



Madison Parks Division

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April 8, 2022

To: Board of Park Commissioners

From: Eric Knepp, Parks Superintendent

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "EK".

CC: Alder Grant Foster, District 15
Alder Brian Benford, District 6
Yang Tao, City Traffic Engineer
Chris Petykowski, City Engineering
Renee Callaway, Traffic Engineering

Re: Alignment for the Paved Path Connecting Lakeland Ave to Atwood Ave through Olbrich Park

BACKGROUND

As part of the larger project of rebuilding Atwood Ave from Fair Oaks to Cottage Grove, City Engineering has been considering improvements to the paved path connecting Lakeland Ave to Atwood Ave. The existing connection uses an abandoned section of Lakeland Avenue beginning at the top of the hill at the corner of Welch and Lakeland, continues on the abandoned roadway to Atwood Avenue. Parallel parking is allowed on this section of Old Lakeland Ave in the park. During the months with snow on the ground, Parks does not plow beyond the backstop fencing located on the east side of Old Lakeland Ave, this allows for sledding on the large hill located on the far west side of Olbrich Park. This has been the existing condition for a few decades now.

In 2017 and 2018, Engineering began the Atwood Avenue reconstruction project, which included proposed changes to the ped/bike connection between Lakeland Ave and Atwood Ave. During the design development stage leading up to the first time the BPC saw this project on 7/11/18, the Engineering team provided only one option to the public, which has been termed [Option 1](#) throughout the process. Based on concerns of inconsistencies with the [Olbrich Park Adopted Master Plan](#), Parks staff offered a second option to the BPC at the 7/11/2018 meeting referred to as [Option 2](#). The BPC supported Option 2 and the issue was referred to Common Council. Option 2 was never approved by PBMVC, nor subsequently by the Transportation Commission. The Council adopted a substitute resolution ([Legistar #52035](#)) that approved the original geometry (Option 1) but directed City Engineering to “review and possibly include the following recommendations in the final design based upon feedback received.” No significant additional work was completed on this at the time in 2018.

In the Spring of 2021 Engineering staff, assisted by Traffic Engineering and Parks staff, worked on reviewing options for the connection between Lakeland Ave and Olbrich Ave. Working with Alder Foster, the group developed a third option, that would allow for a plowed path in the winter but would not bring the through bikers into the park as far as Option 1. This is referred to herein as original Option 3, and can be viewed on page 3 of the [October presentation of options to the BPC](#). Option 3 was reviewed and recommended by both the Transportation Commission and Board of Park Commissioners in 2021.

Since the last time the BPC considered this issue in October of 2021, a few things have occurred. In the Fall of 2021, local residents contacted Engineering and Parks expressing concern that Option 3, as shown at the time, would interfere with sledding, a long established drum circle and an area where neighborhood gatherings such as solstice occur. In addition, they expressed concern that the path alignment for both 1 and 3 will provide an obstacle for park visitors accessing the restrooms, the canoe launch and the lake shoreline. The neighbors were interested in reviewing the options again. They favored Option 2 and in addition they submitted an additional concept for consideration removing bike traffic from the Park, which is referred to as [Option 4](#).

Over the winter, it became obvious to staff that the original Option 3 the design did not provide sufficient spacing to allow for uninterrupted sledding. We continued to hear from residents that expressed concern that Option 3 went through an area used for seasonal festivals and gatherings as well as a well-established drum circle.

Based on these concerns, Engineering conducted a detailed survey of the sled run out area, and working with Parks and TE staff, the team developed a new [Option 3a](#). Staff held a public information meeting on March 22nd of this year, we heard multiple perspectives from a variety of stakeholders. Unfortunately, a clear consensus was not reached at the meeting. Some residents continued to express concerns that the paved path shown in Option 3a also creates an obstacle for those wishing to access the restrooms and the canoe launch.

The issue then went before the Transportation Commission on March 23rd of this year. The TC recommended Option 1, with Option 3a as an alternative, stressing the importance from a Transportation Commission perspective of the year round access for bikes. The table below provides a general overview of the series of meetings and options considered, as well as outcomes of those meetings.

Summary of Legislative and Public Meetings

First Round	Date	Leg File Number	Options Shown	Outcome
Various Public Information Meetings	Various	N/A	Option 1	Option 1 supported
Ped/Bike and Motor Vehicle Commission	6/26/18	52035	Option 1	Option 1 recommended
Board of Park Commissioners	7/11/18	52354	Option 1 and 2	Option 2 recommended
Common Council	6/19/18	52035	Option 1 and 2	See substitute resolution, attached
Second Round				
Transportation Commission	7/25/21	67043	Option 1, 2 and 3	Option 3 favored but did not provide an action
Board of Park Commissioners	10/21/21	67067	Option 1, 2 and 3	Option 3 selected
Third Round				
Public Information Meeting	3/22/22	N/A	Option 1, 2, revised 3 and 4	No clear outcome, voices on all sides
Transportation Commission	3/23/22	70601	Option 1, 2, revised 3 and 4	Option 1 recommended with Option 3 as alternative
SASYN Transportation Committee Meeting		N/A	Option 1, 2, revised 3 and 4	Recommended Option 2
Board of Park Commissioners	4/13/22	70601	Option 1, 2, revised 3 and 4	

ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVES

The background information on the process for this important project above highlights the many perspectives and iterations this project has been through. At this time, similar to what was presented at the Public Information Meeting and Transportation Committee meeting, the Board of Park Commissioners has before it Options 1, 2, 3a (revised 3), and 4. Below is a brief overview of each of these options.

Option 1: This option does provide for year round use in that that paved path avoids the sled run out area. This option, in the opinion of Parks staff focuses on bike use to the detriment of other park users. A person attempting to access the lake shore will have to cross a busy bike path to get there. It will bring bike traffic into a relatively quiet part of Olbrich Park. This path alignment does not align with the 2009 master plan.

Option 2: Early consideration and initial approval by the BPC for this option occurred based on the path not being plowed in the winter to preserve sledding access. This does conflict with transportation goals of providing paths that can be maintained for winter access. It is the most direct route and will result in less pavement through the park than Options 1 or 3. This path alignment most closely integrates with the 2009 master plan.

Option 3a: This option allows for year round use, and creates a flat open space at the toe of the Olbrich hill that can be leveraged into a welcoming space in the coming years. This path alignment does not align with the 2009 master plan.

Option 4: Parks is open to this idea, however, as of the past few years, we have worked to make bikes and biking a welcome activity in our park system, we feel this does not further that effort. It does provide year round use, and does not interfere with sledding. It is a very indirect route and will involve additional climbing for bicyclists headed in either direction. This path alignment does not align with the 2009 master plan.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

After reviewing the Options that have been considered and balancing multiple factors, Parks staff recommends that the Board of Park Commissioners Adopt and the City move forward with the Option 3a. Key factors in this recommendation from staff include:

- The proposed alignment balances a multitude of factors and voices that have been a part of the process.
- Despite not being the most closely aligned to the Adopted Master Plan, it seems based on the factors and input available at this time, that an adjustment from the Master Plan here is reasonable, especially if that adjustment considers how to provide shoreline space that is more flexible than if the path were relatively close to it.
- The proposed alignment reduces potential conflicts between bikers passing through the park across the entire year.
- The design creates an open space for park users at the toe of the hill during the warmer months while preserving significant open space for more active uses on the other side of the path.
- The design provides for ample space during the winter for sledding and significantly reducing potential conflicts between park users biking and sledding.
- The shoreline area north and west of Starkweather Creek within Olbrich Park is of particularly high value to the Parks system. Providing a flexible space that can meet the needs of the community over the long term is of significant value in promoting POSP strategy of improved lake connection for all. During the 2018 discussion of the options, neighbors expressed a desire that this area remain intact as a flexible space that offers opportunities for a calmer, contemplative park space next to the lake.
- Transportation facilities and corresponding winter maintenance responsibilities continue to grow without corresponding operational resources. Though Option 3a does increase from the existing levels of responsibility, it does so to a significantly lesser extent than Option 1.

This project provides an opportunity for reinvestment in important infrastructure within Olbrich Park as a part of the larger Atwood project and without impacting the Parks Division's Capital Budget. The Parks Division supports the overall project and seeks to balance the diverse needs and perspectives of all within the community. I think that Option 3a has the potential to create more opportunities for more diverse uses within the Park, including bikers, than any of the other options. Based on this, and after consultation with professional staff, review of input received, and careful consideration, I am recommending that the Board of Park Commissioners adopt Option 3a as the preferred alignment of the multi-use path through Olbrich Park.