



Sierra Club Four Lakes Group

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Vilas Park Master Plan
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The Sierra Club Four Lakes Group is your local branch of the Sierra Club. We are an all-volunteer organization dedicated to environmental education and conservation. The Four Lakes Group area includes more than 5740 members in the counties of Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Lafayette, Rock and Sauk. And more specifically, just over 1440 members in the City of Madison.

Our members participate in a broad range of recreational activities and hunting sports. We have a broad interest in the parks and open space lands, both for their recreational assets but also for their contribution to human and environmental health.

Below are our specific comments on the proposed changes to the Vilas Park Master Plan. We recognize this park, with its connection to Lake Wingra and the UW Arboretum lands, as a foundation park in the central part of the City of Madison with high ecological, recreational and cultural value.

Note: The Four Lakes Group submitted comments 12/4/2020. These comments are an addendum to those previously submitted.

Playgrounds: In the most recent version of the revised plan, the number of playgrounds was reduced from 3 to 2. We strongly recommend putting 3 playgrounds into the plan restoring the proposed playground near the beach area.

The playgrounds serve visitors arriving from different neighborhoods and participating in different activities within the park. We support prioritizing the playground near the beach and south end of the park before the park near the ball courts assuming that the playground with the shoe slide remains where it is and will be updated. As this is a multi year plan, there should not be a conflict in recommending 3 with the intention of a staged plan implementation when the funds become available.

We also support making one of these parks an inclusive playground. Our understanding is that the City of Madison Parks Department is planning on siting additional inclusive playgrounds with the City Park system. Vilas Park is already a regional draw with the location of the Zoo and currently it has at least some service from Madison Metro which makes it a strong candidate for an inclusive playground. (See our Transportation comments below).

Access by Public Transit: The Vilas Park multi year Master Plan should include specific suggestions for desired locations for Metro stops, especially as Madison Metro is undergoing a system redesign. If possible, both the north and south parking lots should be designed in a way that would allow a bus drive through and drop off. At a minimum, one of these lots should be a designated stopping point for Madison Metro and designate Madison Metro stops on both north and south sides.

We support planning for a Madison Metro stop at the Bus Drop Off location on the south side of the site. In essence Madison Metro would be doing what other buses will be doing at the designated bus drop off site - loading/unloading and then continuing on. The location should

be a part of the plan and it should be indicated on the plan map with a “V”. Designating this location would send a strong signal to Madison Metro to consider a stop at the Zoo entrance as part of its redesign. A stop at this location would improve access for the differently abled, people with strollers and people without cars and visitors to Madison. The stop, which is now located at the intersection of Orchard St and Wingra Dr, should be a fall back location.

Zoo access: With over 800,000 visitors a year and climbing, the zoo is more than a neighborhood attraction. The goal of the zoo has been to be free and accessible to all and the zoo serves as a valuable conservation education and learning center for the community. Direct bus service will reduce barriers for both visitors, volunteers, and students of all ages and income.

Over 300 volunteers of all ages and abilities enjoy their volunteer time at the Zoo and are highly valued by the Zoo for their contributions. Having reliable and safe transportation to and from the zoo is very important to these volunteers and the zoo employees.

Parking: We would support an overall reduction in parking spaces with the improvements to Madison Metro access as well as improvement for bikes and pedestrians as a disincentive to individual auto use. We should be maximizing the use of buses and alternative means of transportation to this park, which has high ecological and cultural value.

Playground and Effigy Mounds (off of Erin St): The Four Lakes Group supports the direction proposed for this area of the site - That the area be returned to a use and nature more appropriate for a burial ground where the viewscapes, soundscapes and the landscape evolve through planned changes to become consistent with a space for personal introspection and the respectful nature of a cemetery.

We advocate the transition to this more contemplative use. This could be an opportunity to actually recognize the indigenous history of this land through a land acknowledgement - permanent, ceremonial or both with the implementation of the revised Vilas Park.

Lagoon Transition: We would support the proposal of an active conversion of the east lagoon to a wetland. Conversion to a wetland may help mitigate sedimentation of the western side of the lagoon. Additional naturalized shoreline buffers coils also help reduce sedimentation and the need for and frequency of dredging.

We also support other's recommendations to take a more active role in reestablishing submergent vegetation in the deepened lagoon to test whether Eurasian Water Milfoil can be prevented from invading a healthy community of native aquatic plants and provide a long term management strategy.

Climate: The Four Lakes Group recognizes that every park and green space in our community plays a positive role in climate mitigation and as carbon sinks. We encourage this plan and the City of Madison Parks Division to prioritize and call out the features of the park that are part of the climate solution/mitigation. For example, we know that mature trees store carbon at higher rates than younger and faster growing trees so cutting mature trees is detrimental to climate mitigation. Naturalized plantings and shorelines help with infiltration and the mitigation of runoff from severe weather events.

By protecting hydric soils, limiting the use of concrete, protecting and restoring habitats and healthy trees that can naturally store carbon, and retaining greenspace that can reduce urban

heat-island effects, Vilas Park can contribute to climate solutions and also be a welcoming public place. - Jane Elder & Bill Davis, Comments submitted 12/3/2020

With the transportation sector as the second highest source of CO2 emissions, planning for fewer auto trips, more bus trips and active transportation should be a priority in this plan. The park is centrally located, serves a regional function, is linked to bike paths and could be central in a bus route redesign. **We urge the Parks Department to participate fully in the Madison Metro redesign effort.**

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