

Vilas Neighborhood Association Feedback for the Vilas Park Master Plan
1/22/2020

The Vilas Neighborhood Association met on January 22, 2020, for a regularly scheduled meeting. Prior to the meeting, the Association advertised as an agenda item that Wendy Fearnside and Ann Rivlin would seek input about particular issues that were under discussion for Vilas Park. Thirty-two people attended, including 23 Vilas Residents, 8 VNA Council members, and our District 13 Alder, Tag Evers. The following is a summary of the input received from meeting attendees. Please note, the below information does not represent approved positions by the Vilas Neighborhood Association. Instead, it consists of the feedback from a variety of Vilas Neighborhood residents.

Picnic Shelter/Warming House

- Desirable features in a Vilas Park picnic shelter/warming house mentioned by residents include:
 - Fireplaces available for public use
 - Family bathroom
 - Good rental space for group picnics and gatherings
 - Solar panels on the shelter
- Possible models for a new shelter
 - The Elver Park shelter was suggested as a model for Vilas. Its key features are:
 - Heated
 - Benches
 - 4 seasons building
 - 4 seasons bathroom
 - Tenney Park's shelter with its glass windows may be a good model, too
 - A key feature of the current shelter is that there is both covered space and easy access to the outside. Its open design allows park users to see through to the lake, lagoon and open space during most of the year. Can there be a shelter that has the option of being enclosed or open depending on the weather?
- Having staff on site or some other manner of making sure the bathrooms are kept up

Dogs and Vilas Park

- There was a strong sense in the meeting that allowing dogs on leash on the walking paths and along the road.
- There was a virtually unanimous opinion that there should **not** be an area for unleashed dogs/an off leash dog park in Vilas Park. One person who attended the meeting contacted us later saying he would like a dog park at Vilas Park or somewhere convenient to the neighborhood.

Parking and Traffic

- There was a strong feeling that adding new parking spaces in Vilas Park would do very little to address parking challenges and would reduce green space in the park.
- Most participants opposed adding to or changing the location of the currently available parking.
- Most participants opposed blocking traffic on the park drive, as there were concerns that traffic would then be redirected through the neighborhood. It was also mentioned that people enjoy seeing the lake as they drive by.

Pedestrian safety

- There was a strong concern expressed about pedestrian safety; there was general agreement that pedestrian usage of the park, including pedestrians pushing strollers, is important and pedestrian safety should be a priority.
- Key problem areas for pedestrian access and safety that were mentioned are:
 - Path near the zoo on the Lake Wingra side, where the grassy area narrows and puddles form on the road. A boardwalk extending over the shoreline was suggested for this area.
 - Crossing the Park Drive to get to Lake Wingra
- Suggestions for improvements:
 - A protected lane for bikes and pedestrians, separated from the rest of the roadway. Alternatively, a separate pedestrian/bike path that is distinct from the road.
 - Speed bumps
 - Road management solutions
 - Have bicycles use both sides of the road, traveling in the same the direction of traffic. Having bicycles going both directions in the pedestrian/bike section of the road is a safety issue.
 - Signage directing bicyclists and pedestrians on where to ride/walk along the road
- There was a high interest in seeing multiple design options that are geared towards pedestrian safety.

Lagoon/Natural Areas

- There was a strong sense among meeting participants that they want to know more about the water challenges affecting Vilas Park, what the options are for the lagoon/drainage in the park/protection of Lake Wingra, and what the tradeoffs among the options are. We strongly recommend that more information about these issues be provided to the neighborhood.
- There was not agreement about dredging and maintaining the lagoon versus letting the lagoon and other low lying parts of the park return to wetlands. Different views were represented, but all felt they just didn't have enough information.

- People want ice skating to continue to be available, but recognize that there are fewer and fewer days when weather and ice quality permit skating. This will be exacerbated over time and may be a factor to consider in future decisions about the lagoon
- Several residents asked if all of the paths need to be paved or whether pea gravel or another, permeable material could be used instead, to facilitate water management.

Enjoying natural beauty of the area

- Boardwalks along the lake in the area where the park narrows between the zoo and the lake, to provide greater connectivity across the park, pedestrian safety, and space to enjoy nature.
- Consider altering the location of the road —can it be put further from the shoreline to allow more enjoyment of the lake? Potentially with the shelter on the lake side of the road?
- The group was largely supportive of benches along the lake, potentially with people able to dedicate a bench as a memorial/in honor of someone.

Connections in the park

- Walking path around the zoo that pedestrians can use when the zoo is closed would be a help.
- There is less need for an improved connection between the park and the Arboretum, since most people accessing the Arboretum from the Park are interested in long walks/runs.

Other

- One parent expressed concern about the safety of shredded tires as ground cover in the playgrounds. Another said his child had been cut when he fell on a piece of tire that contained a metal stud.