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## **Babcock County Park – Lake Accessibility and Stormwater Improvements**

### **Variance Request Statement**

Applicant: Dane County Parks  
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Property: Babcock County Park  
Address: 2909 US Highway 51, McFarland, WI 53558  
Location: Town of Dunn, County of Dane  
Tax Parcel: 0610: 044-9935-7, 044-9965-1, 044-9925-9, 044-9920-4  
Legal Desc.: SEC 4-6-10 PRT FR SE1/4 COM AT PT N35DEG50'W 702 FT FROM SE COR TH N34DEGE 350.6 FT TH N36DEG40'W 59 FT TO SHORE LAKE WAUBESA TH SWLY ALG SD SHORE LN TO PT N36DEG40'W 154.5 FT M/L FROM POB TH SELY TO POB,  
SEC 4-6-10 PRT FR S1/2 COM NW COR LOT A CAMP LEONARD TH N 34DEGE 350.6 FT M/L N36DEG40'W 59 FT TO LAKE WAUBESA N & E TO LOWER OUTLET OF LAKE TH ALG SHORE TO INTS WITH SELY EXT OF RUN N36DEG40' W TO PT 79 FT M/L FROM LAKE S34DEGW 350.6 FT M/L TO NE COR LOT A CAMP LEONARD W ALG N LN SD LOT A TO POB,  
SEC 4-6-10 PRT SE1/4SE1/4 COM SEC SE COR TH N85DEGE 98 FT TH N10DEGE 335.67 FT TH N72DEGW 632.8 FT TH N33DEGE 68.64 FT TO POB TH CONT N33DEGE 254.26 FT TH S52DEGE 84.88 FT TH ALG MEANDER LN S86DEGW 33.72 FT TH N52DEGW 37.95 FT TH S33DEGW 224.81 FT TH N72DEGW 20.8 FT TO POB,  
SEC 4-6-10 PRT FR SE1/4 ISLAND ALSO PRT NE OF LN COM 260 FT M/L OF SE COR TH NWLY TO NE COR CAMP LEONARD 1 & ALSO INCL N 1/2 VAC CAMP LEONARD RD ADJ THIS PARCEL IN R20376/25 EXC PRT NE OF PRIVATE RD ALSO EXC D369/321 & R916/520 & R21476/27 BABCOCK COUNTY PARK BOAT LAUNCH

### **Project Description:**

Dane County Parks requests a shoreland zoning variance for accessibility and lake access improvements at Babcock County Park on Lake Waubesa. The proposed project enhances public lake access for fishing, boating, wildlife viewing, and shoreline recreation for people of all ages and abilities while modernizing existing park infrastructure. Proposed improvements include an accessible fishing pier and shoreline fishing pads, upgraded pedestrian and bicycle paths, an internal access road to the peninsula, limited parking additions, and accessibility upgrades to existing facilities

These improvements are part of a countywide initiative developed in partnership with the Foundation for Dane County Parks, Wisconsin Fishing Expo, and Access Ability Wisconsin to improve equitable lake access at county-owned sites. Similar improvements were completed in 2024 at Fish Camp County Park on Lake

Kegonsa. Babcock County Park has served as a public lake access since 1936 and currently supports boating, fishing, and marine enforcement uses. The proposed improvements build on prior investments, including accessible boarding piers that were installed in 2020, and are designed to provide long-term public benefit while maintaining the park's shoreline character.

The project's goal is to create a fully accessible, safe, and modern lake access site that enhances public health, safety, and welfare by expanding inclusive recreation opportunities to the water.

**Proposed Accessible Fishing and Boating Improvements:**

1. **Accessible Fishing Improvements** – A fixed pier, 20' wide by 24' long, with railing and shoreline concrete pads with boulder embankment.
2. **Walk Improvements** – New and upgraded 6' wide paths, including a peninsula walkway and improvements to existing paths to meet accessibility standards.
3. **Bike Path Improvements** – The 8' wide path will be upgraded to improve accessibility and provide continuous connection between Camp Leonard Road and Highway 51.
4. **Parking Lot Improvements** – An 11-space non-fee parking lot, 2 accessible stalls at the restroom, and in-kind renovations to existing parking.
5. **Internal Road Improvements** – Connection from the boat launch to the peninsula.
6. **Boat Staging Improvements** – Space near the Highway 51 entrance for safe boat staging.
7. **Stormwater Improvements** – Three stormwater basins planted with native species to improve water quality and wildlife habitat.

**Questions:**

**(1) Describe alternatives to your proposal such as other locations, designs and construction techniques.**

Babcock County Park is an established public lake access site with limited opportunities for alternative locations or designs due to physical, environmental, and regulatory constraints. The Park is one of only three public access sites directly on Lake Waubesa and provides access to both the lake and the Yahara River. Relocating improvements elsewhere within the park is not feasible due to extensive shoreland zoning coverage, the Yahara River and U.S. Highway 51 bisecting the site, documented cultural resources, and the Town of Dunn Environmental Corridor.

Proposed improvements are generally located within existing or previously disturbed areas, minimizing new site disturbance where practicable. Amenity locations were selected to minimize shoreline disturbance, avoid removal of mature trees, preserve views, have a buffer from the neighborhood, and meet modern accessibility standards. Existing pathways and parking lots are upgraded where existing routes exceeded accessibility criteria.

Alternative access to the peninsula from Camp Leonard Road was evaluated but found not viable in conversations with the Town of Dunn due to the increased traffic on a dead-end residential street and conflicts with pedestrian and bicycle users. Access from U.S. Highway 51 provides one access point to the boat launch and day use areas to serve park users.

The project incorporates stormwater management features to improve water quality for both the site and the surrounding neighborhood. A basin proposed near Camp Leonard Road will provide stormwater treatment and a buffer to nearby homes, with native plantings that enhance wildlife habitat and overall site character.

Stormwater, erosion control, and floodplain requirements are being addressed through separate permitting with Dane County and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, with native plantings and stabilization measures incorporated to protect water quality from the proposed project and Camp Leonard Road. Overall, the project represents minimum modifications necessary to allow safe, accessible public use while minimizing environmental impacts.

**(A) Alternatives you considered that comply with existing standards: If you find such an alternative, you can move forward with this option with a regular permit. If you reject compliant alternatives, provide the reasons you rejected them.**

Dane County Parks evaluated whether the project objectives could be met through alternatives that fully comply with existing shoreland zoning standards and proceed under a regular permit. No feasible compliant alternatives were identified due to site constraints.

A substantial portion of Babcock County Park lies within the shoreland zoning area, and improvements intended to provide public lake access must be located within this zone to function as intended. Locating facilities outside the shoreland area would not meet the project purpose of providing safe, accessible access to Lake Waubesa.

The proposed improvements are designed to remain within existing or previously disturbed areas to the greatest extent practicable.

Accordingly, no alternatives that fully comply with existing shoreland zoning standards would allow the project objectives to be met. The requested variance represents the minimum relief necessary to allow reasonable use of the property for its established public park and lake access purpose.

**(B) Alternatives you considered that require a lesser variance: If you reject such alternatives, provide the reasons you rejected them.**

Dane County Parks evaluated alternative designs to determine whether the project objectives could be met with a lesser variance from shoreland zoning standards. No feasible alternatives were identified that would require substantially less variance while still providing safe, accessible public lake access.

During design development, alternative layouts for piers, walkways, parking, and access were considered. However, any configuration capable of meeting accessibility, safety, and operational needs would require a similar degree of variance due to shoreline location, applicable zoning standards, and the functional requirements of a public lake access facility.

The proposed design was selected because it provides inclusive access to the shoreline, generally concentrates improvements within existing or previously disturbed areas, minimizes impacts to wetlands, and provides buffering to adjacent residential properties. Alternatives that reduced the variance would have shifted improvements where river and road barriers exist and archaeological resources are identified and were therefore not pursued.

Through coordination with Dane County staff, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and accessibility stakeholders, the proposed design was determined to represent the minimum variance necessary to achieve the project objectives.

**(2) Will there be an unnecessary hardship to the property owner to strictly comply with the ordinance?**

Strict compliance with the shoreland zoning ordinance would create an unnecessary hardship by preventing reasonable use of Babcock County Park as an established public park and primary public lake access to Lake Waubesa. The shoreline is the essential feature that supports the park's long-standing boating, fishing, and recreation functions, and most of the property lies within the shoreland zoning area.

Shoreland standards cannot be reasonably applied to a public lake access facility without restricting safe shoreline access, accessibility, and public use. Strict compliance would prevent necessary improvements to existing facilities, including accessible shoreline access and limited parking and circulation improvements required for equitable public use.

Given the site constraints and historic development of the park, further limiting shoreline access within the vegetated buffer is not feasible without compromising safety, accessibility, and the core public purpose of the property. Accordingly, strict compliance would unreasonably restrict the established public use of the site and result in an unnecessary hardship.

**(3) Do unique physical characteristics of your property prevent compliance with the ordinance?**

Babcock County Park has unique physical characteristics that prevent reasonable compliance with shoreland zoning standards. The property is located at the confluence of Lake Waubesa and the Yahara River, and the shoreline is the essential feature supporting the park's long-established public lake access function. Lake access and fishing facilities must be located within the shoreland zone to function as intended.

The Park is physically segmented by the Yahara River and by U.S. Highway 51, which separates large portions of the property from the shoreline and creates barriers to safe and accessible circulation. Areas east of Highway 51 also contain mapped archaeological resources, further limiting feasible development locations.

Additionally, portions of the park are located within the Town of Dunn's Environmental and Cultural Resource Protection Corridor, which restricts new structures. These inherent site conditions, combined with overlapping regulatory constraints, constitute unique physical characteristics that prevent compliance with shoreland zoning standards while maintaining the park's established public lake access use.

**(4) What would be the effect on this property, the community or neighborhood, and the general public interest if the variance were granted?**

Granting the requested variance would have a positive effect on the property, surrounding community, and the general public. The project improves an established public park and lake access site, enhancing public health, safety, and welfare by providing safe and inclusive shoreline and boating access for users of all ages and abilities, while preserving the site's scenic character. The proposed improvements will open approximately 600 feet of Lake Waubesa shoreline to public use, serving both the adjacent neighborhood and Dane County residents. The strong public use and success of similar improvements at Fish Camp County Park on Lake Kegonsa demonstrate the need for and likely popularity of the proposed improvements at Babcock County Park.

Demographic trends further underscore the importance of these improvements. By 2030, the population over age 65 is expected to exceed those under age 18, with an estimated 40-45% of older adults living with a disability. Providing inclusive and accessible public spaces is essential to supporting mobility, health, and active aging, particularly at public natural resources such as lakes and parks.

The proposed project is consistent with the intent of the shoreland zoning ordinance by supporting public access to navigable waters while maintaining environmental protections. Environmental and cultural resource reviews indicate no adverse impacts, and the project is designed to utilize existing or previously disturbed areas to the greatest extent practicable.

Stormwater management and shoreline restoration will be planted with native species to improve water quality, stabilize the shoreline, and enhance wildlife habitat. Development is sited away from neighboring properties and screened by a stormwater basin and existing trees and vegetation.

Overall, granting the variance serves the public interest by allowing reasonable improvement of a long-established public lake access site while protecting environmental, scenic, and cultural resources, and by expanding safe, equitable access to Lake Waubesa for current and future generations.