

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview of Lake Elmo Park Reserve

Lake Elmo Park Reserve is a natural resource-based park reserve that is 2165 acres in size and is located in central Washington County. The park is entirely within the City of Lake Elmo and is less than 2 miles from the east boundary of the City of Oakdale and the north boundary of Woodbury. As a “Reserve” the focus of the park is to provide the public with nature-oriented, recreation opportunities such as viewing and studying wildlife and wildlife habitat, learning about conservation, swimming, fishing, picnicking, hiking, orienteering, boating, camping and trail uses. The park was officially opened for public use and enjoyment in 1986. The original Master Plan for the park (completed in 1978, See Figure 1.2) directed development of a variety of facilities that have provided high quality recreation opportunities for residents of Washington County and the region. The table in Figure 1.1 identifies park facilities that were recommended in the 1978 plan, current park facilities, and facilities proposed in the new master plan. Please refer to Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this document for more detailed descriptions of current recommendations related to park development.

In addition to the development of recreation facilities at Lake Elmo Park Reserve since adoption of the 1978 Master Plan, the Parks Division has directed several projects focused on restoration and preservation of the park’s natural resources. The work included successful prairie restoration projects, tree planting and construction of storm water management systems that helped to prevent erosion and improve water quality in lakes and wetlands. Other projects that were completed for enrichment of wildlife habitat include such efforts as the installation of duck nesting platforms, bluebird houses and osprey nesting poles.

Figure 1.1 Comparative Analysis - Master Plan Development Summary

(Existing Park Facilities and Proposed Park Facilities)

Complete descriptions of proposed development can be found in chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this document

Park Reserve Facilities (Existing and Proposed)	In 1978 Plan	Existing Facility	In 2006 Plan	Development Comments
Contact Station	2	1	1	No change to existing facility
Family (spur style) Campsites	170	100	120	Add 20 sites and improve 20 sites
Hike-in Campsites	0	5	7	Add 2 sites
Group Campsites	3	3	3	Move barn to site / add restrooms
Equestrian Camping	yes	yes	yes	Move - develop as 'group' site
Equestrian Trailhead	yes	yes	yes	Move - improve trailhead
Reservation Picnic Areas	3	2	2	No change to existing facility
General Picnic Areas	yes	yes	yes	Add small shelters
Large Play Area	0	1	1	No change to existing facility
Boat Launch - # of boats	45	20	20	No change except to reconfigure
Handicapped Fishing Pier	1	1	2	Add 1 fishing pier
Canoe Launch	1	1	1	No change to existing facility
Archery Range (Target)	0	1	1	Move to a different location
Archery Range (Field)	0	0	1	Add new facility
Orienteering Course	0	1	1	No change to existing facility

Figure 1.1 Comparative Analysis - Master Plan Development Summary (continued)

(Existing Park Facilities and Proposed Park Facilities)

Complete descriptions of proposed development can be found in chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this document

Park Reserve Facilities (Existing and Proposed)	In 1978 Plan	Existing Facility	In 2006 Plan	Development Comments
Nature Center	1	0	1	Keep in master plan
Amphitheater	0	1	2	Add amphitheater at nature center
Equestrian Trails	yes	yes	yes	Modify location of trails
Turf Hiking Trails	yes	yes	yes	No change to existing trails
Mountain Bike Trails	yes	yes	yes	Modify - make more sustainable
Cross-Country Ski Trails	yes	yes	yes	Make available at night - with lights
Snowshoe Trails	yes	yes	yes	Allow on proposed mt. bike trails
Paved / Handicap Trails	yes	yes	yes	Add paved trails near Eagle Pt. Lake
Paved Trail to Community	2	1	4	Add community access points
Trail Tunnel under Hwy. 5	0	0	1	Add community access point
Vehicle Entrance	2	1	1	No change to existing entrances
Swimming Beach	1	1	1	No change to existing facility
Children's Farm	1	0	0	Take out of master plan
Ice Skating	0	0	1	Add facility at Brown's Pond
Sliding Hill	0	0	1	Add facility near Brown's Pond

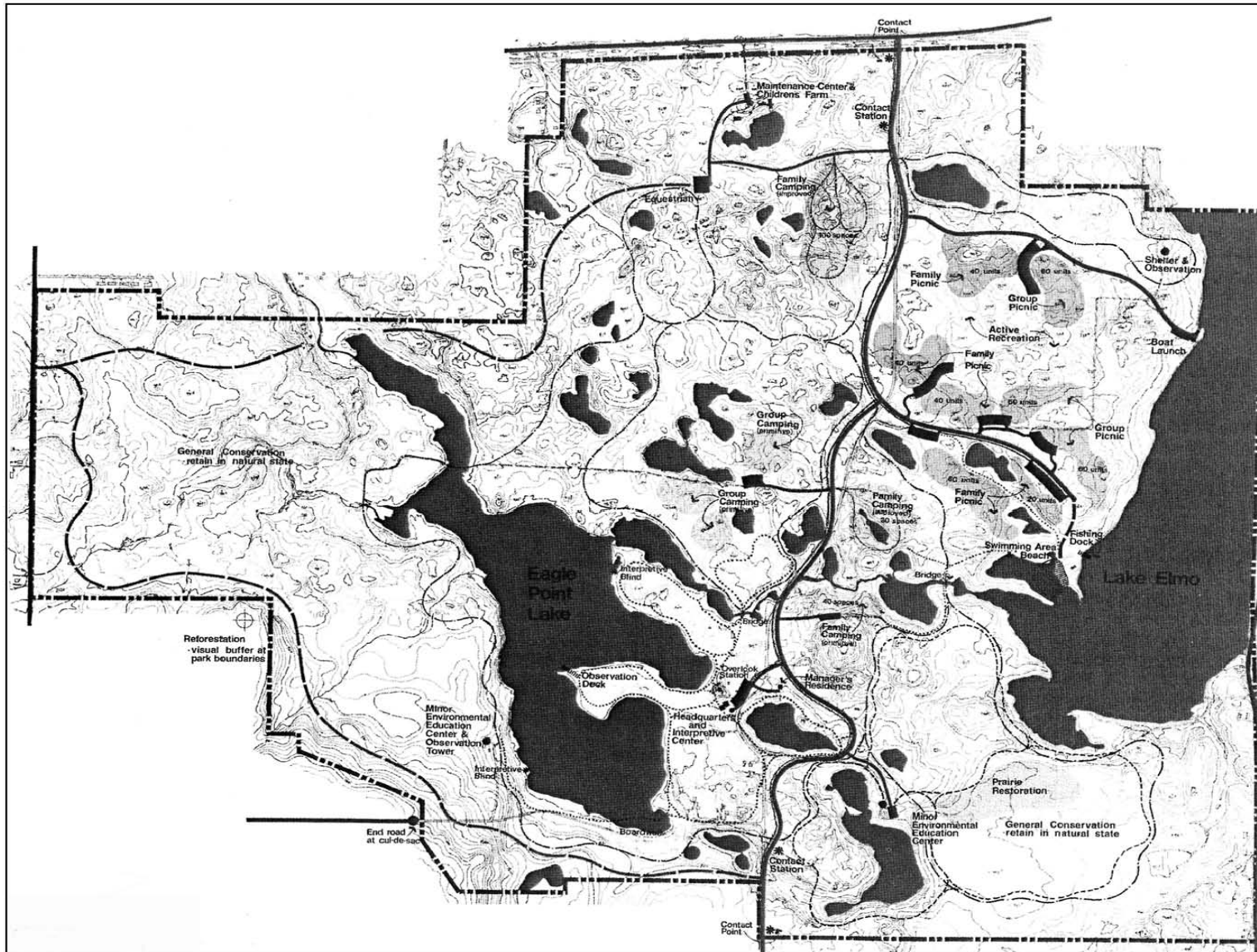
The park is an oasis of expansive green open space in the midst of urban development. Diverse habitats include a deep water lake, a variety of wetlands, prairie, remnants of oak savanna and woodlands. The park also contains farm land still under cultivation and other fields where farming has been discontinued for various lengths of time.

The County determined that the 1978 Master Plan has served its purpose and that it is time to prepare an amendment to the plan. The amendment will address the effects of population growth, new trends in recreational needs and the protection and restoration of natural resources. The plan also considers preservation and interpretation of cultural resources such as Native American archeological features and the more recent European farmsteads.

Consulting firm Sanders Wacker Bergly, Inc. (SWB), in association with Savanna Designs and ALO Environmental Associates, was commissioned by the Parks Division of the Washington County Department of Transportation & Physical Development in April 2005 to assist in the preparation of an amendment to the Lake Elmo Park Reserve Master Plan. The content of the amendment is consistent with the guidelines established by the Metropolitan Council in its Regional Recreation Open Space and Policy Plan. The Master Plan will be used to guide development, stewardship and management of the park for the next 10 to 15 years.

Planning Process

The planning process began with an inventory and analysis of existing site conditions including built facilities, vegetation, soils, topography, drainage, vehicular and pedestrian circulation, etc. The information was assembled on plans and drawings for presentation at meetings with stakeholders and for inclusion in the master plan report. It is critical to understand existing site conditions, opportunities and constraints and apply this information to the preparation of plans for development, operations and management in the park. It is also important to review the data with interested stakeholders so everyone that contributes to the planning process forms their opinions and recommendations from a common information base.



1978 MASTER PLAN

Figure 1.2

The program for park development evolved as a result of input received from county staff, other agencies and the public at large. Public meetings included large and small group discussions and attendees were encouraged to fill out comment cards to document their recommendations. The cards also gave those that are reluctant to speak in group settings an opportunity to provide input. Public participation efforts included meetings, work sessions and other communication with the following stakeholder groups:

- Meetings with Parks Division Staff to gather background information on Lake Elmo Park Reserve and the county park system and to gain input on county goals and objectives and subsequent design concepts.
- Five meetings with the Technical Advisory Committee to receive input on site analysis information, goals and objectives and design concepts. The committee is comprised of representatives from the Cities of Lake Elmo, Oakdale and Woodbury, the Washington Conservation District and the Washington County Park and Open Space Commission.
- Three public open houses were held early in the process to receive input from area residents on goals and objectives and design concepts. One meeting was held in Lake Elmo, one in Oakdale and one in Woodbury.
- Copies of the preliminary Master Plan draft report were distributed to Lake Elmo City Council members and to Woodbury and Oakdale staff for review.
- Presentations of the draft report were made at open meetings of the Councils in each City to gain additional input.
- Five meetings with the Washington County Park and Open Space Commission to review progress of the plan preparation and to receive input on the plan.
- Public input was received from visitors to the Parks Division booth at the County Fair through discussion and comment cards.
- Information about the planning effort was posted on the county Web site and comments were received via email.

Public Participation

The public participation process was instrumental in shaping key recommendations included in the Master Plan as described in the following paragraphs:

- The input received from area residents supported continuation of the park's 'reserve' status which, according to Metropolitan Council policy, limits development to 20% of the total area within the property boundaries. The County Parks Division discussed the possibility of recommending to the Metro Council that the designation be changed to 'regional park' status because the Council places higher priority on appropriating funds for recreational development to regional parks than to park reserves. As a result, 'regional park' status would probably allow the county to implement development proposed in the Master Plan at a faster pace. Residents, however, were concerned that, although development proposed in the current plan plus current developed areas total just 9.1% of the park area, future park administrators may pursue more expansive development goals if the status of the park is changed. In response to input received from area residents, the plan recommends that Lake Elmo Park Reserve remain a 'Reserve'.
- The 1978 Master Plan recommended development of a beach on the shore of Lake Elmo. The current planning process further explored the beach concept and considered other lake related concepts including winter vehicle access and installation of a second fishing pier on the lakeshore.

Resident input described a history of heavy participation in boating and other water-based activities on the lake's limited acreage and discouraged development of facilities that would greatly expand recreational use of the lake. Concern was also expressed about the difficulty of monitoring and controlling winter activities on the lake. As a result of comments and discussions, the plan does not propose lakeshore beach development or winter access. The plan does recommend expanding family fishing opportunities by proposing the addition of a second fishing pier.

- Trail development received considerable public support. Concepts including trail connections to surrounding communities, improved separation between conflicting trail uses, improved mountain bike trails, improved cross-country ski facilities, expanded winter hiking and expanded paved trails were voiced frequently during the process. Chapter 5 of the plan includes recommendations for numerous trail improvements that respond to user objectives.

- Discussions frequently addressed nature-related activities such as photography, birding, nature appreciation, education, hiking in high quality habitat areas, orienteering, etc. The County Parks Division shares in the interest of providing recreation opportunities in a natural resource-based setting. The plan recommends a focus on natural resource protection and restoration (Chapter 4), development of facilities such as a nature/interpretive center, nature trails, wildlife blinds in addition to addressing needs for other compatible recreation facilities (Chapter 5) and continued implementation of sustainable operations and management practices (Chapter 7).
- Input from stakeholders supported controlled expansion of existing park facilities that have proven to be popular with visitors and are compatible with a natural resource-based park development program including the family campground, walk-in campsites, picnic areas and archery range.
- Input from stakeholders supported development of the Red Barn/Brown's Pond area into a multi-use activity center to serve as a trail head for skiing, hiking and snowshoeing, provide warming space for skating and sledding and provide space for meeting and organized events.

The comments received during the planning process (refer to Appendix 'E') supported a development program for the park that is best described by a goal statement prepared in consort with the Technical Advisory Committee which reads:

Maintain and restore natural resources, contribute to the environmental and individual health and well-being of the region, showcase the county's heritage and provide a place for recreators and students to find quiet places, green space, native habitats, clean water and high quality features and programs to serve their interests.

The goal statement was inspired by discussion that occurred at committee and public meetings and is based on the vision statement prepared for the county park system and adopted by the County Board of Commissioners in 2001 which reads:

The Washington County Park and Open Space System adds value to all peoples' lives and contributes to the well being of local and regional communities by providing public enjoyment and education; and maintaining and restoring high quality natural areas. By virtue of its large size, high quality facilities and dispersed locations, the County parks and Open Space system preserves and

showcases the County's heritage and provides a place for users to find quietude, green space, clean water and a place to recreate.

Purpose/Outcome

The primary purpose of the Master Plan is to provide guidance and information on development, maintenance and operation of Lake Elmo Park Reserve to the Washington County Parks Division, County Park and Open Space Commission, County Board of Commissioners, Metropolitan Council and other stakeholders. The content is based on the eleven requirements for master plan content listed in the Metropolitan Council's Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan as follows:

- Boundaries and Acquisition
- Stewardship Plan
- Demand Forecast
- Development Concept
- Conflicts
- Public Services
- Operations
- Citizen Participation
- Public Awareness
- Special Needs
- Natural Resources

In addition, the planning process played the important role of bringing together county residents, staff and officials, agencies and other stakeholders to assess the park's current condition and to plan its future in an open format that encouraged public participation.

Approval

The Lake Elmo Park Reserve Master Plan was recommended for approval by the Washington County Park and Open Space Commission on April 11, 2006. A public hearing was held on May 9, 2006, where the master plan was approved by the Washington County Board of Commissioners. The master plan was forwarded to the Metropolitan Council for review and was approved on August 23, 2006. The Council action included the following:

1. Approved the Lake Elmo Park Reserve master plan update (Referral No. 19770-1).

2. “Encourage Washington County to utilize bio-infiltration techniques or rainwater garden areas to accommodate run-off from the proposed parking areas, where local soils allow. Information on these and other ‘low impact development’ run-off reduction methods can be found in the council’s Urban Small Sites Best Management Practices Manual at the following address on the website: <http://www.metrocouncil.org/environment/watershed/BMPmanual.htm>.”