons, the brewers, and the volunteers all consider the park to

be an essential part of the event. Indeed we believe that a large part of the success of the festival has hinged upon the operational advantages that Olin-Turville Park provides for a non-driving event. It is the ideal venue for this event and we are grateful for the privilege of having hosted it here for the past 21 years. It is our desire to continue to do so into the future.

Economics of the Festival

Festivals are a central contribution to local vitality and provide focus and stimulus for cultural tourism. The following information is included in this proposal as we believe it is relevant in highlighting the value of the Great Taste of the Midwest as an economic asset to the city of Madison and its residents.

Every year MHTG sets a goal of contributing \$30,000 primarily to local charities in Madison and Dane County. **In our 30 year history, we've made over \$380,000 in charitable contributions.** Some of our recipients include Breast Cancer Recovery Foundation, West Madison Special Olympics, WYOU, WORT, Wil-Mar Center, Madison Urban Land Trust, Second Harvest Food Bank, Porchlight, and many others. The Great Taste serves as the vehicle for raising funds that support these organizations and they now have a vested interest in the success of this event as well.

In 2011 MHTG resolved to evaluate its impact on the local economy. Experience suggested that the number of out-of-town visitors had steadily increased over time but that it had not been quantified. A workgroup of MHTG members was convened to design, implement, and evaluate an economic impact study of the Great Taste that would survey attendees, exhibitors, and area vendors. The goal was to evaluate not only the impact of the festival itself, but of the associated events around the city that had been initiated in response to increased interest generated by the event. At the time that this was conducted, the direct economic impact was determined to be approximately **\$1,475,400**.

In the 5 years since we last examined the economic impact of the Great Taste, the craft beer landscape has shifted dramatically. The number of breweries nationally and in Wisconsin has doubled as has the market share for craft beer. There has been a significant increase in the number of events in and around the city of Madison that have capitalized on the popularity of the Great Taste, particularly on the Friday prior to the event itself. National brewing trade organizations schedule workshops and continuing education seminars to coincide with the Great Taste and brewing industry representatives travel to Madison to take advantage of networking opportunities. Even the advance sales for Great Taste tickets that take place in early May each year has served as the genesis for what is now a wildly successful Madison Craft Beer Week. Accordingly, there is no doubt that the economic impact of the Great Taste of the Midwest has dramatically increased since our previous assessment.

Proposed Attendance Adjustments for 2016

In recent years we've made operational adjustments to address the acute pressure that we've experienced from both breweries and patrons wishing to attend an event that draws considerable admiration among enthusiasts and professionals alike. We have taken measures

to alleviate some of these pressures, such as rotating out some breweries periodically, adjusting available park space for new ones to attend, and allocating a number of tickets sold to the public to be made available by random mail order lottery. (Tickets directly sold at locations around Madison are always sold out within a few hours and buyers typically camp in line for hours and even overnight, for the opportunity to purchase tickets.)

Within the park itself, we have proactively made adjustments and improvements to the event layout and operations to allay any concerns that may arise from City of Madison, Parks Department, and Madison Police Department based upon pre-event meetings and post-event debriefings in which all parties share feedback and observations to aid in future planning. Included among those adjustments have been to use areas of the park more creatively to reduce foot traffic in grassy areas, create more open areas by adjusting tent layout, and strategically placing more popular attractions near less sensitive areas. This past year we utilized areas that had not previously been open to patrons by placing the most popular breweries along the paved areas of the park, which reduced foot traffic on grassed areas and eliminated the potential for congestion in other areas of the park. Combined, these measures have created vastly more space within the event area that can be utilized more efficiently. (see attached document showing an aerial view taken by Google during the 2012 Great Taste)

It has been our belief for many years that we are more than capable of accommodating additional attendees without compromising the essence of the event nor the safety of our patrons and it has never been more necessary to address this than it is now. The adjustments that we have willingly made as requested come at a cost. Requests are routinely made for us to hire more off-duty police officers, add more fencing to new areas, add more EMS coverage, add additional traffic management measures, and more. In all cases we understand that we must meet these obligations and we do so willingly. However, we continue to operate at a static attendance level which limits our ability to maintain our standard of charitable giving and offset the rising costs associated with additional operational requirements.

Since 2010, we have operated at an attendance cap of 6000 ticketed patrons. In addition to those patrons, the staff, volunteers, vendors, musicians, and brewers bring total capacity to approximately 8000 people in the park for the event itself. We have managed this level effectively and dynamically since 2010. **If MHTG were permitted to increase the total capacity of persons in the park to 10,000, we believe that we could effectively accommodate the overwhelming demand from those who wish to attend particularly among brewing industry visitors and brewery staff.** The increased revenue from those ticket sales would also allow us to offset the aforementioned cost increases and ensure our viability as a charitable partner in our community.

Proposed Operational Adjustments for 2016

The greatest challenge we have faced is not within the event itself but with respect to how traffic management requests have been increasingly difficult to accommodate. The most significant

barrier to effective traffic management has been the uncompromising requirement to maintain limited public access to the boat launch before, during, and after the event.

The Great Taste is obviously a non-driving event for patrons who are sampling beer. In fact, next to the picturesque setting of the park itself the most appealing feature of Olin-Turville Park from an organizational standpoint is that public parking is nearly non-existent when we close off access to public traffic. Both existing parking lots and the frontage road are used as staging areas for transportation alternatives that we arrange in advance which includes heavily subsidized taxi rides (only a \$1 cost to any home or hotel in Dane County), free shuttles to and from sites around Madison, and charter busses for groups traveling from out of town. This minimizes any incentive for anyone to bring their own wheels to this event.

Our traffic management is made more difficult by the requirement to maintain open access for what we've observed to be the minimal use of the boat launch that has occurred on the second Saturday of August over the last decade. We have had volunteers stationed in that area specifically to monitor boat traffic, which has numbered as low as the single digits in some years. This is an indication to us that the popularity of the Great Taste is known to boaters as a date to avoid Olin-Turville Park. It is evident to us that the efficient and safe flow of both vehicular and pedestrian traffic is compromised as a direct result of maintaining what is already limited public access. Further limitation is wise and prudent in our judgment.

By closing off public access to the Olin-Turville boat launch on the second Saturday of August, we alleviate many of the traffic management challenges that occur at the entrance checkpoints and also provide for a more streamlined load-in/load-out area before, during, and after the event. Less traffic overall is in the best interests of safety and provides more options for the safe exit of patrons post-event.

We are grateful for the traffic management assistance that has been provided by Madison Police Department and believe that closing off boat launch access on the day of the event will ensure that we are able to meet their expectations for providing a safe environment for all attendees.

MHTG Commitment to Olin-Turville Park

We are committed to protecting and preserving our public parks as we are, after all, residents of Madison ourselves. It is our desire to maintain an enduring partnership with the City of Madison and Madison Parks to secure the long term future of this iconic event at Olin-Turville Park. We are grateful for the support that City and Parks staff have provided over the years to facilitate our efforts to maximize our economic impact while minimizing our environmental impact. We would enthusiastically embrace opportunities to help preserve and protect Olin-Turville Park in any capacity if called upon.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Madison Homebrewers & Tasters Guild by:
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Aerial view of Olin Park During the 2012 Great Taste of the Midwest

Based on vehicle placement and shadow patterns, we estimate that Google mapped Olin Park at approximately 4 pm when the Great Taste was at full attendance. Crowd density is easily managed as evident here. In subsequent years since this photo was taken, we've dispersed crowd density even more by utilizing previously unused areas of the park.