



# Madison Parks Division

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November 3, 2022

To: Board of Park Commissioners

From: Eric Knepp, Parks Superintendent  
Greg Mickells, Madison Public Library Director

## **Background**

On March 11, 2020, the Madison Public Library Board and the Board of Park Commissioners jointly accepted the scoping study of the Imagination Center at Reindahl Park, and gave preliminary approval of the project to move forward with planning, design and park master planning.<sup>1</sup> Since then, City staff has advanced the project. Pre-design on the facilities was completed in early 2022. The City team is currently in the Schematic Design phase of the Imagination Center, while concurrently conducting public outreach and engagement for the Reindahl Park master plan update.

As part of that meeting, Commissioners raised the question as to why the library should be co-located at a park, versus a non-park site. More recently, a member of the public submitted information the Board of Park Commissioners indicating that there could be cost savings if the development of the Imagination Center were to be done in a different manner, such as part of a mixed-use development.

The recommendation in the scoping study to site the Imagination Center at Reindahl Park was based on the immense benefits that this project would bring to the neighboring community. The 2016 report from the Madison Public Library, "[A Strategic Plan for Eastside Growth](#)," notes that the neighboring Sandburg Elementary is the only eastside school in the Madison Metropolitan School District that is outside of a five-minute drive from a library. Reindahl Park hosts an array of transit options, and the Imagination Center would bring additional public services to a growing, diverse neighborhood. Further, the ability to co-locate with a year-round park shelter multiplies the potential uses of the space and benefits brought to the area. When compared to other locations, based on community priorities and site suitability goals, Reindahl Park came out on top.<sup>2</sup> The City staff made their recommendation in the scoping study based on community priorities, including the site's ability to be conducive to a space that is a social forum, a civic innovator, a holistic health advocate, a cultural platform, and an economic engine.

As the project continues to advance in its scoping and is nearing the next phase of final site approval, the analysis below identifies the benefits of siting at Reindahl compared to a non-park site.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://madison.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=M&ID=769114&GUID=180E4E58-A699-4649-9A1E-3E222B684B88>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/sites/www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/files/media/Madison%20Public%20Library%20Strategic%20Plan%20for%20Eastside%20Growth%20For%20Web.pdf>

## Analysis

The City of Madison takes seriously its responsibility to spend its resources in the most fiscally responsible manner that will maximize benefit to the community. As stated above, the scoping study identified the benefits to the community by siting the library at Reindahl Park. Moreover, the benefits of placing the Imagination Center at Reindahl Park, a location that is currently owned by the City of Madison, include:

1. **Site availability.** The site at Reindahl Park is currently available and the City will not have to wait for an appropriate nearby site to become available.
2. **Connection to Nature.** Libraries host many community activities and learning opportunities. A library at the park will make nature learning, nature play, and outdoor classrooms more accessible to our residents and our children.
3. **Shared spaces.** Having a park shelter next to the library, and a library next to the park shelter, means that if space is not being utilized by one agency it will be available to the other. Maximizing use of the space means a better return on investment for the community.
4. **Park activation.** Building the Imagination Center at Reindahl Park will bring positive activity to the park, which encourages even more positive activity to occur. Both Parks and the Madison Library intend to utilize the space to provide a wide variety of activities.
5. **Acquisition costs.** The Imagination Center will have no acquisition costs to consider as the property is already owned by the City.
6. **Property tax implications.** Library and Park facilities are exempt from property tax. By being located at Reindahl Park, the Imagination Center will not supplant a market-based development, and therefore will not reduce the amount of property tax revenues that would be collected if a private development were to take place at a non-City-owned location.
7. **Economic development.** Investment in park improvements can increase the property value in the surrounding areas, creating a general increase in municipal tax revenue.
8. **Infrastructure costs.** The ease of access to the Madison Unified Fiber Network reduces the additional costs to connect to this network associated with other locations. The existing parking lot means that a new parking lot would not need to be constructed.
9. **Park shelter replacement.** The Mayor's Executive Budget for 2023 includes \$16 million to support this project, which, if adopted by the Common Council, will occur in 2023-2024. Without this funding, improvements to the Reindahl Park Shelter would not occur until 2028 or later. The current shelter at Reindahl Park was built in the late 1970's making it over 40 years old. The current design contemplates the shelter as a year-round facility, whereas the current shelter is only available during warmer months. The Parks Division's other year-round park shelter at Highland Manor brought \$18,405 in revenue in 2021.
10. **Investment in Civic Spaces.** The Imagination Center will serve the broader neighborhood and region of the City in many ways beyond the robust library and park programming. It is likely to be used as a polling location, which deepens the connection between parks and improving access to the ballot box. The space will also likely be used for a myriad of other public and neighborhood meetings to support a healthy community.

## **Conclusion**

Libraries and parks are natural partners, as both are part of the public commons. They are both spaces where residents can learn, recreate, and connect to each other. Through the robust community engagement and planning process of the Strategic Plan for Eastside Growth, the City has focused efforts on a facility that incorporates the issues and priorities identified by our community members. Foregoing the cost and challenges of siting at a different location provides the opportunity for the City to utilize resources already allocated to the project to be invested in what will be dramatically improved park facilities at Reindahl. Should an alternative site for the Imagination Center be located and acquired, those additional costs would need to be accommodated within a project budget, and would leave Reindahl Park with a substandard park shelter facility and no current corresponding budgetary authorization to replace it. The advantages of the location of the Imagination Center being in Reindahl Park are not singularly financial, though financial benefits do exist. Co-locating the library at the park magnifies the community benefits that the Park Division and the Madison Public Library can bring to the public.