



# Madison Parks Division

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DATE: May 6, 2020  
TO: Board of Park Commissioners  
FROM: Eric Knepp, Parks Superintendent

## **RE: Oscar Mayer Special Area Plan (Legistar File #59745)**

The Board of Park Commissioners will be considering the Oscar Mayer Special Area Plan (“OMSAP”) at its meeting on May 13, 2020. The Board’s recommendations will be made to the Plan Commission, which is the Lead Referral on the item. The Plan Commission will subsequently make a recommendation to the Common Council. This memorandum is intended to provide plan-based context from Parks staff.

The OMSAP is a City Planning Division led planning process that commenced in mid-2018 after the closure of the Oscar Mayer plant on the Northside. The OMSAP once adopted would become a supplement to the City of Madison’s Imagine Madison Comprehensive Plan (“Imagine Madison Plan”) that guides future city planning and development in the area including land use, transportation, economic development, and parks and open spaces. The OMSAP process included the development of a strategic assessment report that set the vision and objectives for the redevelopment of the area. City Planning staff have managed the public engagement and outreach of this effort, as well as managed the challenging work of balancing multiple objectives in the development of the plan. As is normal for special area plans, City Planning engaged the Parks Division staff to ensure collaboration in the development of the plan. The Parks Division’s role in this collaboration is to work to ensure the special area plan is developed in a manner consistent with the park components of adopted plans, specifically, the Park and Open Space Plan (“POSP”), which similar to a special area plan, is a supplement to the City’s Imagine Madison Plan.

The POSP provides the plan basis for siting and sizing of new parks into the Madison Parks system. The POSP recommends walkable Mini and Neighborhood parks (within ½ a mile of residents), with a normal size of 4 to 12 acres. The POSP recommends access within 2 miles to Community Parks (and within ½ mile of Community Parks that serve a neighborhood park function). From a Community Park perspective, the presence of Demetral Park within the OMSAP provides sufficient presence of the larger Community Park amenities recommended by the POSP. Additionally, nearby Warner, Burrows, and Tenney layer this Community Park access for the area to include a diverse set of amenities. From a Mini and Neighborhood Park perspective, the POSP recognizes a modest deficiency in the area just north of the OMSAP area (see *Exhibit 10: Mini and Neighborhood Park Deficiencies Based on Service Areas*, pg. 71) based on a City owned parkland perspective. Notably, as illustrated on the subsequent pages (see *Exhibit 11*, pg. 73) this deficiency is significantly addressed by the presence of Sherman Middle School. Based on these factors, this area would not be considered currently underserved from a POSP perspective. However, the OMSAP shows significant new density and in areas that are currently industrial in nature. The POSP anticipates this type of growth in density by including a key strategy to “Acquire parkland to reduce parkland deficiencies and address increasing residential density.” Given the increased density, it is consistent with the POSP to plan for this within the OMSAP. City Planning worked on this issue with the Parks Division, as Parks staff agreed with early public comments that the park needed to be sized up to address the level of density proposed. The iterations of the plan have grown the proposed park and open space to approximately 13 acres, which in the City’s system would be a substantially sized Neighborhood Park. This sizing of the park as shown in the OMSAP plan is consistent with the POSP. Increasing the size of this park significantly beyond 13 acres is not supported in park planning documents, and is inconsistent with the adopted goals of the POSP.

In addition to providing a new City-owned public park, the OMSAP provides for increased connectivity in the area, including to, from, and through existing park spaces. The pedestrian and bike improvements contemplated in the plan will provide important linkages for residents and visitors to experience more parks, more safely than the existing conditions. This interconnected park system concept is critical to meet the diverse needs of our community by allowing ease of access to parks that planned and developed to incorporate diverse needs of the community. Madison Parks assesses recreational opportunities across the City that are available to the public and seeks to address deficiencies to provide equitable access. From this perspective, the OMSAP provides for the retention of a home for East Madison Little League, which is currently on private property. East Madison Little serves hundreds of children annually as a primary provider of youth baseball and softball program opportunities. Madison Parks does not currently have any youth baseball fields in the system, so the ability to ensure access through retaining these fields is of significant importance to the City.

The POSP includes twelve strategies, developed as part of the city-wide regional planning goals of the comprehensive plan. The plan's strategy to "Ensure that new park development occurs in a fiscally sustainable manner," is consistent with the OMSAP, which provides a fiscally prudent expansion to the Parks system. The parkland that is proposed is anticipated to be secured through dedication requirements from the developer under the Parkland Dedication requirements for new residential developments. This would mean the cost to the City for acquisition would be zero. The new parkland acquired could then be developed using primarily Park Impact Fees due from the developer of the new residential units. This should mean that the new park could be acquired and developed without requiring utilization of existing, and limited, Parks Division City tax funding. The alternative model of buying the land upfront has logic, but generally this model places a higher burden on the City to use existing funds to pay for acquisition and development, as opposed to relying on funding mechanisms codified in the ordinance for developer paid parkland dedication and infrastructure fees. Madison Parks has not purchased land for a new park in an area where a City plan would require it for dedication at least over the past fifteen years and doing so would be extraordinary. In addition to the acquisition and development costs, the Parks Division must acknowledge that there are real resource limitations in regard to operations of a park system. Adding resources that cannot be adequately maintained is a long-term unsustainable strategy for Madison's park system that is emphasized in the POSP.

Parks staff recognizes that there has been a significant focus and community conversation on this plan, with a significant focus on the 31 acre Hartmeyer owned property being acquired in total for a park. Though Parks staff recognizes and appreciates community members supporting more parkland for the City, there is not an Adopted Plan basis for supporting that sized of a park in this location. It would be extraordinary to seek parkland at this level exceeding established standards without a truly exceptional circumstance to do so. It is also important to note here that though there is inherent value in open spaces in the urban environment, initial review of this area by Parks staff indicates this would not be a logical expansion of the Conservation Parks portion of the park system. City Conservation Parks are focused on preserving the highest quality ecological assets available to ensure long-term conservation. Unfortunately, significant portions of this land have been disturbed over the last 100 years and restoration work would be sizable, costly, and long-term to meet Conservation Park standards.

The Board of Park Commissioners may recommend modifications it deems appropriate to the OMSAP to the Plan Commission. However, given the factors above, and the significant sustainability benefits of adding density to the City in a way that promotes long-term environmental sustainability, Parks staff recommends the approval of the OMSAP and that it be returned to the Plan Commission with the recommendation to adopt.