The Cedar Lake & Lake of the Isles Master Plan (Cedar-Isles) will create a vision for the lakes and their surrounding parkland for the next 20+ years. Community engagement was completed in 2020 and 2021 during the Vision and Discovery Phase (or phase 1) of the master plan process. In December 2021, a draft vision, guiding principles, and two initial park concepts were shared during phase 2 for public review and another round of community engagement took place through a variety of different methods. This document outlines feedback from Community Collaborator work during the Initial Park Concepts, phase 2. Learn more about the master plan on the project page: www.minneapolisparks.org/cedar-isles

Community Collaborators

To broaden the voices heard through engagement efforts, project staff sought Community Collaborator services from businesses, institutions, nonprofits, and cultural organizations to design and implement an engagement project that helped MPRB build relationships and gather community feedback. The Community Collaborator initiative is a paid opportunity for groups across the region to convene their own conversations about parks and recreation to inform the design and priorities for the Master Plan. Community Collaborators who participated in the first phase of community engagement for the master plan were invited to submit proposal for the draft initial park concepts phase. The subsequent pages of this document are the result of work done by Anna Haglin and The Witness Project. To see their work from first phase of community engagement, check out Phase 1 Community Engagement Part 2.
Anna Haglin
Cedar Lake/Lake of the Isles Disability Community feedback

All of these interviews were conducted by Anna Haglin either in-person or on zoom. Individual names were left out of the final report to preserve some anonymity, but the individual’s role within the disability community is noted. “DSP” stands for “Direct Service Professional.” They typically provide care for people with disabilities who are enrolled in a day program.

DSP 1

1. Depth perception can be an “unseen” quality of someone's disability. Tree roots can make it very scary for our individuals to walk, especially if there’s no railing.

2. It’s very difficult to plan an outing with disabled folks. We need to know what the facilities are like ahead of time–are there water fountains, handicap accessible restrooms, is there food nearby, where can we sit to take breaks as we make our way along a trail? Maybe this information can be clearly marked on trail maps? That would allow us to plan ahead, which means we’re much more likely to visit!

3. We definitely need a safe drop-off site for our buses, vans, or for “Metro Mobility.” Day facilities usually take their outings in vans. We have to be able to pull over somewhere where a group of people can get out of a vehicle and wait somewhere safe for the rest of us to get out. I’m not sure where there’s a safe drop off area near Lake of the Isles. I don’t see one in either plan.

DSP 2

1. Dirt paths can be difficult if you have mobility issues–even for those who don’t need a wheelchair. If those paths are muddy, the mud gums up walkers or canes. Sometimes mud simply triggers someone’s sensory issues. People with Autism, developmental disabilities, and other mental health disabilities need control over their clothing in order to feel grounded. A muddy trail is a “no-go” for us in that case.

2. It’s nice that boardwalks exist so that people in wheelchairs can get really close to water or shoreline. It’s good to pay attention to railing height–sometimes a thick, wood railing that’s too high can block the view of someone in a wheelchair. However, railings are essential for those who can walk but struggle with muscle-control or depth-perception.
Arts Administrator/DSP

1. I like the “welcome” points in Concept B (although I can’t tell exactly what information would be there). Signage at any entry point or at directional changes in the trail can make all the difference. Not knowing what’s ahead is extra scary for people with disabilities because getting lost might lead to serious injury at worst, helplessness at best. Many able-bodied folks have the dexterity to text for help or simply move out of the way of bicycles/runners. For some people, if they fall down, that’s it–they can’t move.

2. It also helps to have images of facilities on the park website. Many people with cognitive disabilities rely on visual cues in wayfinding. If we can look at pictures ahead of time, they feel more confident when we get to the park.

3. The more benches or seating along the trail, the better! It’s especially nice when we can count on having a seat every 100-200 ft. Or even if we just know how far it is between benches. Extra seating at entry points is extremely helpful!

4. I appreciate the efforts to preserve nature, but it looks to me like choosing Plan A is choosing inaccessibility. In Plan B, there are some efforts to preserve nature, and some efforts to increase access. I like to think we can have both.

DSP 3

1. We appreciate handicap accessible port-a-potties, but we love restrooms in permanent structures–they tend to be easier to maneuver in and out of with multiple people.

2. I’m wondering if there will be lighting along the trails? That would be especially helpful on trails where the surface is uneven.

3. Our individuals can’t use a boardwalk that doesn’t have a railing. We would be forced to walk on a bike path or in the street. Or we just wouldn’t visit that park.

Outdoor Education Director

1. We’ve learned that there’s a difference in what white people want from a community space vs. what Black, Hmong, and Hispanic families want. The latter tend to want lots of community areas–picnic shelters, grills, the ability to play music out loud…the weekends are for big, family gatherings in those traditions. Those kinds of gatherings also need
well-maintained restrooms, and a restaurant can really help. The example I’m thinking of is Minnehaha Falls area.

2. The Hmong people we work with want places to fish, such as docks and shoreline that’s away from swim areas.

3. The safe-crossings are really clear. The use of that natural median is great, because for someone with autism or cognitive disabilities, nature can have a really calming effect. The plants in the median signal to everyone—drivers and pedestrians—that this is a place to slow down and be careful.

4. Dirt paths can be fine for most wheelchairs.

5. I tend to think of Cedar Lake/Lake of the Isles as a neighborhood park that gives local people access to a really natural space. Harriet and Bde Mka Ska are more built up, so people can go to those places for a more urban experience.

6. Usually, lower-income populations can’t afford their own sports or outdoors equipment. Having that equipment available, even to rent, allows those people to experience the outdoors in a new way.

7. The more plants, shade, and nature that can be at the welcome stations, the better. In order to welcome most people with mental health, cognitive, and/or sensory issues, you need a spot that feels quiet and calming. People with autism often need somewhere that doesn’t have too much external stimuli.

8. With the current “welcome furniture,” I’m not sure how a person in a wheelchair could be a part of that table. Currently, they can’t wheel between the bench and table. They can’t sit at the head or foot of the table because those are solid wood.

9. I say keep these parks as wild as possible, while also making space for family gatherings for communities of color. In that sense, I like Concept A if you can add all of those welcome/access points from Concept B.
Below are precedent images shown during the draft initial park concepts phase of the Cedar Lake and Lake of the Isles Master Plan. These images were shown to folks with disabilities and the circled images are ones each participant preferred.

**Participant 1**
Participant 2

LIVING LAKES | precedent images

UNIQUE LAKE EXPERIENCES | precedent images
The Witness Project
Imagine a Future

Where We’ve Been, Where We’re Going

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Faith in the Future?

For those of us who
Absolutely believe
In the importance of a brighter future
This is the time
Here and now

In order to make the changes we
Need to see happen

The Minneapolis Parks need our
HELP
Even as we are called to

Fight for the parks we love
Unless we make great strides
The future looks dire
Unless we can unpack our colonization and unravel its legacy and
Reverse and manage our environmental degradation
Ever aware of the challenges we face, let’s press on

Colleen Casey
Dawn Loeffler

The Death of Wita Topa

My great-great grandfather
Walked the dirt trails of Wita Topa
Room for one
On his way to the lake edge
Finger kissing trees as he passed
Weaving in and out and around
Eating honeysuckles
Stepping high over wild grass
Bare feet sinking into muck and weeds
Several steps forward to clear water
Minnows caressing his calves
He bathed

My great grandfather
Walked a wider straighter path
Room for two
Only two islands of virgin woods left
The water now 5ft below what it once was
He sat beneath the trees
Recovering from a long day in the sun
Back against the bark
Bare feet against mossy floor
Inch worms and monarchs investigating him
He napped

My grandfather
Walked a paved trail
Room for three
Shoes clomping his arrival
He sat on a stump
And yelled directions to the trees
Messages from their families
Calling them back
The leaves would shake
Sprinkling shadows to dance upon the dirt
His eyes followed
His fingers worried the rings
Upon the stump that was his tree
He mourned
My father
Refuses to walk a trail
Rarely visits the lake
He says the wind picks up
Next to grandfather’s missing stump
The shoreline sinks
Nothing left to filter the water
The fish have to be thrown back
The grass is poisoned
To survive the lack of shade
There is dog shit and goose shit
Bikes, boats, and far too many people
He cries

I will soon be able to visit
What is left of my great-great grandfather’s Wita Topa
By light rail
I will follow a black paved trail
Wide enough for a car
Past a pavilion with bathrooms
To sit by the water on a bench
Or picnic
At a table with an umbrella
To protect from the sun
Grass will be manicured to presidential perfection
The aesthetic trees still standing
Will be classified by signage, labeled
12 stone point accesses will breech the water
I wonder

Millions have been spent by Man’s Will to
Reshape
Dominate
Control
His wild nature
Millions more to fix
Over-developmental damages
Tell me Honestly

Shouldn’t it be Nature
Reshaping the Will of Man?
Sharon Kelly

Untitled

For the sister’s receiving, a motherless adopted autistic nephew and 20 diaries. Were the diaries about living with or without autistic biracial son or was that subject silent? Reading diaries, hours needed. Reading the silent wry smiling autistic boy child – a horizon. From Diamond Lake to Bryn Mawr encircling the Chain of Lakes to Cedar Lake on the way to Grandma’s. Driving making conversation Questions without follow up. Smiling happily replies! What do you and Grandma do? We play video games. Do you and your mother drive this way to Grandma’s? I think so. Do you, Grandma, and mother drive or walk to the Lake? Sometimes, after video games or when Mom gets me. Repeating this drive for inter-generational visit video gaming. Deafening car silence, questions and answers few, Mom deceased; diaries many. Slowing road view of Cedar Lake with silence, smiles, and my question. What is the Lake effect on aging, autism, death, and racial identities?
Let’s Celebrate Preston

who wants to teach me to roller skate.

We take our class to the lake. Fall.

Jamal jumps out of school van: laces up.

Out for the morning.

Our students dance around each other,

in perfect balance;

trees blowing just lightly

in the breeze of a cool fall.

I notice their grace.

Each comes toward me, twirls with a spin, glides to a stop

at the end of the lake’s circle.

I waver,

wobble

stop near Pres.

‘You gotta slow down, Landsman!

Don’t worry about Shanika

zoomin’ right by.

She done skated since she a baby.’

By my side, his strides easy, assured;

ten in the morning, out of the confines,

of city school, windows breaking the land,

the street, into dusty panes of light.

He offers an elbow,

I stumble up onto the path,

he square and firm.

For a few minutes we go slow.

Slow.

‘Now you glide, Landsman,

Let go.’

End of fall, still alive with muted reds and yellows,

color reflects in Lake of the Isles morning quiet.
'You go on Pres, you go on.'
I watch him: all assurance
    in the green surroundings
        as he spins in circles,
    laughing in tree shadow,
        as he bends low, gathers speed.

Chicago boy to Minneapolis young man, now 16,
    drives home to relatives
        across farmland;
    extra gasoline cans
        so he does not have to stop
    in a rural station.

Let’s celebrate Pres, who finds ease in autumn gold,
    under a tree branch,
        over hillside,
    swoops and twists.

Rare moment of abandonment,
    spiraling in and out of shrubbery.

slumps on a bench, absorbed;
    intent on a squirrel’s mother
    chasing her babies,
        circling around
            a tree trunk
        as they tease her to play.

He sits a moment longer,
    rising to a slow, graceful stride,
        on by a mother who, seeing him,
    clutches her kids closer.

Celebrate Pres, relaxed.

Leaves reflect in the ruffled water. End of our hour.
We settle in sun: students, teachers, van driver.
No one says much as faces tilt toward warmth.
    Only other time I have seen Pres so at ease
        is when he has on his music; earphones circle
            his head, humming as he writes;
        or maybe when he asks to just sit
            and I point him toward the “just sit” space in my room.
Van takes us back around the water toward Franklin Avenue, green grass catches late morning light.
    I ask Pres if he comes often to skate at the lake.
    He shakes his head. Jamal says, ‘You don’t come here less you with some white people.’
    Shanika nods her head.

We are quiet.

‘Yeah,’ Preston says as we step down to the sidewalk
    ‘You don’t go there much.’
Debra Stone

The Canoe

Crossing the forbidden—Floyd B. Olson Highway—a deceased governor born in north Minneapolis—our neighborhood. Floyd known as Skipper to his Norwegian neighbors & a Shabbos goy to his Orthodox Jewish neighbors.


We’re explorers like our ancestor—George Bonga—the 19th century Black Indian fur trader of northern Minnesota. His mother Ojibwe & my Auntie his descendant from Bungo Township in Cass County named after the Bonga family. Exploring comes natural to us—we’re fearless.

O, a glorious find. We discover treasure—a brown, battered canoe. In the forbidden territory of Cedar Lake woods surrounded by big houses & expansive green lawns without dandelions. In forbidden territory we’re innocent of redlined neighborhoods.

We claim this holey canoe as our own with a single split paddle. In the canoe we bail out water. We slowly sink. Cedar Lake shore beckons sloshing soothing waves. Not afraid of drowning even though none of us could swim. We didn’t drown—if we’d had there’d been much sorrow—I know this now.

Summer soft breeze cool us under the burr oak leafy branches. We eat wild blackberries that leave purple stains around our mouths & fingers. We eat crumbled peanut butter cookies from our pockets. Younger kids gather Black-eyed Susan and Purple Cone flowers. We’re hidden by tall grass from peering eyes. Next time we’ll fill the holes with rags & trade the split paddle with a plank of wood from daddy’s workshop. We’ll mend our canoe & paddle Cedar Lake & Lake of the Isles too.

Who tattled on us to our mamas ruining our plans? “Saw your kids dodging heavy traffic on Olson Highway.”

O, mama went on. “Don’t let me find out you’ve been crossing that highway again—what you doing in that neighborhood? White folks will call the police on you, call child protective services.” Here mama imitates the voice of a white lady with a fake phone to her ear. “Hello, I’m Mrs. White Lady on Cedar Lake, coloreds are at it again. Those people don’t know how to take care of their children.” Mama’s voice rises up. “They put you in foster care, just like that.”
Mama snaps her fingers for emphasis. “Do you want that? I should hope not—don’t need them in our business—you all playing with their trash.”

What happened to the leaky canoe in the forbidden territory? Did someone find our treasure—throw it away—was our treasure nothing but trash?

Childhood memory dug deep into my bones.
there was a reason
it became a trail
was it logical
practical, reasonable
or groomed and forced
walk here, stay on the path
see what we want
you to see
do not venture off
ask why or how
just go

but why
to be part of nature
part of life
even your own
requires intent

so do sharing and including

but so do their opposites
Bill Anderson

Squirrel

like the squirrel who freezes, clinging to the bark
until I turn my head and he can scamper to the other side
I proclaim myself invisible as I step onto the path
I creep along as if stalking prey
but I am not, I am there as a nosy neighbor
not wanting to disturb as I intrude
if the critters flee, take cover, I see nothing
I try not to crush, crunch, stomp, snap
as I would if I were a runner
trying to put space between me
and a thundering herd
I want to see nature as nature is
busy, purposeful, on a mission to ensure future generations
am I on such a mission
I want to believe I am
the distractions of the material world
the obsession of me first
diverts my attention, pulls me in unnatural directions
what’s good for industry, commerce, human civilization
is not always best for nature
for the future

I stand still, listen and breathe
surrounded by trees filled
with squirrels, birds and creatures
I can’t see shyly watching
waiting to learn if I am truly
friend or foe
predator or plague
they must decide that this one, this time, standing still
might be harmless
they return to their purposeful lives
but keep one eye on me, apparently not invisible
to see if I retain their trust
inside
an eastern sun glared hazy beams of light
through the church rose window where
deep purple stained the pews oxblood gold

outside
the church cross bore itself to the morning
the clock bore itself onto eleven am as
a fire truck with ladder ached and moaned
to enter this boulevard of winding paths

crossing
there are only so many ways one can cross
barriers—traffic of hidden faces, six degrees
of separation from here to the water’s edge,
shine as if the glaring sun shone on beetle’s
shells—a bonanza of crossings, 9 green eyes

barrier
a man in black walks down the center of a road
approaching the park and crosses unaware
we make eye contact he nods as he passes there
on his back a small guitar sways with each foot
step raising the gravel to sandpaper cadence away
he goes kitty-corner tangentially through all barriers
Lake of the Isles, Minneapolis

He must be somebody’s brother,
he must be somebody’s son,

yet he is always alone
and his demeanor suggests a mind afloat

like a helium balloon that has escaped
the string that tethers it to earth.

Grounded, the park bench is his meridian,
the starting point from which all other places

can be measured, pinpointed, found.
A human sextant, he shouts

longitudes and latitudes,
coordinates around the globe:

“. . .Fiji: Latitude: 17°S, Longitude: 178°E,

When joggers and walkers enter his circumference,
he pauses until they cross an imaginary line,
equidistant from a celestial body,
then he resumes, loud, clear, urgent,
as if others are depending on him.
Broadcasting, his voice drifts across the lake,

drifts across the city to the 45th parallel,
drifts across time and space,
navigating all of us home.
Not Quite Everyone Goes to the Lake

almost every size and variety of Canis Familiaris
but only a small sample of Homo Sapiens
as if a larger cross section
is reluctant to mix
do not feel welcome
don’t belong, don’t matter

selective mingling of dogs
may enhance their cute
but allow opportunities for problems
to creep in, grow, become standard
bad hips, bad hearts, bad attitudes
Canis becomes damaged

if you ask a dog
the tail he sniffs is a dog
the cut, color, wrinkle, bark is irrelevant
to dogs co-mingling
and continuing as dogs

but humans
find so many reasons to avoid
the connection
that dogs find easy

we love our dogs
but maybe we need them
to teach us
to love us better
Wisdom Young

A Piece of Pie

Beneath the North Star
In a cracker-bitten place
Ice mountains have carved
giant saucers for reflection
Unable to capture the grimaces frozen on our face

Our bones shake
Under triple goose, fur hoods and ugly boots
We have sojourned to Antarctica, fleeing the noose
Oh!! But we forget Duluth!

For rumored opportunities
We give up the sweetness of familiar southern fruits
Wages and diversity are minimal
Yet, while hopping busses, we somehow, still plant roots

After a while
Baring her gold eyetooth
God decides to smile
Spring and summer reveal another truth
“You’ll be alright after all chile”

We find the center well; the citadel
Revolve around her like bumblebees
Under nectar’s spell
Some skate, bike and hike moving in a frenzy

But WE park and post
Leaning on box chevy doors- doing the most
In fluorescent biker shorts and bamboos
Or a 2 piece and a pepper tracksuit with fly shoes
Copper skin glistens in the beams
Rockwell blasts from speakers
“I always feel like somebody’s watching me!”
We are now city folk
Yet, there are some routes we aren’t privy to know
We are expected to pound concrete
...to beg for blue lead
to not brush the street red beneath our feet
Damn, Minnesota and this humidity!
How easily we become a chant, a murmur, a memory

What if instead on a loop
We stopped by the red roof for a scoop
Caught glimpse of a secret under passage
only meant for a few

On the path we laugh
No cars to hear zooming past
We hum a tune
Tongue touching the roof
Cat tails rise in this intimate sphere
Old wealth whispers- “It’s a different world here”
We lay down a blanket in the shade
Look up at the sky
And sigh,
“Must be nice- having a piece of the pie”
Manling Chen

The Dream Park

What does the city park look like?
Heaven and earth,
Creator and creation,
The Heaven (天): invite, cover, embrace, soften, bless, drench, water, enrich, and provide.
The people (人): being embraced, surrounded, hemmed, mantled, clothed, and protected.
Are in unity (合一) like one serene Chinese water-and-ink painting.

What do we comprehend in the city park?
Nature is beyond finite human mind.
Therefore, be amazed, eye-opened, and mind-opened.
Listen and focus on the moment.
Hope for the unknown future.
Come in awe to learn from the Creator,
And each unique person coming across your life trail.

Walking with my family by the lake,
Appreciating the sunset shining the glow of purple, red, orange, gold on the water.
Awesome view humbles us to know our confines in the universe.
The long-living sun, moon, stars, land, lake, and trees witness the history from the past.
Oh, what is our meaning of existence?

Skating on the frozen ice on the lake.
My little child, skating toward me, wavering.
He came and fell into my arms.
His smile and hug told me how joyful and secure he felt in my presence.
Right there, I forgot about me, me, me,
But stayed in this very moment,
To communicate with another amazing human being.

What is the city park for?
The city park is an oasis, a refuge away from daily stress.
Habitat restored, from native red cedar trees to historic legendary stories of pioneers.
The city park is a place where we never tire of drawing pictures or taking photos,
Because the creation always inspires our imagination,
And generates precious memories with ever-changing atmosphere.
How do we feel in the city park?
A place for celebration, with year-round coming together with culture-exploring activities.
A botanical garden for appreciation, with year-round access to plants.
A dream park is a welcoming outer space for transforming our inner space.
So that no one may ever feel left out.

The city park is a place of joy,
Engaging mingling self with other living creatures: from quaking bog to human beings.
Therefore, anyone is welcome.
No cost. No hindrance. No humiliation. No judgment.

What do I hope to remember in the city park?
I see the greater meaning of my existence is nothing about what I have done,
But what I have received.
I am thankful for this park kept for many more generations in the future.
I am thankful for many memories being kept alive in my loved ones’ hearts.

Each person coming to the park, no matter where from, living out a unique story.
If I stop to talk to them,
If I invite them into my life, interact with them,
I may witness miracles I have never imagined.
The invisible spiritual realm is more real than the visible material world.
The material world may fade away, but our spirits live on.

I was not here. But now I hear.
I become one of the natives, writing my history on this land, along with my fellows.
What a grace. Thank God for this land.
What he wanted was silence. What he wanted was the noise tuned to a low rumble, or even a gentle song. He wished there was a space in woods or mountains or one along the shore that welcomed his night self, no threat. He wanted to sit and hear a bird, solitary at dawn, without arousing suspicion. Perhaps his city with its parks had once welcomed him, perhaps he was no more than a man, no less a man, on a bench reading words. He suspects he never had that luxury, the luxury of being simply human: no than more human, no less than human. Now as he walks to the fence at the edge of his allotted space or on the few paths in his permitted area, he is wary. Yet the noise behind him insists he continue toward quiet, no matter the prohibition. Because what he has always wanted is to discern the lap of water, next to him, in front of him: that sound alone uninterrupted by raucous music or even a woman yelling at her boy. He knows there are breaks in any wall, in any fence and if he finds one he knows the risk: of being out of turn. Yet this drive in him is fierce. He saw an image of an old book on the tablet screen one day, before the it was snatched away. Once, looking over his supervisor’s shoulder he saw pictures of water, of trees, of ways to move in vessels out into the lake: pictures of someone crossing the water solely with the power of his body. What he really wants is to be solitary, to evade even laughter, or the push and pull of those he loves, with their words and their tears. What he always wanted was silence.
Denise Alden

Visions of the future

bulldoze the present and especially
the past, bury them with a wellspring
of immaculate intentions.
What is the new world worth
if it destroys everything?

To disappear a people, a history,
is to presume even the stars can be caught,
pinned like moths to a board in constellations
of our own making, or suffocated like fireflies
in a jar to do our bidding, bring us light.

The people are still here against all odds
against the monstrous manifest destiny
that wrought so much misery.
Our quaint rituals around our sun,
one lone star in this galaxy, mean nothing
if we can’t recognize our roots are stardust.

We stand tiptoe on the littoral edge,
peering over this lake called The Milky Way,
on this occupied land where the waters
reflect the sky and clouds,
this Mni Sota Makoce.
Ten thousand lakes pale in comparison:
it’s the counting, the possession,
the re-naming that offends.

All litanies are long, all stars burn out, all peoples
are knit together in lineage: one of us
can be braided with any other to make
new baby braids, filaments of wonder
from every part of earth and stars.
Adornment may differ,
but the desire to adorn is universal,
as in the universe adores variety.
We must start somewhere
but need to know where
the ‘where’ is.
Let us repair, recognize;
not raze or rebuild.
Let us dismantle in order
to re-weave ourselves together.
Let us ask the land
how long she would like to rest.
The cardinal welcomes the spring in song,
red-breasted robins begin to arrive,
a purple finch wings along the shore.
All are welcome!

Families meander along the paths,
some pushing strollers,
bicycles glide by, “on your left!”
All are welcome!

Men walk holding hands with men,
women hold hands with women.
They do not look over shoulders, safe.
All are welcome!

Cattails multiply in the marsh,
redwing blackbirds call out,
a kestrel sits in a nearby tree.
All are welcome!

Restrooms open their doors,
faucets and flushing toilets.
If there are no restrooms, who is this for?
All are welcome!

Hear the sounds of laughter.
See the people walking their dogs.
And look! Even a cat on a leash!
All are welcome!

In winter the people slide by on skis,
glide on the ice with their skates,
a snowy owl flies through the night.
All are welcome!
People of all colors and backgrounds
walk from Lake of the Isles to Cedar lake,
women with hajibs, men with yarmulkas.
All are welcome!
All are welcome!
All are welcome!
All are welcome!
All are welcome!
Expanding the littoral edge,
a nod to the lake before dredging--
not lawn touching water,
but marshy mirage of the past
to keep water from drinking
phosphorus and sodium chloride.
A new notion of boundaries.

Littoral zone, depth where sunlight
pierces bottom to massage
roots of aquatic plants and
draw them toward that yellow orb.
In a lake dredged with machines
to raise surrounding property values,
literal boundaries still remain.

Across parkways a literal edge
raises forbidding shoulders, rows
of multi-million dollar houses turning
watchful eyes toward the lake.
On one roof, Guatemalans ply tall peaks
nailing down new shingles
to beats of Reggaeton, arms encased
in long sleeves on 95 degree days.
Nearby, Mexican landscapers haul
rocks and trees to strains of Norteno,
while weary women load vacuums
and caddies full of chemicals
into yawning trunks of tired sedans.

Imagine these workers gazing at
park benches, or following flight
of a great blue heron or splashing of
canoe paddles. They listen to voices
of passing walkers and hear bursts
of laughter, then wonder if they would
be welcome to cross the street.
Imagine their presence along the shore, far more likely than the imagined birds of the expanded littoral edge—
the common moorhen, European relative of the common gallinule with its bright red beak, and the Wilson’s snipe, a shy bird that will neither rest or nest at a lake where 5.5 million humans walk and canoe each year.

Imagine instead the likely littoral edge, from tiny diatoms and phytoplankton to pondweed leaves' watery wave and yellow pond lilies' crimson throats, from the brilliant green of arrowhead to the tall spikes of cattails, their brown heads waiting for fall to send fluffy seeds floating on air.
Imagine new visitors from neighborhoods not blessed with lakes, alighting from light rail to cross the literal edge and wander paths and boardwalks.

Imagine the rich red epaulettes of the blackbird riding cattails in a spring breeze, bluegills searching for insects under pondweed, Canada geese dipping long necks to feed on tasty tubers beneath pointed leaves of arrowhead where all feel welcome to walk the boardwalk, to cast for sunfish and perch, to play their own music on a picnic blanket holding tacos carnitas, bahn mi, or two sides nestled with barbeque.

Sources: Minneapolis Park Board website--Lake of the Isles Park and Concept Driver: Protect; eBird website for Lake of the Isles; Audubon website for Minneapolis Chain of Lakes; Minnesota Department of Natural Resources website for Lake of the Isles; Big Woods, Big Rivers: An Introduction to the Natural History of Minnesota’s Deciduous Forests--Minnesota Master Naturalists Curriculum; Birds in Minnesota: Revised and Expanded Edition by Robert B. Janssen; and The Nature of St. John’s edited by Larry Haeg with Jennifer Kutter
Nancy Cook

Two Guiding Principles

Celebrate

cemented bench, unobtrusive among cottonwoods, sturdy lap a temporary caregiver, chance to deep breathe, satisfy hunger, talk face to friendly face, become unobtrusive among the trees, listen to squirrel chatter, bird talk, watch the leaves turn, hold a baby in your sturdy lap

the restroom, solid, dry, clean, refuge, respite, relief, open, inclusive, visitors welcome here, visitors expected, by vehicle, by rail, by bicycle, by kayak and canoe, come diapered in Burleys, wheeled in chairs, feel your way with white cane, see with your ears, read with your fingers

the Metro stop, Green line to green space, Van White brown faces to Minnetonka white places, symbol of progress, tales & trails of peoples divided, free to travel or forced to travel, tickets & tracks, testimony to entitlement, bait & lure of imagination, doors slide open, doors slide closed

Tell Stories

children watch with unblinking eyes, listen chin-in-hands, gather in the sand where campfire ghosts speak in confiding whispers, trace pictures that wash away, share tales of bullhead, bluegill, heron, grebes, then drift like smoke into memory, their footprints hollows in the sand

travelers gaze on thick blotched bark, up at ancient arms, broad leafy hands touching sky, find comfort in the deep hollow where oak’s pulse can be felt & solace in the passage of time, listen to troubadour winds, their ballads and rimes of far away, of long ago, of imagine you could be

searchers graze the littoral edge, hold still, scarcely breathe in arctic air, listen: the ice speaks, remembers, re-members forgotten voices, earth’s body language, whale songs, O’ceti Sakowin, birthing moans, muffled thunder, soft mews, glottal stops, stories told in inference & intuition
OP EDS
LITERARY STYLE
Master Plan

a plan to plan the future
using data that is incomplete upon collection
fed into machines obsolete upon installation
to create models, hypotheses and projections
outputs that predict
behavior of irrational creatures
who believe plans are best left
to non-corporeal entities
who may or may not be paying attention

and we wonder why
so many master plans fall short
overwhelmed by a reality
no one except cynical
unpublished science fiction writers
who believe we already live
in a dystopian society expected
even though they haven’t sat
through a single discussion
uttered a syllable
but live to say
   See, I told you

it may be an imperfect process
most are
but isn’t it better to pronounce thoughts
ask questions
than watch from the sidelines

if you don’t participate
constructively criticize
your complaints should remain silent
Introducing: Concept C

For immediate release, the Master Planning Commission has a new option available.

Dear citizens, your input is a PR step crucial in the draft planning process to re-invision, re-envision the Cedar-Isles Parks system. Concept C will be compared to Concept A: Living Lakes, and Concept B: Unique Lakes. Similar to A and B, this new concept will also embody its own version of rewilding; here designated as “historical rewilding.” The need for water quality improvement will be reduced by half, one main activity hub will be included, and the design will forego an ice-skating loop while maximizing mobility options with ample parking and access. (See image). For context, in 1904, Lake of the Isles was a marsh. The following year Theodore Wirth led a campaign to dredge the marsh into a lake in a heroic measure to reduce miasma increase property values. Concept C is bold in its design, proposing to re-fill Lake of the Isles and return the water body to near original conditions, but not quite. This proposed design goes one step further with the complete resurfacing of the lake into a blacktop arena for competition-ready basketball courts. As a natural arena, this lake has a unique bowl-shape topography, well suited for spectators to enjoy tournaments from a wide array of recreational programming, as visitors will enter into the area, descend a steep hill with a curved road, and turn to a surprise sight at the bottom—much like entering the Target Center. Already established habitual community attentiveness will only accelerate public perception of the design. Buses will be able to park alongside the courts at either the north end of the park or south. Please note, this design is the most expensive design as it incorporates public restrooms, flood lights for evening games, concessions, and award ceremonies for the winning teams. Expenses may be increased curbed by working with the Army Corp of Engineers to upcycle sediment dredged from the Mississippi River for the fill. This design does enable the extension to other possible outcomes, not limited to a concrete skateboard park, roller derby loop, four-square infrastructure, weekend food shelf events, and Double Dutch competitions. You will possibly note, the removal from this concept of the “inclusive welcome signage.” With this design, we do not foresee a need for increased signage. Cedar Lake will stay the same in Concept C.
On the Outside Looking In

When I saw a slide presentation prepared by a Minneapolis Parks staff member about envisioning the possibilities of the next phase of the Minneapolis Parks, with images of outdoor classrooms, I was aghast. Not at the notion of outdoor classrooms, but because the image shown to represent them was totally inaccessible to people with physical disabilities. I put on a pleasant voice and pointed this out. “I just want you to know that I think that the idea of outdoor classrooms is great, but the image you showed is one that is not physically accessible for people with disabilities.” I identified myself as a person with a gait disability.

Others in the group pointed out how the image shown would also be challenging or not accessible for people who are blind.

I asked if the Minneapolis Parks had consulted with the specialists in designing spaces to be accessible for people with disabilities. I pointed out that the Minnesota Council on Disability, a State office, has specialists who can help ensure that the design of public places will be accessible to people with disabilities. These specialists have been helping the Minnesota State Parks become more accessible.

It's always surprising to me, a person with a gait disability and the daughter of a mother who used a wheelchair for years, that spaces are not made accessible for people with disabilities. That there is not a greater awareness, or proactivity, among designers of public places thirty years after the passage of the ADA.

When I worked for the Minnesota Council on Disability my supervisory used to point out that, “We are all just one head bonk away from becoming a person with a disability.” Or, we might add, one car accident or spinal cord injury away from becoming a person with a disability.

I recently went to explore the park at Cedar Lake. Whenever I go somewhere, I can’t help but assess the space for physical accessibility. Yes, I am ambulatory and use a cane, but changes in level, staircases, etc. become barriers for me in ways that able-bodied people often do not anticipate. I also think about my mom and her wheelchair and my friends who use motorized wheelchairs or scooters to get around.

When I arrived by car with the friends from my writing group, I noticed that there was only one parking spot designated as handicap accessible in the whole parking lot where we parked. And there were no curb cuts for people with wheelchairs or scooters to use to safely access the sidewalk from the parking lot. Also, when walking the paths along the west side of the lake, the paths were very uneven due to settling, and, in one spot, there was an enormous upheaval in the center of the path that made it difficult for me to walk and would have been impossible for someone using a wheelchair or a scooter to go over, or around. Little wonder that I saw no one using mobility devices, other than myself, at Cedar Lake using the park.

Our small group walked as far as the beach area that has been newly renovated. Again, in looking at the park I felt a sense of how so often people with disabilities are on the “outside looking in.” How would someone using a chair, a scooter, or even a cane, go from the concrete
area near the sidewalk to the water’s edge? Could a walkway have been made to go down toward the water, a walkway wide enough and with a slope friendly enough for people with disabilities using aids in mobility to go nearer to the beach and the water’s edge? There were also no seats in that area for those who might have limited mobility to sit and look at the lake. I am not trained in design, including design of public spaces for accessibility, but I am familiar with some of its hallmarks. And I can sense when there are barriers.

I wondered about what would happen if an individual with a physical disability or a family in which a member had a physical disability might want to go to that beach, the person with the physical disability could not move nearer to the beach or the water. They would have to remain on the concrete area adjacent to the sidewalk. If some of the family members wanted to go on the beach, the others could not go near them but would have to watch them from a distance. Be “on the outside looking in.” Or, individuals and families with someone with limited mobility would likely not go there to use the park.

This leads me to ask who is being included and who is being excluded from park access in the newly renovated spaces in the Minneapolis Parks and in the planned spaces updated in the latest plan for the Minneapolis Parks. It has now been over 30 years since the passage of the ADA.

It leads me to ask when and how things will ever change for people with physical disabilities. The barriers and segregated living persist. Even in new park manifestations and park plans.
Storytelling:

I’d like to hear the story of the wild turkeys I see walking near the lake. What is their seasonal route, the time-table of brooding & raising poults? How have they interacted with and impacted the other species in the area? Are they a food source for some? Have they eaten away some others? Does their refuse fertilize or pollute? I want stories that tell of those turkeys holding up traffic, attacking parked cars, stealing fruit from cherry trees and sitting on neighborhood fences.

I’d like to hear stories of kids playing in the woods. What did they discover there? Did they build forts with fallen branches? Did they sing around camp fires? Did they sleep under the stars with the moon shining above the lake? Did they splash in the lake, go fishing, or learn to canoe? Was there bird watching, star gazing, bug collecting? Have they learned the names of the trees, insects and flowers here? Did they notice the changes in the various seasons?

I’d like to hear the stories of Turtle and Owl, of Crane and Toad, Frog and Fish. What is the seasonal sequence of their lives? Have they and their ancestors always been here or are they recently arrived? How do they interact with each other? What are their names? How has the infestation of humans impacted them? Who has left? Who has recently arrived?

I’d like to hear the story of the land, perhaps from the perspective of ‘Old Tree”. What has Old Tree seen in the many years of standing near the lake? What vegetation has come and gone? What trees have grown up nearby? How has the lake overflowed and receded? What weather has Old Tree seen? Perhaps tornados and blizzards, fires and floods have impacted the lake and the shorelines. How have humans impacted the lake and its surrounding landscapes?

We humans think we have been the only thing to impact the lake, but of course that is single-minded. Weather, vegetation, global warming, animals, water fowl and humans work in concert (knowingly or not) to change the environment. What unintended consequences have changed the look, the vegetation and the animals who live here? Will we move forward observing, appreciating, sharing and honoring the environment?