

It Was Langer Park vs. Fourth Street

Tales of Other Days

By Bob Dewel

A recent column discussed the peculiar location of Langer Park, virtually landlocked by private homes, but with three awkward entrances. A principal use is in winter for ice skating.

Because of that location, straddling one of Baraboo's very few potential through East-West streets, the day may come when serious consideration is given to making Fourth Street a through street, effectively destroying the area as a park. This was actually considered in 1955.

If one examines a map of the city, it appears that Baraboo has only one through East-West street, the familiar and badly rutted Eighth Street-Avenue. There are only two other possibilities to relieve the increasingly crowded Eighth Street corridor. One is Second Street-Avenue, with a significant jog at its crossing with Elizabeth Street.

The other is Fourth Street-Avenue, which would provide a totally straight corridor from Park Street on the West to Lincoln on the East, if it weren't for Langer Park. Baraboo's continued growth and traffic problems will someday invite consideration of redesigning the blockage areas of these streets to relieve growing congestion on Eighth.

The future of Langer Park was a significant matter for the city Council back in 1955. The question arose during consideration of the disposition of the decrepit and abandoned Second Ward School just two blocks away from Langer Park and no longer in use.

The question was whether to make the former school grounds into a neighborhood park, replacing Langer Park. Then Langer Park could be converted to extension of Fourth Street. This would connect its eastern portion to the rest of the street all the way to Park on the West. This would effectively destroy Langer as a park, being replaced by the Second ward school property. A few building lots for sale would help defray the cost of road construction.

Actually the park wasn't even called Langer Park then, but the city sub-committee considering the future of the two neighboring parks was headed by Attorney Harold Langer (not to be confused with his son John, later a local attorney also). When it assumed the name Langer Park is not known. At that time Harold was Secretary of the Board of Park Commissioners.

The entire matter was summarized in 1986 in a multi-page document prepared for the Parks and Recreation Committee by City Attorney Jim Bohl, and provided to me recently by Baraboo Parks and Recreation Director Mike Hardy. Recreation Supervisor Rick Luther also contributed to these articles. Briefly, the July 14, 1955 Langer Report recommended that "eventually Fourth Street must be opened" through the Fourth Street Park.

The loss of this neighborhood park would be covered by conversion of the Second Ward School block to a park and playground. By December of 1955, however, the City Council had



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rejected the proposal, apparently due to the appearance of a new proposal, namely that the Second Ward property be sold to the St. John's Lutheran Church for a school. Details are lacking, or too tedious for detailed reporting, but on January 26, 1956 the City Council, over the objection of the Park Commission, proceeded with negotiations by which the Church eventually purchased the land and old school for \$25,000.

Attorney Bohl's summation of the events surrounding these events consists of 12 typed pages, far more than this short article can outline. The results, for the purpose of our discussion of Langer Park, is that the Park escaped conversion to a through street, and a handsome new Lutheran parochial school soon replaced the old red brick Second Ward School.

Baraboo's growing cross-town traffic remains a future challenge, along with the need for a generous-sized playground for the east side of town. Find your way to Langer Park, sit under the three large white oak trees, and ponder what the future action should be.

