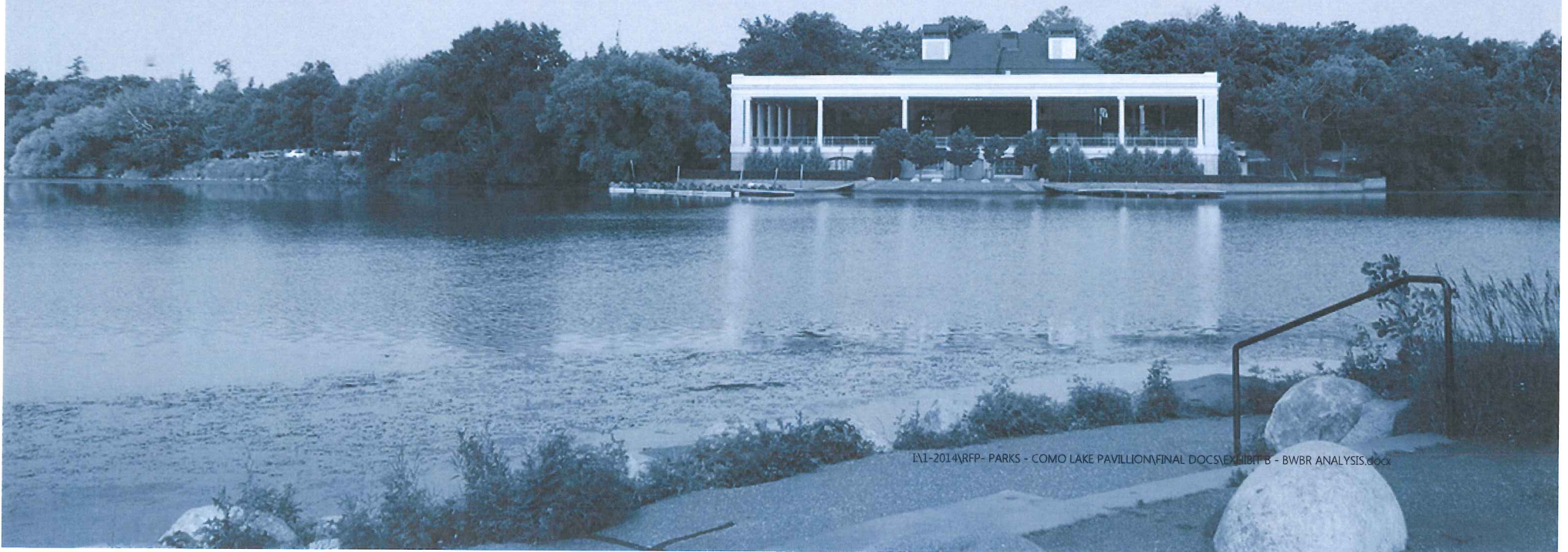


# Como Lakeside Pavilion: A Community Vision and Market Analysis





## Introduction

In 2015, the Como Lakeside Pavilion will have new operators at the facility, and the change in management is giving the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department the opportunity to examine residents' use of the pavilion and its relationship to both the lake and Como Regional Park system as a whole. The start of a new lease agreement to manage the space and operations opens the dining, event, and recreational offerings to a myriad of ideas that could serve this vibrant neighborhood as well as a diverse regional population.

Receiving more than 800 comments through a month-long online survey administered on the city's website and two community meetings facilitated by a third party, ideas were gathered and analyzed in order to solicit a partner who can bring the resources and creativity that would make the pavilion and lake a value-added asset to neighbors and visitors of the popular park. The following report summarizes the findings and observations.



## Saint Paul and Como Park

Saint Paul, billed as the Most Livable City in America, is renowned for its strong neighborhoods as well as stable economic base. Home to a few Fortune 500 companies, the seat of the state capital, one of the largest concentrations of higher education institutions in the country, and a healthcare corridor that attracts both patients and care providers from around the nation, Saint Paul plays a vital role in the region's economy and culture. Key to Saint Paul's stability is its focus on neighborhoods and the amenities that complement them. From world-class libraries to award-winning parks and programs, the City and its residents shape services and physical spaces, which cater to the cultural mix that defines the Twin Cities today. Saint Paul's diversity of housing attracts families from all economic and ethnic backgrounds, including new Americans, longtime state residents, and regional transplants, while preserving some of the most beautiful areas of the city, creating oases for



each of these residents and their neighbors from across the region to enjoy year-round.

Setting high standards for City programs and amenities is Como Regional Park, a 384-acre urban retreat on the city's North End that features a century-old carousel, a family-friendly amusement park, a newly renovated outdoor aquatics center catering to youth and seniors, picnic shelters and sports fields, an outdoor woodland classroom, an 18-hole public golf course, and the nationally renowned and free Como Zoo and Marjorie McNeely Conservatory. On the east end of the park is the 68-acre Como Lake with a 1.67-mile paved path, a fishing pier, a pavilion with an outdoor covered stage, a meeting space, an event center, and a commercial kitchen. Attracting an estimated 4.5 million visitors per year, Como Regional Park ranks as the second most visited attraction in Minnesota, behind only the Mall of America as the state's top tourist destination.

While history and tradition have created much of the charm of the park, its continual status as one of the top family destinations in the Twin Cities is due to its ever-evolving reputation for service and quality, with new and improved attractions serving a shifting city demographic. In 2010, Como Zoo opened Polar Bear Odyssey, a world-class exhibit for the animals and visitors alike. This was followed in 2013 by the opening of The Ordway Gardens, showcasing one of the nation's top-rated Bonsai collections, the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden, and Gorilla Forest, home to seven gorillas. In 2012, the City also opened a new, state-of-the-art aquatics facility that now provides increased recreational opportunities, including a zip-line, climbing wall, and lazy river that caters to residents of all ages. Finally, in 2014, the department partnered with Prom Management, Inc., for the management of Como Golf Course. The golf course provides opportunities for golfers and others to relax in the clubhouse's bar and restaurant with one of the best green space views in the city.

All of the improvements and advances fit with Saint Paul Parks and Recreation's mission and vision: *Helping to make Saint Paul the most livable city in America by facilitating the creation of active lifestyles, vibrant places, and a vital environment through parks and recreation that responds creatively to change, innovates with every decision, and connects the entire city.*



### Como Lakeside Pavilion: A Culinary, Community Opportunity

Sitting on the western shores of the serene Como Lake, the Como Lakeside Pavilion is a 20,050-square-foot facility nestled between the lake and the rest of Como Park. Built in 1992, the pavilion is an exact replica of the one built in 1905 along the lakeshore. With a hill, waterfall and Lexington Avenue separating the pavilion from the rest of Como Park, a pedestrian bridge spanning the avenue brings people from the trails in the central portion of the park to the lake and pavilion. Two parking lots also serve the lake side of the park, providing 215 spots on the north and south ends of the pavilion.

The Como Lakeside Pavilion is the only commercial facility offering dining, meeting, and event space on the lake.

The pavilion features three floors, a promenade with a stage for concerts and shows, and lower-level meeting space. Based on current programming, the square footage of the facility is allocated accordingly:

- First-floor restaurant: 1,206 square feet with approximately 52 seats
- Second-floor mezzanine: 1,040 square feet with approximately 40 seats
- Third-floor banquet/dining area: 2,296 square feet with a maximum capacity of 142 people with tables, or 305 people with chairs only.
- Outdoor promenade: 16,015 square feet with bench seating
- Lower-level meeting rooms: 2 with approximate seating for 15 in each room
- Lower-level patio concession window facing Como Lake

In addition to the pavilion's physical space, a patio with limited café-style seating stretches from the facility to a pier on the shore of lake, where visitors currently can rent paddle boats by the hour or rent Nice Ride bikes as options for recreational activity on or around the lake.

Current operators of the pavilion host approximately 100 events a year, many of them weddings and special events. The current operator partners with the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department to provide Music in the Parks, a summer music series program, featuring about 75 concerts, from community and big bands to local orchestras and acoustic concerts. Amateur and school theater troupes also take advantage of the stage.

While a focal point of the lake, the facility is only one component of the lakeside experience. On any given day from spring through fall, groups take advantage of the beautiful setting for a variety of activities, from yoga, tae



kwan do, fund-raising walks, and community gatherings to biking, jogging, fishing, and enjoying the open green space nearby. Winter brings fewer visitors to the lake side of the park as the lake rarely forms ice because of current aeration. The golf course across Lexington Avenue attracts cross-country/downhill skiers and sledders, but the immediate area currently does not offer outdoor ice options for skating or curling.

### The Challenge

As mentioned, while sitting prominently on the lake, the pavilion currently is not core to many visitors' Como Lake experience. The promenade, itself, sits on the eastern side of the facility, with audiences' backs to the lake during performances on the stage. The stage's location also prevents restaurant customers from having a view of the lake while dining in, as the first-floor eatery sits on the western side of the facility. There is little connection between the two first-floor spaces.

Public access has also been limited to the spaces, both physically with gates and operationally with the current hours of the restaurant. Although parking can be limited during peak use in the park as a whole, parking eases in the evening when the Zoo and Conservatory close, and trails throughout the park do lead visitors to the lake side of the park. Community rooms are currently free to use, but, according to current and previous users, the space lacks the

warmth and friendliness of a community setting through its current design and restrictions on outside drink or food, including water bottles and coffee.

### **A Community Wealth of Ideas**

The affection the community has for the pavilion could be seen in the more-than-800 comments they provided through the Open Saint Paul Survey and community input session. Despite its current limitations, the pavilion is seen as a potential centerpiece to the lakeside visitors' experience as well as to the neighborhoods' quality of life – morning and evening, summer and winter: "Como Park and Pavilion are a treasure for Saint Paul. A fresh mix of casual, gourmet food options with an eclectic entertainment mix would bring me there again and again!"

Such comments were recorded frequently as the city embarked on a comprehensive community engagement process to crowd-source ideas for the qualities that neighbors and visitors alike would find appealing at and around the pavilion. The process included two major phases:

- In June, the city invited residents and users of the park to take an online survey through Open Saint Paul on the city's website. The survey addressed specific operations at the pavilion, from food service and hours of operation to alternative offerings and entertainment. The survey also invited respondents to add comments, and the comments were aggregated into word clouds that identified the most recurring themes in the responses.
- Following the Open Saint Paul survey, the city also hired a third-party facilitator to conduct two community input sessions. Two 2-hour meetings separated attendees into three discussion groups and gave people the opportunity to look at the pavilion and lake from a systemic point of view (as part of the Como Park experience) in a more aspirational light, with questions centered around generic memorable experiences, daily life activities involving recreation, entertainment, and food, and building community. Following the small group discussions, responses were presented to all attendees which allowed them to see where participants agree.

Analyzing the community comments, responses generally fell into three categories:

### ***Celebrate the Lake***

In a metropolitan region famous for its lakes, people's desires to connect with Como Lake are indisputable. This is found in two general areas of the comments: dining and recreation.

To the latter, residents, both younger and older, consistently cited providing



more recreational activities that make the lake part of the overall experience. Currently featuring only hourly paddle boat rentals as the sole activity on the lake (aside from shoreline fishing), respondents identified canoe, paddle board, and kayak rentals as potential draws. In addition to the summertime activities, a significant portion also called for skating, either on the lake or on a neighboring rink near the pavilion, to take advantage of the park in winter and create a year-long destination spot. (While in its history the lake has featured skating, its current condition and operations cannot support such activities because of aeration that runs through the lake.)

To the former, people see opportunities to make the lake part of the dining experience in multiple ways. From re-orienting the current facility layout to café-style seating in the promenade to bistro seating along the lake outside of the facility, many of the comments pointed to a desire for a better ambiance and experience that would set the pavilion apart as the only lakeside eatery in Saint Paul. A place to enjoy a beer or wine as the sun sets over the lake in the evening; a spot to grab a coffee and pastry after an early morning run or group yoga training; an outdoor cart with ice cream and healthy grab-and-go options for family visits; and an outdoor and indoor fireplace to gather with friends in the evening hours were all ideas people gave as a way to bring the lake into the daily pavilion experience.



### ***Celebrate Local***

Recognizing the changing demographic of the area, respondents also recognized the talent and creativity the region offers and see the lakeside pavilion as a way to bring that to light. Beyond wanting to avoid a chain-style restaurant, people voiced a desire for an entrepreneur who would bring a menu that connects with the land much in the same way the Saint Paul Farmer's Market celebrates the region's growers and producers. They also see an opportunity to highlight the different ethnicities that make up the social fabric of both Saint Paul and the visitors to the park. Rather than a rigid menu of food that duplicates other experiences or caters to generic tastes, people are seeking healthy, organic, and creative menus that change with the seasons and bring all visitors together through a celebration of food and drink.

In the same way they envision the menu, respondents voiced a similar desire to celebrate music, dance, and theater. "There is something really special about the entertainment now and I would not want to displace that, but to have a broader appeal, maybe also make it, in part, a venue for newer local artists to debut." This was a common refrain among the comments from residents who see the promenade as a stage to highlight the various styles of music and talent found in our community. Understanding the appeal much of the big band programming has to older residents in the area, many voiced a desire to also cater to younger audiences through a diverse programming of entertainment such as hip-hop, jazz, acoustic, dance, poetry and school theater.

### ***Celebrate Community***

More than a restaurant and event space, most participants in the survey and meetings see the pavilion as a community asset, one that should be open, inviting, and warm. No comments ignored the fact that an operator for the facility needs to make a profit – to the contrary, many commentators actually see a greater potential for the pavilion's financial performance – but there was a general consensus that the pavilion should be a place where the community wants and can come together, though food, events, and meetings. Making the prices affordable, making the menu attractive, opening the space for greater and more casual use, including for those who recognize their dogs as part of their family – this is how people see the pavilion being successful.

In addition to the dining and entertainment that could attract a more diverse and regular audience, residents identified opportunities through community

classes such as dance, art, and fitness like pilates, as a way to broaden the use of the promenade and lakeside setting. More and better seating on the patio and other options to engage the community would elevate those moments for unstructured conversations, as well as technology updates that would allow customers the same WiFi access and study opportunities found in today's café spaces. Some residents also see a regular farmer's or global market as a way to reach out to the broader community, both geographically and culturally.



New ideas aside, neighbors and residents said they want the pavilion to remain a place where casual groups, from book and knitting clubs to scouting troops, could still find free places to meet and feel welcomed to be there. They want it to be a place where families and couples can feel comfortable together.

From more than 800 respondents, additional/alternative services desired at the Pavilion.

A word cloud of services desired at the Pavilion. The words are arranged in a roughly rectangular shape, with varying font sizes and orientations. The most prominent words are 'GOOD food just better', 'RESTAURANTS', 'COFFEE', 'SEATING', and 'SKATING'. Other words include 'WINE', 'SHOP', 'Park Pavilion', 'quality', 'SPACE', 'stand', 'Hours', 'water', 'canoe', 'cream', 'Kayak', 'Rentals', 'area', 'Think Up services', and 'Winter'. The words are in various shades of gray and black, with some in bold and some in regular weight.

WINE GOOD food just better  
SHOP RESTAURANTS quality  
Park Pavilion COFFEE SPACE  
stand Hours  
water canoe cream SEATING  
Rentals SKATING area Kayak  
Think Up services Winter

From more than 800 respondents, type of food service desired at the Pavilion.







## Observations

In fulfilling the Parks and Recreation Department's mission to facilitate the creation of active lifestyles, vibrant places, and a vital environment through creativity, innovation, and connections, the city would be successful finding a partner or partners who are socially motivated and oriented and can envision the Como Lakeside Pavilion as a great connector of community through food, entertainment, recreation, and engagement.

From the visionary goal, a successful partner or partners for the city would bring the following strategies and resources to the table that could meet or exceed the expectations of neighbors and park visitors:

- A vision to draw lakeside views into the casual dining experience, including a capital improvement and operational plan for the pavilion space.
- A daily and seasonal business plan that features evolving dining, drinking, and concessionary options from early morning through evening, including multiple service windows along with possible options for food carts immediately outside of the pavilion as the season accommodates.
- A diverse, seasonal, and affordable menu that leverages the flavors that our community offers through all of its rich cultures and highlights the talent for which our region has become known.
- An operational plan that demonstrates an open, welcoming, and technologically accessible environment for the community while showing a profitable and sustainable business model.
- Either in conjunction with restaurant operations or through a business partnership, a vision for diversifying and expanding affordable recreational activities on the lake, as water quality allows, that attract a broad range of users.
- Experience as an event programmer and promoter who will create connections in the community and provide a rich and diverse entertainment schedule for families and residents.
- A community spirit that sees the opportunities to host groups and classes and welcome people into the lakeside experience.
- A promotional plan that would connect the community to the events happening at the pavilion.
- A collegial vision to uncover opportunities with the city that improves the lakeside experience and creates a four-season asset for neighbors and residents.

While these broad parameters leave a wide opening for interpretation, it also invites an entrepreneurial spirit who brings a solid business background to submit their vision. That vision can then be measured against the community-sourced ideas to Celebrate the Lake, Celebrate Local, Celebrate the Community. Together with more objective criteria on finances, history, and income estimates, the strategies and resources outlined contribute to a solid foundation for vetting a successful partner.

Overall, the experiences people brought to their comments influenced their ideas of what the pavilion and lakeside could be – whether it was a visit to a park in China, a stop at a European café, a performance at Shakespeare in the Park in New York City, jazz on the lawn, paddle boarding on Lake Calhoun, or skating decades ago at Como Lake. In part, examples of individual strategies abound throughout the metro. Whatever examples and lasting memories people brought to the community process, the vision they all agreed on was that Como Lakeside Pavilion provides a space for something uniquely Saint Paul – reflective of the community, respectful of the neighborhood, and civic in its mindset.





## Exhibit C

### Utilities

The Pavilion Manager will be required to pay all utility costs associated with the Como Park Lakeside Pavilion operation. See below chart for 2010 to 2013 utility costs.

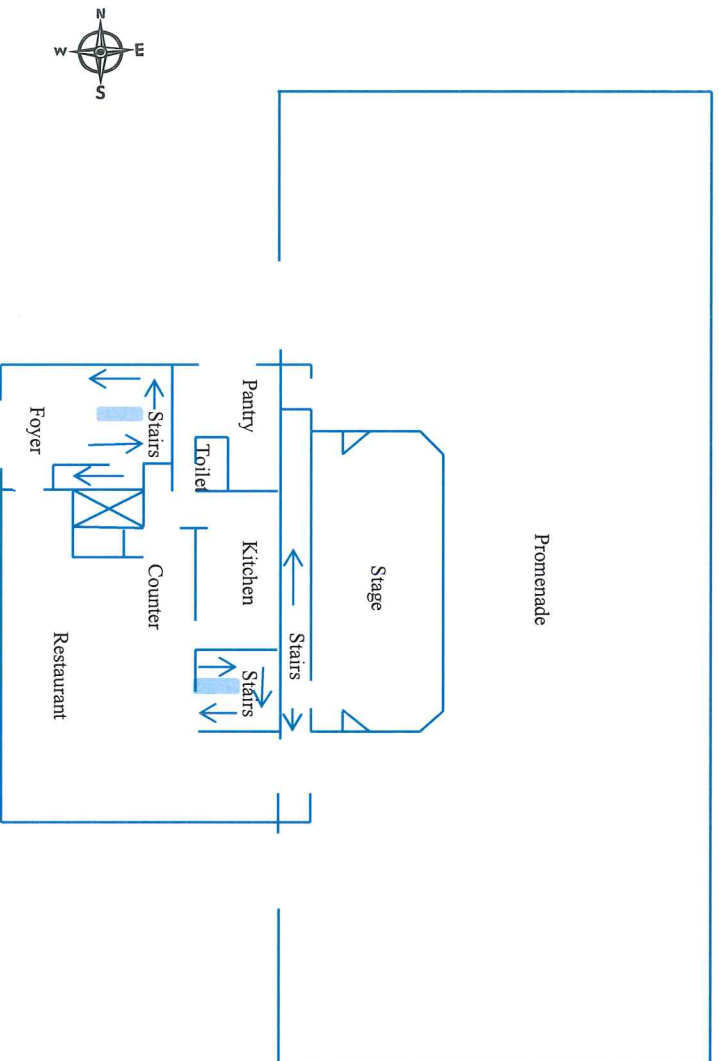
Utility Costs at Como Park Lakeside Pavilion				
	2010	2011	2012	2013
Sewer	3,707	3,512	4,185	3,247
Electri c*	5,756	6,550	8,995	9,737
Gas	19,995	20,200	15,170	15,829
Water	2,687	2,766	3,207	3,448
Total	32,145	33,028	31,557	32,261

\*NOTE: There is an annual Como Park Lakeside Pavilion electric credit provided for a Ramsey County lake aerator.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Credit</u>
2011/2012	\$1,280.73
2012/2013	\$2,563.79
2013/2014	\$2,402.37

# COMO PARK LAKESIDE PAVILION FLOOR PLANS

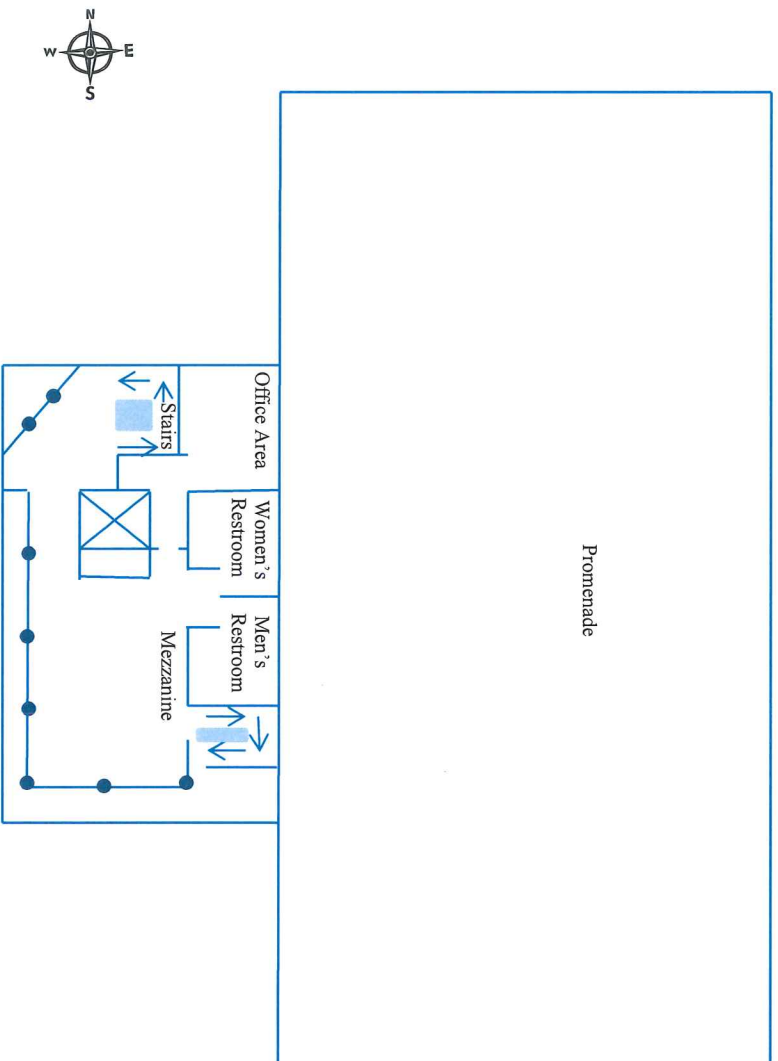
Main Level





# COMO PARK LAKESIDE PAVILION FLOOR PLANS

Second Floor



# COMO PARK LAKESIDE PAVILION FLOOR PLANS

Third Floor

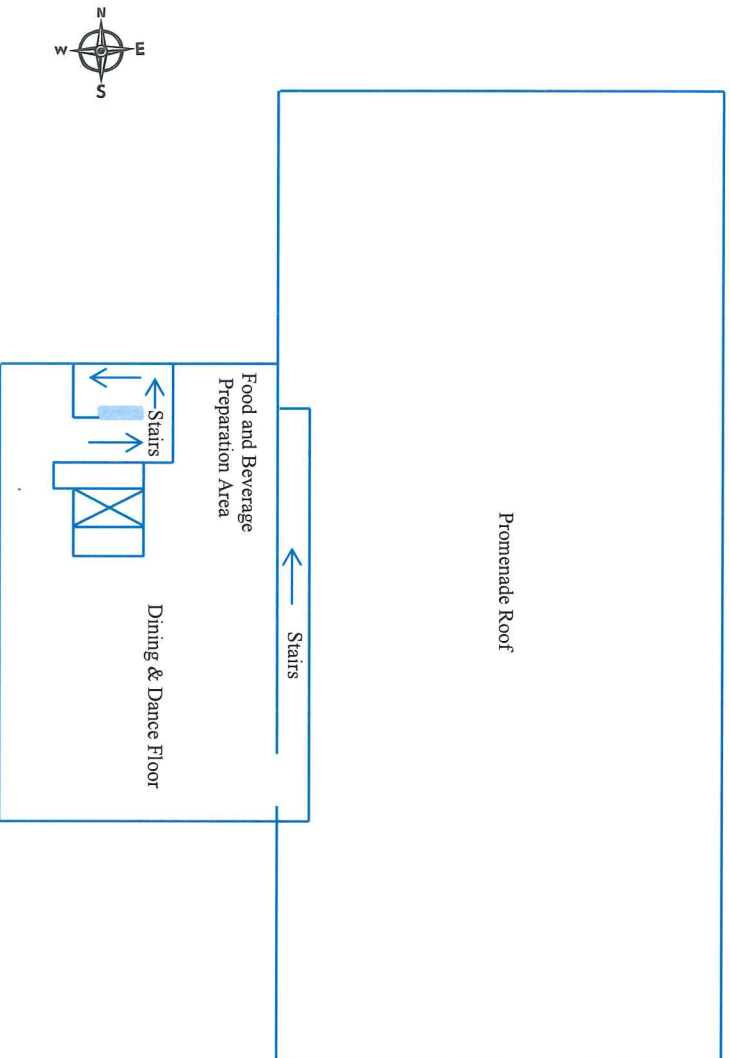




EXHIBIT D

COMO PARK LAKESIDE PAVILION  
FLOOR PLANS

Basement Level

