Lake Access Recommendations

Access to the lakes is a defining feature of Madison, Wisconsin, as the city is situated around three primary lakes (Mendota, Monona, and Wingra) and is part of a chain of five lakes in the Yahara River watershed. There are many benefits of this geographical feature, to name just a few, warm weather water recreational opportunities (fishing, swimming, sailing, etc.), natural beauty, an excellent venue to host community and cultural events, and when the lakes are frozen, an additional 13,000 acres of public open space for a variety of activities, such as skating, fishing, kite flying and ice boating.

Improving access to Madison's lakes involves several key initiatives to enhance recreational opportunities and ensure inclusivity for all residents and visitors. This plan recommends improvements to existing beaches, boat launches, and the installation of accessible facilities:

1. Improvements to Existing Beaches

- Accessibility Upgrades: Retrofit existing beaches with accessible pathways, ramps, and seating areas to ensure people with disabilities can enjoy beach access.
- Facility Amenities: Install amenities such as accessible restrooms, changing facilities, and shower stations to accommodate all visitors.
- Consider strategically selecting 4 to 6 beaches for shoreline design services and reconstruction with sustainability in mind, minimizing shore scouring, and sand migration and other environmental considerations.

2. Care of Existing Boat Launches

- Maintenance and Upkeep: Regularly inspect and maintain existing boat launches to ensure they are in good condition and safe for use.
- Improvement of Facilities: Upgrade amenities such as parking areas, dock facilities, and signage to improve user experience and safety.
- Environmental Conservation: Implement best practices for stormwater management and erosion control to protect water quality and shoreline habitats. Work with the WisDNR to complete necessary dredging in a timely manner. Consider moving a launch to a more sustainable location if its dredging needs are excessive.

3. Installation of Accessible Kayak Launches

- Distribution: Install accessible kayak launches at strategic locations on Mendota, Monona, and Wingra Lakes to accommodate boat access for individuals with disabilities.
- Location Selection: Identify strategic locations around the lakes for installing accessible kayak launches, considering factors such as ease of access, scenic views, and proximity to parking.
- Design Specifications: Construct kayak launches with ADA-compliant designs, including sturdy ramps, transfer benches, and handrails for safe and convenient use.
- Promotion and Education: Provide outreach and educational programs to promote the use of accessible kayak launches and safety guidelines for paddlers.

4. Accessible Boat and Fishing Piers

- Location and Distribution: Install accessible boat piers at strategic locations on Mendota, Monona, and Wingra Lakes to accommodate boat access for individuals with disabilities.
- Design Features: Incorporate features such as wider platforms, non-slip surfaces, and railing systems that comply with ADA standards for safe boarding and disembarking.
- Fishing Amenities: Install accessible fishing piers with features such as a wide platform to ensure the fishing pier platform is wide enough to accommodate wheelchair users and individuals with mobility aids. Use of a non-slip decking material to provide traction and prevent slips or falls. Install railings around the perimeter of the fishing pier at appropriate heights (typically between 34 inches and 38 inches above the deck surface) with openings no larger than 4 inches to prevent wheelchairs from getting stuck. Include handrails along gangways and ramps leading to the pier for added stability and support. Use transition plates at the pier entrance to smooth the transition from land to the pier, ensuring wheelchair users can navigate the gap safely.

5. Lake Access Support Buildings

- In recent years the Parks Division has built new beach shelters at Warner and Tenney Park
- In coming years the Parks Division has plans to build new support buildings at Brittingham and Olbrich.
- The Parks Division plans to collaborate with local businesses, nonprofit organizations, and educational institutions to help provide funding and volunteer efforts for the lake access support buildings.
- During the Vilas Park Master Planning process, the Vilas beach house was inspected and found to be in good condition overall, however the uses of the building and interior are in need of updating.

By implementing these improvements, the City of Madison can enhance accessibility, safety, and enjoyment of its lakes for all residents and visitors, reinforcing the lakes' role as a central recreational and natural asset within the community.