

Sunshine Ridge Development Plan

10327 Shady Birch Trail

City of Madison Parks Division
Madison, WI



play
**MADISON
PARKS**

Board of Park Commissioners
January 11, 2023

Prepared by the City of Madison Parks Division

Eric Knepp, Parks Superintendent
Lisa Laschinger, Assistant Parks Superintendent
CJ Ryan, Assistant Parks Superintendent

Development Plan Staff Team

Sarah Grimalkin, Landscape Architect
Adam Kaniewski, Landscape Architect
Ann Freiwald, Park Planning and Design Manager

City of Madison Board of Park Commissioners

Syad Abbas
Yannette Figueroa Cole
Chandra M. Miller Fienen
Emily R. Gnam
Maira Harrington
Catie McDonald Shannon
Ben D. Williams

Table of Contents

Introduction	p. 1
History	p. 2
Existing Planning Documents	p. 3
Existing Conditions	p. 3
Current Uses and Maintenance Practices	p. 3
Park Naming Process	p. 3
Development Plan Process and Public Input	p. 4
Development Plan Proposed Improvements	p. 5
Future Expansion Area	p. 6
Exhibits	p. 6
Exhibit 1: Adjacent Parks	
Exhibit 2: Birchwood South Development Survey Map	
Exhibit 3: Pioneer Neighborhood Development Plan	
Exhibit 4: Existing Topography	
Exhibit 5: Existing Slope Analysis	
Exhibit 6: Existing Vegetation Survey	
Exhibit 7: Community Survey Results	
Exhibit 8: Public Information Meeting Slides	
Exhibit 9: Sunshine Ridge Park Development Plan	

INTRODUCTION

Sunshine Ridge Park is an 8.01-acre park located on the far west side of Madison at 10327 Shady Birch Trail and was acquired by the Parks Division in 2014. Following the National Recreation and Parks Association recommendations, Sunshine Ridge Park is classified as a neighborhood park and has a service area of 1/2 mile. The nearest developed parks to this location are Cardinal Glenn, Sugar Maple, and Thousand Oaks. Acacia Ridge and Old Timber Parks are also near Sunshine Ridge Park, but at this time are undeveloped. See Adjacent Parks Map (Exhibit 1).

In addition to Outlot 9, which currently comprises Sunshine Ridge Park, Parks staff also discussed the property immediately to the west. When this property is developed, Parks staff anticipate the parcel adjacent to Sunshine Ridge Park will be designated as public parkland. In the interest of a more robust and comprehensive development plan, both parcels were considered in this planning process.

It is the intention of the Parks Division that this area's parks and amenities act as a cohesive system in order to maximize recreational potential. Therefore, in an effort to address the greater far west planning area as a whole, three undeveloped parks were included in this development planning process, including: Acacia Ridge, Sunshine Ridge, and Old Timber Parks. These parks underwent the site inventory and analysis and public input process as a group; however each has a separate development plan document and corresponding report.

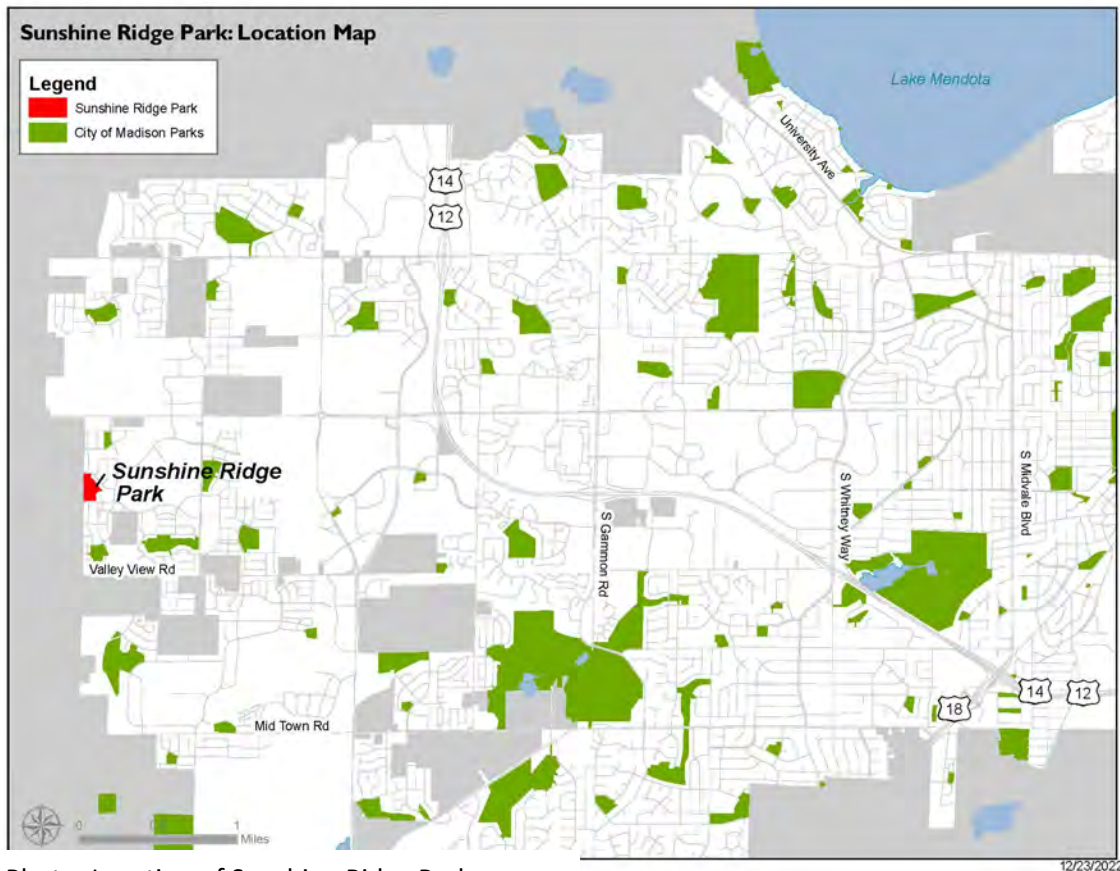


Photo: Location of Sunshine Ridge Park

HISTORY

The parcel for Sunshine Ridge Park has extensive history as agricultural property. In the year 2014, this parcel was dedicated as public parkland in Outlot 9 as part of the Birchwood South development (see Exhibit 2). Sunshine Ridge Park and the surrounding neighborhood are part of the Pioneer Neighborhood Development Plan (see Exhibit 3).

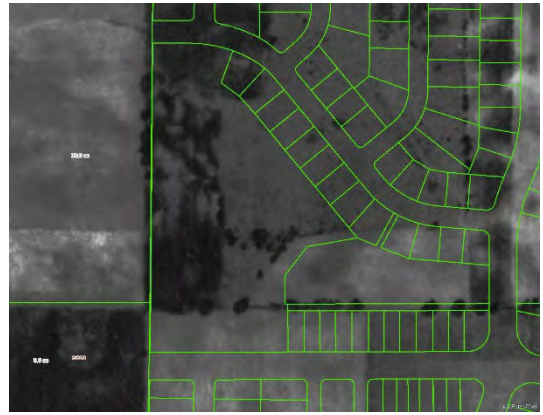


Photo: Aerial view of Sunshine Ridge Park, circa 1937

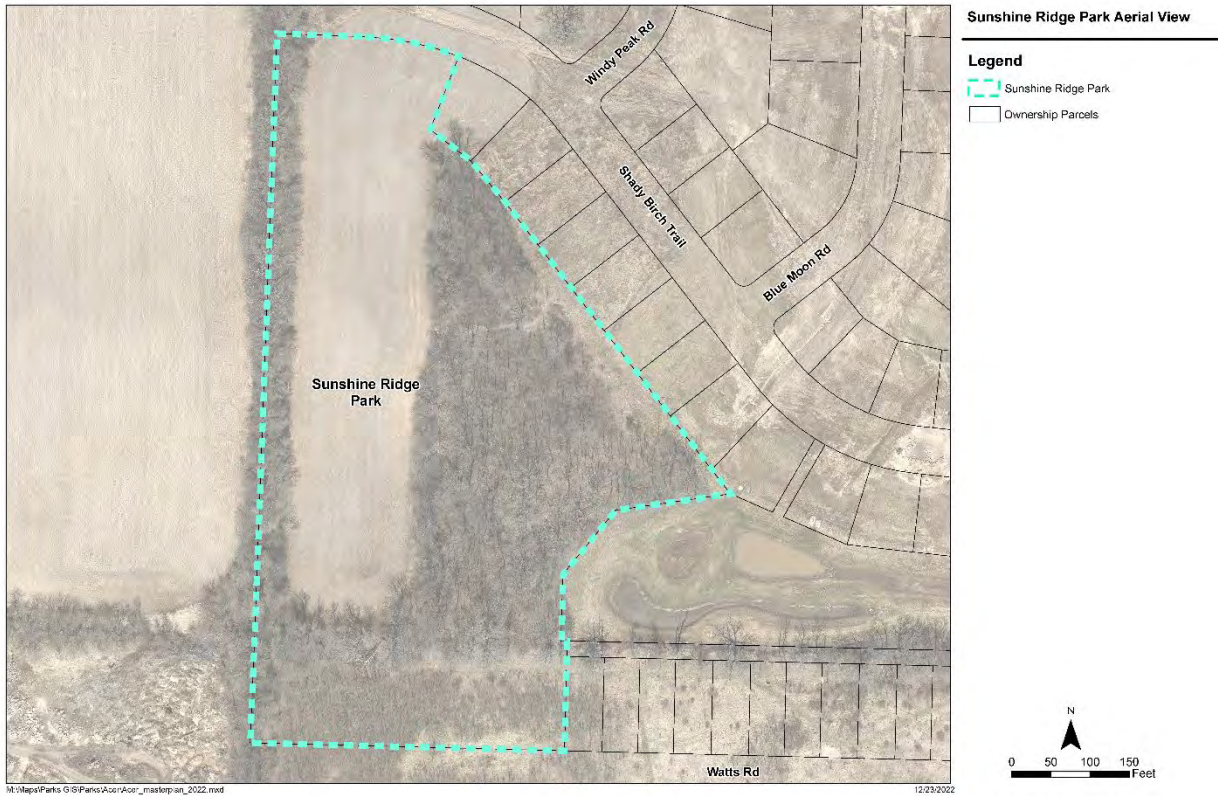


Photo: Aerial view of Sunshine Ridge Park, circa 2020.

EXISTING PLANNING DOCUMENT

The Pioneer Neighborhood Development Plan contains general recommendations for park acreage and location for this area, including for Acacia Ridge, Sunshine Ridge, and Old Timber Park. However, as an undeveloped park, and a relatively new acquisition, Sunshine Ridge Park has not previously undergone any planning processes by the Parks Division.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Sunshine Ridge Park consists of 8.01 acres of abandoned agricultural crop field, a steep, wooded slope on the eastern boundary, and a vegetated windbreak on the western edge. The parcel slopes downwards from the east to the west, with steep slopes on the east side of the property, which can be seen on the Topography Map (see Exhibit 4). A majority of the park area features slopes upwards of 11%, as shown in the Slope Analysis Map (see Exhibit 5).

The dominant soil types on site include Kidder and a variety of silt loams, including: Griswold, Plano, Ringwood, St. Charles, and Troxel. Typical characteristics of these soils include 6-12% slopes and a well-drained profile. Kidder soils feature 10-20% slopes and are eroded.

A vegetation survey was undertaken as a component of a previous planning effort (see Exhibit 6). The eastern woods include several hardwood species such as *Juglans nigra*, *Quercus macrocarpa*, and *Celtis occidentalis*. The western windbreak is dominated by low-quality *Acer negundo*, typical of disturbed areas and woodland edges. Overall the site features numerous oak and native species.

CURRENT USES AND MAINTENANCE PRACTICES

As an undeveloped park, Sunshine Ridge Park offers no formal amenities. The parcel is open to the public for unprogrammed activities.

There are no current maintenance practices at the time of the writing of this report.

PARK NAMING PROCESS

Park parcels receive “working names” when the City of Madison becomes the owner of the land. The names for the three parks involved in this development planning process, Acacia Ridge, Acer (now Sunshine Ridge), and Birchwood South (now Old Timber), are examples of working names. The Parks Division presented the official park naming policy and process to the public during both public meetings, and invited suggestions for new park names to be submitted through the community survey. At the second public input meeting, Parks staff polled participants on which new, official name they preferred. The Long Range Planning Committee then reviewed these names, which were accepted at the December 2022 Board of Park Commissioners.

Acer Park received several suggestions for a new name, including: Driftless Edge, Shady Birch, Birchwood South, Sunshine Lane, Mountain, Ridge or Valley, and Rover Park. Attendees of the second public information meeting preferred Sunshine Ridge Park, and so after review by the Long Range Planning Committee and the Board of Park Commissioners the official name was revised from Acer to Sunshine Ridge Park.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN PROCESS AND PUBLIC INPUT

The development plan process included public input meetings (PIM), a community survey, and review by the Board of Park Commissioners, which is consistent with the adopted [Park Master Plan Policy](#).

Public Input Meeting #1

The first public input meeting was held on June 23, 2022 and was advertised with signs placed in the park, postcards sent to residents within a 1/2 mile radius of the park, email notifications sent to the alder and Cardinal Glenn and Birchwood Oaks neighborhood associations, social media posts, and on the Parks Project webpage. The public input meeting provided history, background, and context for the site and elicited neighborhood input on the park and potential amenities. This meeting was recorded and, along with a PDF version of the presentation, made available on the Project webpage.

Online Community Survey

To gather additional feedback, a community survey was created to gauge the desire for specific amenities that are typically offered within neighborhood parks while also identifying seasonal usage patterns and demographic information. An additional section was designed to elicit feedback and ideas regarding the names of the parks involved in this development planning effort. This survey was made available online and garnered 146 individual responses. The results of the survey were then compiled; these results can be seen in Exhibit 6.

Neighborhood Association Meeting

Representatives from the Cardinal Glenn and Birchwood Oaks neighborhood associations also independently gathered feedback, and met with Parks staff on August 1, 2022 to discuss their findings in relation to the draft development plans.

Public Input Meeting #2

After analyzing the input received at the first public input meeting, through the community survey, and from the neighborhood associations, two development plan design concepts were created. These development plans were provided for the community to review at a second public input meeting which was held on August 11, 2022. The second meeting was advertised with signs placed in the park, email notifications sent to the alder and Cardinal Glenn and Birchwood Oaks neighborhood associations, email notifications to those who attended PIM #1, social media posts, and on the Parks

Project webpage. The majority of the public input meeting participants expressed a preference for the final proposed development plan for Sunshine Ridge Park. This meeting was also recorded and made available on the Project webpage. The presentations provided at both public input meetings can be seen in Exhibit 8.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

For all three parks the top desired amenities identified through the development planning process were hiking/walking paths, sun/picnic shelters, off-leash dog areas, and preservation of the existing natural areas. Overall, there was strong representation and support for the broader themes of socializing, nature, shade, connectivity (in particular for pedestrians and bicyclists), variety (in terms of recreational opportunities), and canine access. The proposed park development plan for Sunshine Ridge Park (see Exhibit 9) took into consideration the varying topography, the potential for erosion in steeper areas, the existing vegetation, and the public input received by Parks staff.

Native Vegetation

The development plan includes the addition of “no-mow” vegetation in the abandoned agricultural area of the park. Parks staff received several comments supporting the reintroduction of and preservation of native vegetation in the park, as neighbors were in support of providing resources for wildlife and minimizing mowing. Additionally, over 82% of survey responses rated natural areas in parks as very or fairly important. Besides ecological benefits, the native vegetation also provides a buffer between residential lots and park users, offers opportunities for nature play, and physical and mental health benefits to park patrons.

Nature Nook

The proposed nature nook will be an area designed to provide play opportunities for younger children in the 2-5 age range. Similar to existing nature play in other Madison parks, this area could feature a combination of logs, boulders, loose parts play, or features which encourage digging. Parks staff will perform public outreach and gather feedback from neighbors as a component of the construction process. Seating will be provided in this area.

Council Ring

This area will act as an informal seating and gathering area in the park, and will be located at a confluence of trails.

Trails

A variety of trails, including paved, mowed, and hiking, will take advantage of the native vegetation and interesting topography in the park. Over 40% of survey respondents indicated they typically visit parks or outdoor recreation areas to walk/hike or view nature, and 26% said the opportunity to do so was lacking in their local public areas. Nearly 92% of respondents ranked hiking/walking paths as fairly or very important amenities to be included in their local parks. Adding trails to Sunshine Ridge Park will not only help meet this need, but will help improve connectivity throughout the Cardinal Glenn and Birchwood-Oaks neighborhoods.

FUTURE EXPANSION AREA

As discussed in the introduction of this report, Parks staff examined the property immediately to the west of Sunshine Ridge Park in anticipation of its future designation as park land. The consideration of both parcels in this planning process allowed for a more robust and comprehensive development plan.

Off-Leash Dog Park

Parks staff heard strong support for dog-related amenities, both through submitted comments and survey results. Approximately 59% of survey respondents rated an off-leash dog park as a fairly or very important amenity for their local parks. According to studies conducted by Parks staff, the far west area of Madison is deficient in dog park facilities. This parcel, once developed, will help meet this need and offer sufficient acreage to build a sustainable off-leash dog park that will not share a property line with any residential parcels.

Open Field/Play Space

The area to the south of the proposed off-leash dog area is designated as an open field/play space, which will provide unprogrammed recreational opportunities to the neighborhood. For example, pick-up games of soccer, tag, or Frisbee, which may be more easily conducted in a large field versus a smaller, residential lot. Over 48% of community survey respondents rated open fields (for soccer, Frisbee, catch, etc.) as fairly or very important to include in the development plan.