



For Immediate Release

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**Upon Closing of Sale, City of Monona Officially Takes Ownership
of San Damiano Property on the Shores of Lake Monona**

MONONA, WI – JUNE 1 – In the culmination of a deal that has been nearly a year in the making, the City of Monona today closed on the purchase of the property most commonly known as the San Damiano Friary at 4123 Monona Dr. An official ribbon cutting or celebratory event is being planned for later this month.

The City negotiated to buy San Damiano from the St. Norbert Abbey of De Pere for \$8.6 million, well below market value, with a commitment from Dane County to contribute \$2 million towards the purchase price. Additional funds to bring down the overall cost to taxpayers are being sought through a variety of other avenues including grants and private fundraising.

“There has been an incredible cooperative effort in our community to purchase, protect and preserve what is an unequalled asset on the shores of Lake Monona,” says Monona Mayor Mary O’Connor. “While today warrants a celebration, we also want to take a cue from the property itself to pause, take a deep breath and listen: it is of utmost importance that the process of transforming San Damiano into an asset for Monona and the surrounding region be deliberate, thoughtful and intentional, as well as sustainable in every sense of the word.”

Established in July 2020, the Friends of San Damiano is a 501(c)3 non-profit working alongside the City to advance the use of San Damiano as a place for public recreation, reflection and programming. “We’re your friends and neighbors, working on a volunteer basis to support fundraising and volunteer efforts related to the purchase and transformation of the San Damiano property,” said Friends of San Damiano board president Andrew Kitslaar. “We’re excited to assist with more community outreach and public engagement now that the City officially owns the property.”

The history, location and characteristics of San Damiano almost defy description. The nearly 10-acre property includes more than 1,000 feet of Lake Monona shoreline and is currently about 70% wooded. It's a mini arboretum teeming with a variety of trees, plants and wildlife. San Damiano was originally the site of encampments created by Indigenous peoples of the region, including ancestors of the Ho-Chunk Nation.

According to O'Connor, the City is currently working toward the creation of a steering committee that will include key City representatives and relevant partners, as well as some at-large community members, to help guide what comes next for San Damiano – which likely must start with a comprehensive master planning process. “While there is lots to be done in terms of planning for the future of San Damiano, we believe there can be a balance between short-term use and enjoyment as we shape a generational vision for that future,” says O'Connor.

In the immediate days and weeks, the City of Monona Parks & Recreation Department will lead efforts to conduct initial clean-up of the property including tree trimming, brush clearing and securing the house that sits on the property. Once that happens, the addition of some simple benches and picnic tables will allow residents and visitors to explore the majestic property, many for the first time.

On the afternoon of June 19, Friends of San Damiano will host a community volunteer event to continue with clean-up efforts. Visitors who want to roll up their sleeves will be asked to sign up for slots and to bring supplies such as gloves and wheelbarrows. Those who would prefer not to commit to a task can bring a blanket or a picnic or simply come take a walk. More information will be coming soon on the Friends of San Damiano website and social media channels.

The purchase of the San Damiano property was unanimously approved by the Monona City Council at a meeting on September 8, 2020. More recently, the Council approved a memorandum of understanding that defines the relationship between the City and Friends group.

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For more information, please visit:

City of Monona: www.mymonona.com/SanDamiano

Friends of San Damiano: www.sandamianomonona.org