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**Sent:** Wednesday, July 13, 2022 5:25 PM

**To:** Park Commission <pacommission@cityofmadison.com>

**Subject:** comments to Madison parks board for JUL 13 WED 6:30p meeting about Agenda Items #18-19 (Reindahl Park and Imagination Center updates)

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Hello Board of Park Commissioners:

This will be lengthy, because several years of failed public process need to be covered. Apologies also for typos, as the release of your agenda only last Friday has limited the time for public consideration and response. I write as an individual, not on behalf of any organization, though I do talk about one.

I write to ask that the Board consider delaying approval of the proposed Reindahl Park master plan amendment process. The public has not yet been presented with alternative sites for the Imagination Center (IC) outside Reindahl Park, nor the relevant fiscal comparisons. Millions of dollars in potential municipal revenues are at stake.

So too are 15-18 mature trees, at the MPL's proposed IC site. That's in addition to the ~40 in Reindahl Woods already unnecessarily lost to the MMSD sewer pipe trenching scheme, 17 more trees in Reindahl woods that parks staff now says must also be cut down, three mature large trees cut down this winter at parks staff direction for unknown reasons, and several other trees outside the Reindahl woods in other parts of the park that were cut down for the MMSD pipe. I.e., potentially ~75 large, mature, and mostly native trees in one park, invaluable ecologically (and with a value in the hundreds of thousand of dollars, if they were on private property).

On 11 March 2020, the Parks and Library Boards met jointly at Olbrich Gardens. From the minutes of that meeting:

*A motion was made by Martin, seconded by Henak, that further consideration of (Imagination Center or IC) design studies as well as future consideration of the required amendment to the Parks Master plan shall include consideration of additional land acquisition to preserve parkland. The motion passed by voice vote/other. Alder Skidmore abstained.*

To the best of my knowledge, no such consideration has been undertaken since then, or- if there has- there's been no communication about it with the community. Therefore the required master plan amendment can't be undertaken.

The highlighted portion of the motion was inserted at least partially in response to comments I made during the meeting. I'd pointed out that the community had been provided only one site scenario, in Reindahl Park. There had been no scenarios for the several sites adjacent to Reindahl, or nearby, including one walkable/bike-able site much closer to future residential users (Reindahl is remote from almost all current residences on the northeast side).

There had been no scenarios for a Pinney PL approach (condo-style, in a mixed use development). I pointed out that no housing can be built above any facility in any Madison park, nor could any commercial mixed-use be built, unlike Pinney PL. This means that an IC built inside Reindahl Park can not generate property taxes, which over decades would amount to millions of municipal revenue. It also means a lost opportunity to provide much needed market or subsidized housing for Madison, at an attractive site (as at Pinney and Sequoya PLs).

After public comments, including mine, Library Director Mickells responded to commissioner questions about my statement. Among other things he stated: "The city has never seriously considered any other site." He also stated that the main advantage of the in-park site was that there was no land cost. I raised my hand to inform Board members that a Pinney PL style approach also need not require any land acquisition cost. The developer usually pays for the land, even if the city first acquires it. (This probably is why the last five libraries in Milwaukee were built like Pinney PL, condo style.) I was not recognized, per usual city meeting protocol once a board begins discussion.

That's the context for the highlighted statement in the motion above, which is actually less direct than the actual motion that night. That final motion was actually read aloud twice by staff that night. I was easily able to take notes. At least one commissioner wanted alternate IC scenarios outside the park provided to the public, with fiscal comparisons. When I saw the diluted version of the motion in the published meeting minutes, I contacted city staff, provided the original wording, and requested a correction, but that was refused. I also asked that Dir. Mickells' statements (above) be added to the minutes, but that was also refused.

I later sent the land purchase information to both boards. I have also provided it on several occasions to other city electeds and staff, as well as during public meetings. To no avail.

Not mentioned in the report from Supt. Knepp before you tonight: Information about the ideas submitted by Friends of Reindahl Environs (FORE), submitted to him in January 2020, with a request to meet and discuss our proposal (attached).

Multiple follow up inquiries by email and phone over the course of several months from me on behalf of FORE went unanswered by Supt. Knepp. After your board and the Library board passed the March 2020 motion, FORE was very interested in the possibility that other site scenarios would be explored with the public, before master plan work began. We never heard from Supt. Knepp until this summer (see below).

The pandemic broke out, and then the Summer 2021 encampment occurred. Sup. Knepp has cited these developments to explain the delay in the promised 2020 revision of the 2013 Reindahl master plan. But there was plenty of time for Parks staff to coordinate or carry out several expensive

capital projects that should have been considered with the public during the master plan amendment process.

- A long chain link fence along Portage Rd was replaced with ... another chain link fence! The community might have preferred a berm and plantings.
- The roof on the historic Reindahl barn was replaced rather than maintained, prior to discussion with community about future uses (park equipment storage is certainly not the best use).
- Tennis courts were re-surfaced, before the community could ponder whether all the courts were really needed, or if other recreational uses of this space were better.
- Paths were paved, some per the 2013 master plan, even though FORE had requested curvilinear paths.
- Etc.

One path was paved over the refilled MMSD sewer trench through Reindahl Woods, fragmenting its habitat and ecology. FORE had requested a different route that would allow the woods to heal relatively more quickly, after 40 mature native trees were cut down. One of those trees, #260 on the MMSD pre-trenching inventory was a shagbark hickory, likely over 150-years old, based on its 18.5" diameter at breast height (DBH), according to a chart used for non-invasive tree age estimation.

Three more large native trees (basswood) outside the woods were cut down this past winter, without public discussion. Because the trees were located near the proposed IC site, Supt. Knepp was asked if this was yet another action to make that site seem inevitable. He responded only that it "was for different reasons."

Many small (~1" DBH) trees have been planted in the turfgrass at Reindahl Park since the sewer trenching was filled and grassed or paved over. The location of all these sapling should have been part of the master plan amendment process, with an emphasis on ecology, in addition to other functions of the park.

Isn't this staff-driven *de facto* master planning?

Then Library staff announced a January public meeting about a preliminary design of the IC on a specific site inside the park, also replacing Reindahl's existing Modernist shelter. There had still been no discussion of alternate sites or scenario. There had been no master plan amendment public process. It was revealed that 15-18 more mature trees would be cut down.

Some weeks ago, Supt. Knepp invited me to meet at Reindahl, along with other members of Friends of Reindahl Park. I had complained to my alder about Supt. Knepp's failure to respond to FORE.

Most folks I know who are advocates for the environment are now convinced that no matter how many people speak or petition for an IC site scenario outside Reindahl, the city is not going to listen. But I was able to get one person to join me. She happened to be a co-founder of FORE, and co-drafter of our white sheet with ideas for the master plan amendment. Due to the lack of response by Parks staff, the pandemic, and family health matter (for me), we had paused organizing FORE.

The meeting was scheduled. Supt. Knepp informed me that he would be joined by several parks staffers who had experience highly relevant to the Reindahl woods and the path paved through it. I responded that there was no need, since there can be no disagreement that there was no need to trench a sewer pipe through the largest and oldest woods in the park, as there were clearly other options. Nonetheless, these staffers showed up for the meeting. Only one spoke, so I guess they were here as witnesses.

In [August 2019, Supt. Knepp blogged](#): "Additionally, given the no-build nature of the permanent easement, I found it important to limit future conflicts that could occur with facilities needed to meet the future community needs in the park. This includes potential long-term grade-separated access across or under E. Washington Ave." In his report to you tonight. Supt. Knepp states that: "Parks has also overseen the Board directed path installation in conjunction with the MMSD sewer interceptor project."

At our recent meeting, Supt. Knepp said he decided to route the sewer pipe through the woods. I asked him how that could be, since he has no background in natural sciences. He repeated that he made the decision. Parks planning leader Ann Freiwald was present and I asked about her previous public statement defending this route, in which she stated that folks love Madison Parks trails and paths (probably they come to the parks for other reasons, but enjoy using the paths to experience natural features, like intact old trees in places like the Reindahl Woods used to be). She said that she had only become involved toward the end of the decision.

After Eric left the meeting, Ann Freiwald told me and the other FORE attendee that several parks staff members had actually advised Supt. Knepp. She also stated that when the East Towne Market redevelopment planning was being done, the idea of siting the IC there was raised, but quickly dismissed. In 2014-15, MPLS was actually offered donation of a parcel in East Towne Mall, as documented in the 2016 report on strategic planning that laid out the argument for locating a new library on the northeast side of Madison; the offer, for an unidentified location, was rejected.

Who actually made this decision?

As I have communicated to Parks Board Chair Gnam, it is important to document this decision, if only to avoid such an outcome in the future. I told her about the 2021 Metro

staff transit fare options report, which did not identify the staff authors. The name of a transit manager who was interviewed and spoke on behalf of bus drivers (who were not interviewed) was also not identified. This was immediately noted by international transit experts with whom I'm in communication on policy matters. I informed Metro director Justin Stuehrenberg and he soon provided all the missing names. This has been useful information for local citizen advocacy.

During the recent meeting with Supt. Knepp, he also emphasized that "Reindahl Park is not a conservation park" as if FORE was advocating for that, rather than just 50% for nature. He also declared that it would be impossible to dedicate 50% of the park for nature (i.e., 45 of the 90 acres); I disagreed, with good reason.

It is worrisome that Supt. Knepp may have misrepresented FORE's entirely reasonable position when talking with other folks interested in a balance future for Reindahl. It is impossible to know if he did, because he met with existing park users (soccer, community gardens, etc.) and apparently self-evaluated other existing facilities/users (tennis, playground, shelter, etc.).

There was no opportunity for all of us to talk with each other. And what about other folks who might want new activities in the park (e.g. outdoor art, a dog walk area, frisbee golf, biergarten, etc.)? Is it really possible to involve them in August, just weeks away, and when public process participation is least likely?

There have been many (perhaps hundreds) of targeted meetings with interest groups about IC programs or services. Since the 2016 MPS strategic planning report, there have been none for the community about sites outside Reindahl Park, in so far as I know.

Isn't this staff-driven *de facto* master planning? How does it provide the "balance" that Supt. Knepp always touts? Does it not also undermine the validity and reliability of the content of Supt. Knepp's report before you tonight?

It all seems to me quite un-democratic.

During the meeting at Reindahl, Supt. Knepp also mused whether there was any value from black walnut trees. This is a native tree that is key for southern WI forest ecosystems, providing food for critters, including humans. It is also of medicinal and cultural value to the indigenous peoples who first lived in the vicinity of Reindahl park. There are several black walnut trees in Reindahl. Every June, I forage a few dozen green nuts, to brew an ancient liqueur/digestif known in Italy as nocino. I hesitate to even mention this, because past communications with MMSD, Parks, and Library staff seemed to lead to acceleration or intensification of their project schedules and actions, contrary to pursuing reasonable or less expensive alternatives.

Why so much concern for trees? There are many reasons. For example: When I was President of The Friends of Lake View Hill County Park, I learned that some of the butternut trees (close relatives of black walnuts) in that park's 20-acre woods had thus far resisted a blight that was very worrisome. The US Forestry Lab was doing research of this possible genetic treasure. If that resistance was confirmed, they wanted to clone the trees. This small woods had been partially logged and quarried in the 1800s and early 1900s, also hosting pig enclosures. Yet the mature trees were still valuable, for all sorts of reasons.

Last, PFAS.

PFAS had been found in Well 15, located in Reindahl Park, which has since closed by Madison Water Utility (MWU). So, during the sewer pipe pre-construction phase, MMSD voluntarily did groundwater sampling in along the route inside the park. PFAS were present, at levels similar to those in the well. My apartment backs onto the park. I and other neighbors requested that MMSD protect us from airborne PFAS during construction, using dust control. I and others also asked that the dewatering from the dig be filtered to remove PFAS before the water was piped via storm sewer to the East Branch of Starkweather Creek. Neither request was honored. No doubt some of this very likely PFAS-laden soil made its way into my apartment and that of other neighbors, as well as into the community gardens, and into the lungs of other park users.

Later, I was informed that MWU employee Chuck Larson (since retired) had actually raised, within internal staff emails, the idea of testing the foundation soil borings required for the IC in Reindahl Park, for PFAS. His colleagues basically responded that it was better not to poke the bear. (I actually investigated getting hold of one of the cores, which legally must be stored for a fixed period, for testing by the state lab. However, the sampling and chain of custody process was complex, city staff permission was an unknown variable, and the cost was prohibitive.)

Now the State of WI has set a PFAS standard, soon likely to be replaced by an even more restrictive EPA standard. News reports indicate that EPA scientists are actually considering a zero PPT standard for PFAS and other related chemicals. These chemicals are that dangerous.

Furthermore, a recent article in The Guardian listed Madison as one of the cities where they found that EPA testing may be underestimating the problem. They found that a broader and more sensitive test for these chemicals indicated that Madison sample was nearly double that indicated by the EPA's test.

If the IC is built in Reindahl Park, PFAS and the other chemicals of concern are almost certain to be in the construction soil and dewatering outputs. These materials will need to be mitigated, and safely disposed of. That likely will be very expensive. It is a shame that additional sites for the IC that are further from the PFAS pollution from the county and national guard airports have not yet been explored.

Thanks for your consideration of my concerns.

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## **REINDAHL PARK & ENVIRONS: IDEAS FOR THE 2020 MASTER PLAN REVISION**

***By Friends of Reindahl Environs (FORE)***

DRAFT D v.20JAN2019 rev.12JUL2022

### **PARK**

1. Dedicate at least 50% for Nature
2. Increase native critters and trees (including edible fruit and nut trees)
3. Use plantings, berms, arbors, etc. to protect natural areas and walking paths from intrusions (views, noise, lighting, etc.) on users' experience, by traffic, community gardens, playing fields, other recreation facilities, etc.
4. Maximize reduction of impervious surface reduction: no new roads; consider reducing roads/parking
5. Natural hydrology, with 100% stormwater stay-on
6. Maximize dark sky (e.g., end Wendy's night security light pollution near Woods)
7. Expand prairie/meadows: Pollinators (beehives / honey); Monarch corridor
8. Paths west and north of Woods (NOT in Woods); reroute path east of Woods between Woods and community gardens; plant trees to restore eastern section of Woods and screen trail/park from retail and water pumping station east of the Woods.
9. Redesign/construct all trails/paths: more organic, non-linear; non-fossil fuel surfaces
10. End pesticide usage and mowing by field sports teams/sponsors
11. End neighboring residents' encroachments in park and public ROWs
12. Eliminate sources of litter from adjoining areas

### **ENVIRONS**

13. Connect to re-wilded county land north of Bartillon Rd and south of Rieder Rd: prairie/meadows, trails/paths (no group/congregation facilities), stormwater infiltration (no large bird attractant/congregation). Option: Solar PV w/pollinator habitat beneath.
14. Eco-connections to Reindahl Triangle, Sandburg Woods, Starkweather Creek Parkway, and wetlands complex east of HWY 51 and north of Rieder Rd., Cherokee Marsh, Sycamore Park (and East Branch of Starkweather Creek)
15. Eco-community landbridges or underpasses across HWY 51 and HWY 151.

### **REINDAHL/PORTAGE RD LIBRARY/FACILITIES (shelter, playground etc)**

16. Whether stand-alone or condo, adjacent to park rather than in it (with visibility on HWY 151)
17. No site prep until 2020 park Master Plan public process has been completed
18. Meet *Living Building* standard (energy-positive/carbon-negative, etc.)
19. No mature trees destroyed; net increase in trees.
20. Repurpose Parkside Drive, ending Portage/East Washington through-road use.
21. Build over the existing parking lot for the park shelter.
22. Consider replacing or encasing the current **Modernist** concrete park shelter with a more community-friendly and locally-grounded design (e.g., like the Tenney Park shelter).

### **PARK AMENITIES**

23. Relocate/reduce soccer playing fields if necessary, to allow more nature
24. Add X-C ski loop/trail
25. Treetop canopy viewing/education platform or elevated walkway
26. eBikes rack
27. Public art/sculpture
28. Commemorate former Sunnyside Elementary School (where Wendy's and strip mall are now located)
29. In developed areas of the park, consider signature colorful native plantings that can be extended across the neighborhood, building community and enhancing aesthetics (example: <http://www.ny4p.org/the-daffodil-project>)

**NOTE:** If library is built in park, it can't be built with housing above using the the condo approach (as part of a mixed-use development, e.g. like Pinney and Sequoya PLs). Consider these several sites: Arby's, Wendy's, Einstein Bagels/FedEx/Men's Wearhouse strip mall, or Office Depot sites, with donation, land swap, or acquisition.