

The Vilas Beach Project

by Officer David Dexheimer

Goldstein Award Submission

June 1, 2015

Vilas Beach Project Summary

Since the early 1980's a group of Cuban immigrants chose to gather and drink in a parking area adjacent to Vilas Beach. In spite of the very public location, their presence was tolerated by the community for many years. Drinking, loud music, and the ogling of women at the beach were overlooked as cultural diversity. Some residents of the Vilas Neighborhood noticed changes in 2006. It wasn't until 2009 that the police caught up to the community and analyzed incident data for Vilas Beach.

Officer David Dexheimer adopted Vilas Beach as a Problem Oriented Policing project after noticing an increase of police incidents and a change in the nature of the calls. Observing and engaging the people near the beach, his first insight was the presence of transients, some of whom he recognized. For several years the banning of alcohol in other parks was rippling outward from the center of the city, displacing transients. Officer Dexheimer proposed banning alcohol at Vilas. The strong negative reaction revealed the complexity of this problem. Off-the-shelf park problem solving would not work in Vilas.

An emerging open air drug market was discovered. More evidence was needed to educate citizens and city agencies. An innovative, non-enforcement based method of documenting the drug market was devised by Officer Dexheimer. Public support was built through personal contacts and through numerous public presentations. Responses were refined to only target the problem behavior and make them more acceptable. Building on past partnerships with the Parks Department, Officer Dexheimer was able to coerce them to make changes in the design.

The most dramatic responses happened in May 2011. Signs were posted prohibiting alcohol from near roadway. The parking was reconfigured. Picnic tables were removed from a traffic island. And stressed areas were physically closed with fencing for restoration of the vegetation.

A seed was planted by Officer Dexheimer with the Latino group that relocation be considered someday. That day was May 19th, 2011. They chose a much better spot on the other side of the beach, away from the road. The area no longer met the business needs of the drug dealers. They left. The transients were displaced again. Some returned uptown.

Police incidents dropped dramatically and continue to stay low. The solutions have been self-sustaining. The police facilitated transfer of ownership to citizens and park rangers. Drug incidents and evidence of use disappeared after 2012.

The Vilas Beach Project

Scan

The Vilas Park Beach was for many years a gathering place of Latino men who drank alcohol and leered at the bathers. But it was not considered a problem by the community. The situation changed due to the influx of other groups, though many in the community were reluctant to acknowledge this.

The first documented identification of a problem at Vilas Beach, in September 2006, was the Vilas Neighborhood Association's request that alcohol be banned in all city parks after a summer of drunken disturbances at Vilas Beach¹. In January 2006, a Top Ten List of district problems² ranked Vilas Beach number four of all locations in number of police incidents. The South District did not have a Community Policing Team at the time and other than alerting patrol officers there was no concerted effort to address the problem.

Vilas Park, a jewel of the Madison park system, is located in a relatively affluent residential neighborhood. Its 42 acres are home to the Henry Vilas Zoo, picnic areas, playing fields and a popular beach on the shores of Lake Wingra. It is located a mile from downtown Madison and the Capital square. Vilas Park is eight blocks from the University of Wisconsin campus. Vilas Zoo alone hosts over 700,000 visitors per year. The park annually hosts school children by the

¹ See three articles from the Capital Times in the appendix

² See South District Top Ten Problems poster in the appendix

busload, family outings, sporting events and countless other visitors. The problem area was located adjacent to Wingra Dr, a scenic park road that was built in 1904 by Madison's historic Park and Pleasure Drive Association. The road is used heavily by bicyclists, runners and other pedestrians, and is often crowded with children and families going to the zoo or beach. The area which had been taken over by several different groups of users was a turn out parking area with space for about twenty vehicles. It was separated from the main road by a large traffic island, 330 feet long and 40 feet wide.

Patrol officers were aware of an increasing number of calls to Vilas Beach and viewed it as a chronic gathering place where alcohol consumption lead to frequent disturbances. The complex nature of the problem only became apparent after it was adopted and analyzed by Officer Dexheimer. When displaced transients arrived and the problem began to grow, it was still basically alcohol and the ensuing affects of over-consumption that characterized the site. Though it was not immediately noticed, drug dealers began parking amidst the other site users, taking advantage of the disorder. This activity increased and became a small open air drug market.

In January 2009, the South District Community Policing Team was seeking to identify district problems so that the team could focus on Problem Oriented Policing. One handy reference was the Top Ten List from 2006. Vilas Beach was fourth on the list of problems in the South District. It was the only problem location in the Charlie 1 sector to make the list. Having worked that area as a patrol officer, Officer David Dexheimer was mindful of Vilas Beach emerging as a problem and after reviewing police incident data took ownership of it for the next three years.

Analyze

Surveys, interviews, observation and crime data were used to analyze the problem. Personal contact with stakeholders was critical to a thorough understanding of the origins and evolution of the project area. Learning local history was also important.

The gradual emergence of the problem at Vilas Beach makes it difficult to pinpoint a beginning. The crisis rose out of an ongoing but relatively tolerable nuisance that began in the early 1980's. The picnic area alongside the beach attracted a small group of Cuban immigrants who had fled Cuba during the Mariel boatlift. The group was mostly known for their daily presence in the picnic area. Usual activities included consumption of alcohol, vigorous games of dominoes and occasional Mariachi music. One member of this group introduced himself to Officer Dexheimer as "the Mayor of Vilas Park".

In 2006, the demographic of those gathered at the beach was changing. In addition to the familiar Cuban presence was an influx of transients³. Soon after, the use and suspected sales of illegal drugs was noticed. In early contacts with the group occupying the problem area, Officer Dexheimer noted the presence of several persons that he recognized as being State St⁴ "regulars". He confirmed with the downtown neighborhood officer that these new Vilas arrivals were displaced from uptown. Two reasons for this were the banning of alcohol at other city

³ This report will use the word "transient" to refer to chronic alcoholics and substance abusers who more or less choose to live on the streets and in shelters. They reject offers of services because they are unable to comply with basic standards of behavior even in supported environments. This word is preferred to distinguish them from families who have lost housing due to financial circumstances and are actively working with social services to improve their situation. Generic use of the term "homeless" is a disservice to them.

⁴ State St is Madison's primary downtown business district and extends eight blocks from the Capitol Square to the University of Wisconsin

parks and the reconstruction of Peace Park⁵. A trio of death investigations in 2008 also prompted a displacement of transients from nearby Brittingham Park.

In confirming that the composition of the Vilas Beach group was changing, Officer Dexheimer was beginning to understand the complexity of this problem population. What was still perceived as a homogeneous Latino crowd, quickly became recognized as four or five different groups: the Latino men who chose the location to drink; the transients who had been displaced and migrated to Vilas, which still allowed alcohol and that was still relatively close to downtown services; the drug dealers who used the increasing disorder as cover for their activity and also benefited from the drive-thru nature of the site; and finally young, mostly white users arrived to party in this location which seemed to be uncontrolled public space. Their arrival was heralded by the procession "boom cars" along the scenic Wingra Dr that could be heard long before they were seen, even though they first appeared over an arched bridge more than 1,400 feet away. A fifth group, the drug purchasers, were originally thought to be drive-through customers only. But Officer Dexheimer's data collection as well as anecdotal evidence from citizens suggests that many customers actually used the drugs in the park.

⁵ An urban vest-pocket park that was taken over by transients. It's closure and reconstruction displaced dozens of regulars who hung out there.

In the course of analysis through interviews, observation, reviews of police calls, community outreach, foot and bike patrol, connections were made with many varied stakeholders. They included:

- Cuban immigrants, part of the Mariel Boatlift
- Beach visitors
- Zoo visitors
- Residential neighbors
- Henry Vilas Zoo management
- Wingra Boats proprietor
- Cyclists, runners and other pedestrians using the bike path and roadway
- Displaced transients from other areas of the city
- Madison Parks Department staff
- Badger Football tailgaters
- Visitors who park and picnic at Vilas, including school tours
- City of Madison service providers including police, fire, detox, hospitals.
- Local alderpersons
- Drug dealers

As the makeup of the group changed, there were specific behaviors that changed. Disturbances had become more frequent. Open drug use was observed and reported to police. Although bathrooms were readily available, public urination was frequently observed. The problem

population had evolved and grown. There was growing dissatisfaction from the public regarding increased disorder in the area.

The problem group was now so large and their presence so frequent that they had exclusive ownership of the parking area, traffic island and adjacent lawn. The 20 parking stalls were often all occupied by vehicles associated with group.

Observation revealed the problem occurring from late morning until after sunset. Those contacted in the park past the ten o'clock closing time were clearly a different set of park users looking more for privacy than large social activity.

Vehicles parked along the curbs were used for various purposes by the different user groups. But the presence of user vehicles played a big role in how they interacted with the site. At any given time several of the parked cars would have the doors open. Usually facing the curb where associates gathered or sat. Music from several different vehicles at the same time was heard through the open doors. Most of the cars were partially occupied with people sitting sideways in the seat with their legs out the open door. The drug dealers however usually had their doors and windows closed. Some people used the lawn adjacent to the beach but most stayed close to a vehicle. Even the picnic tables on the island were moved to be close to one of the cars that was playing music.

Community response was at best uneven. Meetings with neighborhood associations and prior efforts by the area Alder demonstrated that there was a tolerance for public drinking in general, especially in association with Badger football games. A point of pride among Madison's residents is their acceptance of diversity. Early intervention efforts were viewed by some as an attack on the Cuban/Latino community. Some initially defended the continued use of alcohol with the argument that a bottle of wine is essential to a picnic and beer is essential to a successful tailgate party. The Madison Parks superintendent was on record saying that the Parks Department encouraged Badger tailgate parties in Vilas Park. At the same time there were some voices expressing support for an outright ban on all alcohol at Vilas and all other Madison parks. Many in the community believed that this was problem of overconsumption of alcohol and the attendant disorder one would expect from that behavior. Initially there was little recognition of the emerging drug traffic and the changing demographic associated with the problem.

Educating the community and documenting the nature of the problem were important steps in the process. Convincing and motivating other city agencies was critical as well. Except for patrol officers routinely responding to calls there was no coordinated, targeted response prior to the adoption of this project. Caretakers and natural surveillants prior to 2009 were zoo management, parks maintenance staff, the seasonal, part time lifeguard, and citizen users of the beach and zoo. Discovery and documentation of the problem was accelerated by the arrival of a new business, Wingra Boat Rental. The owner was disturbed by the loud music and boisterous behavior that easily carried to his shop. He became an early and important ally in advocating for change.

Respond

The goals of the project were to eliminate the drug market, reduce anti-social behavior and increase real and perceived safety for legitimate park users. Measurable objectives were to reduce police calls for service to pre-problem levels and eliminate public drug use that was documented by the drug debris survey. Alcohol was a factor in much of the problem behavior. Eliminating it from the park or restricting its use were among the first responses considered. Madison had a record of success with this strategy in other parks.

Traditional policing methods were used to try to decrease problem behaviors. Arrests were made for city ordinance violations including casual possession of marijuana, glass containers prohibited in parks, public urination, loud music and so forth. An undercover drug operation including the purchase of drugs by an informant was conducted. This confirmed the presence of drug sales but was not expected to be a viable tactic to address the drug market. Enforcement had no observable impact on the number of people in the parking area or the anti-social behaviors.

Reckless and impaired driving complaints from citizens alerted officers to another consequence of the significant overconsumption in this area of Vilas Park. Officer Dexheimer used the Community Policing Team to conduct a drunk driving operation focused on vehicles leaving the park. Several OWI arrests resulted. But due to distance from the park it did not seem likely to be a deterrent. The low frequency and small number of cases failed to produce useful data to document the harm caused by vehicles leaving Vilas Beach.

An important relationship developed when Wingra Boat Rental moved into the Vilas beach house. The owner, Tyler Leeper, was concerned about noise and rowdiness affecting his business. Officer Dexheimer met frequently with Leeper. Dexheimer provided training to Leeper and his staff providing them with the tools to make enforceable citizen complaints against "boom cars"⁶ which frequented the area. Most importantly, The Wingra Boat crew added another layer of natural surveillance and provided helpful and current information regarding activity at Vilas Beach.

Vilas residents were more aware of the nature of the problem as a result of Officer Dexheimer's continuous effort to inform the community. City agencies were still unmoved. Police incident data alone failed to convince decision makers about the need to act. That changed in July of 2010 when a passionate letter from a Martha Merrill, a neighborhood resident who ran past Vilas Beach several times a week, ended up in the mayor's office. Merrill described the sordid state of Vilas Park in great detail. At that point Officer Dexheimer had been working on the problem for 18 months without any significant support to change the park. Now he was poised to act. It would be another ten months before the first design changes were made by the Parks Department.

Frequent contacts with the core group of daily users of the target area developed more important relationships for Officer Dexheimer. These contacts, both on foot and on bike, developed familiarity between the officer and these individuals. Although contacts were sometimes made for enforcement reasons, they were often gestures of casual out reach. Not always welcomed by the core group, they were nevertheless important contacts in terms of

⁶ Vehicles playing loud music that can be heard at considerable distance from the vehicle.

better understanding the issues and motivations of the group. In discussions, in particular the Latino contingent, Officer Dexheimer explored the possibility that future changes might someday make relocation a reasonable alternative.

The location began to show the impact of constant use. The vegetation in the target area was severely distressed. Large patches of bare ground were now present where grass once grew⁷. The bare ground evidence of overuse was in stark contrast to the healthy vegetation in other picnic areas. The officer's casual contacts also lead to the observation of the presence of significant quantities of discarded drug packaging in the immediate area. Those observations lead to the "drug trash survey"⁸.

Officer Dexheimer conducted a survey of three similar parcels in Vilas picnic areas over the course of several weeks⁹. He sampled, counted and collected items of drug debris, principally packaging that is distinct and exclusive for use with illegal drugs, specifically cocaine base, better known as crack. In addition to scouring the ground for this discarded drug debris, a second element of the survey was a "trash pick"¹⁰. The results of the drug trash survey clearly showed the significant and chronic use of drugs in the targeted area. The results also showed that the area of concern near the beach was markedly different than other areas of the park. The evidence suggests that public drug use was a common and accepted part of the groups culture.

⁷ See photos in appendix

⁸ See drug debris survey photos in appendix

⁹ See "Vilas Park Project 2010" in appendix

¹⁰ A trash pick is a method used by police drug units to establish probable cause for a search warrant. Residential trash is collected surreptitiously from the curb at night and examined at another site for items that document drug manufacture or sales. Though this evidence may not meet academic standards for data, it is accepted by U.S courts as an element of probable cause. It also has proven to be very convincing to citizens and city agencies.

At the conclusion of the drug trash survey, armed with quantifiable data, Officer Dexheimer made a presentation of his findings to several neighborhood groups and the Board of Madison Park Commissioners. This convinced people, who had earlier insisted that only alcohol was the problem, of the true nature of the problem. Citizens and commissioners now agreed that there was a serious problem at Vilas Beach that needed a solution.

In March 2011, Assistant Parks Superintendent Steve Doniger met with Officer Dexheimer and Sgt James Dexheimer at Vilas Park. After discussing several options, Doniger agreed to implement the following changes:

- The parking area was restriped for angle parking only which disrupted the way in which people had used the area with their doors open and music playing. They were no longer able to occupy their vehicles and the surrounding grass at the same time.
- Signs were posted that prohibited open intoxicants in the roadway and parking area.
- Picnic tables were removed from the traffic island; shrubs and trees were trimmed.
- Lawn areas on the island and near the beach were fenced and closed for restoration.

From the time in early 2009 when Officer Dexheimer first proposed an alcohol ban for Vilas Park, many responses were proposed that needed to be refined and adapted. It required persistence and an ability to adapt as more was learned about stakeholders perceptions, biases and willingness to act. Though the eventual physical changes seem rather simple and straight forward, they are really the result of much effort to change people's minds.¹¹

¹¹ See table of the evolution of proposed responses in the appendix. Those in blue font were implemented.

Assess

The project goals were achieved beyond all expectations. Police calls for service in the target area dropped from **137** in 2010 to a low of **28** in 2013¹². They remain at a similar low rate through 2014 and into 2015. Drug incidents, which first occurred in Vilas Park in 2006, peaked in 2010 with nine cases and no new incidents have been recorded since 2012. We attribute this sustained success to understanding the dynamics of the problem behaviors and very specifically targeting the design features which facilitated them. The police incident data on the number of calls and the nature and seriousness of the calls provide easy and ongoing documentation of the success. The innovative data collection method that helped prove the existence of the drug market was recently replicated. The result of a May 2015 drug trash survey showed no detectable drug packaging in any of the three plot areas that had been surveyed in 2010.

The patches of bare ground that suggested evidence of overuse, as seen at open air drug markets, are gone. The deterioration of this space motivated the Parks Department to close and restore it. When the problem existed, there were large patches of bare ground that, given normal use, would have allowed grass to grow. The area now sports a healthy lawn.

The specific impact of the implemented responses was the relocation of the original Latino group to a more acceptable location away from the roadway and a return to its ethnic character. The gathering is greatly reduced in number and has posed no significant problem. Drug dealers, who had used vehicles parked parallel along the roadway as concealment, the disorder as cover

¹² See graph in appendix that shows total police incidents at Vilas Beach over ten years and another graph which reflects changing the nature of these calls.

and the traffic pattern as a drive thru business model, stopped coming in May 2011. As soon as the Latino group no longer parked at that location, the dealers occupied vehicles stood out like a sore thumb. The transients who had contributed to the decline of Vilas Beach when they were displaced from other parks have again moved. Some chose the park shelter temporarily but there has been no ongoing presence of transients there.

The Vilas Beach Project is an illustration of how a really specific and creative design change can appear, in retrospect, to magically end a problem. Characterizing a project by its most concise change, like "angle parking", ignores the extensive problem solving effort required to get to that point. In reality the solution would not have been known or successfully implemented without intense study, partnership building, shifting and sharing and data collection. The problem solving effort has been monitored daily by citizens, officers and parks staff and has been periodically evaluated by checking incident data. The dramatic change has been sustained for the entire four years since the Parks Department began implementing the projects design responses.

During the course of the project, the Greenbush Neighborhood Association had expressed interest in forming a Parks Watch group. The Madison Parks Department had offered such a program to citizens interested in helping parks thrive. Officer Dexheimer brought Parks' staff and citizens together for Parks Watch training. Unfortunately the program has fallen out of usage not just at Vilas Park but throughout the park system. The Vilas Neighborhood Association was a consistent partner and ally during the three years Officer Dexheimer worked on the problem. He prepared a report for them in July 2011 to update them on the success¹³.

¹³ See Vilas NA reply in the appendix.

The Madison Parks Department has also initiated a park ranger program in 2011. There are currently two full time positions and several seasonal positions. At the request of Steve Doniger, who implemented the design changes at Vilas, Officer Dexheimer met with the new rangers and provided training on how to monitor Vilas Beach and how to be effective resources for MPD officers.

In 2012 Captain Joe Balles guided the adoption of a municipal ordinance that permitted banning individuals from city parks for repeat instances of anti-social behavior. While not a part of the Vilas Beach Project, Captain Balles relied on the partnership developed with the Parks Superintendent and his staff during the POP projects at Olin and Vilas Parks. Later that year, Captain Balles and Captain Carl Gloede, Sergeant James Dexheimer and Officer David Dexheimer were all honored at the 2012 Parks Award banquet for building the partnership between MPD and Madison Parks.

Parks Watch and supporting the park rangers are efforts to transfer ownership of park problems from the police to the community. Since implementation of changes began in May 2011, Vilas Beach has required far fewer police services and the change has been self-sustaining. The creation of the additional tool, the ordinance dealing with park behavior, enables either officers or rangers to intervene with individuals causing chronic problems but it has never been used or needed at Vilas Beach.

**Madison Police Department
Madison, Wi**

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Appendix

Vilas Beach Project

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Goldstein Award Submission

June 1, 2015



Graphic showing the relationship of the former problem area to the Vilas Zoo and Vilas Beach

Citizen Complaint Letter to Alder B Soloman

From: Martha Merrill [mmerrill@afscme40.org]
Sent: Friday, July 02, 2010 11:42 AM
To: Solomon, Brian
Subject: complaint about vilas park

Hi Brian,

My name is Martha Merrill, and I too am a resident of West Lawn Avenue (just down the block at 2350). My husband and I love the neighborhood and decided to purchase our first home there 4 years ago. One thing that drew us to the neighborhood was the proximity to Lake Wingra and the running path. We are both avid runners and have run the Madison Marathon multiple times. We run around Lake Wingra 4 to 5 times a week.

I have been meaning to write to you for the past couple of months because I am growing continuously concerned about the explicit drug use and drug deals that I am seeing in the picnic area at Vilas park. I know that this area is a popular destination on summer nights for people. That said, over the past four years I have seen the picnic area deteriorate from an area where families went to cook out and enjoy the evening to a place where people openly use and sell drugs. Further, during morning runs, I have noticed that the picnic areas are completely trashed- there is litter and food all over the ground (all this litter cannot be good for the lake I am guessing).

I do have to say this summer has been the worst. This is the first summer that, on multiple occasions, I have seen persons completely strung out, passed out on the grass or on a picnic table. This is the first summer that the drug dealers are no longer hiding what they are doing. This is the first time that people are using drugs out in the open instead of in their cars. The straw that broke the camels back for me writing this email is that last night I saw eight men standing/sitting around a picnic table openly passing around two joints. There was a three year-old little girl sitting on the picnic table in the midst of what was happening. It has gotten to the point where my husband is seriously concerned for my safety if I am running around the lake at dusk alone, afraid I could stumble into a drug deal gone wrong.

I guess my question is- Where are the police? Why is this problem being ignored? I ask in all sincerity because I do believe that this picnic area is being ignored, and because of this, has grown worse.

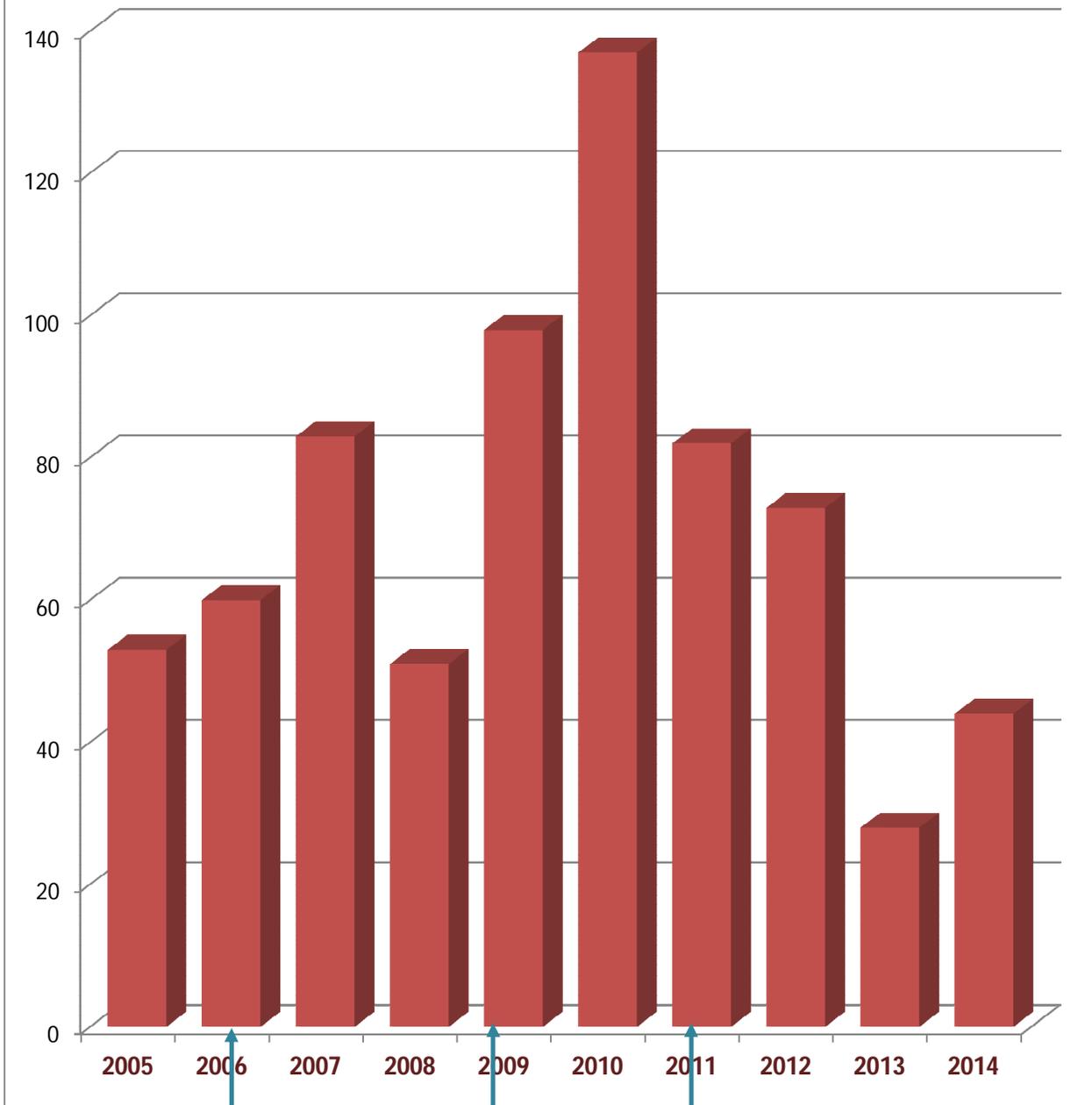
I love my neighborhood, Vilas park, and Lake Wingra and I refuse to see this park deteriorate into a drug dealers haven. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate that many of the people who are coming to Wingra are escaping their own neighborhoods where it is unsafe to sit outside at night and enjoy the summer. I don't blame them and would do the same if I were in their shoes. I am happy that there are wonderful and beautiful places in Madison where people can go to escape. That said, what is going on at Wingra cannot be tolerated. The picnic areas of Lake Wingra are no longer wonderful, beautiful or safe.

I am fed up and ready to see the City take a serious look at what is going on at Vilas before the situation becomes even more out of control. I would like to know if the City considers these picnic areas at Wingra a problem and what steps it is going to remedy the drug use that is going on.

Thank you so much for your time and attention to my concern.

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Police Incidents at Vilas Beach

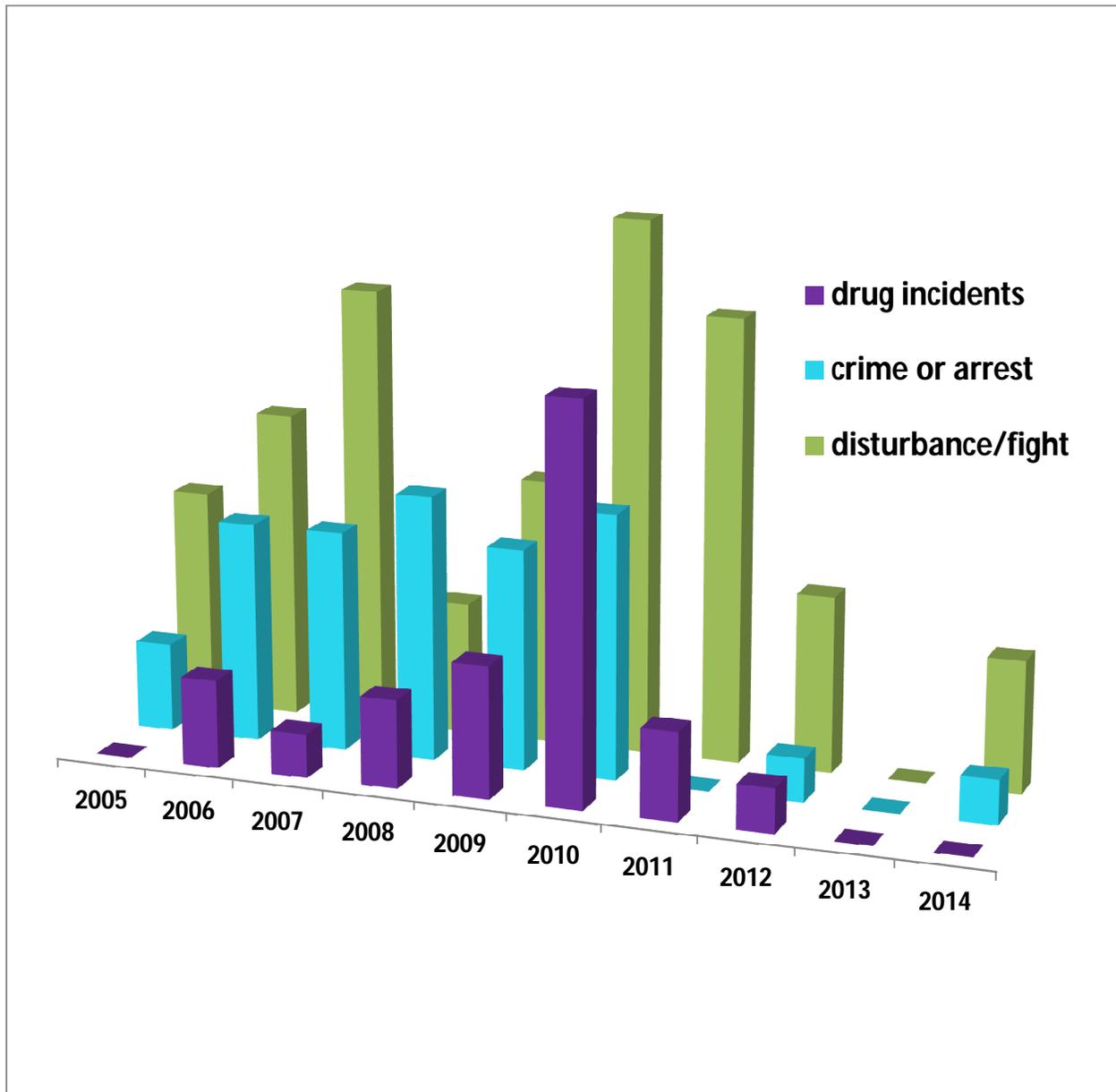


September - Vilas Neighborhood Association take concerns to the Parks Commission and unsuccessfully request citywide alcohol ban

May - Madison Parks Department implements design changes and posts alcohol restrictions

Officer Dexheimer begins Vilas Beach Project by checking this data through 2008 and notices a trend.

Police Incidents at Vilas Beach - Highlighting Non-routine Calls



| | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|--------------------|
| 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | |
| 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | drug incidents |
| 2 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | crime or arrest |
| 5 | 7 | 10 | 3 | 6 | 12 | 10 | 4 | 0 | 3 | disturbance/fight |
| 46 | 46 | 67 | 40 | 84 | 110 | 70 | 67 | 28 | 40 | non emergency call |
| 53 | 60 | 83 | 51 | 98 | 137 | 82 | 73 | 28 | 44 | |

South Police District 2006 Top Ten District Problems

| | 2005 CFS |
|---|-----------------|
| 1. South Transfer Point / McDonald's / Mobile | 437 |
| 2. 910 W. Badger | 105 |
| 3. Prostitution in the Badger Rd Area | 44 |
| 4. Vilas Park Beach | 50 |
| 5. Brittingham Park Shelter | 169 |
| 6. Olin Park Conservancy | 107 |
| 7. Beltline Traffic failing to yield or safely pass emergency vehicles | |
| 8. Penn Park | 61 |
| 9. Walgreens / Open Pantry - S. Park | 273 |
| 10. Turbot - Traceway Area | 145* |

BOARD OF PARK October 13, 2010

COMMISSIONERS

Meeting Minutes - Draft

and Li Shaoyan and to allow the Superintendent of Parks to determine the time line for the removal of the fence. **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

VI. NEW BUSINESS

Vilas Park

Superintendent Briski stated that just as the issues at Olin-Turville Park were brought forward for the Park Commission's awareness, tonight South District Police will discuss their findings at Vilas Park. Police officer Dave Dexheimer and Captain Joe Balles presented the results of their investigation. They also met and presented this information to the Greenbush, Vilas and Regent Street Neighborhood Associations. Tonight's presentation is to make the Park Commission aware of the issues but is informational in nature.

Registered Speakers:

NAME

Captain Joe Balles Provided information

Officer Dave Dexheimer Provided information

Ald. Julia Kerr Neutral

Carol Lobes Supports Alcohol prohibition

Officer Dexheimer began by saying he believes that the Henry Vilas Zoo and Vilas Park are crown jewels in the park system and more than 700,000 people visit just the Zoo. He then expressed his concerns about Vilas Park, noting the problem is not particularly new but there have been changes in the pattern this past year. Dispatches to the park include the beach house, beach, shelter and the Zoo entrance. Police have been watching the activities for many years. There is a core group that comes daily for the consumption of alcohol. This year there has been a rise in the over consumption of alcohol and illegal drug use. The drug issue has surfaced because of the chronic daily use of alcohol that provides a market for drug sales and use. He added that these issues have been discussed, together with cultural issues, by the Park Commission's Ad Hoc Committee on Alcohol and Related Behaviors.

Police looked specifically at three areas in the park and found differences in the behavior of people within those three areas. Plot 2 revealed much evidence of drug use. If this plot was an apartment building, the owner would receive a drug nuisance letter. There was also lots of alcohol related trash along the lake edge.

It was acknowledged that it is a seasonal problem at the park that increases as summer goes on. Slides of the monthly call summary show alcohol and drug issues rise throughout the summer. In addition to the alcohol and drug related trash, there is evidence of the overuse of those areas as the grass is worn down and soil is compacted.

Police are not making a recommendation this evening but are looking for a wide array of suggestions based on the behavior of people to change the atmosphere in the park to resolve these issues and change that behavior. Alcohol is banned in 12 other parks in the South and Central Police Districts. The neighborhood associations strongly support banning alcohol in the park. Captain Balles added that police spent a great deal of time on plot 2 and many arrests were made in July. They have tried to enforce current laws but this is a

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BOARD OF PARK October 13, 2010

COMMISSIONERS

Meeting Minutes - Draft

situation where you could arrest people (many of whom are the same individuals) all summer long.

One suggestion was the temporary closing of the west and east driveway entrances by the beach to prevent vehicular traffic. Also, the picnic tables could also be moved away from particular areas. A suggestion was also made to close the road by the bridge near the tennis courts.

Commissioners agreed that just arresting people isn't the solution and questioned whether closing off plot 2 would simply move people to either other locations in the park or to other parks. The entrenchment of alcohol has

led to an explosion of drug use and excess alcohol in the park. They agreed that plot 2 should be closed so that it can be reseeded. Unfortunately this issue has been before the Park Commission many times, not just at Vilas but parks throughout the city.

Ald. Kerr stated that what the neighborhood is looking for is a range of solutions, both short and long term that will meaningfully effect change to the problems. What can be done between now and next April? In the short term, closing the road, banning alcohol or a banned persons list may be good solutions for Vilas. In the longer term, she requested that Parks staff work on a redesign of plots 1, 2 and 3 for inclusion in the 2012 budget.

Commissioners reported that the Long Range Planning Subcommittee is looking at parks where alcohol has been banned to determine whether the ban has worked. In the past as alcohol has been banned in a park, the problem has simply moved to the next park down the line. However, they agreed that it is important to address the problems in this park.

Superintendent Briski recommended that Parks staff continue to work with police, the alder and neighborhood association to develop an action plan by late winter/early spring. Among the recommendations may be the banning of individuals at the park. It was suggested that a Park Commissioner be part of this group.

Commissioners noted at one time there were individuals doing outreach on State Street and they would like to see that become a component for solutions at Vilas Park. They also stated that the collaboration between Parks staff, police and the alders resulted in a big win at Brittingham and that Olin-Turville is headed toward that same result.

Capital Times, Oct, 2006

ALCOHOL PLAN DRAWS COMMENTS

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Danya Hooker | Posted: Tuesday, October 3, 2006 12:00 am |

A public hearing Monday to discuss a proposed alcohol ban in Madison parks focused mostly on the behavior of park-goers rather than their alcohol consumption.

"I really don't like to see things happen where the responsible majority has to live their lives by the irresponsible few," longtime Vilas neighborhood resident Gillian Nevers said.

The city should focus on patrolling the area better and addressing the issue of homeless people in the parks, Nevers said.

One version of the ban would prohibit drinking at all parks unless a shelter reservation and permit are secured.

A narrower ban could limit the types of alcohol allowed or create designated drinking areas, Parks Superintendent Jim Morgan said.

For several months, officials have struggled to find a balance between public safety and responsible enjoyment of the city's parks. Three more hearings are planned.

"You have a real problem and that's the over-consumption of alcohol," Morgan said. "And you've got to form a reaction that doesn't somehow eliminate acceptable uses."

Vilas Neighborhood Association President Julia Kerr said something has to be done to stop unsafe behavior at the parks, including fights, inappropriate comments toward women and girls, and dangerous drinking.

Posted in [Local](#) on *Tuesday, October 3, 2006 12:00 am* | Tags: [Alcohol](#), [Park](#), [Madison](#)

Capital Times

BOARD TO DISCUSS PARK ALCOHOL BAN WILD DRINKERS PROMPT ACTION

DEAN MOSIMAN dmosiman@madison.com 608-252-6141 | Posted: Wednesday, September 13, 2006 12:00 am |

After a summer of dealing with loud and intimidating drinkers at Vilas Park, the Madison Park Commission is exploring an alcohol ban at all city parks.

Under the broadest possible ban, drinking would be prohibited unless a shelter reservation and permit are secured or at a special event.

The city, which has been dealing with chronic drinkers in the Downtown area for years, has already banned alcohol in 18 of about 250 park facilities, including popular spots such as Elver, Olin-Turville, James Madison and B.B. Clarke parks.

But the city has been reluctant to impose a sweeping ban because it would penalize responsible users.

"Certainly, what's going on at Vilas is a problem," commission chairman William Barker said. "We're trying to figure out a way for everybody to coexist in our parks."

A possible alcohol ban would be controversial.

The city lets adults drink alcohol in non-glass containers at beaches and parks, but has long been getting complaints from neighbors and park users. It has been banning alcohol at individual parks since 1988; the latest park added to the list was B.B. Clarke in 2003.

The problem, however, simply moves, parks Superintendent Jim Morgan said.

This summer, the Vilas park Neighborhood Association raised concerns about a group of homeless chronic drinkers and a regular party west of the beach at the park, Morgan said.

"It's been bad all summer," he said, adding that there have been confrontations at the park. "They challenge people. They've challenged some of the residents."

A few weeks ago, lifeguards had to tend to a drinker who couldn't breathe and went into cardiac arrest, he said.

Meanwhile, lots of people use alcohol in moderation at parks and don't cause problems, Morgan stressed, noting that the Vilas parking lot area was awash in Badger fans having a good time Saturday and that families often enjoy beer with picnics.

"The Park Commission is at a quandary at what to do," Morgan said. "(It) has to decide whether to look at one park, all parks or no parks."

When a broad ban was considered four years ago, Parks Division staff research found a range of rules in other places, including broad bans from Milwaukee to Portland, Ore., to Tallahassee, Fla.

Ald. Paul Skidmore, 9th District, a longtime Park Commission member, said the problem isn't alcohol but abuse. "It's an issue of behavior," he said, adding that it's time for the community to have a serious dialogue.

At the moment, some members support a broad ban and others don't, Barker said.

"The Park Commission wants to do what's right," he said. "I don't want to act in a vacuum. We're going to have to do very thorough analytical work and figure out something. I'm confident the people on this commission have the strength of will to work it out."

Posted in [Local](#) on *Wednesday, September 13, 2006 12:00 am* | Tags: [Alcohol](#), [Madison](#), [Park](#), [Safety](#), [Crime](#), [Lifestyle](#)

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Capital Times

THEIR BADGER GAMES START AT THE ZOO THAT IS WHERE THE TAILGATERS GET THEIR MONKEY MASKS, BUT SOME ZOO-GOERS AND NEIGHBORS DON'T LIKE THE TRADITION.

CHRIS MARTELL cmartell@madison.com 608-252-6179 | Posted: Sunday, October 8, 2006 12:00 am | [No Comments Posted](#)

On football Saturdays, migratory red-breasted Badgers alight outside Vilas Zoo before taking off for Camp Randall.

Before Saturday's 11 a.m. game, one group of tailgaters set up camp in the zoo's main parking lot at 7 a.m. to breakfast on brats, beer, Crown Royal, Jack Daniels and Doritos.

When the zoo opened at 9:30 a.m., members of the group, waiting to visit the restroom, stopped at the gift shop to buy rubber monkey masks to complete their football-day ensembles. Asked why they chose Vilas for their pre-game warm-up, the answers included: "It's free." "There's bathrooms." "There's monkeys."

While Saturday's tailgaters were making noise in Vilas' parking lot, neighborhood residents have been making another sort of noise lately.

Some are calling for a crackdown on the behavior of drunks who loiter in Vilas Park, not just on football Saturdays, and to consider a proposal to ban alcohol in all 250 city parks.

For many Badger fans, it would wreck a longstanding tradition.

On a lawn outside the zoo, a large multigenerational group set up a red tent for their regular tailgate party. Bob Richards, a member of the group, said the group has been coming to the park since 1991, and they never miss a game.

"It's perfect here," he said. "There are trees for shelter from the wind, and it's pretty." **Plus, it's close. "It's one beer to the stadium."**

Elsewhere in the park, tailgaters were tossing footballs and beanbags. On the other hand, members of the Red Hat Society, a social organization for women 50 and older, were fighting Badger traffic en route to their morning zoo outing, and parents were searching for parking spots for their children's soccer games.

By about 10 a.m, almost all of the zoo's 180 parking spots were filled, as were the adjacent streets in the neighborhood.

Brent Walter, who has managed the zoo gift shop for 18 years, said he comes to work early on football Saturdays if he wants a parking spot.

"We get a lot of complaints about the tailgaters from the zoo-goers," he said. "It's been like this since Barry Alvarez turned the team around. But we don't control the parking lots; the city of Madison does. I guess the university has more clout than the zoo."

There have been a few verbal altercations between parents hoping to take their children to the zoo for the day and tailgaters who clearly had been drinking, said zoo director Jim Hubing.

Hubing recalled one day when several zoo-going families parked on the park's grass because all the parking slots were filled with tailgaters.

"They were really mad when they got parking tickets."

A number of Vilas Neighborhood residents also have complained about tailgaters blasting music, blocking driveways and getting drunk.

The city, at the request of the neighborhood association, is holding a series of public hearings on a proposed alcohol ban in city parks, one of which was held last week.

An alcohol ban would make Vilas Park tailgaters as endangered as the ring-tailed lemurs who live in the zoo.

Badger fans have one important ally in Parks Superintendent Jim Morgan, who said, "We encourage tailgating in Vilas Park."

Melissa Huggins, a member of the Vilas Neighborhood Association, said it's unfair to permit drinking at most of Madison's parks, while banning alcohol at some of the city's most popular parks, including B.B. Clarke, James Madison, Olin-Turville and Elver.

"If it's banned at some parks it should be banned at all of them," Huggins said. "Or it should be allowed in all the parks, so problems with drinking aren't pushed to Vilas. It should be fair."

GO ONLINE

Video: For a taste of tailgating outside Vilas Zoo, visit www.madison.com/wsji.

Evolution of Proposed Responses

| Restrict alcohol in Vilas Park | Modify the physical design | Gain support for change | Motivate city agencies implement changes | Influence the behavior of problem users | Transfer ownership |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|---|--------------------------------|
| Total ban on alcohol | Temporary closure of parking area | Survey neighbors | Seek support from local Alders | Bike patrol | Facilitate Park Watch training |
| Prohibit alcohol at set locations | Remove picnic tables from traffic island | Recruit boat rental owner and zoo director | Presentation of analysis to Parks Commission | Ordinance enforcement | Train new park rangers |
| Enforce glass container ordinance | Trim trees and shrubs | Presentation to Neighborhood Assoc | Use citizens letter for leverage | Building rapport with regular users | Park Behavioral Policy and Ban |
| Post alcohol on roadway ordinance | Close lawn areas for restoration | Document drug market with data | Use shifting and sharing with Madison Parks Dept | Planting the seed of benefits of relocation | |
| | Reconfigure parking | | | Drunk driving enforcement | |



No Parking signs with new angle parking striping



Alcohol restriction sign



Vilas Shoe

Drug Trash Survey

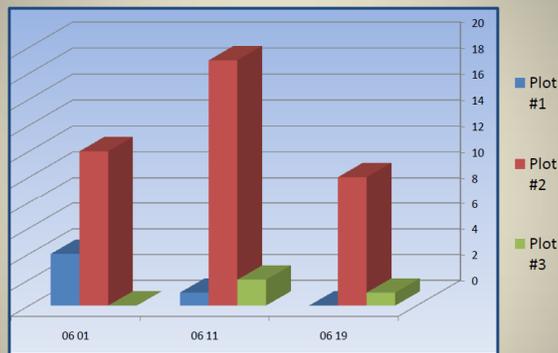
On June 19th 2010 I completed a three week drug trash survey of three Vilas Park Beach areas. On June 1, June 11 and June 19 I examined three similar parcels with the intent to locate, identify and collect suspected evidence of drug use in the park. The three areas were chosen specifically for their similar characteristics in order to determine the difference (if any) of drug usage in one area from another.

All three parcels are similar in size measuring approximately 350' x 150' and are near Lake Wingra on the south edge of the park on Vilas Park Dr. All parcels are adjacent to parking, have similar picnic facilities and are used by visitors with approximately the same frequency. The sites are open grassy areas interspersed with mature shade trees.

The three trash survey collections were conducted from approximately 8 am to 9:30 am. The time was selected so that it was possible to scan an area without interference from park users. Approximately one half hour was dedicated to each of the three survey plots. The items of suspected drug evidence that were found in the park were primarily remnants of drug packaging. These were typically knots of torn plastic or corners of plastic baggies. The evidence is not conclusive as to the type of drug usage prevalent in the park.



Survey Results



Random Drug Trash Pick (10-191805)

On Friday July 9, 2010 following the arrest of a subject who was in possession of a half ounce of marijuana, I conducted a survey of the west beach (plot #2) area. At the time, there was the usual group of park "regulars" numbering approximately 40 - 50 persons. It was not at all difficult to locate, in a very short time, 31 pieces of drug packaging evidence. The survey was not nearly as thorough as the earlier drug evidence surveys because of the presence of so many park users and so it can be assumed that many more pieces of evidence were missed.



Three slides from Officer Dexheimer's PowerPoint presentation explaining his data collection method, "drug trash surveys".

Vilas Park West Beach Closure Plan



This temporary closure plan will require the use of "Jersey Barriers" at the west and east driveway entrances to prevent vehicular traffic from circumventing the closure. Each entrance is approximately 30 feet across (+/-). Approximately 1,100 feet of fencing (+/-) will be required to enclose the space depicted above.

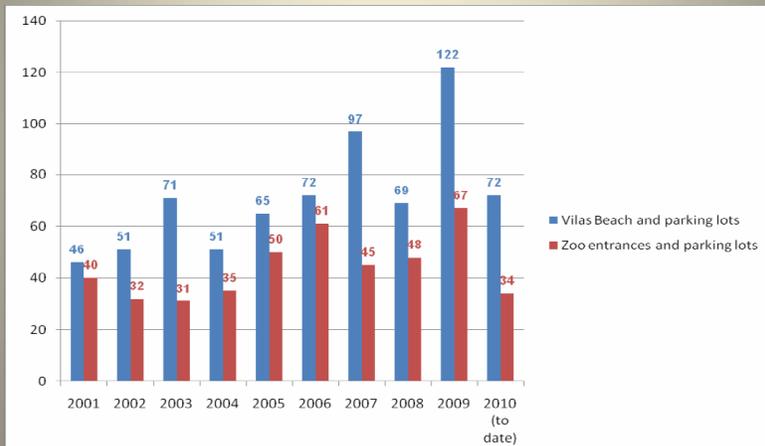
It is recommended that environmental and shoreline stabilization projects be undertaken during the time of the closure. Among these is the removal of the lesser shrubs on the traffic island and the lakeshore area and revitalizing the soil and turf in the entire area.

Police calls for Service Comparison

01 01 2010 - 07 15 2010

The following chart shows the disparity in calls for service for those to the west beach and beach area compared to calls for the rest of the zoo. Henry Vilas Zoo is an extremely busy attraction drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. Despite the enormous difference in the size of distinct user populations, every year the Vilas Beach and west beach areas consistently outdraws police attention in the rest of the park.

As of October 12, 2010, 1501 Vilas Park Dr has generated 129 calls for service.



Three slides from Officer Dexheimer's PowerPoint presentation showing the proposed road closure plan, police data for Vilas from 2001 to 2010 and photos showing bare ground at several locations at Vilas Beach.

Narrative by Sgt Jim Dexheimer (retired)

I had the honor of supervising my brother on his adventure at Vilas Beach. He has been reluctant to 'blow his own horn'. That's what we were taught as kids, you don't blow your own horn. The purpose of this narrative is to highlight some of the epiphanies and insights of this journey. And to blow his horn.

Team Scan

The top ten list of problems from 2006 ranks Vilas Beach at number four of locations generating calls for service.

Data Check

David checks police incident data to confirm observations of an increase in calls. Somewhat surprised by the upward trend in numbers and seriousness of incidents. Still not envisioning a complex problem

One stakeholder group identified

In the course of observing and engaging the park users who were seen as a problem, David relied on his knowledge of individuals who generate repeat calls for service throughout the city and recognized some of the denizens of Vilas Beach. He confirmed with the State St Neighborhood Officer that they were transients recently displaced from downtown. At this point Officer Dexheimer was still unaware of the historic presence of Cuban immigrants near Vilas Beach.

Researched Madison's SOPs for transients in parks

For several years the city adopted alcohol bans in parks to deal with problems. David mapped the parks within a two mile radius of the State Capitol with the dates alcohol was banned. It was an informative graphic because it not only pointed to a proven response but identified an underlying cause of the emerging problem at Vilas. Transient were being displaced by alcohol bans and park closures, but they preferred to stay as close to the central city as possible in order to access shelters and food programs. On his map, Vilas was now the closest park that still allowed alcohol.

Off the Shelf Response

Not all substantive community problems will require a full blown SARA treatment. Believing the Vilas Beach problem was simple and similar problems had been solved throughout the isthmus,¹ Officer Dexheimer proposed that Vilas Park be added to the list of city parks that prohibited all alcohol

Backlash

In proposing an alcohol ban for Vilas, David ignited a vocal and vehement resistance from several different stakeholder groups. Hundreds of badger football fans partied at Vilas Park before every home

¹ The central section of Madison is a narrow isthmus between Lakes Mendota and Monona

football game. He was attacking this historic tradition that surprisingly was supported by the Parks Superintendent and some police commanders. Other parks users saw it as a sacred right to be able to picnic with wine. And a third group including many neighboring residents still believed the problem group was exclusively Cuban immigrants who began gathering in Vilas in the early 1980s, shortly after the Mariel Boatlift. These neighbors saw ethnic bias in the attempt to ban alcohol. Undeterred, David met with these stakeholders and continued to work with them during the project.

Complexity

As the complexity of the Vilas Beach problem became apparent, Officer Dexheimer began a more thorough analysis and acknowledged that this was going to be a long term Problem Oriented Policing project. He continued to build relationships and keep people informed about the status of the problem. With more knowledge he hoped to change the minds of people who opposed any action. He also refined and modified suggested responses to make them more specific, including alcohol restrictions.

Data

At one point in 2010 we discussed the need for new data to help convince people of the nature of the problem. After exploring drunk driving data and drug buys, I suggested that he go out and find something to count. David came back with an innovative approach that borrowed from drug search warrants and quadrat studies in botany. He invented the "drug trash survey" which documented the existence of a drug market without enlisting in the war on drugs. the photos of patches of drug debris on the ground were very dramatic and convincing.

The Hard work

With citizen letter in hand and photos of baggie corners in his pocket you would think it would be easy to change the design of the problem area at Vilas Beach. But it took ten months to get the first line painted and the first sign posted. Persistence and patience in dealing with an uncharacteristically uncooperative Parks Dept eventually paid off. This wonderful place, visited by hundreds of thousands of kids each year, is once again safe and magical, thanks to Officer David Dexheimer.