

Village of Shorewood Hills Parks and Open Space Plan

Introduction

The Village of Shorewood Hills parklands, including wooded and open spaces, shoreline, trails, and public recreation areas, constitute one of the community's greatest assets. These resources provide for Village residents' interaction with nature, relaxation, and recreation in ways that enhance a sense of community and promote the stewardship of natural resources.

Village ordinances define "parks" as "all of the lands and water owned or used by the Village for park or recreational purposes except those lands leased to others" (Village of Shorewood Hills (VOSH) Ordinance 12.01). The ordinances further specify that the parks are "under the jurisdiction of the parks committee," consisting of one elected Village trustee and six Village citizens, all of whom are appointed by the Board's President, "subject to confirmation by the board" (VOSH Ordinances 12.02; 2.02 (10) (b, 2)). The Parks Committee also includes ex officio members whose information and wisdom contribute to decision making. These are the Village Forester and the Garden Club president. In addition to monitoring parks maintenance and restoration, the Committee has responsibility for advising residents "on the care of trees, plants and plant diseases" (VOSH Ordinance 12.02).

Parks Planning

In 2002 when the Village undertook the development of a comprehensive Village plan in accord with "Smart Growth" legislation, the Board designated the Parks Committee as the body responsible for drafting a long term plan for Village parks. For some time the Parks Committee has recognized the need for plans to guide maintenance, development, and restoration of various parks. Although no comprehensive parks plan exists, previous Village of Shorewood Hills Parks Committees have worked on planning. Recently specific plans for individual parks have been developed. In 1992, the "Park, Open Space, and Outdoor Recreation Plan" focused on Post Farm Park, but also profiled the other parks. Specific management plans have been developed for Tessa and Hans Reese Woods (1999) and preliminary plans were written in 2001 for Post Farm Park and the Quarry Park portion of Dudley Davis Quarry Park. The Reese Woods plan has been implemented. However, existing plans apply to only a few parks and some of the plans are obsolete and probably no longer meet the needs of the Village.

The first step in the Village "Smart Growth" Planning process was conducted by the planning firm Vandewalle and Associates at an open Village meeting. From the focus groups at this meeting the consultants concluded that what the Village residents present valued most were trees and a community spirit of harmony and supportiveness.

Subsequently, Mark Wegner, the Village Forester, distributed to residents through the Village Bulletin a parks and recreation survey. Although the response rate was very low, the survey data showed resident concern for the health of trees and access to pedestrian trails.

With community and arboreal values in mind, the Parks Committee created an outline tentatively spelling out the Committee's planning mission and some of its goals. This interim draft outline was presented to the Plan Commission in June 2002 at an open meeting where public comment was invited. The Plan Commission encouraged the Parks Committee to continue to develop this outline.

In October 2003 the Parks Committee presented a draft of the Village of Shorewood Hills Parks and Open Space Plan to the Plan Commission at another open meeting for public comment. The Committee intends to continue to listen to and include community input. The Plan will support the parks' roles in community life and, as closely as possible, reflect the visions of the residents of the Village of Shorewood Hills for the future of their parks.

Mission of the Village of Shorewood Hills Parks Committee:

In addition to accepting the mandates presented in the Village ordinances, the Committee is

1. To provide and regularly update an overall parklands restoration plan that maintains appropriate biodiversity and protects native trees, plants, and compatible animal life.
2. To actively educate residents about ways to safeguard the natural resources of Village parklands.
3. To cooperate with the Recreation Committee and other Village committees to ensure that the development and maintenance of recreational facilities occur and are compatible with the parks' natural environment.
4. To create opportunities for residents to participate communally in activities that improve parklands and enrich neighborhood ties.

Vision for Village of Shorewood Hills Parks

Village parks will

1. Enable Village residents to explore and enjoy public natural areas and recreational facilities.
2. Serve as an example of healthy urban natural areas that contain appropriate biodiversity and protect native trees, plants, and compatible animal life.
3. Obtain sufficient funding for proper maintenance and replanting.
4. Be available for the enjoyment of residents as appropriate for each park category.

Purpose of Parks Plan

The four purposes of the Parks Plan are

1. To implement the park vision.
2. To identify parks and open space goals for the Village of Shorewood Hills and to identify processes to meet those goals (see page 5).
3. To provide Village administrators and residents with a basic knowledge of parks, parks facilities, and parks histories that will supply a foundation for future parks planning.
4. To satisfy requirements of the State of Wisconsin and granting agencies for a parks plan in order to obtain grant money.

Overview of Village of Shorewood Hills Parks

The Village owned parks, which include both recreational areas and natural areas, contribute to the character of the Village of Shorewood Hills (see Village of Shorewood Hills Parks Map for park locations). Almost all of the parks are natural areas or have at least some portions that are natural. These natural areas are mostly made up of deciduous (in many parks predominantly oak) woodland. In many of the parks wildflowers, usually spring ephemerals, cover the ground, contributing to the natural diversity usually present in mixed hardwood natural areas and embodying the beauty of the spring season in Wisconsin.

A variety of other plants and shrubs provide wildlife food and cover. The Shorewood Hills parks support a diverse group of birds and other wildlife species. This animal diversity is increased by the Village's proximity to Lake Mendota and the adjoining 250-acre University of Wisconsin-Madison owned Campus Natural Areas.

The northern edge of the Village of Shorewood Hills is the shore of Lake Mendota. Three of the parks and the leased Blackhawk Country Club border Lake Mendota, giving residents views and access to the Lake and contributing to the Village's feeling of openness. Most of the nine parks managed by the Village are relatively small, covering only about 21 acres (or 121 acres including Blackhawk County Club), and they are scattered throughout the Village. Many of the parks connect smoothly with adjoining private wooded yards, making the parks and the yards seem larger. In summary, the parks add to the wooded, park-like character of the Village of Shorewood Hills.

The Shorewood Hills parks vary in their purposes. Some of the parks, like Post Farm Park, Four Corners Park, and the Marina, have active recreational use. Others, including Koval Woods and Kaeser Woods, are natural areas meant for passive enjoyment. In addition, the degree of development varies from no development in the Oak Way Lots to intensive development in Post Farm Park. The flowerbeds at the H. S. Roth Entry Park, formerly called the Entrance Park, and the Village triangles add color to the neighborhoods and enhance the appearance of the Village.

History of Village of Shorewood Hills Parks

(The Parks Committee is deeply indebted to Thomas D. Brock and his book, *Shorewood Hills: An Illustrated History*, for information on and history of the Shorewood Hills parks.)

The parks have a diverse history that affects their current appearance. For hundreds of years before European settlement, Native Americans visited this area. Over a thousand years ago mounds were built along the Lake Mendota shore. Although many mounds were destroyed, some still remain on the Blackhawk Country Club property. Shortly before settlement, Native Americans probably managed much of this area with fire, possibly promoting an oak savanna landscape in drier areas. Bur oaks survived the repeated fires due to their thick bark, but the repeated fires killed most other trees. However, near Lake Mendota mesic forest may have survived and in wetter lowland areas other habitat types probably existed.

Shortly after settlement much of Shorewood Hills was farmed or grazed. These disturbances destroyed much of the natural ecosystems of the area. Some areas, like the rock quarry in Dudley Davis Park, were used for other purposes. Once the area was no longer burned, many areas that were not repeatedly plowed or grazed began to grow up in oak forest. These oak trees were closer together than oaks growing in a savanna. As a result, they grew upward rather than forming the wide canopies typical of savanna grown trees. These trees shaded out the sun-loving savanna plants. The woodland plants that replace the savanna plants tend to bloom early, before the oaks get leaves, and die back relatively early in the growing season.

The parks were acquired in several ways over a period of time. Several of the parks, including Bigfoot, Koval Woods and parts of Four Corners and McKenna Park, were set aside when Shorewood Hills was developed and were gifted in 1930 to maintain the open character of the Village. Other parks, including much of Dudley Davis Quarry Park, were acquired when owners failed to pay their taxes. The Village of Shorewood Hills purchased still other parcels, like Post Farm Park, which was acquired in 1968. Finally, other parks were given to Shorewood Hills including most of Bradley Park (1936) and Reese Woods (1972) (Brock, 1999).

Even after the parks were acquired, the individual parks were managed differently. In some parks the Village of Shorewood Hills Garden Club planted many wildflowers. In other parks, like Kaeser Woods, almost no management was done. In still other parks a variety of trees and shrubs, both native and non-native, were planted. The natural areas of parks owned by the Village also suffered, at least periodically, from benign neglect. The theory of the time was that natural parks did not have to be managed, but should be left alone for nature to take its beneficial course. Thus, although many wildflowers were planted in Dudley Davis Quarry Park, years of neglect allowed exotic shrubs like honeysuckle and buckthorn and non-native invasive plants like garlic mustard to invade and take over much of this and other parks.

In the mid-1990s an energetic volunteer group began to battle non-native invasive species. In order to save the native woodland understory, Kathie Brock organized the residents of the Village of Shorewood Hills to eliminate non-native garlic mustard. She raised awareness, led work parties to eliminate garlic mustard in the parks, and mapped garlic mustard throughout Shorewood Hills. Garlic mustard was declared a noxious weed by the Village Board in 1998. The ordinance required all garlic mustard to be removed from public and private lands. Garlic mustard was worst in the areas near the railroad corridor and in and near the Dudley Davis Quarry Park. In addition, Kathie Brock's group raised awareness of the dangers of other non-native species including honeysuckle and buckthorn. At approximately the same time, Tom and Kathie Brock initiated the removal of garlic mustard, honeysuckle, and buckthorn in the nearby Campus Natural Areas so that these invasive species would not spread between these two adjoining areas.

Partially in order to continue this active war on non-native plants, Shorewood Hills hired a full time Forester/Horticulturist in 1999. He also replaced Professor Charles Koval who voluntarily served as Forester and took care of the trees of Shorewood Hills for many years. A significant portion of this job involved removing invasive species from the parks, including all garlic mustard by hand pulling or treating with Round-up. The Forester also followed the precedent of previous years, encouraging the removal of garlic mustard on private land by sending letters to residents known to have garlic mustard on their land, reminding them that the 1998 law requires them to remove it. The Forester also planted native plants in the parks. Since that time, several restorations have begun.

In 1999 the first Forester, David Koehler, wrote a restoration plan for Reese Woods that called for it to be restored to oak savanna. A plant inventory was taken and savanna seeds planted in 1999. Subsequently honeysuckle, buckthorn, and, in 2002, many of the black locust, were removed and more savanna seeds and shrubs planted. Many of the plantings survived and became an established part of the park plant community. Garlic mustard continued to be removed. Several controlled burns have been conducted at Reese Woods.

Partial restorations, involving the removal of honeysuckle and buckthorn and in some cases, other less undesirable trees and shrubs, occurred at Four Corners Park, Koval Woods, the Edgehill Parkway edge of McKenna Park, Bradley Park, Post Farm Park (all), and Dudley Davis Quarry Park (all). In many areas local residents protested the removal of screening vegetation, even if the species were undesirable. The general goal was to return the area to oak savanna or oak woodland by removing non-native species and selected other trees. Stated specific goals included restoring native ecosystems, restoring understory diversity, and regenerating oaks. Four Corners planting began in the fall of 1999. Limited planting also occurred in Koval Woods in 2001. Planting began in 2003 in Post Farm Park and Dudley Davis Quarry Park to restore the ground layer.

Summary of Village Parks and Open Areas

Although all the Shorewood Hills parks have some natural areas, for the sake of discussion, parks and open spaces are divided into recreational, mixed, natural, garden, and trail or corridor. A table summarizes the Shorewood Hills parks and green space by category, giving the size and facilities at each park. The Village of Shorewood Hills Parks Map shows the size of each park.

Recreational

Recreational parks provide a place for community activities and gatherings. They tend to have heavy usage, at least at some time of year. Shorewood Hills has 10.8 acres of recreational park area in three parks: one large park, Post Farm Park; and two smaller parks, the Marina and Four Corners Park. In addition, the 9 acre Shorewood Hills Elementary School grounds, which is owned by the Madison Metropolitan School District, provides a gathering place and a variety of recreational opportunities to Village residents. The Village has an agreement with the school enabling residents to use the Heiden house and adjacent field area for an ice rink and other Village activities. Finally, the largest open area of the Village, 99.5 acre Blackhawk Country Club, is leased to the private country club until 2025, but Village residents have access to this land in winter and limited rights to golf in summer.

Mixed Use

Mixed use parks have both recreational and natural areas. They are generally not as heavily used as recreational areas, or have high usage for relatively shorter periods. The Village has 2.69 acres of mixed use park area in two parks, Bradley and McKenna Parks.

Natural Area

Natural area parks are not designed to be high use areas. They are designed to protect native plants and animals, to preserve green space, to control erosion in steeply sloped land, and to be enjoyed by passive recreation like walking and nature observation. The Village has 6.1 acres of natural areas in four parks, Dudley Davis Quarry Park (includes Reese Woods), Koval Woods, Oak Way Lots (includes Kaeser Woods), and Bigfoot Park. Both the Oak Way Lots and Bigfoot Park were preserved to prevent building on steep lots prone to erosion and are not designed for human recreation of any kind.

Gardens

The Shorewood Hills Garden Club and the Village Forester/Horticulturist maintain multiple garden areas throughout the Village that significantly enhance the Village's appearance. The largest of these is the 1.2 acre H. S. Roth Entry Park, formerly the Entrance Park. In addition, there are 21 triangles scattered throughout the Village. A larger triangle at the corner of Shorewood Boulevard and Bowdoin Road is landscaped.

Trails or Corridors

There are a variety of trails and corridors throughout Shorewood Hills. Some of the trails that lead into parks are discussed with the park descriptions. Other public sidewalks include the Tally Ho Lane Walkway, the Shorewood Boulevard Walkway, and the Edgehill Parkway to Crestwood Walkway.

In addition, the Railway corridor, although not owned by Shorewood Hills, provides a corridor of green space that runs the length of the Village. A variety of bike trails also run through the Village including the Blackhawk Bike Trail, which connects to bike trails going to Middleton and to downtown Madison, and the Lakeshore Path, which continues from the University of Wisconsin into Shorewood Hills.