

Monday, Nov. 10, 2020

Re: Proposal for Retaining the Existing North-Side Playground in Vilas Park

Dear Alder Evers and the Urban Design Commission:

Please consider keeping the playground located on the north side of Vilas Park near the Van Buren entrance. This playground is known to neighborhood kids as the “Cheese Park” because of the swiss cheese-like play structure it features.

The Vilas Park redesign eliminates two playgrounds and adds one. It makes sense to add a play area near the beach and to keep the playground near the zoo--these are important play spaces that will be used by Vilas Park’s many visitors from across the city and beyond.

However, it doesn’t make sense to get rid of an existing playground that benefits all sorts of park visitors.

Benefits of Retaining the Cheese Park

Provides a Visible and Accessible Overflow Playground. On weekends and summer days, the Shoe Park and the beach can get very crowded. The Cheese Park will draw kids and families who are overwhelmed by the busier areas of the park and offer another place to play.

Encourages Children to Explore the Larger Park and Increase Their Activity Levels. Kids often run back and forth from the Shoe Park to the Cheese Park. Two playgrounds within sight of one another allows kids to safely run ahead of their caregivers--children benefit both physically and mentally from this kind of independent exploration.

Reduces Crowding in Popular Picnic Spaces Near the Zoo and Beach. Vilas Park is a sought-after location for school, group, and family picnics throughout the spring, summer, and early fall, and these groups usually choose a picnic area near one of the two existing playgrounds. Having a third play option for kids will help to spread these groups out around the park.

Currently, the Cheese Park is often chosen as a site for groups to meet--it offers a play space for younger kids and basketball for older kids and adults, as well as opportunities to grill. If we eliminate this play space for kids, these groups would likely only choose to meet near the zoo or the beach, making these areas much more crowded.

Draws Foot Traffic to More Areas of the Park. The Vilas Park redesign has some exciting new features that visitors might not be aware of. Caregivers drawn across the park by the playground will be exposed to the other opportunities on that side of the park, creating more users for the tennis, basketball, four-square, and pickleball courts.

Creates a More Diverse Group of Users for this Area of the Park. The open space near the Cheese Park is popular as a place for college students to gather--there are often groups gathering near the Cheese Park for keg kickball, or "sloshball."

The tennis and basketball courts also largely draw older teens and adults.

These are important users of the park, and we believe Vilas Park should be welcoming for everyone. However, removing the playground in this part of the park eliminates a social signal that this is a space for families as well as adults, which makes it safer for everyone.

Offers Space for Exercise. The Cheese Park, unlike the Shoe park, is also used for different types of cross training exercises. Runners, walkers, and bikers stop to do core or upper body exercises on the play equipment and trainers even occasionally offer group classes here.

Provides a Playground for the Vilas Neighborhood. Madison has playgrounds that are used by kids from all over the city, but it also provides playgrounds for neighborhood use. Removing this playground eliminates a neighborhood playground for Vilas kids.

We greatly appreciate the thoughtful planning that has gone into the Vilas Park redesign, and hope that you'll consider this small adjustment with large benefits.

Sincerely,

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