

From: Ann Rivlin <amfrivlin@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, February 18, 2021 9:41 AM
To: Vilas Master Plan <vilasmasterplan@cityofmadison.com>; Knepp, Eric <EKnepp@cityofmadison.com>; Park Commission <pacommission@cityofmadison.com>
Cc: Wendy Fearnside <wendy.fearnside@att.net>; Jim Lorman <lorman@edgewood.edu>; Catherine Jagoe <cajagoe@gmail.com>; Evers, Tag <district13@cityofmadison.com>
Subject: Comments on the Vilas Park Master Plan

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Joint comments from Resident Resource Group members Wendy Fearnside, Catherine Jagoe, Jim Lorman and Ann Rivlin regarding the master plan process and the Vilas Park master plan are attached to this message.

Regards,
Ann Rivlin

Concerns Regarding the Master Plan Process for Madison Parks

February 18, 2021

To the Board of Park Commissioners and Parks Superintendent Eric Knepp,

We are writing based on our experience as representatives of the Greenbush, Vilas, and Dudgeon-Monroe neighborhood associations on the Resident Resource Group (RRG) for the Vilas Park master plan process. We have served as representatives to this group for many months and are very familiar with the process that has been followed for the Vilas Park master plan. Our involvement has highlighted for us a significant flaw with how Madison conducts its master plan process for parks that has a substantial effect on the Vilas Park master plan and other parks that may share characteristics with Vilas Park—specifically, the process does not require sufficient analysis to support plan recommendations regarding issues that will have potentially significant impacts on the environment, park users, neighborhood residents, and/or the broader community. In making these comments, we are writing as individuals, not as representatives of our respective neighborhood associations.

From our reading of the document laying out the 2016 master plan process and discussions with Parks staff through our role on the RRG, it is evident that the master plan process does not call for significant analysis prior to developing design recommendations in a master plan. Instead, it requires a master plan to identify the facilities, recreational amenities, and general landscape elements/land management areas to be developed in each park. It also requires significant public input such as surveys, meetings, and presentation of report drafts to the public. Detailed analysis of any particular element of the park master plan occurs later, when a project identified in the plan has been selected and funded for implementation. For smaller and less used parks, this process may not pose a problem. However, it is a problem for Vilas Park and for other parks where size, geography, and the number and diversity of uses and users make the issues involved more complex.

To be clear, we believe Parks and MSA staff have followed the Board of Park Commissioners-approved master plan process for Vilas Park. With the exception of the Annie C. Stewart Memorial Fountain, they

have defined facilities, recreational amenities, and general landscape/land management areas that are to be developed in Vilas Park as called for in the master plan process.

Specific concerns for the Vilas Park master plan related to the lack of supporting analysis include:

- Visitors to the zoo average 750,000 a year, many of whom enter from the north end of the park. Yet no analysis of traffic safety and flow was done to support the relocation of the north entrance of the zoo to Campbell Street. Traffic safety and flow along Grant and Drake streets are vitally important for all park users, zoo visitors, and neighborhood residents. The absence of traffic analysis means that we have no way to evaluate whether the Campbell Street entrance enhances or harms the experience of park users, zoo visitors and neighborhood residents.
- The lagoon is a key feature of Vilas Park and affects other important park amenities, but the master plan proposes dredging half of the lagoon and leaving the rest to revert to wetland, without analyzing the impact on water quality and aquatic life in the lagoon and Lake Wingra; without a full understanding of the effect of different management options on ice skating; and without an ecological study of the management strategies for, and potential outcomes of, wetland restoration. For example, the current plan places the park shelter on the western half of the lagoon, but did not include analysis that could mean the shelter could be located on the eastern half of the lagoon, thus shortening the access road to the shelter and reducing the potential for conflict between cars accessing the shelter and pedestrians crossing the bridge from the island.
- Several proposed features in the master plan are located in areas identified as having potential archaeological value. Vilas Park and the area around Lake Wingra have an unusual number of effigy mounds and burial sites, but the master plan process has been silent on these archaeological features outside of the Wingra Overlook area.

These issues have significant ramifications for the appropriateness of key features of the master plan—features that affect hundreds of thousands of people each year.

A planning process that provides conceptual design recommendations before conducting data collection and analysis on features that affect hundreds of thousands of people is very problematic. It is possible that everything will work out and no changes will be needed. But if subsequent analysis suggests that some of the concepts are unsuitable, a great deal of time, money and effort will have been wasted. We firmly believe that the master plan process should allow for detailed analysis of design features that have a significant impact, such as the proposed Campbell Street entrance and lagoon plan in Vilas Park.

Our intent here is to point out an inherent flaw in the stipulations for the master plan process, in the hope that doing so will provide a reason for addressing the need for additional data and analysis before proceeding with implementation of the master plan for Vilas Park and for developing additional standards for master plans developed for similar parks in the future.

Everyone involved in a park master plan process wants the outcome to be a better park for all users. However, when changes to a park are of the magnitude of some of the changes proposed in Vilas Park, additional analysis should be conducted before proposing a change. Addressing the flaws in this process should result in better outcomes both for Vilas Park's master plan and in the master plan process more generally.

Respectfully,

Wendy Fearnside (Vilas)
Catherine Jagoe (Dudgeon-Monroe)
Jim Lorman (Greenbush)
Ann Rivlin (Vilas)

From: David Seth Gevers <dsgevers@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, February 18, 2021 6:36 PM
To: Vilas Master Plan <vilasmasterplan@cityofmadison.com>
Cc: Park Commission <pacommission@cityofmadison.com>; Urban Design Comments <urbandesigncomments@cityofmadison.com>; Evers, Tag <district13@cityofmadison.com>
Subject: Vilas Park Master Plan Comments

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Dear Alder Evers and Parks Commissioners,

Thank you for taking the following comments on the proposed final design for the Vilas Park Master Plan:

1. There is too much surface parking. The purpose of the park is not to provide parking for the zoo. Available street parking is not taken into consideration in the parking counts particularly along Vilas Ave. Please reduce the amount of surface parking.
2. The design of the parking and bus loading area on the lake side of the zoo is too big. The waterfront area is being converted into a huge parking lot in this design. We should be protecting the viewshed and value of the lakefront. It is not clear why the bus loading needs to take place in this location.
3. There should be three playgrounds in separate areas of the park (as there is now) provided in the plan. There is no reason to remove a playground that gets extensive use from participants from around the city. Please add back the beach playground into the plan.
4. The reinserted (previously removed) west playground (Van Buren Playground) should be a full playground with equipment like it is now, unless it is on an effigy mound and then we should find another spot for it.
5. The effigy mounds throughout the park area need further study and protection. The proposed new entrance to the zoo parking lot likely goes right over burial mounds. This lack of equity, inclusion and history has been pervasive in this process.
6. The added open-sided shelters are not a good use of space and restricts the casual use of the park areas. I understand the desire to raise funds through park rental fees but this is a fundamental misunderstanding of how the park is being used.

Thank you,
David Gevers
Former Vilas Neighborhood Association President 2014-2015

From: Bonnie Gruber <bonniegruber@mac.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 3, 2021 11:12 AM
To: Park Commission <pacommission@cityofmadison.com>
Cc: Evers, Tag <district13@cityofmadison.com>; Eileen Hornberger Thompson <eileenlittleredt@gmail.com>; Sarah Bahauddin <sarahbahauddin@gmail.com>; Wendy Fearnside <wendy.fearnside@att.net>; Ann Rivlin <amfrivlin@gmail.com>
Subject: Agenda Item 64455, Vilas Park Master Plan

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

I was glad to see that comments from Eileen Hornberger Thompson and SallyLehner (which I endorse) and also Ann Rivlin, Wendy Fearnside, and others and David Gevers were included with your March 10 agenda.

But I expected to see my comments, emailed on February 16 to "Vilas Master Plan comments," Ald. Evers, Supt. Knepp, and four others involved in the planning. I repeat it here and ask that it be shared with all members of the Parks Commission and included with the item on the agenda:

I want to repeat my opposition to creating a new park entrance/exit road at the corner of Drake and Campbell streets and expanding the parking lot north of the zoo.

In this email, I offer a more personal historical perspective and vision for the future.

I have lived at the corner of Drake and Campbell since about June 1, 1962. My husband's grandparents, John and Alma Diehl, had bought the house in 1929, when it was new. My husband, John Gruber, had visited here as a child and lived here as a University of Wisconsin student. We raised two sons here, and our grandchildren and great-grandchildren (who call me Grandma Zoo), visit when they can.

Over the years these six generations have enjoyed having Vilas and Bear Mound parks and the UW Arboretum nearby for play, exercise, and learning about nature

The woods

For more than a century, the strip of woods along the south side of Drake Street have provided a scenic backdrop for picnicking and other park activities. The woods give us a natural view, shielding us from the sights, smells, and sounds of human activity such as power mowers and boom boxes in the park. The trees produce healthful oxygen and are home to a variety of birds.

In recent years the city has cut down four trees on the north side of Drake Street near my house but only replaced one, making us rely more than ever on the trees in the park to moderate the climate.

The park entrance and exit

The idea of a new park entrance/exit dates back at least to the mid-1960s, when it was part of a draft zoo master plan that would have expanded the zoo by 2.6 acres and significantly increased parking areas. There was much opposition to that plan, and some people favored moving the zoo to another location instead. Neither expanding nor moving the zoo was approved.

A Campbell Street entrance was proposed again in the 1970s. Traffic engineers said the existing entrance/exit at Randall Avenue was too confusing. It allowed two-way traffic on both sides of a circle around the entrance sign. I proposed that the west side of the circle be closed, and the road be one-way into the park from Randall and out at Grant Street. This became the accepted compromise. It has served us well.

Campbell Street

In 1971, a report by the Environmental Awareness Center, endorsed in concept by the Dane County Board, recognized Oakland and Campbell streets and Vilas Park among 23 ecologically significant sites in the proposed E-way. It proposed a pedestrian walkway along Oakland and Campbell connecting Picnic Point and the Arboretum. Although such a walkway has never been officially designated, the block of Campbell between Vilas Avenue and Drake Street gets considerable pedestrian traffic.

There are no sidewalks in this block; longtime residents told me that property owners were assured many years ago that there would never be sidewalks here.

The zoo

In July 1974, a fence was built around the zoo. Some neighbors didn't like it, but it did provide a truce line past which the zoo would not expand.

The future

The plan for Vilas Park must be for the "new normal." To combat global climate change, it must discourage use of the automobile and promote energy conservation. To stop COVID-19 and prevent future pandemics, it must enable social distancing and discourage crowding. It must provide ways for people to get out in nature and get healthful exercise. Vilas must be a park, not a parking lot.

I want our descendants and other future residents of the neighborhood to have the same mental and physical health benefits we have enjoyed.

Conclusion

I ask the Board of Park Commissioners to delete from the proposed Vilas Park Master Plan all changes to roads and parking in the area between Drake Street (Grant to Randall), Randall Avenue, and the zoo.

Bonnie Gruber
1430 Drake Street
13th District Neighborhood Association President, 1976
13th District Alderperson, 1977-79 and 1981-85
Vilas Neighborhood Association Council Member, 2020-present

-----Original Message-----

From: Erich Schmidtke <erichschmidtke@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 3, 2021 8:44 PM
To: Park Commission <pacommission@cityofmadison.com>
Subject: Vilas Park Master Plan ~ Comment

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Hello Commissioners,

I participated in the Vilas Park Master Planning process. I think that due to residents' active participation and to MSA and Parks staffs' responsiveness to public comments, essentially all of the issues and problems have been successfully resolved, and as a result this Final Draft of the Plan is starting to look pretty good.

The only remaining area needing fixing is the southern parking lot by the beach, which continues to be Way to large in the proposed Plan. This area is priceless lakefront area which should remain as passive or active recreation space for the benefit of Park users, NOT to be used for a massive parked car lot.

Residents worked Hard to convince Parks staff to agree to reach out to St Mary's Hospital to discuss developing a public-private partnership to cooperate to provide parking for park and zoo users. Since St Mary's already has a substantial parking lot and ramp structure at this same site, it makes sense for the City to cooperate with St Mary's to provide parking. Weekends are when demand for parking at Vilas Zoo and Vilas Park is the Greatest, and weekends are also when demand for parking by St Mary's staff and visitors is the Least. In fact, weekends St Mary's lot sits nearly empty. So cooperation makes sense on many levels. Furthermore, St Mary's ramp and car lot have potential for future expansion.

At the final public hearing on the Master Plan, Parks staff finally agreed to reach out to St Mary's and to put this potential cooperation into the Plan document itself. Given this, it no longer makes sense to also propose such a vast car lot at the beach area. Cooperating with St Mary's to provide parking at St Mary's while simultaneously calling for a massive car lot at the beach is redundant, unnecessary, and a waste of valuable Park space. So get rid of the Southern lot or drastically reduce its size.

Like I say, most of the other problems with earlier Plan Drafts have been successfully resolved or compromise reached. I won't go into these other issues and problems which were successfully resolved unless the Commissioners are interested in learning specifics. So this Southern Parking lot problem is the lone problem that remains to be fixed.

Thank you, Erich
Madison resident

PARKS RESPONSE

Dear Susan,

I will include your email with the other public comments. The letter you forwarded was already sent to us by Sally Lehner and is attached already.

Respectfully,
City of Madison Parks Division

From: Susan Wolf <wolfsusan5@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, March 5, 2021 2:18 PM

To: Park Commission <pacommission@cityofmadison.com>

Subject: Fwd: Please Support Archaeological research letter on Vilas Park and protection for Bear Mound Park

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

To the Board of Park Commissioners:

The letter here forwarded to you refers to agenda item 64455 for your March 10 meeting. My apologies for not including this agenda item reference in my previous email to you.

Susan Wolf
Vilas Neighborhood Association member
participant - Bear Mound park savanna restoration project
Madison St. - long-time resident

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Susan Wolf <wolfsusan5@gmail.com>

Date: Fri, Mar 5, 2021 at 2:05 PM

Subject: Fwd: Please Support Archaeological research letter on Vilas Park and protection for Bear Mound Park

To: <pacommission@cityofmadison.com>

To the Board of Park Commissioners:

I am Susan Wolf
Vilas Neighborhood Association member
participant - Bear Mound park savanna restoration project
Madison St. - long-time resident

I urge the Board to accept the necessity to make studies and take actions to protect all native American sites and cultural resources in Vilas and Bear Mound Parks BEFORE TAKING ANY OTHER ACTIONS on the proposed Vilas Park Master Plan, including not accepting any part of the master plan before protective studies and actions have been completed.

I wholeheartedly support the letter below that more fully explains the need for protection before any further Vilas Park planning or implementation, and the accompanying attachment..

THE LETTER:

March 2021

Re: Support for the Protection of Mounds, Archaeological Sites, and Cultural Resources in Vilas and Bear Mound Parks

Dear Board of Park Commissioners,

We support greater protection of the mounds, archaeological sites, and cultural resources in Vilas and Bear Mound Parks. The City of Madison should do more than what is minimally required under the law to protect mounds and cultural resources (per Ho-Chunk Nation Department of Heritage Preservation.)

We ask that you:

1. Remove the proposed Zoo entrance/exit (Drake Street and Campbell Street) from the Vilas Park Master Plan to avoid additional degradation to a known burial mound site (Site DA-1193/BDA-0574) near that location and adverse impacts to Bear Mound Park (DA-0185/BDA-0412). This entrance/exit change was in all three preliminary Vilas Park plan options, yet it was not discussed with the Ho-Chunk Nation Historic Preservation officer Bill Quackenbush during planning meetings.
2. Require the Vilas Park Master Plan to include an archaeological identification survey of Vilas Park, in its entirety, as a prerequisite to any further park feature planning or ground disturbing activities. The identification survey should be conducted in partnership with the Ho-Chunk Nation Department of Heritage Preservation, the State of Wisconsin Office of Historic Preservation, and other Native American consultants. All parties should know what cultural resources are or are not present so planning decisions can be made in an informed and respectful manner that values the indigenous cultural heritage in this area.

Vilas Park is located within the Lake Wingra Mounds area, encompassing one of the densest known effigy mound grouping locations in North America; special consideration is necessary in Vilas Park due to its location along the shores of Lake Wingra and the former geographical ridge, once home to mound groupings

that extended from Bear Mound Park southeast toward Lake Monona and Lake Wingra.

3. We believe that the Lake Wingra mounds, cultural resources, and archaeological sites in Vilas and Bear Mound Parks should be cherished and celebrated by the City of Madison Parks Department (including planners and landscape architects) and by neighborhood residents.

Thank you for your consideration,

Eileen Hornberger Thompson
Vilas Neighborhood Association Representative for the Bear Mound Park
Campbell Street

Sally Lehner
Madison Street

2-19-21
Bonnie Gruber
Vilas Neighborhood Association Board Member, Former District 13 Alder
Drake Street

David Gevers
Former Vilas Neighborhood Association President
Madison Street

--

Susan Will Wolf
1921 Madison St.
Madison, WI USA 53711
email: wolfsusan5@gmail.com

From: Joan Laurion <joan.laurion@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, March 5, 2021 3:12 PM
To: Park Commission <pacommission@cityofmadison.com>
Subject: Effigy Mounds in and around Vilas Park

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Good morning, I am writing to encourage you to make preservation and utmost respect for the effigy mounds in and around Vilas Park a priority in your master plan.

Also, of great significance, I think it would be an important step to highlight the effigy mounds that are NO LONGER in the area because of development and lack of respect for mounds in the past.

I suggest that in Vilas Park there be a number of historical markers, maps, pictorial guides--all chosen and prepared with input from Ho Chunk tribal leaders/artists--about the importance of Lake Wingra, the area that is now Vilas Park and the surrounding hills and waters.

This is only proper and just as you consider a master plan for land that was originally Ho Chunk land.

Thanks for your consideration, Joan Laurion

From: Brook Soltvedt <soltvedtbrook@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, March 5, 2021 3:53 PM
To: Park Commission <pacommission@cityofmadison.com>
Subject: Vilas Park Master Plan

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

First, thank you for all your hard work on behalf of Madison's citizens and visitors, to make this a city we all love.

I am not much of a park user, and even though I've lived on the near west side for about 40 years, neither Vilas nor the zoo have been draws for me. So I trust others to provide good guidance about what people want to use the park for, and the features it should have.

My purpose in writing is to express a strong desire that any plans review and consider Ho-Chunk sacred burial grounds and other historical /archeological features that may not have been considered when developing the current proposal. If I have learned one thing from 2020, it is that my ignorance of our past meant I was ignorant of how that past shaped our present and continues to marginalize and hurt so many people. To achieve an equitable city, we can't simply erase these cultural monuments.

Thank you. Balancing so many competing interests and needs is not an easy task.

Brook Soltvedt
(she/her/hers)
1034 Waban Hill
Madison, WI 53711
