

# JOHN NOLEN DRIVE: MADISON'S GATEWAY, OVER TEN YEARS IN THE MAKING

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# SUMMARY

Madisonians from all our diverse communities appreciate our waterways and lakefronts, and John Nolen Drive is no exception. However, it doesn't reflect or leverage its full potential as a gateway and more for this city! And it is exciting to share that two projects—the [John Nolen Drive Reconstruction Project](#) and the [Madison LakeWay Project](#)—are [converging to generate a premier gateway and lakefront!!!!](#)



[Madison Lake Front for all](#)

These two projects didn't come out of thin air, and the final results won't be only informed by engineers or consultants. Rather, **insight and needs have come from over ten years of studies, commissions, and deep community engagement**, building to this point in time where plans are being finalized before the shovel meets the ground in late 2025.

Starting in 2012, five different projects have brought us to this point: [Madison's 2012 Downtown Plan](#), [South Capitol Transit Oriented Development Plan](#), [A Lake Front for All](#), [Monona Waterfront Challenge](#) (transforming into [Madison LakeWay Project](#)), and [John Nolen Drive Reconstruction](#).

**Each step, each block, was laid down through community engagement**, peaking with the Monona Waterfront Challenge and John Nolen Drive Reconstruction. Communities from all over Madison were engaged with intention, with a special focus on Madison's Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color (BIPOC) populations.

**EQT By Design, along with the City of Madison, is proud to have assisted in bringing in diverse voices across Madison** to ensure this new gateway into Madison fosters well-being for all our residents and is a place where people from all backgrounds and walks of life not only feel accepted but feel heard and seen. **It will become a place accessible to all, where Indigenous histories are uplifted, Black joy can flourish, and our BIPOC voices are heard in its creation.**

# INTRODUCTION



Sasaki's Lake Monona Waterfront Master Plan Draft

John Nolen Drive is one of the main entryways into Madison. It also has some eyesores, bad traffic, and tight bike paths along one of Madison's waterfronts, making it, at times, an underused and underappreciated waterfront. But now, big changes are in the making for John Nolen Drive and Lake Monona's waterfront.

These changes have been in the making for over ten years, starting with Madison's 2012 Downtown Plan, which identified a need for a community park along the Monona waterfront. The 2014 Transit Oriented Development Plan identified needs for John Nolen Drive redevelopments, culminating in two concurrent projects—the Lake Monona Waterfront redesign and the John Nolen Drive redesign.

City developments, at times, can seem unclear and not accessible, making it hard to tell what is happening, when, why, and how community voices play into each project. But in these projects, community voices were included or built upon with the intention of the involvement of EQT, along with the City of Madison and Urban Assets. So, while it can seem like nothing is happening or your voices disappear into a bureaucratic machine, never to be heard again, in these projects, we have sought to ensure they reverberates throughout! **Your voices are designed, reflected, and made clear in the making of the John Nolen Drive gateway into the City of Madison.**

**What are these projects, and how did your voice make a difference in launching a complete redesign of John Nolen Drive and its waterfront gateway?**

# YOUR VOICE IN EACH PIECE OF THE GATEWAY

It can be difficult to know when and where community voices were implemented in public projects. This is usually because many projects take years to mature, and John Nolen Drive and Lake Monona Waterfront are no exception. This report is **making community voice clear and accessible!**



Madison Lake Front for all

The making of this gateway can be divided into Six projects:

1. Madison's 2012 Downtown Plan (2008-12)
2. South Capitol Transit Oriented Development Plan (2013-14)
3. Law Park Project (2019-20)
4. Monona Waterfront Challenge (2022-23)
5. John Nolen Drive Reconstruction. (2021-present)
6. LakeWay Project (2023-present)

**Your voices were included at each step, informing the next stage or even a new project itself.** How were community voices implemented and carried through from 2012 onward?

Large city projects can and do take time. The reason for this is that **the City of Madison wants to get these developments right**. It takes a lot of community involvement, multiple types of approvals, and resources to pull off—every step of the way, from pedestrian crossings to speed limits, has to be considered.

The length of a project doesn't mean the city is unsuccessful at implementing large projects, but like any meaningful endeavor, you have to pull it together piece by piece. In the case of John Nolen Drive and Lake Monona Waterfront, the pieces can be found within multiple projects.



# 2012 DOWNTOWN PLAN

[Madison's 2012 Downtown Plan](#) was also a series of plans, projects, and engagements, to create a long-term strategy for Downtown Madison. The public was instrumental in pulling together this plan with over

- **125 public engagements** of businesses, community organizations, city meetings, and more, “ representing well over
- **2,250 personal contacts.**”

Even then, many other [small community meetings and individual contacts lent input to this plan.](#)

Looking back, there are themes carried through, from the beginning of engagements in 2008 for what became the 2012 Downtown Madison Plan through to present day with the Monona Waterfront Design Challenge and John Nolen Drive Reconstruction project.

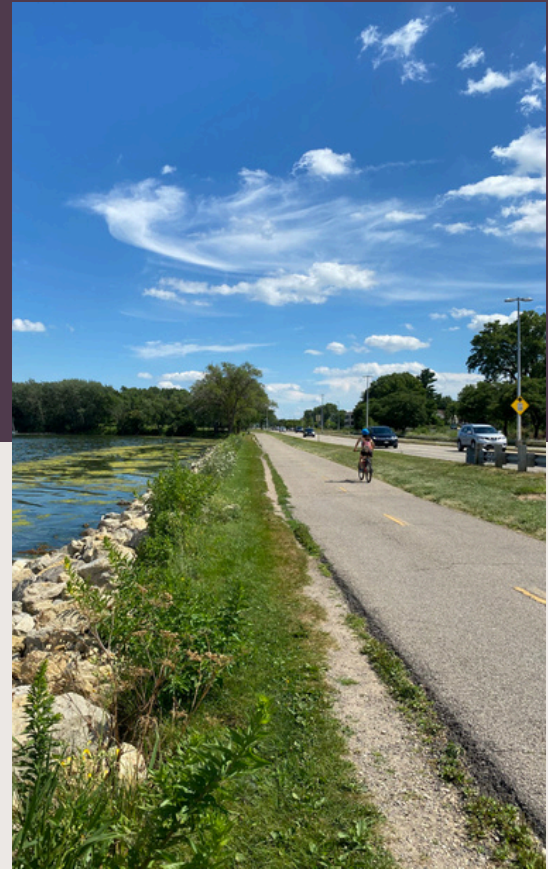
In the most Madison way, the report's biggest and first takeaway from community engagement, your voices, was “celebrate the lakes”



[Sasaki's Lake Monona Waterfront Master Plan Draft](#)

Madison's wider community ideas, wants, and desires have been central to all projects that grew out of this report and its informative engagements. There were two core ideas for celebrating the lakes directly connected to John Nolen Drive Reconstruction and the Lake Monona Waterfront plan:

- “Beautifying John Nolen Drive entering the city and Broom Street, the “gateway entrance park” and
- “Transforming Law Park” [to a place for the community to gather](#).



[Madison Lake Front for all](#)

Additionally, a core part of [this report that grew from engaging community members](#) was better transportation choices. Complete Green Streets, prioritizing pedestrian, biking, and public transportation came from these engagements. Specifically, as it relates to John Nolen Drive and the Lake Monona Waterfront biking and pedestrian infrastructure.

This plan, launched with community engagements in 2008 and adopted in 2012, set the foundation for developing this Madison Gateway, with community voices leading the way.

# 2014 SOUTH CAPITOL TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (TOD)

The South Transit Oriented Development (TOD) engagement and [subsequent report](#) continued to build on this foundation. They took the needs identified in the Madison downtown plan to launch this study, which “looked at a number of alternatives to improve safety and aesthetics of the gateway intersections for pedestrians and bicyclists while continuing to facilitate traffic movement.” **This process engaged multiple stakeholders— City Staff, the South Capitol District Madison Planning Committee, and the public.**

The TOD study first identified issues with the East and West Gateways, provided different design concepts, and then made recommendations, with community engagement occurring during each step. The West Gateway is the intersections west of Monona Terrace: North Shore Drive, Broom Street, and John Nolen Drive. The East Gateway, John Nolen Drive, Wilson Street, Blair Street, and Williamson Street have already undergone a round of redesign for safety and traffic flow.





**Public concerns and recommendations were identified and put forward through the public process** for the West Gateway. The study identified:

- “Pedestrian and bicycle movement and safety,” specifically in intersection crossings.
- Dedicated space/lanes for bicycles were identified, increasing both pedestrian and bicycle access and safety.

**These concerns led to key recommendations:**

- Improved bicycle and pedestrian crossings;
- Expanded pedestrian and bike paths;
- Bicycle and pedestrian path connection to Wilson Street;
- An additional bike path on the east side of Broom Street;
- Better signage in directing traffic, pedestrians, and bikes.



Madison Lake Front for all

The TOD study continued to build toward future projects; in addition to the gateways, they studied the “Connections between the Capitol Square and Lake Monona” and “Parks and Paths” along Law Park and the Capital City Trail. Many familiar design concepts came from these public engagements, such as connecting Capitol Square and the Law Park area through a bridge or underpass, a plaza bridge that extends Law Park, the separation of bike and pedestrian paths, increased green space for the parks and pedestrians, better lighting, and better access to water/shoreline interaction.

This 2014 study set the path forward for the City of Madison to fully realize this gateway as it builds toward its future.



# 2020-2023 BUILDING THE FUTURE: MADISON'S GATEWAY

After a decade, it was time to dig deep and redesign Lake Monona's waterfront. This can be broken down into two core pieces: "[A Madison Lakefront for All](#)," which directly led to the "Lake Monona Waterfront Master Plan," and the intermediary step of the Lake Monona Waterfront Design Challenge, which bridges these two pieces together.



A Madison Lakefront for All was a preliminary report to "serve as a reference guide for (the) future master plan redevelopment" project. Although no specific recommendations for the master plan were made, it did identify "community goals," informing future planning efforts, and "reinforce(d) ongoing efforts to reconnect the waterfront to the greater downtown area and the broader community." Also, [this report](#) provided a "site inventory and analysis," — meaning an exploration of infrastructure, geography, and use of the waterfront. The project area of this report included Law Park, John Nolen Drive Causeway, and North Olin Park.

Through two phases of engagement, there were **21 events** with tabling and intercept interviews, **22 small group meetings**, **200 targeted contacts**, **four area-focused workshops**, a city-wide workshop, and **998 survey responses**.

These engagements provided important findings about this area's current and future uses. For [Law Park](#), walking and biking are how most people experience it today. Family/friend gatherings, walking, canoe/kayak/paddleboard, relaxing, and programmed activities are people's five favorite outdoor activities, with nature viewing right behind. **The community felt lake access, open lawn, and nature were the most important features** for Law Park. However, people have hurdles to experience these things, such as parking, traffic, and pedestrian connections. **The community desired better facilities, access, safety, events, and amenities, such as food, as desired modifications.**

Other engagements were conducted for John Nolen Drive and Olin Park, finding similar themes, such as pedestrian/bike connections, better signage/wayfinding, increasing accessibility for public use areas, amenities, and the ability to interact with the lake. Along with this would be aesthetic changes, making the entryway into Madison from John Nolen Drive more pleasing.

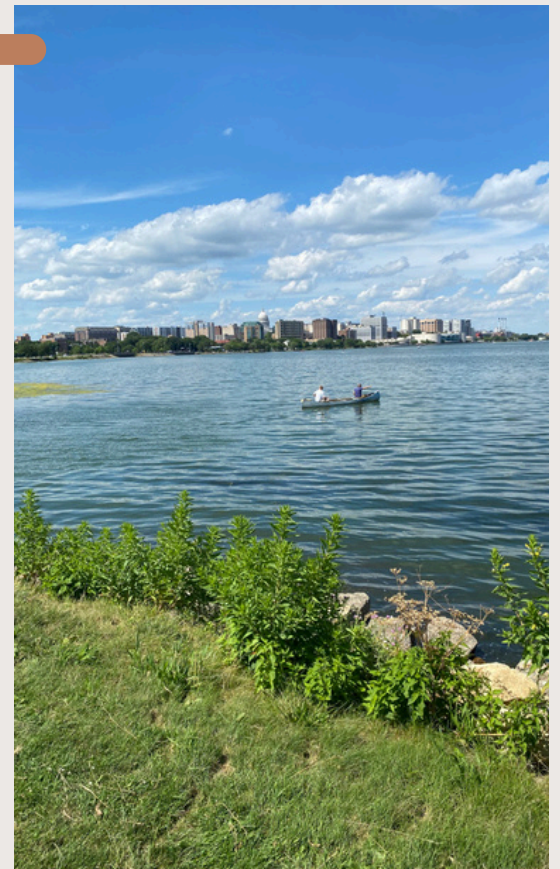


**Voices from marginalized communities wanted to see an honoring of Ho-Chunk land and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) histories.** Intentional design serves all Madison communities, especially regarding accessibility and activities.

Engagements highlighted the voices of Madison's marginalized communities on what the future of Law Park could look like. What was heard was *the need to tell the whole history of Madison and Law Park, culturally diverse art and events, ensuring access to the park for the elderly and people with disabilities, and wayfinding language for marginalized non-English speakers.*

These findings, along with the site investigation and analysis— [which you can read here starting on page 26](#)— informed the Monona Waterfront Design Challenge and, in turn, the master plan for the Lake Monona Waterfront.

Now as the project moves forward, the name of the Lake Monona Waterfront project was recently changed to Madison LakeWay, and the new identity embraces the vibrant and visionary plan for the 17-acre lakeshore district. Please see [Madison LakeWay](#) for more information.



Madison Lake Front for all



# 2024 MADISON LAKEWAY PLAN

Following this preliminary report, a design challenge was launched to reshape the lakefront and parks along Lake Monona, and the City of Madison put a call out to design firms to create “a conceptual master plan” to propose to the city. This process involved an ad-hoc committee (a temporary city committee charged with a specific purpose); after the committee evaluation of 15 proposals, three finalists were put forward to the public.

**The plans put forward to the public reflected much of the past decade of community engagement;** they all attempted to create a safer, more accessible waterfront filled with opportunities to engage with nature, engage with the community, and stay active through walking and bike riding. All while respecting the history of the land this city is built upon.



Sasaki's Lake Monona Waterfront Master Plan Draft

The public engaged with the three competing plans, and the people spoke. There were **over 1,500 survey respondents, five community meetings/public workshops on the proposals, more than 4,000 public comments, and over 12,000 Google map comments analyzed.** The Sasaki firm plan was selected through those engagements, but engagements didn't stop there. The final plan, which was submitted and now accepted by Madison's Common Council in April 2024, was informed by more rounds of community engagement through focus groups, workshops, and community sessions.



The Madison LakeWay plan is ambitious, reflecting the wants and needs of Madison's diverse communities.



Madison Lake Front for all

Madison Parks is continuing to refine the master plan and coordinate work to fit alongside the John Nolen Drive reconstruction. **Phase 1 of remaking Lake Monona Waterfront will work in tandem with the John Nolen Drive reconstruction, remaking bike and pedestrian paths along the causeway heading towards Monona Terrace and Law Park,** as well as the first part of "Lake Lounge," connecting the waterfront to the parks on the other side of John Nolen Drive away from the lake, at the North Shore Dr. intersection. To learn more about all the phases of the waterfront redevelopment, [you can read the master plan report here.](#)

# JOHN NOLEN DRIVE RECONSTRUCTION

The [reconstruction of John Nolen Drive](#) has been over 10 years in the making— much is set in place to transform the primary Gateway into the city. **John Nolen Drive reconstruction is an ongoing project, one where your voices have continued and will continue to have an impact.**

So far, 2 surveys, totaling over **2,400 respondents**, and **3 focus groups** engaging BIPOC populations have taken place. Another public information meeting is planned for Fall 2024. Through these two engagement periods, community voices continue to build upon all the past listening and learning the city and design firms have done—the impact of the voices of communities in Madison continues to shape these projects.



[Sasaki's Lake Monona Waterfront Master Plan Draft](#)

The two phases of community engagement can be broken down into listening and reflection. The first phase of listening was to understand the public's concerns about John Nolen Drive and to gain a better idea of community needs and wants regarding John Nolen Drive. The second phase of reflection is using those conversations to create “alternatives” to the current state of John Nolen Drive and present them back to the public to see what alternatives the public is drawn to.

Core learnings from listening to Madison communities about John Nolen Drive:

- **Improving safety**, updating infrastructure, and increasing accessibility and mobility for all users.
- **Making it a more people-centered design**, with pedestrians and bicyclists feeling the least safe.
- **Better lighting**, reduced roadway speeds, traffic calming, barriers between different modes of travel.





From there, **ideas for alternative designs were proposed to the public for feedback, reflecting on what was heard.** This helps ensure that the public was understood through the engagements. What was critical about these engagements in presenting alternatives was also presenting trade-offs. Why are there trade-offs? Road design works within a limited space, so if people want wider bike paths with a buffer, this might mean narrower medians for crossing. However, specific crossing designs and installations can make that narrow median safe.



Sasaki's Lake Monona Waterfront Master Plan Draft

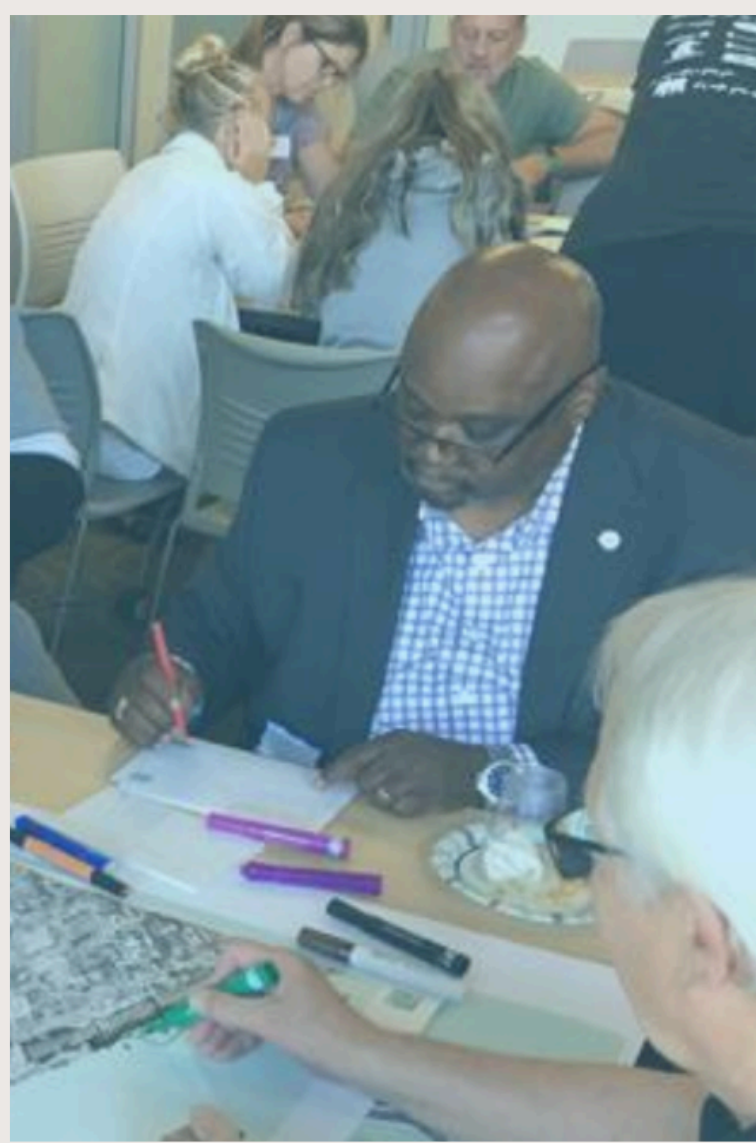
What was heard [through these sessions](#)?

- People like a wide bike/pedestrian path with a grass buffer;
- People prefer a separate bike/pedestrian path over a combined path;
- Preference for shorter and more direct crossings at the North Shore Drive and Broom Street Intersections;
- Preference for a more conventional Broom Street intersection, including traditional pedestrian crosswalk locations.

You can read the [presentation about the tradeoffs to learn more](#) about what these design changes mean.



These engagements will inform the final design process, which is currently ongoing. The project team is finalizing their design based on this feedback. There will be a public information meeting this **coming Fall, 2024**, with construction beginning in Fall 2025.



Madison Lake Front for all

The funding for phase one of this project—East Lakeside Street to South Broom Street—and the first corresponding phase for Madison LakeWay is being finalized. John Nolen Drive funding comes from federal funds and local funding sources. Madison Lakeway funding is expected to come from a combination of federal, local, and private contributions, with any city funding coming from the capital budget. Why is this important? **These projects do not contribute to the forecasted budget shortfall**— the shortfall comes from the operational budget, not the capital budget through which these projects are funded.

## **COMMUNITY IMPACT: YOUR VOICES BUILT THE GATEWAY TO MADISON**

Over a decade ago, the city engaged the public about what it would like to see in the growth and development of Downtown Madison; while it can be hard to see where community voices have had an impact at times, they absolutely do have an impact.

The Madison community voiced what they would like to see on John Nolen Drive and Madison LakeWay, not only setting the direction for these projects but also molding them so that they will change the city's landscape, creating a true gateway into Madison.

Ensuring a wide array of people are listened to and heard when it comes to these projects, especially **considering the city's marginalized populations, will always be necessary**. While not everyone may be happy with every decision, through engagement, the city can ensure a positive outcome for these projects, which is the most likely outcome. An outcome that will create a thriving Madison and a place for its many communities to come together and exist together, **increasing our collective well-being is the shared goal of EQT By Design and The City of Madison.**

**The reconstruction of John Nolen Drive and the Lake Monona Waterfront is a great example of inclusive engagement! And, embedding vision all Madisonians should be proud of for decades to come.**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

***In order to make change, you need to know that change is necessary.***  
And we at EQT appreciate how together we contribute to that change and this work! We never do this work alone and in fact we seek an invitation into it.

We'd like to give thanks to those who invited us into this work:

- The City of Madison
- The City of Madison Parks Department
- The City of Madison Engineering Department
- KL Engineering, Inc.
- Urban Assets

Most importantly, we have to thank – **You, the community members who lent your voices**

**Thank you!**