



# Madison Parks Division

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Date: May 8, 2024  
To: Board of Park Commissioners  
From: Eric Knepp, Parks Superintendent  
**Subject: Olbrich Park North Parcel Park Development Plan**

In 2023, Parks Division Planning and Development staff began the process of creating a Park Development Plan for the Olbrich Park North Parcel. Once complete, this plan will provide a framework for future development and improvements, including identifying desired amenities and resource protections. Public engagement efforts related to the plan included direct engagement with stakeholders, including Olbrich Botanical Gardens and Garver Events, along with two public information meetings and an online survey to gather comments regarding needs and desired outcomes for the parcel.

## **Brief History of North Parcel**

The site houses the Garver Feed Mill, which was originally built for the United States Sugar Company and later owned and operated for manufacturing purposes by Garver Feed & Supply Company. Garver was designated as a City of Madison Landmark in 1994 and State and National Register of Historic Places in 2017. In 1997, Olbrich Botanical Society (OBS) acquired Garver Feed Mill and approximately 5 acres of adjacent land, which was transferred to Parks and combined with 17.8 acres of land acquired by Parks through DNR grant programs for the North Plat. The area currently considered within the Plan served for decades as unimproved vacant land and a back of house operations for Olbrich Botanical Gardens for production of leaf mulch, composting, storage of bulk product and other work supplies, with the intent to eventually expand the Gardens. There were plans made early in the ownership of the parcel for Gardens expansion and significant parking. The general concept of this can be seen in light pink outline on the [2009 Olbrich Master Plan](#). The 2009 Plan changed the future planned use to a more naturalized use north of preserving the buildings and Gardens maintenance area, while also planning for parking around Garver and a potential dog park. An RFP was awarded to Commonwealth for an Arts incubator in this space, which led to a referendum being authorized by the [Common Council](#) for the April 2009 election to address the needs of MGO 8.35, Preservation of Shoreline Parks. That referendum passed, but the recession led to the project failing to take off. In 2014, the Board of Park Commissioners and Common Council authorized a new Request for Proposals (Legislative File 35479, RES-14-00752). After significant community engagement the rights to develop the space was awarded to Baum Revision for their vision of adaptive reuse of the Garver Building and proposal for an adjacent microlodge development on Lot 2. The expansion of leasing park land to Lot 2 for private development was supported by the Common Council and Board of Park Commissioners and had significant support from the neighborhood and public at large. The City of Madison subsequently sold the Garver Feed Mill through the surplus process and entered into a Development Agreement with Baum Revision (Legislative File 48607, RES-17-00785) that included direct City financial support of the redevelopment of the building. The City of Madison

also purchased additional park land on the far west side of Madison to accommodate the need to free portions of the land from DNR restrictions prior to executing a long-term lease of the land. The redevelopment of the Mill was completed in 2019, but Baum was unable to fulfill their commitment to develop the additional five acres for purposes of establishing a microlodge development, and Baum's rights to develop Lot 2 reverted back to the City for the land to return to park uses.

### **Environmental Concerns of North Parcel**

The soil around the Garver Feed Mill is contaminated from its historic industrial uses, as such, the land is listed as a DNR brownfield site. Under the original Development agreement, although the City was responsible for managing all contaminated material at Garver, Baum's plan for Lot 2 addressed the DNR capping requirements for site remediation. A portion of the site was used for gravel crushing operations to support nearby road construction projects in 2022 and 2023, as well as to clean up construction debris related to the Baum redevelopment. Due to the land reverting back to park purposes, the total obligation of capping and remediating the site is the responsibility of the Parks Division. This critical work has been significantly delayed due to the modifications of the plans.

### **Considerations of the Park Development Plan**

Throughout the process to create the proposed plan, staff shared and evaluated a number of different scenarios for the parcel. The proposed plan includes restoration of new and existing natural areas, complete with walking paths, picnic area, a nature play area and an open turf area. In addition, the plan includes a support space for Olbrich Botanical Gardens and a moderately sized parking lot. Staff also received feedback about the desire for community gardens which may be considered in the future if there is interest, commitment and formal agreement with an organizer, but any gardens must be constructed as raised planters due to the risks associated with the brownfield site. Staff also heard significant feedback supporting adding a restroom to this portion of the park. That was not included in the plans given the fact that Olbrich Park is already on the very highest levels of available public restrooms.

Throughout the process and as the plan is before the Commission for consideration, staff have continued to receive comments regarding parking. While some wish to limit or eliminate additional parking, others feel significantly more is needed. As with any proposed changes, it is unlikely that the adopted plan will be fully supported by all, and staff continues to try to strike an appropriate balance point. Although the Parcel is situated along major multi-use paths and transit lines, this area of the city is a destination for many guests from outside of the immediate neighborhood and city limits, many of which depend on vehicles to get to either the Gardens, Olbrich Park (classified as a community park), Garver Events, boat launches or the Biergarten/Rutabaga rentals. Over time, through the redesign of the Lakeland Ave. stub, which reduced parking by about ½ and the redesign of the Biergarten and boat launch parking lots, the amount of parking in the area has been or will likely continue to be reduced. While it would be irresponsible to construct parking lots to meet peak demand, it is also not reasonable to ignore a long-standing issue in an extremely busy urban park that is a significant destination for a variety of purposes. Parks staff continues to evaluate ways to best size and locate parking facilities within parks, but it is clear there will always be opposition to them as well as advocacy for their importance. The Commission has wrestled with this issue many times and staff suggest that the Commission, as the policy making body controlling park land use, is best positioned to strike the appropriate balance point on the issue.

**Priorities for the Parks Division:**

Through the proposed plan, the Parks Division has attempted to balance its obligations to restore the brownfield site with the desires and needs of the community and stakeholders to create the best possible park space. There are two absolutely critical priorities identified in the plan that must be addressed within very short order. Those priorities that are included in the Parks Division's Capital Budget proposals are as follows:

1. **Brownfield Remediation:** The contaminated land must be cleaned up and site capped in accordance with DNR conditions in order to protect the community and environment from further risk of contamination. This includes final grade of the site.
2. **Olbrich Back of House Support Area:** Olbrich continues to serve over 340,000 guests each year. The proposed service area provides space necessary to support operations and frees up parking stalls in Olbrich proper parking lot that are often used for short-term storage of material.

Any other improvements or amenities identified in the Park Development Plan for the North Parcel will require additional design work and public engagement, as well as securing additional funding in the budget process. Due to the current financial situation of the City of Madison, it is difficult to say when funding could be available to construct any additional improvements as this plan will join the dozens of currently unfunded development plans in the system.