



MADISON PARKS

Vilas Park Cultural Resources Report

Master Plan Background



Vilas Park Master Plan was adopted by the Board of Park Commissioners on March 10, 2021

Parks staff erroneously indicated that a complete Phase 1 Archeological Survey had been completed for the park.



March 18, 2021 – Letter from Parks Superintendent, Eric Knepp, to Board of Park Commissioners

“Commitment to conducting a Phase 1 Archaeological Survey prior to additional design development work.”



Numerous construction projects have been included in the Park Division’s Capital Improvement Projects budget in upcoming years



Began process to contract with consultant to complete a Phase 1 Archaeological Survey on the entire park in 2023. Were advised that doing so on the entire park would not be responsible.

Early 2024 – Began preparation of a Cultural Resources Report to identify the planned process to follow for planned projects in Vilas Park.



Archaeology Background

- Literature Review
- Phase 1 Archaeological Survey
- Archaeological Monitor
- Geomorphology



Vilas Cultural Resources Report

- Initially prepared by John Hodgson, Phase One Archaeology
- Consultation with representatives of the Ho-Chunk Nation
- Consultation with the Wisconsin Historical Society
- Consultation with the City's Preservation Planner
- Public Information Meeting held on October 22, 2025



Vilas Cultural Resources Report

- Native American Presence
- Charles E. Brown – Wisconsin Archaeological Society Founder
- Historic use of Vilas Park area

Photo by Sara Mayer



Vilas Cultural Resources Report

Map from the original 1834 survey map of the Wisconsin Territory.



Vilas Cultural Resources Report



1904 plat map of
the Vilas Park area
(Anson 1904)

Vilas Cultural Resources Report

1906 photograph
of a dredge barge
operating in Lake
Wingra



Vilas Cultural Resources Report

- Archaeological and Cultural Resources Review for Park Development Projects
 - 1950's Federal and State Laws
 - Enforcement regulated through state historical societies or historic preservation officers.
 - Wisconsin State Statutes 44.40 and 157.70



Vilas Cultural Resources Report

Extraordinary steps not
required by State Statutes

	Steps to Protect Archeological Resources at Vilas Park
1	Conduct a Literature Review
2	Conduct a Geomorphological Review of Vilas Park
3	Define Project Areas in the Vilas Park Master Plan
4	Consult with the Wisconsin Historical Society, Native American Tribes, and Other Concerned Parties about the Project Area
5	Obtain Required Permits
6	Perform Initial Analysis Using Ground Penetrating Radar of Project Area
7	Create the Preliminary Project Design to Determine Project Scope
8	Create the Project Design to Determine Specific Ground Disturbance
9	Obtain Required Permits
10	Conduct Phase 1 Shovel Testing of Project Area where required by the State Historical Society
11	Post Authorization to Proceed
12	Commence Construction
13	Conduct Archaeological Monitoring During Construction as Required

1. Conduct a Literature Review

- Review all available information
- Search for information on previously undocumented archaeological sites
- Review past archaeological investigation

2. Geomorphological Review of Vilas Park

- Consult with a Geomorphologist
- Determine the location and approximate depths of original soils
- Extraordinary Step

3. Define Project Areas in the Vilas Park Master Plan

- Project Areas will be identified as projects are scheduled to be constructed in the near future.

4. Consult with the Wisconsin Historical Society, Native American Tribes, and Other Concerned Parties about the Project Area

- Adhere to Wisconsin State Statutes 44.40 and 157.70
- Adjust design plans as necessary following consultation
- Continue consultation throughout the project

5. Obtain Required Permits

- In advance of any archaeological work

6. Survey Project Area Using Ground Penetrating Radar

- Performed by a consulting professional
- Identify potential archaeological resources in project area
- Extraordinary Step

7. Create the Preliminary Project Design to Determine the Project Scope

- Adjust design to limit conflicts
- Host a public meeting

8. Create the Project Design to Determine Specific Ground Disturbance

- Incorporate public and concerned party input
- Determine specific locations of proposed ground disturbance
- Seek additional input

9. Obtain Required Permits

- Request to Disturb
- Certificate of Appropriateness

10. Conduct Phase 1 Shovel Testing of Project Area where required by WHS

- Performed by a qualified Archaeologist
- Focused on proposed disturbance areas
- If archaeological materials are found, all work will cease
- Archaeologist prepares report of findings
- Project may be modified based on findings

11. Post Authorization to Proceed

- Letter from the Wisconsin Historical Society

12. Commence Construction

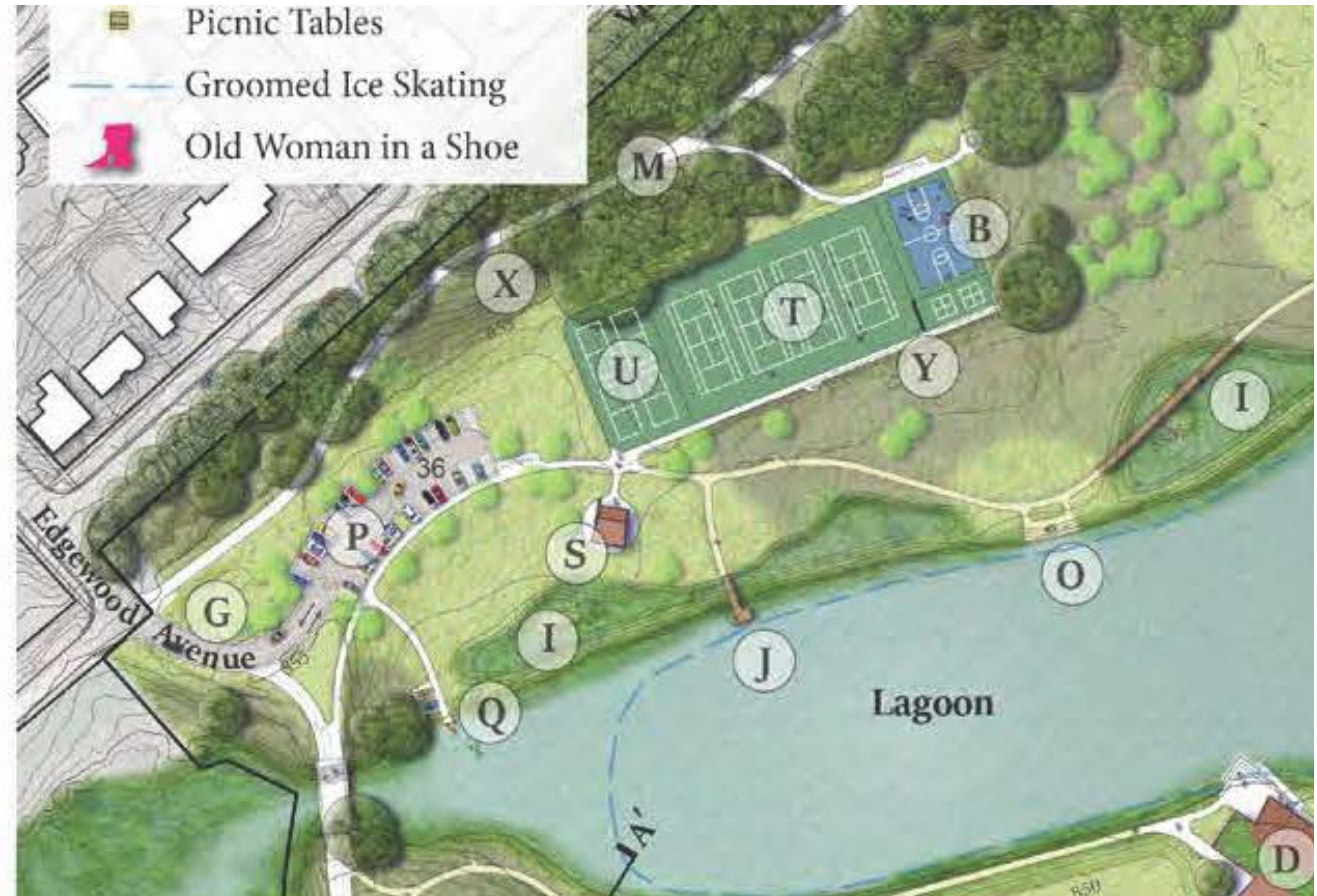
- Train staff and contractors on permit conditions

13. Conduct Archaeological Monitoring During Construction as Required

- Performed by a qualified Archaeologist
- If archaeological materials are observed, work will stop
 - Concerned parties will be consulted to determine next steps

Vilas Park Master Plan Implementation

- Courts and adjacent parking replacement
- “Dinosaur” playground removal (no replacement)
- “Cheese” playground replacement with a nature-based playground
- “Shoe” playground replacement
- Randall Ave. entrance planting / parking deterrence
- Future implementation phases to be determined



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MGO 8.35 – Preservation of Shoreline Parks

- City-wide referendum required for projects over \$2.23M (2025 dollars)
- Amount threshold increases 5% annually



Thank You!