





Master Plan Recommendations: Recreation, Events, and Enterprise

6.1 Introduction

Recreational activities around the Chain of Lakes today are surprisingly similar to what they were 150 years ago. People swim and play on the beaches, fish along the shore, and boat on the water in the summer. Families and groups gather for picnics, using park amenities such as restrooms, playgrounds, and lawns for games and activities. Visitors still enjoy strolling around the lakes, although today bicyclists, roller bladers, dog walkers, and runners have joined them. As the number of cars has increased, pleasure driving along the parkways has been replaced by commuting traffic. In spite of increased numbers of visitors, the Chain of Lakes is still a refuge; a place to play, relax, and enjoy the outdoors.

Although MPRB does not have recreational staff in its regional parks, it does program events at the Lake Harriet Bandshell. From Memorial Day to Labor Day, concerts or movies are held daily except for Tuesdays. All 106 movie/concert events are free and in total account for almost a quarter of the 5 million visits to the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park.

In addition to concerts, MPRB works with private vendors/ organizations to provide services to park visitors. These enterprises generate almost a million dollars annually for the MPRB general fund. The vendors provide food (Tin Fish at Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Bread and Pickle at Harriet), equipment rental (Wheel Fun) and organize races (Anderson Races) around the lakes. Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Harriet are popular fund-raising venues for a variety of organizations.

Permits for events such as races/walks, weddings and other ceremonies, for rentals of the picnic shelter at Beard's Plaisance, and for buoys and canoe/kayak racks also generate general fund revenue for the MPRB.



6.2 Recreation

Swimming. Lake Harriet has two beaches: North Beach (lifeguarded daily 12-7 pm) and Southeast (no lifeguard), and Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska/Bde Maka Ska has three: North Beach (no lifeguard), 32nd Street Beach (lifeguarded on weekends noon-7), and Thomas Beach (lifeguarded daily noon-7 pm).

Although Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Harriet have some of the best water quality in the metro area, swimming is not taught at either of these lakes. MPRB aquatics staff lacks the facilities - changing rooms, restrooms, offices, and storage - needed for instruction. This deficiency of facilities also affects lifeguards. None of the beaches are considered universally accessible. The nearest accessible beach is at Wirth Lake in Theodore Wirth Regional Park, north of the project area, and at Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park's main beach.

THE MASTER PLAN calls for Thomas Beach to be universally accessible and to provide facilities for lifeguards and swimming instruction (see SW Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska Focus Area recommendation #3 and #4).

Boating and Launching. Gas powered motors are not allowed on either lake, with the exception of emergency rescue watercraft and tenders for races such as regattas and triathlons. Electric motors are allowed. Launching at Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska allows boaters to enjoy the Lagoon, Lake of Isles, Cedar Lake, and Brownie Lake.

Boat launches are located in the most congested spots at each lake: the northeast corner of Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and the Bandshell area of Harriet. The launches are used by sailors, fisherman, emergency vehicles, and MPRB Environmental Stewardship staff. Currently each boat is inspected for AIS (Aquatic Invasive Species) prior to launching. Those entering the launch areas must constantly be on the lookout for the hundreds of bicyclists and pedestrians crossing the driveways. This is especially an issue at the Harriet launch, because launchers must cross the trails when backing down the driveway into the water. Congestion at the NE Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska turnaround at the launch is further complicated by sailors rigging their boats, multiple daily deliveries to Tin Fish, garbage collection, accessible parking, and parents dropping off and picking up their children who are attending sailing school.

The Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska boat launch has no parking for boats and trailers. The North Beach lot is striped for boat trailer parking, but many choose to park on the streets of the adjacent ECCO neighborhood to the east of Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska. The launching areas at both lakes are used by weed harvesters in operation five days a week, several hours a day. Several times each day the harvesters dock at the launches to unload vegetation to be trucked off-site. At Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska the harvester uses a second launch site located just north of the Refectory/Tin Fish and next to the Wheel Fun rental booth.

THE MASTER PLAN. *Unraveling the congestion and safety issues caused by the intersection of boating-related activities and trail use presented the greatest challenge in the master plan. Launching operations add to the congestion at each lake. The CAC approved recommendations relocating both boat launches at Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska (see the NE, North, and NW focus areas) and reconfiguring the driveway and trails at the launch on Lake Harriet (see Bandshell focus area).*

Sailing. Founded in 1989, Lake Calhoun Sailing School offers classes for ages four to adult with scholarships available. Over a thousand students each summer take advantage of the lessons offered weekdays during the summer at two hour intervals. Participants rig their boats on a sandy beach extending some 200 feet south of the NE Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska boat launch, dragging their boats in and out of the water during lessons. Sailing School equipment is stored in an MPRB-owned garage south of the Calhoun Refectory (Tin Fish). During stormy weather, Tin Fish provides shelter to students. A motorized tender operated by the Sailing School and Sailing Club docks in the northeast corner and helps stranded sailors and other boaters, including those who rent boats from Wheel Fun. Facilities are not accessible for adaptive sailing programs. In the winter, the Sailing School stores its boats in the area between the trails and water's edge south of the Calhoun Refectory (Tin Fish).

The Calhoun Yacht Club (CYC) was organized in 1901 to promote sailing, yacht racing, ice-boating, and social events. The CYC hosts a few regattas on summer weekends. Sometimes participants rig on the trails near the launches which frustrates runners and walkers.

Master Plan Recreation, Events and Enterprise Recommendations:

1. *Redistribute recreational uses and facilities appropriately to alleviate congestion and safety concerns.*
2. *Expand and/or re-adapt existing spaces for new recreational activities in response to changing trends and/or demographics.*
3. *Expand winter programming and recreational opportunities.*
4. *Add comfort facilities around the lakes for park users including restrooms, changing facilities at beaches, bicycle parking, more benches, and other flexible seating. In picnic areas, provide movable tables, additional grills, and adjacent un-programmed open space to accommodate larger and more culturally diverse gatherings.*
5. *Improve way-finding and informational signage to direct new visitors to destination areas.*



The Lake Harriet Yacht Club is centered around weekly group sailing. Members have full access to the eleven club-owned sailboats. Children are expected to have basic sailing skills and no formal training is provided, although parents and members can give pointers.

The Twin Cities Sailing Club (TCSC,) a cooperative of 200 members, owns 24 sailboats moored at Lake Harriet. Two or three times weekly experienced members teach newer members how to sail. Once certified, members can sail any of the Club's boats any time. On any given day many sailboats underway on Lake Harriet will be TCSC's, including for sailboat races with sailors from the Lake Harriet Yacht Club (LHYC,) whose members own most of the balance of sailboats on the Lake. TCSC and LHYC share use of Lake Harriet's boat shed and conduct joint activities throughout the year.



THE MASTER PLAN. The existing sailing program at Harriet is accommodated in the Master Plan. The docks, piers and amount of parking for boats and trailers remain unchanged. The boat launch configuration has changed. The boat shed used by the sailing programs for storage has been expanded and the intention of the master plan is consolidate facilities and uses to the extent possible.



THE MASTER PLAN. Harriet is currently home to the Chain of Lakes adaptive sailing program, although facilities are inadequate. A stable dock, a designated specially-designed berth, and lift are needed. The master plan calls for these and other modifications (see Lake Harriet Bandshell Focus Area #9).

Windsurfing and Other Water-Based Activities. Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska is a Minneapolis destination for windsurfers. The primary launch site is from the North Beach and parking in close proximity is in demand. Stand-up paddleboards are increasingly prevalent and launch from the same area. In winter snow-kiting and iceboating are popular on Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska.

Many windsurfers did not support the master plan's (temporary) relocation of the Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska boat launch to the north parking lot. The windsurfers felt boats and trailers would take available parking and that the dock and boat traffic related to the launch would interfere with windsurfers' launching to and from the North Beach. The boat launch proposed for the North beach area was removed from the master plan.

Fishing. Both Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Harriet have fishing piers. Many people also fish from multiple spots along the shoreline of each lake. This foot traffic erodes the shoreline and helps create a perception of poor water quality.



THE MASTER PLAN recommends developing several access points for shoreline fishing around the lakes (especially those with ready-made shade) and eliminating others by repairing erosion and revegetating the areas (see Chapter 3: Natural Resources Recommendation #3—Shoreline Erosion).



Picnicking. Sought after, formal picnic areas defined by anchored picnic tables and grills, are located at only two places around the two lakes: Beard's Plaisance and William Berry north of the Bandshell. The only picnic shelter at the two lakes is located in Beard's Plaisance and it is fully reserved every warm season weekend and week night. Both formal picnic areas have other amenities that make them more enjoyable for families: adjacent parking, restrooms, and playgrounds.

Informal picnicking occurs at many other spots around the two lakes. Groups bring their own grills and blankets. Lack of or limited parking and accessible routes to picnic "furniture" pose barriers.

MPRB staff has requested any new permanent grills be installed with hot coal collection containers.



THE MASTER PLAN. Eating outdoors with friends and family in a beautiful outdoor setting is a recreational activity that is enjoyed across racial and economic lines. Many park users expressed a desire to have additional areas for picnicking with more grills and movable tables that could be pushed together to accommodate larger groups. Additional sought-after amenities include first come-first served picnic shelters (non-reservable), water, restrooms, and green lawns on which to play pick-up games of soccer, la crosse, baseball/softball, volleyball, and tuj lub. These lawns act as flexible spaces that could be used for new recreational and cultural activities as regional demographics change. The West Calhoun Neighborhood, which does not have a neighborhood park, requested picnic facilities at northwest Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska. The master plan recommends development of more formal picnic areas at three focus areas at Lake Calhoun/ Bde Maka Ska: Northwest, Southwest, and at William Berry.



Archery. An archery range has existed in the William Berry area south of Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska for many decades but has seen better days. The area is frequently flooded.

THE MASTER PLAN retains archery as a recreational use, relocating and reconstructing the range elsewhere in William Berry to make it more accessible and challenging (see S Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Wm Berry Focus Area recommendation #8).



Playgrounds. The parks have playgrounds at Beard's Plaisance, William Berry, North Beach (Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska), and at the 32nd Street Beach (Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska). National Safety Organizations recommend that playgrounds should be updated every 20-25 years because equipment wears out and safety and accessibility standards change. Public playgrounds require daily inspection and depending on the level of use, daily maintenance. The William Berry and Beards Plaisance playgrounds were replaced in 2011; William Berry cost more than \$1 million. Recently MPRB created a universally accessible playground at Waubun in Minnehaha Regional Park for \$1.5 million. Equipment replacement in a smaller existing playground is less costly, but still averages about \$250,000 in MPRB's neighborhood parks.



The location of the North Beach playground will be adjusted when equipment is updated, according to the Master Plan (N Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska Focus Area - Recommendation #4). The equipment in place currently is overdue for replacement.

THE MASTER PLAN shows a universally accessible playground and beach at Southwest Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska (see recommendation #2). The East Calhoun neighborhood (ECCO) requested an expansion of the playground at 32nd Street to provide equipment for older children (ages 5-12) as well as pre-schoolers. The Master Plan suggests constructing a nature playground in this area with facilities for children of all ages (see East Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska Focus Area - Recommendation #1).





Winter Use. Though the lakes are quieter in winter, use is still high in comparison with other regional parks. The bicycle path is plowed for both bicyclists and pedestrians. Iceboating and snow-kiting enthusiasts enjoy the uninterrupted expanses of the lake while nearly every day ice fishermen set up portable shelters. Currently the MPRB does not maintain rinks on either of the lakes. Winter programming is minimal although the Lake Harriet Kite Fest and City of Lakes Loppet Ski Festival (cross country skiing) bring hundreds to increasingly popular events.

THE MASTER PLAN. Many CAC members requested that existing pedestrian trails be plowed in winter. This expansion of plowing would require additional staff and mechanical equipment. Since winter paths are sanded and salted, plowing the pedestrian paths would also have an environmental impact, increasing sediment loads and salinization of the lakes. Although expansion of winter programming was a recommendation of the CAC, plowing of pedestrian trails was not specified.



Unique features. Besides the Bandshell, Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Harriet have other unique and treasured recreational resources to attract the regional visitor.

The Streetcar. The Minnesota Streetcar Museum (MSM), a private non-profit organization, owns and operates a streetcar line through William Berry Park from the northwest corner of Harriet to the southeast corner of Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska. Trolley rides are offered for a fee during the summer by MSM volunteers. A maintenance facility where old cars are maintained and restored is tucked away on the hillside west of Harriet and was recently improved through private donations.



The CAC took a second look at a 1997 Comprehensive Plan's suggestion to extend the trolley line to Lake Street. The problematic at-grade crossing of 36th Street West, the loss over the years of the track right-of-way on the bluff along east Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska, and the streetcar's lack of flexibility as a transit system led the CAC to abandon this recommendation.

Roberts Bird Sanctuary (RBS) had a parallel master planning process to that of the Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska- Harriet Master Plan. As a protected natural area, RBS is fenced and gated.

THE MASTER PLAN. As part of improving overall accessibility at Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park, the Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska Harriet Master Plan sought to improve accessible entry into both the east and west ends of the sanctuary (see Harriet Bandshell Focus Area – Recommendation #7). The tree canopy outside the fenced area of RBS is important as additional habitat and as a migration corridor for birds. Keeping the northeast shoreline of Harriet in a natural state and reducing the footprint of the maintenance area for Lyndale Park through reorganization and improvements was recommended by the CAC (see Lyndale Park Focus Area – Recommendation #6).



Lyndale Park and the Rose Garden at the northeast corner of Harriet is a historic part of a larger arboretum that includes the Peace Garden and experimental gardens. Staff and a large group of volunteers maintain the gardens.

THE MASTER PLAN. For the passive enjoyment by visitors of all abilities, the Master Plan recommends that paths be made accessible throughout the gardens and that shade and benches be added for the comfort of all. The chain link fence around the Rose Gardens should be replaced with a more historically appropriate style (see Lyndale Park Focus Area – Recommendation #5).





Comfort facilities. One of the CAC's recommendations was to add comfort facilities around the two lakes including restrooms, benches, drinking fountains, picnic shelters, beach changing rooms, storm shelters, and docks (Recreation, Events, and Enterprise recommendation #4). All these facilities should be constructed compliant with ADA standards.

Specific locations for these smaller elements are not designated in the master plan. The CAC wanted some of the added benches and tables to be movable, so that visitors could adjust seating to capture sun or shade and move tables and benches closer together for gatherings of groups of different sizes. In the past MPRB has been reluctant to provide movable furniture because of added mowing time, theft, and potential retrivals of the furniture from the water.



THE MASTER PLAN adds restrooms in several places (see focus area recommendations). Currently portable toilets, provided and serviced by private vendors, largely serve the needs of the millions of visitors to Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Harriet. If and when plumbed restrooms are built around the lakes, they will require the extension and perhaps replacement of underground utilities. In order to be sensitive to the LGBTQ community, restrooms should feature all-inclusive facilities non-specific to gender.



Plumbed restrooms will add MPRB maintenance time. Besides keeping plumbed restrooms clean, stocked, and functioning, a time-consuming task for MPRB operations staff is the twice-daily unlocking and locking of restroom doors to prevent undesirable after-hours activities.

Adult Fitness Stations. Adult exercise equipment spaced around the lake was requested by members of the public for Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska. The CAC did not object to the inclusion of small exercise stations around the lake as long as they did not interfere with other recreational uses. Adult exercise stations are shown in the East Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska focus area and could be located elsewhere around the lake, where appropriate and where space allows. Stations would have to be accessible and designed to current playground safety standards with resilient surfacing that is contained and easy to maintain.

Recreation Trends. One of the themes that emerged from discussions with the community was the need for open spaces that could be used in a variety of ways and for the different activities favored by diverse communities. For example, soccer and lacrosse are sports growing in popularity. Although Met Council does not fund construction or maintenance of courts and fields, it will allow open lawns that can be used in a variety of ways and by a variety of groups.

During the master planning process, the CAC heard from advocates of skate board parks. Proponents of a skate board park stressed the importance of providing outdoor facilities that attract younger generations. The only possible location for a skate board park in these two parks was the northwest corner of Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska along the pedestrian promenade. Though neighborhood representatives strongly objected to its inclusion, the Board included an amendment in their approval of the Master Plan, to allow construction of such facility along the promenade in NW Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska.

Another emerging trend popular among teenagers and young adults was “mocking” or “hanging out” in multiple hammocks strung between adjacent trees. Tuj lub, a Hmong spinning top game, was also mentioned. Specific locations for these activities were not addressed in the master plan.



6.3 Events and Enterprise



Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Harriet together generate about one million dollars each year for the MPRB general fund through events and enterprises which include permits for races and walks on the parkways, trails, and water (regattas and triathlons) and for weddings and other ceremonies in the gardens at Lyndale Park. Other permitted enterprises that generate funds for the MPRB include rentals of buoys, canoe racks, the Beards Plaisance picnic shelter, and the athletic field at northwest Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska. The MPRB also receives a percentage of the revenue from concessionaires (in 2016: Tin Fish, Bread and Pickle, Wheel Fun, and Nice Ride). The million dollars generated by events and enterprises for the general fund is used throughout the park system.



Races and walks are staged at the northwest and southwest areas of Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and from the Bandshell area of Harriet. MPRB Board policy allows parkways to be closed every other weekend for races. The parkways are booked solid for races scheduled from April through October and the organizations sponsoring the races renew their permits year after year. The MPRB earns an average of \$12,000 per race. Race/walk event permit holders are responsible for trash pick-up, portable toilets, staffing including policing, and the repair of any site damage.



Although no recreational staff is assigned to regional parks, MPRB does program the Bandshell and other events around the lakes. The Lake Harriet Bandshell concerts and movies, offered six nights a week from Memorial Day to Labor Day, draw an average of 5000 to 7000 visitors each evening. Parking quickly fills nearby lots and spills into adjacent neighborhoods. When available seating is taken, visitors sit on blankets on the slope to the north of the Bandshell. Additional MPRB maintenance crews are hired for the summer to clean-up the site after each event so the area is ready for the next morning's visitors.

At NW Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska the large open space is used to stage races and other events like the Loppet cross country ski races. The ball diamond is often reserved. The open field is rented to groups for lacrosse and volleyball tournaments and for movies in the parks on summer nights. The large surface parking lot co-owned and operated with the Calhoun Executive Center is a big plus for event organizers.

Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Harriet generate general fund revenue used throughout the park system, but MPRB has no policy to reinvest in the park resources or infrastructure that sustain these events and enterprises. By example, the impact of the thousands of visitors that pound the turf and compact the soils daily throughout the growing season in the Bandshell area is unsustainable from a resource standpoint. Other major cities limit similar events/festivals to once every six weeks and event organizers are required to aerate soils and re-sod lawns afterwards.

Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Harriet are being “loved to death.” The MPRB wants to encourage use of the Chain of Lakes and the amount of funding the regional park receives is dependent on visitor counts. However, as the most popular areas within the most popular regional park in the Twin Cities Metro (and in the state), reinvestment in the infrastructure and resources of Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska and Harriet once every decade or so is inadequate.

The community and CAC discussion did not weigh the impact of revenue generation on the resource and facilities. However, when discussing access and equity, some members of the CAC expressed that the MPRB should encourage use of other park “gems” in its system for recreation and programming. Many citizens commented that the parks and parkways around the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park were over-programmed for events. The CAC was leery of corporate sponsorship and naming as a way to generate revenue.





Boating as Enterprise and Equity. The MPRB rents sailboat buoys and canoe/kayak racks through a lottery drawing each year in February. Most years applicants are turned away. In 2016, annual rental for a buoy cost \$450 for Minneapolis residents and \$550 non-residents. Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska has 139 buoys. Harriet has 180 buoys.

Currently canoes, kayaks, pedal boats are available for rental through concession (Wheel Fun). A driver's license and deposit are required.

Although a few citizens proposed that boat launching should be banned from the Chain of Lakes to prevent the spread of Aquatic Invasive Species, no one suggested it be eliminated from an equity standpoint. Some suggested that free canoes be provided to the public but this was rejected as problematic from a safety, liability, and maintenance standpoint. The driver's license requirement and costs to rent boats may be barriers for new immigrant groups and the economically disadvantaged. The sailing school provides need-based scholarships, but admittedly they have not been well-used.



THE MASTER PLAN. Infrastructure improvements can be made to docks to promote adaptive sailing, but no other structural modifications were recommended in the master plan to make boating a more equitable pastime at the lakes. Programs that offer swimming and boating lessons and improved marketing of opportunities that do exist may be ways to improve equity of boating as a recreational activity.



