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Sent: Wednesday, October 30, 2024 12:14 PM

To: Park Commission <pacommission@cityofmadison.com>; Mayor <Mayor@cityofmadison.com>

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Subject: Failure to Follow Commitments to Protect Indigenous Cultural Heritage in Vilas Park

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Dear Board of Park Commissioners,

I am writing to ask that you please direct Parks Superintendent Eric Knepp to follow-through with Parks Department commitments to protect the Indigenous cultural heritage in Vilas Park as outlined in his 2021 Vilas Park Master Plan Cultural Resources Memo. In this Cultural Resources Plan, Superintendent Knepp promised to engage with the Ho-Chunk Nation early in any planned project work in Vilas Park and to conduct at least a Phase 1 Survey before any work in project areas so that the City knows what cultural resources are or are not present and can plan accordingly.

Since the Vilas Park Master Plan was approved by your Board in 2021, there have been numerous violations of the Cultural Resources Plan by the Parks Department. Most recently, this week, the Parks Department flagrantly disregarded community concerns raised on numerous occasions, including before your Board at its September meeting, and directed the disturbance of an area indicated to contain Indigenous cultural resources.

If you will recall, at the September 2024 Board of Parks meeting, Superintendent Knepp initially proposed that you adopt a new cultural resources plan that would, in effect, eliminate the Indigenous cultural heritage protections for Vilas Park. Then, in a surprise move, he tabled his request, as many community members and public speakers had taken the time to appear before the Board and submit comments objecting to broken promises by the Parks Department to protect Indigenous cultural heritage, as well as the proposed new cultural resources plan that removed critical protections.

This week's disturbance is especially worrisome because it was in an area that the Parks Department knew may contain Indigenous cultural resources, possibly uncatalogued burial mounds and rocks that align with astronomical events, such as the rock alignments in nearby Bear Mound Park. Furthermore, it seems there was deliberate disregard and disturbance of the area, beyond what is necessary to remove a tree. It appears a bulldozer cleared the area and disturbed the soil of an approximately a 15 x 15-yard area and moved at least two of three boulders in alignment. The soil is now showing in this area, large tire tracks have created many indents, and the aligned boulders were moved multiple times without any regard for their original angle and placement (see attached photos). All of this done without any notification to the Ho-Chunk Nation's Office of Historic Preservation, as promised.

I understand that the City attempted to rectify the damage by moving the boulders again, but there was no clear and accurate marking as to the original placement. Please note that in Bear Mound Park, at the Spring Equinox alignment, the sun rises directly over the aligned boulder in the same shape, creating a halo effect--the boulder shape and placement are critical components of the Indigenous cultural heritage in the park.

Please use your authority to make sure that the City is following-through with its commitments to protect the Indigenous cultural heritage in Vilas Park. It is unfair and wrong to allow the Parks Department to deliberately flout promises and commitments made to the Ho-Chunk Nation and public in the Vilas Park Master Plan.

Sincerely,
Sally Lehner
Vilas Neighborhood Resident





