



June 7, 2022

Eric Knepp, Parks Superintendent
Madison Parks Department
210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd #104
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Mr. Knepp,

Please accept this letter and accompanying materials as a formal request from the Olbrich Botanical Society (OBS) and Madison Parks Foundation (MPF) to rename the park currently known as Kerr-McGee Triangle Park to “R. Richard Wagner Park,” after R. Richard (Dick) Wagner, who passed away on December 12, 2021. As a transformative leader who made our community and parks system better, renaming this park in his honor will recognize and celebrate his lifetime of community service and advocacy, and allow future Madisonians to learn about his important legacy as a public servant and leader in the LGBTQ+ community.

Dick’s Legacy with Madison Parks

Dick’s steady and skillful leadership helped create the first-class parks system Madison enjoys today.

For more than three decades, Dick served on the Board of Directors for the Olbrich Botanical Society, volunteering more than 2,100 hours and helping Olbrich navigate multiple capital campaigns, strategic plans, and expansion projects, including the recently-built Frautschi Family Learning Center and new production greenhouses, the largest capital project in Madison Parks and OBS history. Under Dick’s leadership, the Gardens grew into a regional tourist destination, welcoming more than 335,000 visitors each year to a free, accessible oasis of beauty, inspiration, and education.

Outside of Olbrich, Dick was an active volunteer and advocate throughout the Madison Parks system and beyond. He led the Historic Park fund, which created the Period Garden Park in Mansion Hill, and wrote the case statement for Holy Wisdom Monastery to raise money to purchase the 55 acres that is now Wisdom Prairie.

He was a founder of Kerr-McGee Triangle Park. According to a recent Our Lives Magazine article, Dick led neighborhood protests in the 1970s against an incongruent apartment complex,

which led to the City Of Madison acquiring the land and designating it as park space. Dick spent a great amount of time maintaining the planting beds at Kerr-McGee and was an annual participant in the Earth Day Cleanup Challenge. Not lost on us is the fact that Dick died in Kerr-McGee park, doing what he did best – serving others – as he was re-routing a package to a neighbor that was mistakenly delivered to his house.

OBS and MPF are honored to be among the community organizations that will receive a gift from Dick's estate, and are forever grateful for his lifetime of service and generosity.

Beyond the Madison Parks system, Dick had an unparalleled influence on Madison, Dane County, and the State of Wisconsin, particularly as a champion of LGBTQ+ rights. We feel these significant accomplishments further support our request to rename Kerr-McGee Triangle Park in his honor.

Dick's Service to the City of Madison

Dick chaired the Madison Landmarks Commission and lived in several Madison landmark homes. He was a founding member of Historic Madison, Inc. and the Madison Trust for Historic Preservation. Appointed by Mayors Soglin, Skornicka, Sensenbrenner, Bauman, and Ciesleweicz to other bodies, his service included chairing the Plan Commission and the Urban Design Commission.

Dick's Leadership in Dane County and Wisconsin

In 1980, he was elected to the Dane County Board of Supervisors where he served 14 years, including four years as chairperson. County service included the Dane County Regional Planning Commission, where he championed the first Starkweather Water Quality Plan, and the Airport Commission, where he championed noise abatement efforts.

Governor Martin Schreiber appointed him to the Wisconsin Arts Board, where he served as chairperson, and the Wisconsin Humanities Council. Governor Tony Earl appointed him as co-chair of the Governor's Council on Lesbian and Gay Issues. In 1974, he supported efforts to enact a Madison gay rights ordinance and in 1978 and 1979 he served on the advisory board for the Gay Center.

Dick's Advocacy in the LGBTQ+ Community

In 1985, as one of the first openly gay officials in the nation, he was a founding member of the National Association and Conference of Gay and Lesbian Public Officials (now the Victory Institute) and co-hosted the fifth conference in Madison with now Senator Tammy Baldwin.

Dick was a founding member and first co-chair of the New Harvest Foundation for LGBTQ+ charitable causes in the region and organized efforts to place George Segal's "Gay Liberation" in Orton Park. He served on the Board of the AIDS Network where he championed the Rodney Scheel House for persons with HIV/AIDS. He served on the board of Fair Wisconsin 2005-2013, and co-founded UW-Madison's LGBT Alumni Association.

Dick was also an accomplished author and historian, writing two books on the state's gay history, "We've Been Here All Along" in 2019 and "Coming Out, Moving Forward: Wisconsin's Recent Gay History" in mid-2020.

Thank you again for your consideration of our request to create R. Richard Wagner Park. We look forward to continuing to work with you in our efforts to meaningfully honor Dick's legacy.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Tanya Zastrow
Executive Director
Olbrich Botanical Society

Stephanie Franklin
Executive Director
Madison Parks Foundation

OBS / MPF

Please find attached:

Letter of Support from Alder Michael Verveer
6th District Alder
Letter from the Marquette Neighborhood Association.