



## Madison Parks Division

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February 8, 2018

TO: Tenney Lapham Neighborhood Association

FR: Eric Knepp, Parks Superintendent

CC: Alder Ledell Zellers, District 2  
Vern Stenmann, Big Top Events  
Conor Caloia, Big Top Events

### **RE: BREESE STEVENS FIELD CONTRACT – KEY TOPICS**

I first want to thank TLNA for its continued engagement in this discussion. I also regret that I cannot be at the meeting tonight, but I look forward to hearing how it goes. I will be in touch with Alder Zellers to discuss next steps and we will evaluate next steps. Concerning process, any contract changes would require approval by the Parks Commission, Finance Committee, and the City Council. Any changes to the alcohol licensing would also require approval from the ALRC.

Big Top Events has produced an FAQ document that I have been able to review prior to completing this memo. Their document provides significant information that I think will be valuable in the conversation. The goal of this document is to provide City perspective on many of the issues I have heard from the last public meeting on this topic and to provide additional context for the discussion. Parks has not been engaged in detailed contract negotiations on this project at this point. I feel strongly that we need to hear from the community prior to being able to negotiate on behalf of the City. I appreciate all that we have heard to date and look forward to the challenge of finding a path forward that balances the many needs of the facility, neighborhood and City.

#### **1. Breese Stevens Vision – Preservation through Purpose**

The Parks Division, Board of Parks Commissioners, and Common Council have been working for a number of years to make improvements at Breese (see #2). Our vision for the facility has always been to ensure its long-term preservation as a Landmark through providing purpose to the facility. Parks worked with Isthmus Architecture from 2016 into 2017 to produce a Facility Plan for Breese Stevens. It can be found on the Breese Stevens Field Concession and Restroom Addition project page: (<https://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/projects/breese-stevens-field-concession-and-restroom-addition>). This Facility Plan promotes a vision for the facility that provides preservation through purpose and integrates with the Parks Division Mission, Vision and Values (<http://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/about/mission.cfm>), especially in regard to preserving and promoting our historic legacy and to provide opportunities for cultural interaction. A key aspect of achieving this vision is to provide a facility that is a purposeful and loved part of the neighborhood and community. I feel that this requires thinking creatively about what can provide purpose to a facility. The strategy of making it an athletic venue only was tried for many years. I think it is fair to say that strategy failed. The City spent hundreds of thousands, if not over one million, dollars to complete

restoration work over the past 10 years. The condition of the facility had deteriorated in part due to the lack of purpose and resulting lack of timely reinvestment in the facility. It is our hope that by diversifying the uses at Breese we are promoting a more diverse and larger group of people who get to actually use this historic gem.

## **2. City Investment at Breese Stevens Field**

Historical records indicate that the City purchased the property for \$35,000 in November, 1923. From that point until the mid-2000's there are few records related to investments made by the City at Breese. We know there were at least some investments during this period (e.g. lighting), but from the condition of the facility in 2005, it is clear there was no plan to adequately invest in maintaining Breese.

From 2007 until 2018, the City has focused on reinvesting at Breese to address long-standing issues of deferred maintenance and to begin to modernize the facility to provide it with more opportunities to be purposefully used by the community. The total investment from 2007 to 2018 has been \$5.455M. This has been funded from a variety of sources including \$2.7M in General Obligation (G.O.) Debt, \$1.14M in TIF, \$1.12M in Impact/Development Fees, \$285,000 in Private funding (\$185,000 from Big Top and \$100,000 from Dane County), \$200,000 from the sale of park assets (appx 50% of the sale proceeds from the James Madison Park homes), and \$9,500 from other sources

The proposed development that would bring professional soccer to Breese would require additional investment of approximately \$1.6M into the facility to continue the facility plan work and to ensure that Breese meets league standards. These improvements are additional restroom capacity, hospitality areas, additional seating capacity, ongoing historic preservation work, and locker room improvements. Currently, the City has planned an additional \$700,000 towards working on the Facility Plan for Breese over the 2019 to 2022 period. As a part of the negotiations and City budget process, we would work to secure a funding allocation from a variety of sources including impact fees and private investment to reduce costs attributed to the tax levy.

## **3. Contract Length and Financials**

The Big Top FAQ covers this issue well. The City would like to have a longer term commitment for a number of reasons, while keeping checks and balances in place to ensure that Big Top remains an active and responsive manager of Breese. It is important to note that the longer term of the agreement does provide financial certainty for the City, which allows for better budgeting.

In addition to the points covered in that document, there is a real opportunity for cost savings in a longer term arrangement with a reliable operator. Negotiating and working through contracts such as these takes a very significant amount of staff time. This staff time is therefore not available to support other important initiatives that are key to achieving the goals of the City and Board of Park Commissioners. I would estimate that if an extension is approved for Big Top in 2018, the City (mostly Parks, but numerous other agencies as well) will have expended between 300 and 400 hours on the agreement. Those hours would, in my opinion, be better focused on supporting key goals for the City and Division, such as our Connecting Children to Nature Initiative and the Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative.

I look forward to negotiating the financial terms of the agreement, but given the numerous moving parts of the discussion this will likely be in the latter phases of contract negotiation. It is important to note that this is not a normal landlord tenant relationship, as the City retains a significant amount of control over the Facility under the existing agreement, and I anticipate this continuing in the future. It is also important to note that though it is possible we could find another operator of the facility, but the only qualified response we received from the original RFP was from Big Top. Without a partner I fear we could return to the old model, whereby Breese was all but abandoned for 30 years and had very limited usage or purpose. During this period the City had sole responsibility for all costs associated with Breese and a very limited revenue stream to address those costs.

#### **4. Concerts**

We have heard concerns regarding the number of concerts requested by Big Top. We also recognize that these events are a unique opportunity for many people to enjoy national level talent at a unique and historic venue near downtown Madison. We are hopeful that through a thoughtful negotiation process, we can find balance. Concerning concert decibel levels and monitoring them, Park Rangers check every concert event at Breese during sound check and again during the show. Like other concerts in parks, we monitor the sound at the soundboard, as this is most easily controllable location to modify the sound levels if needed. We are continuing to work on a method to better document and report on all sound level monitoring completed by the Parks Division.

#### **5. Professional Soccer**

As a Parks Division that has thousands of participants playing soccer in our system every year, we are excited about the opportunity to have a professional level team in Madison. Soccer is the world's sport and our participation rates are high across all parts of the community. We also think that it really fits as a key cornerstone of giving Breese long-term purpose. Professional soccer would also have a positive economic impact on the City and neighborhood.

#### **6. Other Events at Breese**

We have heard concerns related to the overall number of events and if it is possible to regulate these based upon size or type. We would like to review the example schedule that Big Top is working on to get a better feel for how the year will look with professional soccer in place. After hearing more feedback on the calendar and reviewing it, we will evaluate if there are ways to provide more predictability for neighborhood residents without creating a regulatory framework that would cost the City time and money to manage beyond what is needed.

#### **7. General Noise Concerns**

In addition to Concert events, Parks has heard concerns related to other noise issues. Most of those are from a few years ago and were related to the PA system for athletic practices. Big Top has assisted in managing that issue generally well. We do have plans to update the audio system at the Facility to provide both a better fan experience and reduce noise spillage into the neighborhood.

## **8. East High School Athletics**

Big Top has indicated a willingness to provide more access than is currently granted to East under the MMSD-City agreement that provides for 32 dates per year. The City is proud to have East play in a City facility at Breese. No contract language has been drafted by the City in regard to this or other items at this time. Given the fact that MMSD is a separate legal entity from the City, we will work closely with them during contract negotiations to develop an agreement that works for all parties.

## **9. Public-Private Partnerships in Parks**

The City of Madison Parks Division is not a traditional recreation department. In many parks and recreation agencies there would be a significantly higher number of professionally trained facility and program managers who would be much more adept at managing a facility such as Breese and working to actively program it. The Parks Division has one full time programmer position across the system. Even at Warner Park Community Recreation Center, which we operate and maintain, we have program partners on site. This is similar at Olbrich Gardens with our relationship to Olbrich Botanical Society. This lack of program staff and expertise makes it a challenge to meet the needs of our community without partnerships. These partnerships range from other governmental entities (MSCR) to non-profit entities (Friends of Olin-Turville) to for profit enterprises (Brittingham Boats). I feel strongly that Parks has taken a balanced approach to pursuing these partnerships. We focus on areas and for services that we have think would be desirable given input we receive from the community. We also pursue these partnerships in situations where we acknowledge that there are individual skillsets that we do not have within the organization to do the work well (e.g. manage a Minor League baseball team).

## **10. Parking & Transportation Concerns**

Parks agrees with Big Top that the additional off street parking options continue to go up in this area. It is important to continue the discussion Alder Zellers has been having discussions with the Parking Utility to obtain sufficient wayfinding signage to ensure the parking ramps are the go to location for many of the event attendees. Big Top's proposed improvements for bike access are notable and are the most significant commitment to bike parking for events that I am aware of in the City of Madison.

## **11. Ticket Pricing – Dynamic Pricing**

Parks staff have heard a number of concerns related to ticket pricing at concerts with a specific emphasis on dynamic pricing. We have completed some initial reviews of how these systems work and it does appear that ticket pricing is often outside of the control of the facility manager. I also have significant concerns about the enforcement of any provision that might be contemplated given the secondary market and scalping.