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**Subject:** Parks Commission meeting April 3, 2024 Agenda Item 15 Legistar number 81653

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Attached to this email is a PDF containing my comments on the Lake Monona Waterfront Master Plan.

Ron Shutvet

## **Lake Monona Waterfront Master Plan Comments submitted April-3-2024 by Ron Shutvet**

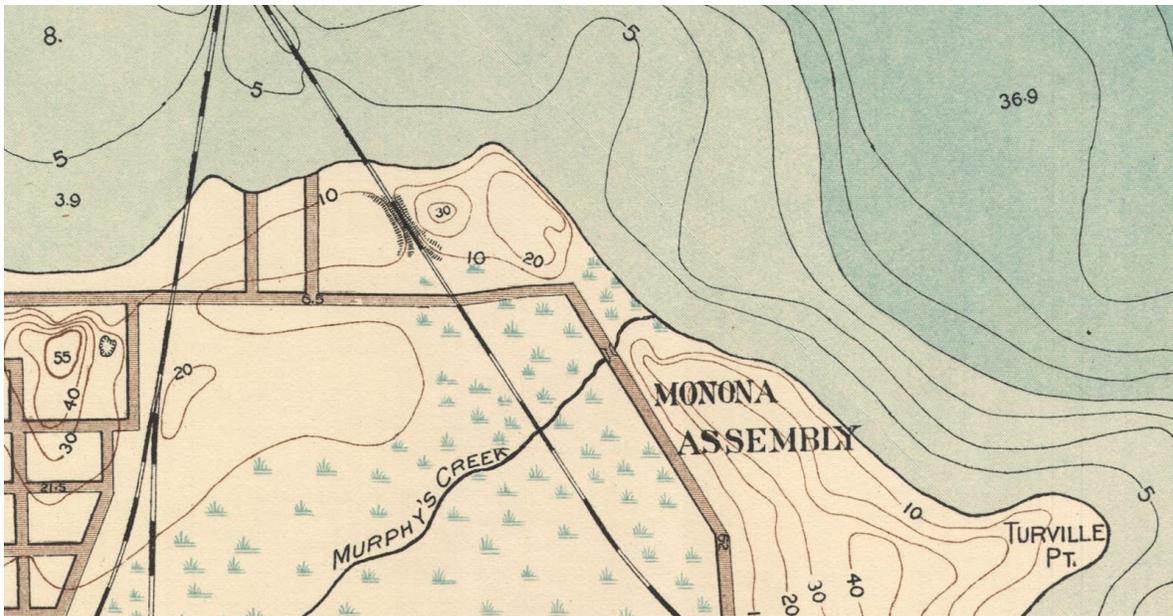
### **Olin Park Area**

A natural glacial ridge rising 10 to 30 feet above Lake Monona once existed just east of the railroad corridor and near the shoreline of Lake Monona in the northern portion of Olin Park. The railroad had cut its right of way through this ridge of glacial deposits when the rail corridor was constructed in 1854. Then when John Nolen Drive was constructed in the mid 1960's, the remainder of that glacial ridge was pushed into the lake as fill material to construct the John Nolen Drive causeway. You can still see the remains of this ridge on the west side of the rail corridor on the residential properties along O'Sheridan Street. This ridge and other higher glacial deposits between Lake Wingra and Lake Monona helped create the marshland that surrounds much of Lake Wingra and the southwestern reaches of Lake Monona.

I would like to see the city restore the higher ground that existed northeast of John Nolen Drive before it was pushed into Lake Monona to construct the causeway. This restored higher ground would act as a noise barrier that will deflect vehicular traffic noise upward and over the northern portion of Olin Park. The three smaller "Landscape berms for noise attenuation" that are shown on the LMW draft plans are likely just tall enough to partially block the view of JND from the park and not do much to attenuate the traffic noise.

There are people who will say that they won't be able to see the lake and Madison's isthmus as well as before as they travel northward on John Nolen Drive and approach the causeway. That may be so, but I say they will still be able to enjoy the view of Lake Monona and the downtown skyline for their entire trip across the causeway.

Before John Nolen Drive was constructed the passengers riding on the northbound trains that traveled on this rail corridor couldn't see the downtown skyline or the lake very well either until the train cars passed the glacial hill that the railroad corridor had cut through when it was constructed in 1854. I'm sure the passengers still enjoyed the wonderful view of the growing city once they passed by the hill and were crossing the railroad causeway. The trains back then probably slowed to less than 35 miles an hour as they crossed the lake and approached the growing city on the other side.



A portion of the Hydrographic Map of Lake Monona, 1900  
Click on the above map to open the full high resolution version of this map.

The motorists who would complain about their view being blocked could just slow down a little bit more as they cross the causeway. They will still see Madison's Isthmus and Lake Monona just fine once they pass by this restored hill. We need to place the quality of the pedestrian/bicycle experience along the JND corridor above the desire for motorists to travel as fast as possible through this area in their vehicles. How can we get traffic on the John Nolen Drive Corridor to slow down? I suggest the speed limit over the causeway be permanently reduced to 25 MPH along the entire causeway. The JND causeway needs to be utilized as a scenic drive to and from the city, not a high speed commuter corridor.

Transportation planners will say you need to keep the speed limit higher to keep traffic from becoming congested. But every time the traffic becomes congested along this corridor the speed limit doesn't matter because everyone is going the same speed, slow. It is the growing traffic counts; the overwhelmed traffic lights; and the backed up turn lanes at the intersections along JND that slow the traffic down the most during high traffic volume times, not the speed limit.

Ever since it was opened to traffic in 1967, the entire length of John Nolen Drive became a racetrack in the minds of some drivers who used it then and who use it today. It is common for people living near John Nolen Drive to hear the sound of cars or motorcycles actually racing each other across the causeway. This is most noticeable on warm summer evenings when the windows are open and the daytime traffic has died down. But it happens in the middle of the day, too. I can hear the revved up engines over the sound of the waterfall in my backyard. Even most of the vehicles going slower are usually still going over the posted speed limit. This has been the nature of travel along the JND causeway since it was constructed. I've experienced it myself throughout my 48 years or so that I have lived here. It will only be a matter of time

before one of these vehicles veers out of control; and flies across the ped/bike trail; and injures or kills people on the trail. We need to slow this traffic down to make this a safe and pleasurable experience for all who travel along the JND corridor.

The glacial hill that once existed at this location was a part of a trail system that was developed over thousands of years by the indigenous people who moved here once the last glacier receded from the Madison area. Restoring this hill will help tell the glacial and Native American history of this area. To learn more of the Native American history of this park of Madison, you can visit the Friends of Olin-Turville Parks website where the friends group has created a new webpage on the Native American history of this area of Madison. Here is a link to that webpage.

<https://www.olin-turville.org/history/native-american-history-of-this-area>

### **Constructed Wet Mesic Prairie in Olin Park**

The proposed Wet Mesic Prairie in Olin Park should be scaled back to about half the size shown in the plans. This part of Olin Park needs to retain as much usable open space as possible as it has some of the best views of the lake and the Madison skyline as you move through the park. Native bur oak and white oak trees need to be planted in this entire area to provide a natural open oak savanna appearance not a wetland experience. With a restored hill along John Nolen Drive in this area, people will be enticed to pause from their walk or biking experience and sit under the oak trees (once they grow to an appreciable size) and enjoy the views of the lake and downtown Madison from this area.

The area I propose for a smaller wet mesic prairie is the southern half of the full area proposed in the draft plans. This area just north of Lakeside Street had formerly been a wetland area. It was part of the existing wetland south of Lakeside Street next to Wingra Creek before Lakeside Street was constructed. A portion of the wetland area south of Lakeside Street is partially filled with building rubble brought in from downtown Madison many years ago. If the city wants to restore additional wetland in this area, this is the place to start.

The wetland area bounded by Wingra Creek, Lakeside Street, and the park entrance road should be incorporated into the master plan. This wetland area could become a jewel of Olin Park if it is restored and boardwalks added to provide a self-guided nature trail through this area. The surface water drainage system in the park area to the north should be directed towards this existing natural wetland, not towards Lake Monona in an underground storm sewer pipe that is being proposed along the east side of the Madison Parks office building. A small decoratively designed box culvert should be constructed across Lakeside Street to connect the two seasonally flooded areas again.

### **Transportation and Parking Issues**

More details are needed on proposed future transportation and parking infrastructure at Olin Park. How will overflow parking be handled? There are times when existing parking in this area is strained to the max with activities in Olin-Turville Park during the summer months. I am not sure that the 90 degree intersection proposed near 330 E Lakeside will be an improvement. The existing entrance road for Olin Park was constructed with a curved design to direct vehicles around the curve and onto the new park entrance road, Olin-Turville Court, rather than have them travel east on Lakeside Street and encounter the dead end and turn-around circle at Wingra Creek. Before the existing Olin Park entrance road was constructed, the original route of Lakeside Street continued eastward from that dead end road; across a bridge at Wingra Creek; and eastward again between the Olin Park high ground and the level athletic field.

### **Canopy Walk**

Seriously reconsider the proposed canopy walk. This park feature will probably be enjoyed by some park visitors but hated by many others. It is too close to the natural lakeshore and detracts from the fact that there is already a natural glacial hill in this area that provides a great view of Lake Monona and Madison's Isthmus. Few will enjoy the experience of being underneath this canopy walk. It will be a view blocking eyesore for people experiencing the park from ground level. Depending on the construction materials used, the deck of this canopy walk could become an annoying noise maker in the park, with the sound of footsteps hitting the decking. Imagine this noise traveling outward from the canopy walk area. I also wonder how well this canopy walk will be able to handle bicycles and roller blades. They will probably be noisy traveling on this elevated decking too. Going to be hard to keep them off.

### **ADA Path along lakeshore between the Parks office building and Lake Monona**

The full draft master plan document shows a new ADA accessible path that would connect the western portion of the Olin Park lakeshore to the proposed boating pier on the east side of the Parks office building. I don't see how this is possible with the amount of grade change that exists here (a rather high stone stairway exists there now). You would have to alter even more of the natural glacial hill to construct this as an ADA route. Much of the eastern portion of this hill was removed when the Wisconsin Medical Society building was constructed back in 1954. Please do not alter any more of the glacial hill to achieve this goal. The Parks building is too close to the lake to be able to create an ADA path between the proposed boating pier and the existing Parks building without significantly altering the natural topography of this beautiful hill even more than it has been altered already.

### **A Proposed Nature Center in Olin Park**

A proposed nature center and any other proposed new buildings should be postponed into the future after the city has officially begun acquiring the remaining residential properties to the east of this park. A nature center in the northern portion of Olin Park needs to be more than a little rectangular building in a parking lot sitting way off the lake and having no view of the lake.

The entire land area north of Wingra Creek and east of John Nolen Drive should be the expanded boundaries for a revised master plan study of this portion of Olin Park. This future park area deserves to be master planned as a whole, not in a bunch of pieces.

The existing building is too small, poorly designed for a multi-use parks building, and is way too close to the lakeshore. The city should start planning now for a new building or multiple buildings but incorporate the entire land area north of Wingra Creek and east of John Nolen Drive into the full master plan for this future park. Position all structures further from the glacial hill and the lake to provide a much larger lakeshore experience here.

Potential uses for a new building or buildings in this area include a combination glacial history and Native American history discovery center; a nature center; boat rental and beach facilities; beer garden on the lake; and more.

#### **Best location for a new beach on Lake Monona**

Thoughts of a new swimming beach on Lake Monona should also be directed to the shoreline along the existing residential properties east of the Parks office building. The lakeshore in this area has a nice sand bottom that gradually deepens as you get further into the lake. Plan elements that require the construction of additional buildings and engineering infrastructure in Olin Park need to be postponed until Madison fully commits to acquiring all of the residential properties east of 330 East Lakeside Street. That is the time to start the design phase for a new building or set of buildings that are set back more from the lake and provide a better lakeshore experience than what is currently possible with the land that the city now controls.

#### **Shoreline areas in Law Park and along the JND causeway**

The existing blasted limestone rip-rap along the causeway and Law Park should be repositioned or enough removed so that it can be covered with a sufficient layer of natural rounded glacial cobbles and boulders to give the rip-rapped areas a more natural appearance.

Please do not look at glacial cobbles and boulders as just a manmade lake edge treatment. Often, glacially formed natural lakes have huge quantities of cobbles and boulders naturally piled up at the shoreline along portions of the lake edge. At the tip of Turville Point there is a large section of shoreline that consists of glacial cobbles and boulders that were pushed up into piles over 4 feet high in places. Geologists call these natural piles of stone and soil along the lake edge 'ice ramps'. They were formed by the action of thousands of years of shoreline erosion and winter ice heaves.



Ice Ramps at Turville Point - Lake View 12-8-2023



Ice Ramps at Turville Point - Land View 12-8-2023

Much of the shoreline of Turville Point Conservation Park is a natural shoreline. Thousands of years of wind and wave action have cut away some of the original shoreline of the glacial hills in Olin-Turville Park. During that same time, thousands of years of winter ice heaves have slowly pushed the remaining cobbles and boulders along the shoreline further onto the shore each winter to create most of the existing cobble and boulder coated shoreline. This place is absolutely beautiful with the glacial cobbles and boulders along much of its shoreline!

Consider the placement of several large glacial boulders in groups at locations in Law Park and along causeway shoreline. These larger boulders could be utilized as natural seating at select

areas along the shoreline. Natural glacial boulders will always look better than large cut stones or concrete seating areas because they will retain their natural appearance and won't look crooked having settled a little bit since they were put in place.

Ice heaves in the winter and large wave events can and do gradually move massive stone or concrete steps and seating at the shoreline out of place in a few years. A few years ago, the UW Memorial Union completely reconstructed the cut stone shoreline on their lakefront. Years of wave action and water level fluctuations had caused settlement and displacement of the cut stones at the lake edge. Also, where concrete has been used to secure a level pedestrian route along the lakeshore near the UW Hooper sailboat storage areas, large glacial boulders that were placed in great quantities between the concrete wall and the lake to protect the wall from direct wave action and undercutting of the retaining wall footings have already shifted slightly and sit a little lower than when they were positioned there during the most recent reconstruction of that shoreline.

### **Artificial Weed Beds**

The use of manmade floating weed beds should be avoided. Lake Monona has plenty of weed beds. In fact, there are so many submerged weed beds along the causeway and Olin Park shorelines that the county cannot keep up with cutting and collecting the excessive vegetation and removing it from Lake Monona each summer. In most areas where these artificial weed beds are being proposed, they will often be subjected to high waves when the lake is not covered with ice. Then unless these artificial weed beds are removed in the winter, ice heaves and ice shoves could likely damage or even destroy these shoreline features. Then too, the steel cables and anchor weights needed to hold these structures in place will present themselves as annoying or even hazardous obstacles to fishermen and anyone boating on the lake.

I worry too that these artificial weed beds and floating wetland areas will become coated with windblown and stormwater sourced debris in vast quantities that will be not only unsightly but difficult to remove. This debris will contain lots of waste plastic items that tend to float to the shoreline and collect with the floating vegetation there. One benefit of the rip-rap shoreline is that the stronger wave action there slowly breaks up the manmade debris and it gradually disappears. It doesn't really disappear but slowly breaks up so finely that it is no longer visible unless you take a closer look. In areas where floating weeds can accumulate along the shoreline, the man made debris will accumulate too. If not cleaned up somehow, this mass of weeds and human debris is what you might see when you look at these floating weedbeds and engineered fringe wetlands along the causeway shoreline.

### **The Water Walk on the Causeway**

The proposed boardwalks arching out over the lake along the causeway and the walking paths near the lakeshore will also be exposed to periods of high water and strong wave action. Ice heaves could damage some of the boardwalk structure and shoreline improvements during extremely cold winters unless the decking is removed each winter. The existing rip-rap

shoreline that coats the lake edge on the causeway and along Law Park is moved around somewhat by the shifting ice during colder winters with deep ice. The city should do some research to see if similar shoreline structures have been installed on other larger lakes in northern Wisconsin and Minnesota that experience even colder winters with thick ice and strong ice heave activity. Find out if some designs hold out better against the elements than other designs.

### **Ped/Bike Underpass**

The design details are still quite vague for the proposed ped/bike underpass on the south end of Law Park. The city needs to provide a more detailed plan of the proposed ped/bike underpass, including a cross section view complete with proposed grade elevations for the railroad tracks, roadway, and ped/bike paths in this area.

To create a truly grand gateway underpass at this location, the elevations of the railroad tracks and roads need to be raised. Since this redesign of the JND corridor is meant to be constructed to last for many years, now is the time to integrate a ped/bike underpass into this project that will be embraced and heavily used by city residents and visitors alike. In studying this location for a ped/bike underpass for the last 8 years, I believe the best alternative would be to raise the railroad tracks approximately 6 feet and John Nolen Drive approximately 8 feet at the proposed underpass location. This would be for an underpass having a 10 foot clearance height. You can knock two feet off these numbers if an underpass with a 8 foot clearance height is constructed. But, the lower underpass ceiling won't be as inviting. The elevations of the two corridors would then gradually lower back to existing elevations as you move away from the proposed underpass. The railroad will be able to stay at a 0.5% grade or less. The road grades would be manageable also.

This would require the reconstruction of the northern four JND bridges as well as the northern two railroad bridges adjacent to the JND corridor. Since the city is already planning on reconstructing all of the roadway bridges over the causeway, the reconstruction of the two railroad bridges and additional fill necessary to bring the rail and roadway elevations up to their new elevations would be an additional cost. The railroad recently reconstructed four of the six railroad bridges over Lake Monona and created slightly higher watercraft clearances at those bridge locations. These two remaining railroad bridges need to be upgraded to provide the clearances necessary for the growing popularity of small watercraft on Lake Monona and Monona Bay. Does this all sound like a costly and complicated endeavor? I think so. Is this effort going to be worth the cost? We will find out eventually, one way or another.

Wouldn't it be great if you could cross under JND any time you want without having to wait for the traffic lights to change or worry about getting run over by a vehicle that fails to stop at the lights. And wouldn't it be great if you could cross under the northernmost JND and railroad bridges in your canoe, kayak, or other small watercraft? Right now, just water and fish are the only things that can go under the northernmost John Nolen Drive bridge as this bridge is too low for this area to be a navigable waterway.

And what can be done with that public sidewalk on the south side of Broom Street at the rail corridors along JND? This sidewalk is currently not ADA compliant. There is a seven step concrete stairway at that location today. If Broom Street and the rail crossing at this intersection is raised 5 feet the stairway can be eliminated. The dilapidated garage at 318 S. Broom Street could be removed for the property owner at no cost to the owner and other parking arrangements be made for occupants of the property. See image below.



318 S. Broom Street

Across Broom Street, at the back portion of 451 West Wilson Street the property along Broom Street and the rail corridor could be enclosed with a 5 foot high retaining wall or the entire back portion of the property could be rebuilt with a partially below grade parking structure having a useable open space for the occupants on the roof of the structure. Costs associated with this could be negotiated between the city and the property owner depending on how the back of the lot is modified to work with the new railroad grade.



451 W. Wilson Street along the Broom St. side of that lot.

I have already submitted to the Madison Engineering Department my suggestions for new elevations for the John Nolen drive roadway and rail corridor as well as elevation data for an underpass that has a 10 foot height clearance and the ped/bike path through the underpass would be at elevation 848 feet on the lake side and 846 feet at the rail corridor.

I am hopeful that an underpass will be constructed here that will have a clear line of sight from one end to the other as this will be necessary to provide an open and inviting underpass for all to enjoy as they navigate the JND corridor without having to wait for traffic signals at the at grade crossings. I hope the city doesn't just kick the can down the road and construct a less desirable H or T style underpass that is partially below lake level at this location because they don't want to deal with the cost and the effort needed to raise the elevation of the railroad and JND high enough to create a truly grand ped/bike underpass.

### **Hamilton Pier Plaza and Swimming Pool**

I question the feasibility of the Hamilton Pier Plaza with its swimming pool. Repeated cycles of winter lake ice heaves or high water with strong waves could damage this pier and pool area. The proposed swimming pool on this pier deck looks out of place. It could even be a health hazard for people attempting to swim here. A swimming pool at this location would be way more dangerous than a beach. The lake gets quite deep quickly at this location as you move away from the shoreline. Will the swimming pool have sides and a bottom or will it just be an area of the lake surrounded by a pier? How would an area like this be winterized to keep the lake ice from slowly destroying it. Are others having trouble imagining how this will work jutting out over the lake as shown in the plans? Inexperienced swimmers, especially children, should probably not be swimming here at all. Some park visitors will probably want to swim in both the pool and the lake at this location. Lake swimmers and canoes or kayaks could be pushed under

the pier. People could sustain injury here during high wave events. The Hamilton Pier Plaza appears to be flanked on both sides by proposed engineered wetland areas. Would park users who decide to jump into the lake to swim at this location have to swim back to the shore in relatively deep water then climb through the artificial wetland area to get back on shore? Where's the diving board? Lots of design, feasibility, and safety questions here.

### **Boat Vendor with Paddle Craft Livery**

The proposed boat vendor area with paddle craft livery in Law Park lacks a breakwater. High water and strong wave events can damage the pier and boats moored there. Winter ice heaves and late winter ice shoves can damage the shoreline landscaping in this area and any building or pier constructed directly on the shoreline. I have seen ice heaves push large rip-rap boulders upward and partially onto the shore here. They become partially suspended in the air for a while until the ice melts and then gravity and high wave action pull them back snugly onto the rip-rap layer again.

### **Conclusion**

I have other concerns about the proposed master plan but the above are the highest on my list right now. I worry a lot about things like ice heaves, high waves, and other acts of nature that could make some of these proposed lakeshore elements short lived and more expensive than originally thought. I left out any discussion of the master plan elements in Law Park northeast of Monona Terrace. This area still seems to be in flux due to additional design elements that might one day cover a portion of John Nolen Drive in that area. As we move forward from here, I hope that the city will listen and respond to the concerns of all area residents who take the time to study this master plan and suggest appropriate revisions.