

# Executive Summary of Recommendations

The map on page 7 summarizes the concept used to develop the master plan and recommendations. The Executive Summary Recommendations are listed in the order of importance. **The YRP Committee feels the first three recommendations have the highest priority** and create the spine for the other recommendations to become more effective. Over the next decade, weaving together the original O.C. Simonds plan with this new master plan will create a bright future for the Yahara River corridor.



*Historic 1911 photo with the recently constructed Steensland Bridge in background*

- 1. East Johnson and East Washington Bike/Pedestrian Underpasses.** Accomplishing the goal of safe bike/pedestrian use of the Yahara River Parkway will require safe crossing measures at the two primary arterial streets on the east side of the isthmus: East Johnson Street and East Washington Avenue. Daily vehicular traffic volumes where these streets intersect the Yahara River are among the highest in the City of Madison. According to 1995 average daily traffic counts, the Yahara River is crossed by approximately 32,000 vehicles per day on East Johnson Street and 50,000 vehicles per day on East Washington Avenue. Pedestrian underpasses at these streets – including a recommended west riverside underpass

for the proposed bike/pedestrian route and east riverside underpass for the proposed footpath – is needed to create a safe bike and pedestrian access through the Yahara River Parkway. The Committee also recommends improved at-grade crossings at Johnson and Washington to provide safe crossings at times of low traffic volume.

- 2. West Riverside Bike-Pedestrian Path.** A central recommendation of the YRP Committee is to create a continuous bike/pedestrian path on the west side of the Yahara River extending from Lake Mendota to Lake Monona. With bike/pedestrian underpasses at East Johnson Street and East Washington Avenue, this route would meet the need for a safe, formal cross-isthmus transportation option for pedestrians and bicyclists; provide a connection between existing bike/pedestrian routes; and provide multiple access points to the Yahara River Parkway and its scenic and recreational assets.

*Connections to Existing Bike/Pedestrian Routes.* The proposed Yahara Parkway bike/pedestrian path should provide safe and well-marked connections to existing bike routes, including the Mifflin Street, Isthmus, Johnson/Gorham, and Sherman Avenue bike routes/paths as well as existing state bike routes.

- 3. Thornton Avenue Alternatives.** Thornton Avenue runs parallel and directly adjacent to the west side of the Yahara River Parkway. The YRP Committee recommends conversion of Thornton Avenue, wherever possible, to bike path and green space, and to Parkway amenities. Options that would increase Parkway green space, while allowing traffic flow and ensuring access for property owners, include creating turnarounds at appropriate points on Thornton Avenue, changing segments of Thornton Avenue from two-way to one-way traffic, and/or eliminating segments of Thornton Avenue.

4. **Burr Jones Field Area Redevelopment (East Johnson Street to East Washington Avenue).** The YRP Committee recommends a comprehensive redevelopment plan for the Burr Jones Field area – encompassing lands between East Johnson Street, East Washington Avenue, the river, the City Garage, and the Fiore Center (see map at right) – to reach its potential as a social and recreational centerpiece of the Yahara River Parkway. Although Burr Jones Field occupies an ideal open space site in the center of the Isthmus along the Yahara River, its use is presently limited by inadequate and/or unsafe access for vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians. Burr Jones Field also lacks screening from adjacent commercial/industrial properties, East Washington Avenue, and East Johnson Street. Its design as an athletic field makes minimal use of the Yahara River Parkway as an aesthetic and recreational amenity. Acquisition of additional undeveloped properties on East Johnson Street; improved access for pedestrians, vehicles, and bicycles; and the construction of a multi-purpose, water-based facility along the Yahara River to integrate Burr Jones Field and the greater Yahara River Parkway are recommended. The YRP Committee recommends developing a partnership with property owners and facility users in the Burr Jones area – including Madison Gas & Electric (MG&E), the University of Wisconsin Athletic Department, Fiore Shopping Center, and railroad owners – to identify redevelopment opportunities for Burr Jones Field and adjacent land parcels between East Johnson Street and East Washington Avenue.

5. **East Riverside Foot Trail.** To increase access to the Yahara River Parkway and provide a slower-pace alternative to the proposed west riverside bike/pedestrian route, the YRP Committee proposes a low-impact, unpaved foot trail on the east side of the Yahara River extending from Lake Monona to Tenney Park. A continuous foot trail would offer pedestrians the opportunity to enjoy the east side of the Parkway – which is presently inaccessible and/or uninviting in several areas – at a



*Looking north at the Burr Jones park site and the Yahara River*

leisurely pace while avoiding potential conflicts with faster-paced bicyclists, roller-bladers, and runners utilizing the west riverside bike/pedestrian route. There are also several points along the proposed foot trail that are ideal sites for pedestrian-oriented educational amenities, such as informational signs describing environmental and historical aspects of the Yahara River Parkway. A key to the east riverside foot trail is acquisition of two privately-owned riverside land parcels lying to the north of Winnebago Street.

6. **Park Stewardship, Landscape and Historic Preservation Planning.** The YRP Committee feels that it is very important to develop precise plans for the restoration of renowned landscape architect Ossion Cole Simonds' initial vision for the landscape of the Yahara River Parkway and Tenney Park. At the heart of this vision is a planting and landscape plan that emphasizes native plant species such as Viburnum, Hawthorne, Dogwood, and Elms organized in a prairie design. A comprehensive redevelopment plan for the Yahara River

Parkway should utilize both Simonds' historic vision and plant species native to the upper Midwest.

To improve the visual appearance and natural feeling of the Parkway and Park, collaboration with MG&E and the Public Service Commission (PSC) should proceed to place the power lines and other utility lines underground.

The responsibility for enhancing and protecting the Parkway could be shared with the adjacent neighborhoods and the City Parks Division. By actively involving and training children, residents, club members, and other interested persons, the Parkway could get the attention that is needed to maintain its plant communities. To nurture the landscape environment, a management plan should be developed to guide the long-term success of the Parkway and Park.

- 7. Educational Signage and Outdoor Educational Resource.** The YRP Committee recommends working with the schools to create an educational outdoor lab, located in the vicinity of Marquette/O'Keeffe Middle School, that would explain specific plants, different types of birds, and what's in the water. The Committee also recommends utilizing the Yahara River corridor as an educational resource to reveal the geological, Native American, and early settlers' history, as well as the ecosystem of the river corridor. A signage system would be used to guide and inform students and residents.

A public-private partnership should be formulated to synthesize an educational program promoting the environmental and historic significance of the Yahara River Parkway. A sample of the types of groups that can assist in the effort includes the Urban Open Space Foundation and the Madison Trust for Historic Preservation. Target audiences should focus on the student populations of Marquette/O'Keeffe, Lapham, Lowell, and East High schools. Other projects could include demonstration projects, self-guided walking tours, work parties, environmental and historic

markers/displays, and seasonal clean-ups.

Portions of the Yahara River adjacent to Marquette/O'Keeffe School are a natural focus area but the existing "rip rap" (large boulders used to secure shoreline) makes it difficult to access the water's edge. Providing improved access to the river for students and the public will aid and facilitate in the educational activities and general enjoyment of the river.

- 8. Parkway Focal Points.** Several sites along the proposed bike/pedestrian path and footpath represent ideal opportunities to enhance the Yahara River Parkway with site amenities such as artwork, benches, bike racks, drinking fountains, educational signage, and landscaping.

*Williamson Street/Yahara River Parkway Intersection.* The YRP Committee recommends the development of the Yahara River Parkway/Williamson Street intersection as a focal point/rest area along the proposed west riverside bike/pedestrian route, potentially including benches, a drinking fountain, a shaded area, a kiosk (a cylindrical structure on which notices can be posted), a bike rack, a telephone, water access, and landscaping consistent with the Parkway and Isthmus bike path/pedestrian bridge. In conjunction with other redevelopments, focal points could be considered for other sections along the riverway.

*Tenney Park.* Since the Yahara River Parkway and Tenney Park were both initially designed by O.C. Simonds in the early 1900s, a comprehensive redevelopment plan for the Yahara River Parkway should include plans for the river portion of Tenney Park. Primary concerns include ensuring a park-like setting while providing parking space, increasing green space, and implementing a plan for landscape treatment and historic preservation as part of a similar plan for the greater Yahara River Parkway. Tenney Park Beach is one of the most popular beaches on the east side. In 1995, a survey reported more than 16,000 citizens used the beach.

*Filene Park.* Filene Park, east of the Tenney Locks, represents a scenic site, overlooking Lake Mendota, for such site amenities as public artwork (such as a piece of sculpture), public furniture (such as a bench), and/or educational signage.

*Marquette Elementary/O’Keeffe Middle School Educational Area.* Work with the school to create an educational outdoor lab for school children (See Recommendation 7).

*Yahara Place Park.* The three elements necessary to complete the intersection between the Yahara River corridor and Yahara Place Park are completing the path system and upgrading the landscape material, providing handicapped access at this end of the river, and creating new navigational aids to alert boats to lock closings, bad weather, and the entrance to the Yahara River.

**9. Private Development Guidelines.** The YRP Committee’s mission was not only to study ways to improve the Yahara River Parkway itself, but also to determine ways to increase open space in a park-deficient area while enhancing the Parkway’s visual and social integration with the surrounding neighborhoods. As Parkway-adjacent land parcels become available for sale and/or redevelopment, the YRP Committee recommends that the Parks Division and other appropriate agencies investigate the acquisition of these lands to increase the area of the Yahara River Parkway’s open space. In addition, many of the land parcels along the Parkway – particularly on the west side between East Johnson Street and Williamson Street – are currently utilized in ways that present few opportunities for integrating the Parkway with surrounding private parcels. Access to and views of the Parkway are limited; landscape and facade design bears little relation to the Parkway; and the predominant land uses are manufacturing and commercial sites with large and barren parking lots that face the Parkway.

To encourage a more socially and aesthetically inviting development pattern along the Parkway, the YRP Committee recommends that the City of Madison encourage residential, mixed commercial/residential, and open space redevelopment including appropriate landscaping and design elements at several key sites. Redevelopment programs, such as a TIF district, may be used to encourage compatible housing and commercial uses on adjacent private parcels. The YRP Committee considers modest, affordable housing to be a Yahara area asset, and recommends that any redevelopment along the Parkway be consistent with the area’s existing residential character. The Isthmus 2020 plan identifies the Yahara area as a recommended area to accommodate residential growth in the next several decades. The housing should provide affordable options for a diverse mix of people, especially the growing senior population.

The big question that Isthmus 2020 had to answer was, “What proportion of the 120,000 people forecasted county growth should be accommodated by the Isthmus?” The Yahara River corridor is situated in an excellent location for future residential infill development as stated in the 2020 report.

The YRP Committee’s recommendations on residential redevelopment and density could add residential dwelling units of between 10-25 units per acre. The goal is to add housing/retail/offices to expand the existing urban neighborhoods along this neglected resource, the Yahara River corridor. These redevelopment additions will have the attributes, qualities, and characteristics to make this a desirable place to live.

# Map 1

## Yahara Parkway Design Concept: Summary of Elements

