

1.0 Executive Summary

Just as water, sewer, and public safety are considered essential public services, parks are vitally important to establishing and maintaining the quality of life in a community, ensuring the health of families and youth, and contributing to the economic and environmental well-being of a community and a region.

There are no communities that pride themselves on their quality of life, promote themselves as a desirable location for businesses to relocate, or maintain that they are environmental stewards of their natural resources, without such communities having a robust, active system of parks and recreation programs for public use and enjoyment.

From a statement by the National Recreation and Park Association, "Why Parks and Recreation are Essential Public Services."

1.1 Introduction/Context

Healthy, thriving communities demonstrate success and achievements in many areas. In essence, why do people choose to live in a community? Access to good jobs, education, and healthcare are often very important indicators. Couple these positives with low unemployment, clean air and water, a welcoming environment, and a commitment to the future, and a community becomes exciting to families, long-time residents and newcomers, business and community leaders, and entrepreneurs.

Communities throughout the nation have concluded that parks and green space, combined with fresh water resources such as lakes and rivers, attract residents and visitors to their regions. Combine recreational opportunities with local amenities such as restaurants, rentals, lessons, festivals and concerts to create a community that holds quality of life for residents and visitors now and well into the future.

Fond du Lac is fortunate in having committed to developing and preserving a strong system of parks and green space, especially at Lakeside Park. With its lengthy Lake Winnebago shoreline, Lakeside Park has provided family and recreational opportunities for generations. Its potential in attractiveness to new generations and visitors stands unparalleled. Long-time residents can and do attest to experiences that thrilled children and families and created unforgettable shared memories, linking generations.

Yet, even treasured areas can and must change. Doing nothing often results in decay, a negative change. Wise planning combined with a sense of stewardship can maximize positive change. Fond du Lac has the opportunity to preserve the best of the history and traditions of Lakeside Park while charting a course for future generations. With this in mind, the members of the Lakeside Park Exploratory Committee (LPEC) present this final report with recommendations for City Council and community consideration.

1.2 Lakeside Park Exploratory Committee Creation and Charge

After issuing a call for applications, the Fond du Lac City Council appointed members to the Lakeside Park Exploratory Committee (LPEC) in July 2014 and convened its first meeting August 26. Members were chosen from a wide variety of backgrounds and interests, but all were Fond du Lac residents who cared deeply about the future of the community and shared the excitement of joining a group charged with studying the utilization of Lakeside Park. Members joined together to answer the questions: “Can Lakeside Park be better used for the benefit of the City’s residents, stakeholders and visitors?” and, “If so, how?”

As noted in the City of Fond du Lac’s Recreation Plan 2010-2014:

Located on the southern tip of Lake Winnebago, Lakeside Park includes a wide variety of recreation facilities. Although first classified as a large urban park, Lakeside Park secondarily functions as a district park to the neighborhoods within a one-mile service radius. The main stem of the Fond du Lac River divides Lakeside Park into two distinct properties. East of the river is situated the 159-acre Lakeside Park East which contains the majority of recreation facilities available within the entire park. West of the river is property acquired by the City in more recent years as an expansion of the original park. Lakeside Park West includes the 234.7 acre Supple Marsh and 13.5 acre Kilowatt Club lands.

Lakeside Park East has been intensely developed as a recreation resource to serve the entire community. It has almost one mile of Lake Winnebago shoreline in addition to boating facilities within the Municipal Harbor. The Tack Oil property along Harbor View Drive was also added to the park, and is included in the acreages listed. A dog park was added in Lakeside Park West.

The LPEC charge, then, was to study the use of this important and strategically located resource and to develop a report with recommendations that would “inform the plan for Lakeside Park for the foreseeable future.”

1.3 Planning Process

The LPEC met at least monthly from its initial organizational meeting in August 2014 through a final meeting in June 2015. To facilitate the work of the committee, two subcommittees were appointed, a Stakeholder Subcommittee, and a Data Subcommittee. Among its tasks, the Stakeholder Subcommittee designed and conducted participation in surveys that asked stakeholders about past use and ideas for improvements that could lead to increased park use in the future. The Data Subcommittee collected information on use of parks in other communities and brought attention to ideas that might be of interest for Lakeside Park.

Throughout the process, however, the LPEC remained focused on key important broad themes to guide discussion and planning for Lakeside Park. Key aspects of the conceptual framework for the vision included the notion of the park as a gathering place, a destination, a link to the community’s history, a link to moving the community into the future, and new ways for the park to improve quality of life for current and future residents and for visitors.

1.4 Developing a Vision Statement for Lakeside Park

The Committee developed and approved the following Lakeside Park Vision Statement:

Lakeside Park: A premier destination that reflects the pride of Fond du Lac yesterday, today and tomorrow, and serves as a gathering place that provides a myriad of opportunities to improve the quality of life of visitors both locally and beyond.

Vision discussions included extended examination of prioritized strategic issue questions that would guide the development of recommendation for improvement:

- How to provide more access both to and from the Lake?
- How to upgrade amenities and services that showcase Lakeside Park as the jewel of Fond du Lac?
- How to market the park and its offerings?
- How to improve cultural diversity awareness in the community?
- How to make history relevant to today, especially for younger generations and newcomers?

The strategic questions listed here demonstrate a critical focus on inclusiveness, bridging our past to our future, and planning for the Lakeside Park of the future as a significant resource as a civic space, a family space and a destination for families, young professionals, and others. The LPEC was acutely aware of the need to have Lakeside Park be increasingly relevant to the changing nature of our community's demographics and economic needs and was also cognizant of the importance of changing recreational, life-style and entertainment needs that parks such as Lakeside Park can fulfill in a community's development.

1.5 Focus on Inclusiveness

After reviewing ideas from stakeholders--including more than 3,000 survey responses, engagement of community members, opportunity for public comments at every meeting, and extensive involvement of committee members-- more than 60 specific ideas were identified. LPEC members discussed and ranked ideas using a conceptual framework that focused on Impact and Ease of Implementation. The results of those rankings led to 27 specific recommendations.

1.6 Utilization and Under-Utilization

Significant to a charge to the LPEC was a focus on utilization of the park. From survey data to anecdotal stories of how families and individuals currently enjoy the park to attendance counts at festivals such as Walleye Weekend, and from numbers of attendees and participants at special events such as the July 4th fireworks displays to lines of cars streaming through the park to enjoy winter holiday lights and music, it has been clear to members of the LPEC that the park is used and enjoyed.

At the same time, however, parts of the park are often under-utilized and can be changed to attract even more visitors and users. Since park usage reaches its peak in warmer weather, the LPEC recommends consideration of activities and features that could lead to more usage throughout the entire year. In addition, many recommendations are designed to attract residents and visitors who might otherwise travel to other destinations to enjoy attractions such as a trail around the periphery of the lake, a restaurant, and water-related activities.

Many recommendations capture the imagination and spirit, allowing visitors to “touch the water” in ways that are not currently possible. To be clear, LPEC recommendations are designed to provide residents and visitors with more opportunities to make personal and emotional connections to Lakeside Park as a significant resource for recreation, to enjoy events and activities, and to understand the park as a common civic space for Fond du Lac. The goal is not simply to add to the numbers of people who visit, use and enjoy the resources of Lakeside Park, but to add to quality of life and overall satisfaction and enjoyment that visiting the park can provide.

The LPEC hopes to make a contribution in preserving the legacy and historical significance of Lakeside Park, while generating greater access and interest for new generations, new residents, and the community’s changing demographics. Members of the LPEC believe that the park of the future must preserve the past while capturing and welcoming new traditions, new stakeholders, and new activities that will nurture and promote this community as it grows and develops in the future.

1.7 Recommendations

The LPEC discussed and selected 27 specific recommendations that are identified and described in this report. The recommendations span the strategic questions that were listed above, and include amenities, activities, facilities, ties to history, and efforts to bridge to the future. Committee members categorized the recommendations in terms of impact and potential ease of implementation, then ranked the recommendations.

Recommendations, listed in priority order, include the following:

- **1 Walking and Biking Paths.** The Fond du Lac community can greatly benefit from the creation of walking paths and a bicycle loop that connect riders from other trails to Lakeside Park. Completion of this project will build upon the past success and excitement of bicycle activity in the city, while fostering greater physical activity and promoting the health and well-being of the community. New walking paths close to the shoreline will allow more residents to “touch the water,” while enjoying Lake Winnebago and the scenic beauty and important green space within Lakeside Park.
- **2 Concerts and Festivals.** More concerts and festivals in Lakeside Park will add to quality of life, spur local spending, and increase public enjoyment of the area. More concerts and festivals highlight Lakeside Park and Fond du Lac as a destination for events for all ages and a vibrant community with “something for everyone” by maximizing the opportunities afforded by access to green space, water, concerts, games, food, competitions, entertainment, and shared experiences in a local civic space.

- **3 Public Docks and Boat Landings.** By providing more public docks in Lakeside Park, the City would be encouraging greater access to and from the lake, while adding to economic development, greater utilization from new stakeholders, and increasing the overall attractiveness of the park to residents and visitors. Creating additional spaces to launch non-motorized watercraft such as kayaks is also recommended.
- **4 Multi-functional Amphitheater.** The addition of an amphitheater will promote additional uses for the park by providing space to incorporate festivals, concerts, bands, plays, historical presentations and other ceremonies that promote the park as a critical civic space, leading to positive effects on economic development, as well.
- **5 Food Options.** Increase the variety of foods available in Lakeside Park through the use of mobile food trucks, other vendors and a possible permanent restaurant. Throughout stakeholder survey responses and other feedback, there was substantial support for additional amenities related to food and beverages in the park. Very recently, the effect of food trucks in attracting people to downtown and local parks and civic spaces has been featured on Fox Valley television reports. The same results can be expected for Fond du Lac and Lakeside Park.
- **6 Public Beach.** Investigate and if feasible develop a public beach with access from Lakeside Park. The idea of a public beach surfaced repeatedly throughout LPEC discussions, both within stakeholder surveys and during committee meetings. A public beach would increase access to the lake in ways that are simply not possible at the present time. With such a large local water resource, and with the knowledge of other communities having successful beaches, the City needs to seriously investigate and, if possible, develop a public beach in Lakeside Park.
- **7 Marketing.** Establish a marketing strategy for Lakeside Park to focus on increasing public awareness of the current and planned features for Lakeside Park, while generating interest among new audiences. The City's marketing strategy should include areas such as branding, signage, social media, and ties to community organizations such as the Fond du Lac Convention and Visitors Bureau, as well as organizations that offer programs in the park.
- **8 Children's Activities.** Strengthen, upgrade and improve features of Lakeside Park that will promote activities for children. Expanding children's activities should generate interest, activity, and excitement in playground equipment, amusement rides, and general activities geared to children and families that will lead to greater utilization of Lakeside Park.
- **9 Boardwalk.** Build a boardwalk over the rocks on the shoreline of the lake in Lakeside Park. A boardwalk will also showcase Lakeside Park, increase utilization, allow park visitors to "touch the lake," and experience the beauty of green space and water

resources. A boardwalk will add to the aesthetic experience of the park while creating memories and a desire to continue to return to the park.

- **10 Marsh Walk.** Create an elevated walkway over the marsh area of Lakeside Park West with a pedestrian bridge connector to Lakeside Park East. A marsh walk would be a creative and attractive way to provide environmentally friendly access to the natural areas of Lakeside Park West. The marsh walk could cater to individuals, families, and groups that care about and wish to learn more about our eco-system, within the historically underutilized western area of Lakeside Park.
- **11 Rentals.** Provide the community with the opportunity to rent various watercraft, bicycles and boat tours through a highly visible, family-friendly area. The availability of rentals from power boats to sailboats to kayaks, along with bicycles creates new and exciting adventure opportunities for residents and visitors. Investigate the possibility of corporate sponsorships to minimize the cost of rentals to Fond du Lac residents.
- **12 Activities on the Lake.** Leverage the interest in festivals and water activities to develop competitions on Lake Winnebago that would generate local, regional, and even national interest and exposure similar to the WISSA (World Ice and Snow Sailing Association) competition this past winter. Other ideas include power boat races, water skiing and regattas on the lake.
- **13 Restaurant.** Pursue a public/private partnership to provide a full-service restaurant near the water. Many communities take advantage of water resources by providing full-service restaurants that allow diners to see, feel and enjoy the natural beauty of a lake or river. Fond du Lac can do the same. The new facility would add to quality of life, stimulate local economic development, and add new revenues for the City.
- **14 People Piers.** Build additional pedestrian piers at the lakefront and on canals to provide vantage points for fishing, walking, meditation, and enjoying sunsets over the lake. More access points will bring more people to the park for lake appreciation experiences.
- **15 Sports Facility.** Develop a multi-purpose outdoor sports facility in Lakeside Park to make the park a premier destination for sports activities. Such a facility will support strong local interest in sports, generate additional interest in physical activity, and provide excitement in both competitive and non-competitive sports activities. A sports facility will also generate additional tourism and local economic development.
- **16 Splash Pad/Ice Skating Rink.** Construct a splash pad/skating rink to provide new opportunities for families to enjoy outdoor water-based activities in both summer and winter seasons, increasing year-round outdoor fun.
- **17 Nature Center and Historical Building.** Establish a nature center and history-related learning center in Lakeside Park to provide a dedicated space for educational activities focusing on area environmental education. This idea is an outgrowth of an idea that

appeared on page 41 of the City's 2010-2014 Recreation Plan, which includes a possible Lakeside Marine Museum with exhibits on the history of local outboard motor manufacturing. Including on-site workshops could also stimulate economic activity in the immediate area.

- **18 Four-Season Restrooms.** Construct modern, four-season restrooms to facilitate increased year-round utilization of Lakeside Park.
- **19 Extend Wi-Fi to Lakeside Park West.** Extend Wi-Fi throughout the entire expanse of Lakeside Park to facilitate more educational opportunities, provide a guided walk, extend the use of a possible marsh walk, and increase linkage for tech-savvy new audiences.
- **20 Landscaping.** Add more landscaping throughout Lakeside Park to beautify the grounds and make the park more inviting, especially near park entrances. The City could consider the possibility of creating a botanical garden featuring wildflowers and the natural landscape of the state's history and heritage. Local collaborations could include the Gottfried Prairie and Arboretum, and the UW-Extension Master Gardeners.
- **21 Plaques, Historical Markers, and a Sense of Place.** Create and install plaques, historical markers and landmarks within Lakeside Park to add to the awareness of area history and sense of place as a community. New historical markers provide the opportunity to become more inclusive of all the traditions and experiences of community members.
- **22 Upgrade Existing Pavilion, Shelters, Bridges and Restroom Facilities.** Refurbish or replace the existing Lakeside Park Pavilion to create a more inviting, modern and attractive spot for weddings, family gatherings and general civic space. Shelters and facilities throughout the park would benefit from renovation or modernization to accommodate the large number of picnics, gatherings, festivals and other events hosted in Lakeside Park.
- **23 Community Outreach.** Develop a community outreach plan to increase the exposure of the park and its amenities. By reaching out to stakeholders groups (such as under-represented groups, the faith community, and park-affiliated groups), the City can create greater local awareness of the existing and new opportunities that Lakeside Park offers.
- **24 Water Sports Classes.** Offer classes for a variety of water activities that can be accommodated in Lakeside Park. Classes and lessons might include motor boating, sail boating, kayaking, windsurfing, water skiing, and paddle boarding. Providing lessons will generate a greater awareness of recreational opportunities on the lake.

- **25 Public Art.** Install public art, a sculpture garden, and/or other artwork stations/displays to showcase art to the public. Contests, work with local artists, and collaboration with the Fond du Lac Arts Council could lead to increased park visits and a heightened sense of community.
- **26 Transportation.** Include City bus routes through Lakeside Park. A renewed focus on public transportation into the park could increase utilization and lessen potential parking problems. Public transit could also be used to call attention to the park through advertising campaigns and special event programming.
- **27 Snowshoeing.** Identify and encourage winter use of the park through previously under-used seasonal activities such as snowshoeing. Designate particular areas of Lakeside Park West for these activities.

1.8 Follow-up

Committee members were very concerned about follow-up and suggest that recommendations be included as part of a new strategic plan for Lakeside Park and one that recognizes a “district” of the city featuring Lakeside Park. While the recommendations can be considered as stand-alone items some of which could be adopted fully or in part in the short-term, and others of which could be considered as part of a long-term strategic plan—the underlying intention is for the vision to be connected to a master plan.

The LPEC recommends that the master plan for the park also consider ways to beautify and make more attractive the area leading into the park from Main and Scott Streets at Harborview Drive. Consideration should be made for a significant renewal of the entryway at the Main Street location to the park. This would signify the beginning of the park and include the purchase and removal of some structures North of Harborview Drive. Such a project, admittedly, is not an easy task as properties adjoining the park are privately owned. Revitalization of this property would require a public/private partnership, or be dependent upon incentives or community good will for modification and beautification. At the same time, such changes would benefit the public good, and should also lead to more significant economic development and revitalized community building.

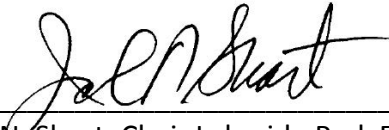
The charge to the committee included consideration of previously established legal agreements related to concessionaires, boathouses, and the Yacht Club facility and adjacent parking lot. The LPEC recommends that that City consider ways to modify these agreements, where possible, to secure greater public access to space and facilities. For example, there could be ways to encourage development above existing structures and facilities for public access and enjoyment, particularly in areas that are close to the Lake Winnebago and would provide a greater connection to this important water resource for residents and visitors.

Overall, the LPEC recommends that the City engage a consultant to determine the feasibility/cost/environmental impact of these ideas. Dr. David Marcouiller, UW-Extension

faculty member and chair of the UW-Madison Department of Urban and Regional Planning, stands out as a strong resource, who has already toured the Lakeside Park area with the LPEC and has expressed interest in working with the City on future planning processes related to the recommendations.

Finally, the LPEC urges that the City Council identify ways to collaborate in the design and implementation of the plan. This could include partnerships with local organizations to highlight current and new features, activities, facilities, and uses for the park; linking to other community initiatives, such as Envision Fond du Lac; and soliciting funding opportunities through corporate partnerships, grants, gifts and donations, volunteer time, and community outreach.

Respectfully submitted,



John N. Short, Chair Lakeside Park Exploratory Committee



Ray Lapierre, Vice-Chair Lakeside Park Exploratory Committee