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SPECIAL REPORT: CONVENTION CENTER

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Can anything else hurt Lake Monona?

By Susan Lempert Smith
Special to the Journal

Bernard Saloy knows Lake Monona. He grew up on Rutledge Street and remembers, as a boy, finding treasure in the city dump that is now Lake Park.

He remembers the fence that kept the bottles and cans from floating out into the lake. And, during his 14-year career working for the city health and engineering departments, he recalls all the things that have been done to Monona in the interests of improving it.

"Things like the tons of sodium arsenite — now known to be concentrating, as well as pesticides — that were dumped into Monona to kill lake weeds."

Saloy also knows about Madison's worries about its lakes. He's spent time photographing the planes of ending dirt that floated

out from the newly constructed conveyor. And he remembers shivering as a boat during the winter of 1983 as he peered down into the lake to investigate the mayor's assertion that the conveyor was impairing circulation between Monona Bay and the main lake. (It was.)

So it's not surprising that Saloy checks a little when asked whether he thinks the proposed lake-edge convention center will harm the lake.

"Considering all the other things we've done to the lake, how could this harm it?" Saloy asked.

"I'd call it a little bit to be Warden Pond, but it's not."

During his retirement, Saloy has kept up his interest in civic affairs by serving as co-chairman of the Central and Union Avenues, civic group led by the Capital Community Citizens for projects that enhance or detract from the city's

beauty. And while Saloy doesn't think the convention center would harm Lake Monona, he does think it would do a lot for Madison.

It's a structure that would give the park back to the general public, Saloy said. "I have a sense now, when I drive by, that it's been given over to the waterfowl."

Saloy's historical view aside, Madison is a city where concern over a turtle held up the South Ball Lake project for a decade. And it's likely that a host of environmental questions will be raised during the convention center debate. Among them:

**Bernard Saloy
retired city employee, commenting
about proposed convention center**

The fish.
Unlike the nearby site proposed for the aquatic center, the site chosen for the new convention center has little exposure to a fish habitat. The new plan calls for filling one acre of the lake as opposed to four acres for the aquatic park.

Robert Haines, the state Department of Natural Resources water specialist who prepared a report on the aquatic center site, said that the convention center site consists of steeply sloping fill that offers little refuge for fish.

In contrast, he said, the aquatic center site factor to the east is

more gently sloping and serves as a spawning ground for panfish such as bluegill and bass.

The toxins.
The arsenic and copper compounds that Saloy and other would-be watchdogs have dumped on the site are not there. So are mercury, mercury compounds, PCBs, lead and cadmium from the days when Starbuckler Creek and the lake itself served as dumping yards for Madison industries.

A 1989 DNR survey of Lake Monona sediments found "heavy pollution" levels of copper, mercury and arsenic in the lake bottom. Another 1987 study found that the deeper sediments were more heavily contaminated but have, over the years, been covered by less polluted sediments.

There is concern that construction along the lakeshore will stir up these polluted sediments and broadcast them again through the lake.

But the DNR's Haines said that based on his study of the engineering methods proposed for the aquatic park, the potentially contaminated sediment is a major problem.

"I think that the state of the art is that most of it can be contained during construction," he said.

Runoff.
A host of environmental issues will be whether adding more concrete to the lakeshore will increase runoff into the lake. Environmentalists worry that bringing more cars and parking lots closer to the lake shore, and parking them in the two new parking garages, will increase the amount of oil and other pollutants that will be washed into the lake.

Additionally, paving the garage of Lake Park, which can filter rainwater and runoff before it seeps into lake, may also increase the amount of pollution.

Hotel would be boon to center

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son, according to the Greater Madison Convention and Visitors Bureau.

When indirect spending is figured in — money spent by business and industry, money spent by workers coming from the convention center — the economic impact is even greater. The estimated total economic impact is \$64 million, Laveland and Horwath said.

Parrell said his 200-room Holiday Inn and trade center is estimated to be the market potential for a Downtown convention center. According to the firm's study, the Downtown center would host several events each year to Hammons, including 23 national conventions, six local corporate events and four smaller trade shows.

Laveland and Horwath concluded that to respond to these County Exposition Center on John Nolen Drive would draw away two events annually because of parking and lodging elsewhere if a large convention fills Downtown. "Everybody wins," he said.

The Holiday Inn-Madison West, which opened this spring and is owned by national developer J.D. Hammons, has boosted business at

other hotels at least twice, Parrell said. On these occasions, the Holiday Inn could not accommodate all the people attending events in the trade center.

"Making the trade center have been extremely successful," Parrell said. He did not give details, but a sales manager said April that events were booked into the year 2008.

The number of convention centers nationwide grew 27 percent from 1980 to 1988, resulting in a 48 percent increase in space, according to industry data.

Improved marketing and a dedication of public funding are essential to a successful convention center, Laveland and Horwath said. The latter involves setting up a room tax to pay for a meeting, while larger groups are termed conventions. Great

declines and lower conventions are termed meetings and trade shows. Laveland and Horwath contend that Madison can compete in the convention market with such cities as Las Vegas, Little Rock, Ark., Springfield, Ill., Lexington, Ky., and Green Bay, Wis.

To meet the projections for Madison, Madison must undertake an especially aggressive dedication of funds on the part of local government and business, the consulting firm said.

At the time, the proposal was to build the center on the shore of Lake Monona just east of the current proposed site, which is at the foot of Martin Luther King Jr. St.

So far, there has been no public disclosure of a plan to build a hotel to serve the proposed convention center. City officials have expressed hope that the convention center would induce a private developer to build a hotel after the center begins operating.

James Curley, a private developer who is expanding these County Exposition Center on John Nolen Drive would draw away two events annually because of parking and lodging elsewhere if a large convention fills Downtown. "Everybody wins," he said.

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Convention lingo explained

When does a meeting become a convention? And what's the difference between a convention and a trade show? The convention business has a long history of its own. Sometimes words are used interchangeably, but they're not. Other times, blurring a distinction is to be avoided.

There really is no difference between a meeting and a convention, said Bill Gertz, president of Greater Madison Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"When we've got 60 people in the room, it's more likely to call it a meeting," Gertz said. "And yet, it really is."

Generally, a gathering of less than 100 people is called a meeting, while larger groups are termed conventions. Great

with a shuttle service until a new hotel is built, he said.

Based on his observations across the United States, Gertz said there must be at least one large hotel nearby. "If you're not so richly attached — for a convention center to be successful — you need a hotel," he said.

In Cleveland, for example, there is a hotel across the street from the convention center, and there is no convention center there.

Gertz said it is an unrealistic to expect a convention center to be successful in a downtown area, a major expansion of the downtown convention center has led to the construction of three major hotels only a short distance away, he said.

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Darlington battles flooding

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efforts and the damage on video tapes that Anderson hopes to show federal and state officials.

Each business had its own tragedy.

Federal Emergency Management Agency officials, in the state to assess flood damage to downtown, agreed to extend their trip to investigate the Darlington damage.

Anderson expected them early this week.

The Coast to Coast Store had just two new wooden floors, an old sub-floored store, Anderson said. Now, it is ruined.

Nearby, Jan's Fashion store is fare any better.

"It was a beautiful dress shop. It was really classy," Anderson said. But the new carpeting had to be ripped out, and dresses were piled up on top of wooden racks.

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