

## HISTORY - MADISON PARK

**GEOLOGY:** At the time of the lowering of the level by 9' of Lake Washington with the opening of the ship canal in 1917, some filling was done along the newly created shoreline. The major shoreland change must have been that the shallower water made feasible a bathing beach. Test borings taken offshore in 1971 revealed a significant layer of charred wood about 10' deep - possible relationship to a forest burn identified at Seward Park as occurring in 1490's. Park Engineer I. S. Rodley recalls that test borings taken for the adjacent Park Shore Apartments revealed coal near the surface. Lake Washington and the uplands are the result of reshaping by the Vashon Ice Sheet 14,500 years ago, reshaping of earlier glacial deposition and tilting of strata with overlying Vashon till, then resultant wash of glacial meltoff.

**HISTORY:** The pioneer settler who established his 320-acre estate on these shores was John J. McGilvra (1827-1903), a New Yorker who studied law, practiced in Chicago in association with A. Lincoln who later, as President, appointed McGilvra as U. S. Attorney for Washington Territory. He prosecuted Seattle's claim under the Townsite Law. He invested heavily in real estate, the development of this acreage being the most prominent. Judge J. J. and Elizabeth M. McGilvra built their home here in the 1880's, cutting one of the first roads from town "through the wilderness" to Lake Washington. Since it was wilderness (even though it had been logged), the Judge's road went in a straight line from town to his estate, so it did not "conform" to the much later platting of streets and avenues that were laid out on a north-south, east-west grid. All the realtors who had property so far from town had the common problem of getting prospective buyers out to the real estate and to induce them to live so far from town. Lakeshore picnic sites had become possible and popular with the glorified stage coaches rattling over the long, rutted roads. Then came a new "toy": the electric trolley car and cable car. As soon as the fears of electrocution had abated, the realtors knew they had a sales trick: build cable or trolley cars out to their subdivisions with a park at the end of the line offering inducements ranging from picnics, boating and swimming to gambling, vaudeville and zoos. But the Judge added a new scheme to his development because he limited construction to cottages and required an annual tithe for the use of the property: it was described in the Seattle Star as "perhaps the only feudal estate in the U.S." Nevertheless, hundreds did build cottages and it was not until the 1920's that the McGilvra Estate relinquished its hold and the lots sold.

However, to do this, Judge McGilvra and associates built a cable car line along the road that was named in honor of the 4th President, James Madison, and he set aside 21 acres for a park on the waterfront. The Judge named his homesite "Laurelshade" and the park was simply "Madison Park" although the first city directory listing (1890) was: "Madison Street Pavilion, Geo K. Beede propr." until 1907 when Wm. Steffen took it over for a few years. It was also listed as "Madison Park Theatre" from 1901-1905 when the theatre group seems to have gone downtown. In 1910 the community and cable car operator (Seattle Electric Co.) fell into a dispute over rebuilding the realtors' flimsily built line and the maintenance on the park was discontinued as a non-essential transit expense. Soon after, the pavilion was destroyed by fire.

McGilvra's 21-acre park was bisected by Madison Street for the "Seattle Baseball Grounds (aka "Madison Street Ball Park"), on the north side of Madison Street near Lake Washington" was so listed in directories from 1892-1900. An old photo shows a wooden grandstand alongside Madison Street cable car line. The park was the home of the first NW professional champs.

Evidently the beach area had been a favorite picnic/camp ground for the pioneer families, for the Judge built wooden platforms on which they could pitch a tent and stay all summer - if they brought enough supplies in a wagon. "Tent City" it was called and was just south of what is now Blaine Street. The system of bicycle paths developed in 1898 by George Cotterill included the park in its 25-mile system.

Since the water along the beach was 9' deeper before the 1917 ship canal opening, McGilvra developed the waterfront with a boathouse, piers, promenade and twin bandstands offshore with shoreline seating for a "thousand" persons who could enjoy beer to the tunes of

Wagner's Band or full-blown operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan staged on a barge, with the villain chucked overboard for the delight of the audience. Cruises around Lake Washington were available on steamers of the famed "Mosquito Fleet" (which also operated on Puget Sound. The Seattle Golf and Country Clubhouse was developed in the (Laurelhurst) area and the directories from 1901 to 1907 directed its patrons to go "by boat from Madison Park" to Webster Point, for bridges and roads were few and in poor condition - so why not enjoy a ride on one of the "new-fangled" cable cars and a motor launch on Lake Washington?

Then came plans for the great Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Expo, first planned for 1907 but postponed to 1909. The boulevard system (designed by the famed Olmsted Bros. in 1903) was developed in the area of the Expo site (the University Grounds) and old photos indicate that Madison Park was given new features of amusement rides plus a new name: "White City Park", which was added to the directories of 1910-11-12, and then vanished as did the amusement rides. However, a Japanese (summer) Teahouse was purchased from the A-Y-P Expo by Emma Watts and placed in Madison Park. A miniature train ride was installed at the park and was so popular with parents that there was no room for children. Greenhouses were a feature here and were still present in 1920 when the Department took them over, after the expiration of a lease, and moved the "exotic plantings" to Volunteer Park.

Under the listing "Places of Amusement" from 1890-1905 was "Madison Park House, Mrs. Elizabeth Shrier propr., east end of Madison St."

A 1915 letter from the NW Automobile Assn transmits a check in payment to the Dept for oiling the race track at Madison Park account of auto races. As real estate promotions, the cable car-trolley-park plan was highly successful in every case. The "Mosquito Fleet" steamers promoted the development of settlements across Lake Washington, one of which was Kirkland, but the development of the ferry boat made the lake steamer obsolete except for excursions/cruises. The ferry was designed to carry automobiles as well as foot passengers. So Madison Park, at the terminal of the cable car line and road from downtown Seattle, was a natural site for ferry service to Kirkland in 1908 - also an attractive feature for the AYP Expo: the first boat was the steam-propelled Lincoln, built at Houghton. The ferries spared the motorists considerable time and grief of the long drive around the lake on poor roads: the demand for more adequate and more frequent service led to the proposal for a pontoon bridge from Madison Park to Evergreen Point in 1926. Property owners on both sides of the lake protested the "unsightly obstruction across a far-famed scenic feature." But the auto owners increased and the ferries could no longer meet service demands and costs to a floating bridge was built in 1940 but from Mercer Island to Day Street, and by 1943 the Madison Park-Kirkland ferry was abandoned.

Meanwhile, back to the cable car . . . The Madison St. Line was one of the more successful cable routes, for on a summer Sunday cars ran every two minutes - "everyone in Seattle went to Madison Park!" In the winter, removable glass panels were installed to protect the gripman and the rear sections of the cars were permanently enclosed, so passenger service was year-round. But during slack passenger times, freight cars were pulled and an extravagant use of advertising on the cars helped the line survive the financial panic of 1893. In 1899 the cable company was consolidated with The Seattle Electric Co. In 1902 there was an attempt to transfer the park to the Department (just before McGilvra's death) but the Department was just then planning for the first major Comprehensive Design for the system, resulting in the hiring of the famed Olmsted Bros. The Olmsted Plan for Parkways bypassed Madison Park, possibly because the "Park-like" features were minimal, especially with the presence of the ferry-cable car facility. The 1910 dispute resulted in converting the cable line east from 14th to a trolley car line, the west end cable line functioning until 1943. By then the gasoline and trolley bus era had replaced the cable and trolley car era.

The lowering of the lake level created a new demand for a swimming beach, so in 1919 the Seattle Electric Co. built a bathhouse and improved the beach area: the boat docks, etc., had been left quite unusable by the 9' lowering of the lake level! Due to the indebtedness of the S.E.Co. plus the burden of maintenance for a non-essential park

operation, Madison Park was transferred to the Park Department in 1922. (By 1911 the Madison Park acreage had shrunk to 15 acres and after the development of streets, i.e., 43rd, was down to four acres at the time of acquisition; the strip of beach south from the ferry dock). Seattle Transit retained an option on the block west, between Blaine, Howe and 42nd, until 1961; however, the Federal Works Progress Adm. (WPA) replaced clay tennis courts there in 1936. The WPA also remodelled the bathhouse and built the beach steps.

Play equipment and picnic stoves had been removed from the park upon the regrading of the waterfront to provide a bathing beach after the lowering of the lake. After a time the Improvement Club began to request the replacement of these facilities but others in the neighborhood protested the plan of converting the park into a playground for there was not space enough for both. The PTA entered the argument but proposed the acquisition of a new site for the playground. There was a proposal in 1932 to vacate that portion of 43rd lying between the beach and the tennis court area, but this met opposition, too. However, the street was barricaded during hours that the bathing beach was open. In 1939 there was a petition to rezone the shorelands north of Madison to commercial purposes and the community and commercial clubs entered a protest - "the most hotly contested zoning fight City Hall has witnessed in months" (PI) - resulting in a request to the State Land Commissioner to withhold these shorelands from public sale and to make them available, under a 1937 State Law, to municipalities for park purposes. The Park Board concurred in this action, wanting the shorelands for future development rather than for immediate improvements. However, the 1939 deed from the state stipulated reversion of property to the state if park or playground development was not commenced within one year. Then a long struggle began to clear the waterfront of houseboats and the land of encroaching neighbors plus reports of the State Inspector that no work had been done and lawsuits contesting the legality of the transfer of property to the city. The city alleged that some of the encroachments and houseboats were attempts to defeat development by the Park Department. The Department was able to prove that clearing, grubbing and filling done were necessary before any other work could be done; further, that the "time limit clause" in the deed was "without warrant of law". Then debates began regarding proposed improvements; the Board directed that a new bathing beach would require a bathhouse, etc., etc. and therefore was not recommended, nor was a playground (1943). The State reaffirmed the 1939 grant in 1945, again opposed by "undercover commercial interests". Now the Department planned a small children's play area with a bulkhead and fence along the shore. This time Scout Troop 15 plus some fathers came with picks, shovels and rakes to do preliminary clearing; two names for this portion suggested were "McGilvra" and "Gallagher: - no action taken by Park Board. The contractor building the bulkhead found this waterfront had been filled with paving blocks from Madison Street, bricks and stumps, all covered with fill dirt.

A portion of the "North Shorelands" deeded by the State became landlocked by the development of Edgewater Park Apartments. And most of it was under water. A fireplace and small dock were built by residents and the Park Board found it necessary to request a Revocable Permit.

The abandonment of the Madison-Kirkland ferry service in 1943 prompted the Park Board and Mayor of Kirkland to join in a request to the King County Commissioners to transfer title to each ferry terminal site to the adjacent cities for park purposes. This was done in 1950 and the Board proceeded with the removal of the old dock and piling and the construction of a small boat dock/fishing pier, restoring, in a way, the small "landing" of Judge McGilvra. But the turntable and other facilities for the cable car were replaced with vehicle parking. A boat launching ramp was proposed but marine engineers advised against it.

The limited development of the play area on the shoreland north of Madison Park beach did not fulfill the need for recreation facilities (playground and indoor) of the Madison Park community; neither had the expansion of the bathhouse. Efforts of the community to acquire a playground through a LID in 1932 had been blocked by a court decision. So the



City Planning Commission was requested to make a study in 1950. Their recommendations were the enlargement of the playground at the McGilvra School and/or sharing in the construction of a gym and auditorium at the school and the acquisition of a 5-acre tract for playground purposes. But during the depression and World War II periods, only limited funds were available, so the 1948 Park Bond was needed for improvements with little available for new acquisitions or construction, so a restudy was requested of the Planning Commission in 1952 for a better use of existing areas in the community. The need for acquisition was underscored, especially in consideration of the city-wide use made of Madison Park beach. They also recommended closure of 43rd and re-development of the area with the beach and park. Also proposed was the acquisition of the triangle along the south side of Madison Street, Howe, 43rd and private property. Further, that the "north" shorelands be developed as a beach area for community children and families. The Park Board proceeded with the plan to vacate 43rd between Blaine and Howe but the BPW opposed; it was not until 1961 that the vacation was approved, but by then neighborhood development made closure of the street infeasible. At this same time, Seattle Transit released their jurisdiction of the park area west of 43rd in exchange for city property adjacent to their expanding terminals. With the concurrence of the community, play apparatus was installed in the north shorelands area, with lawn space available for children's games, protected from the lake by the still-present fence (1963).

In 1960 the Pioneer Association proposed the gift of their Hall to the city for use as a community center and museum (it is located just south of the beach and was built in 1910, the site donated by Judge McGilvra - part of "tent city" - and built with a bequest of \$20,000 by Sarah Denny, daughter of A.A. Denny, pioneer. The hall is unchanged since 1910 and was entered into the National Register of Historic Places in 1971.) Objections for the transfer came from "pioneers" and in part from the Department re repairs and maintenance resulting from public use.

Upon a community petition in 1965, the one block segment of 43rd became one-way traffic and angle parking designed to (partly) relieve the critical need for parking. And more beach area was made available with the removal of shrub areas.

McGilvra Street is named for the pioneer Judge J. J. McGilvra whose homesite was on this beach.

Madison Street is named for the 4th President of the U.S., James Madison, term 1809-1817.

Howe Street is named for James B. Howe, pioneer member of the Seattle Bar Association.

Blaine Street is named for E. F. Blaine, lawyer associated with Judge McGilvra, honored as "Father of Seattle Park System."

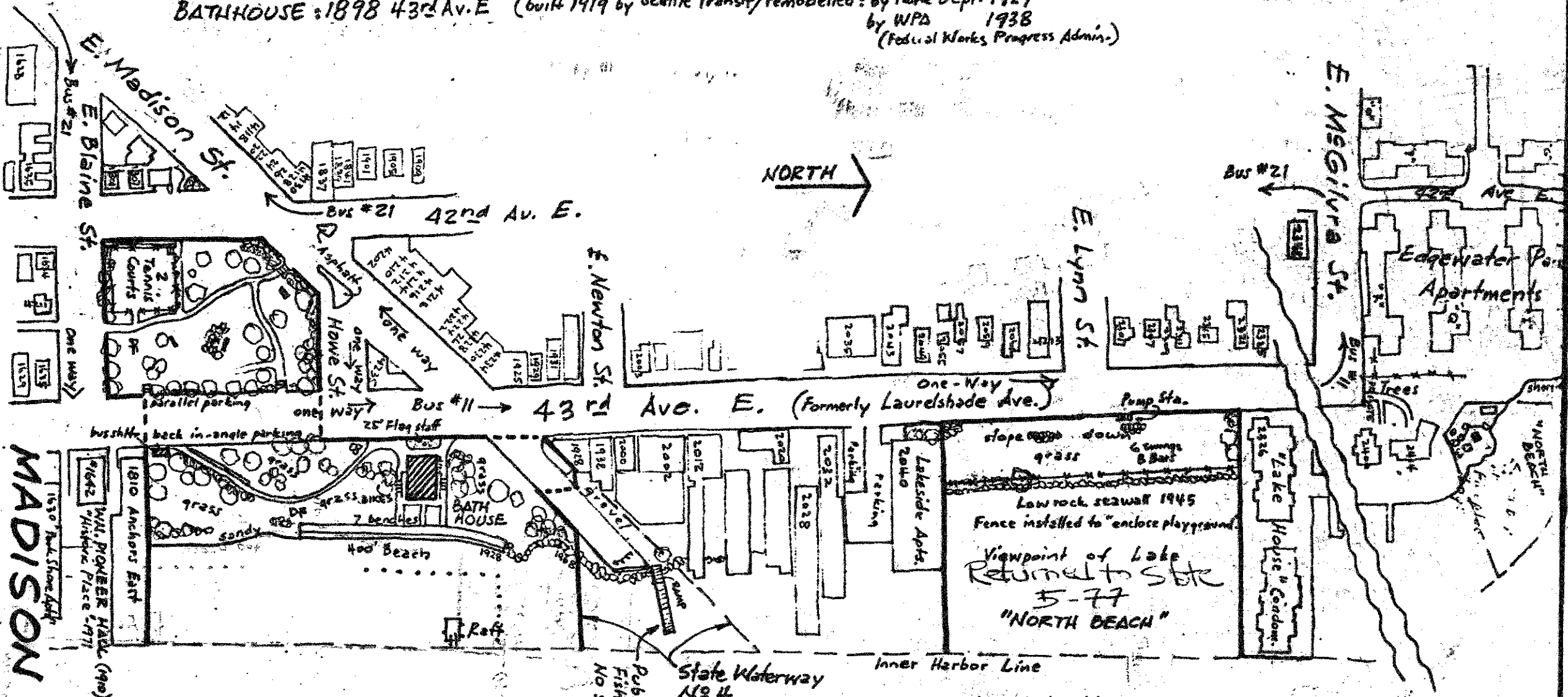
9/74

Don Sherwood

12.5 Acres (Incl. 7.5 shore lands)  
(INCL. "NORTH BEACH")

Transf. 1922 (from Transit)

BATHHOUSE: 1898 43rd Av. E (built 1919 by Seattle Transit/remodelled: by Park Dept. 1929  
by WPA 1938  
(Federal Works Progress Admin.)



MADISON PARK

111976  
435

Madison Park

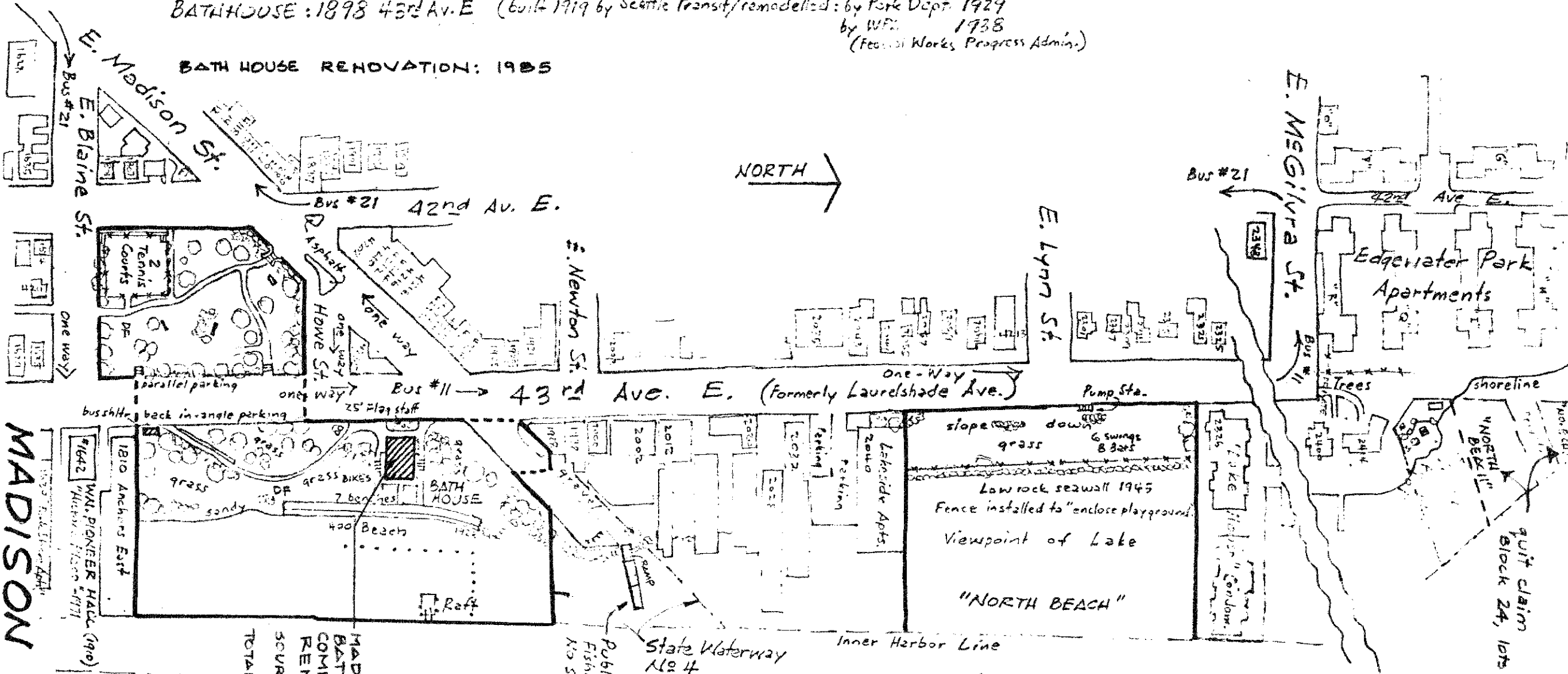
13.6 Acres (Incl. 7.5 shorelands)

(Incl. "NORTH BEACH")

Transf. 1932 (from Transit)

BATHHOUSE: 1898 43rd Av. E (built 1919 by Seattle Transit/remodeled: by Park Dept. 1929 by WPA 1938 (Federal Works Progress Admin.))

BATH HOUSE RENOVATION: 1985



MADISON PARK

111976

435

SOURCE OF FUNDS:  
UPAIR  
TOTAL COST: \$5,044.41

MADISON PARK  
BATHHOUSE  
COMMUNITY CENTE  
REMODEL.

Public dock and  
Fishing pier (1930's)  
No Swimming

State Waterway No 4

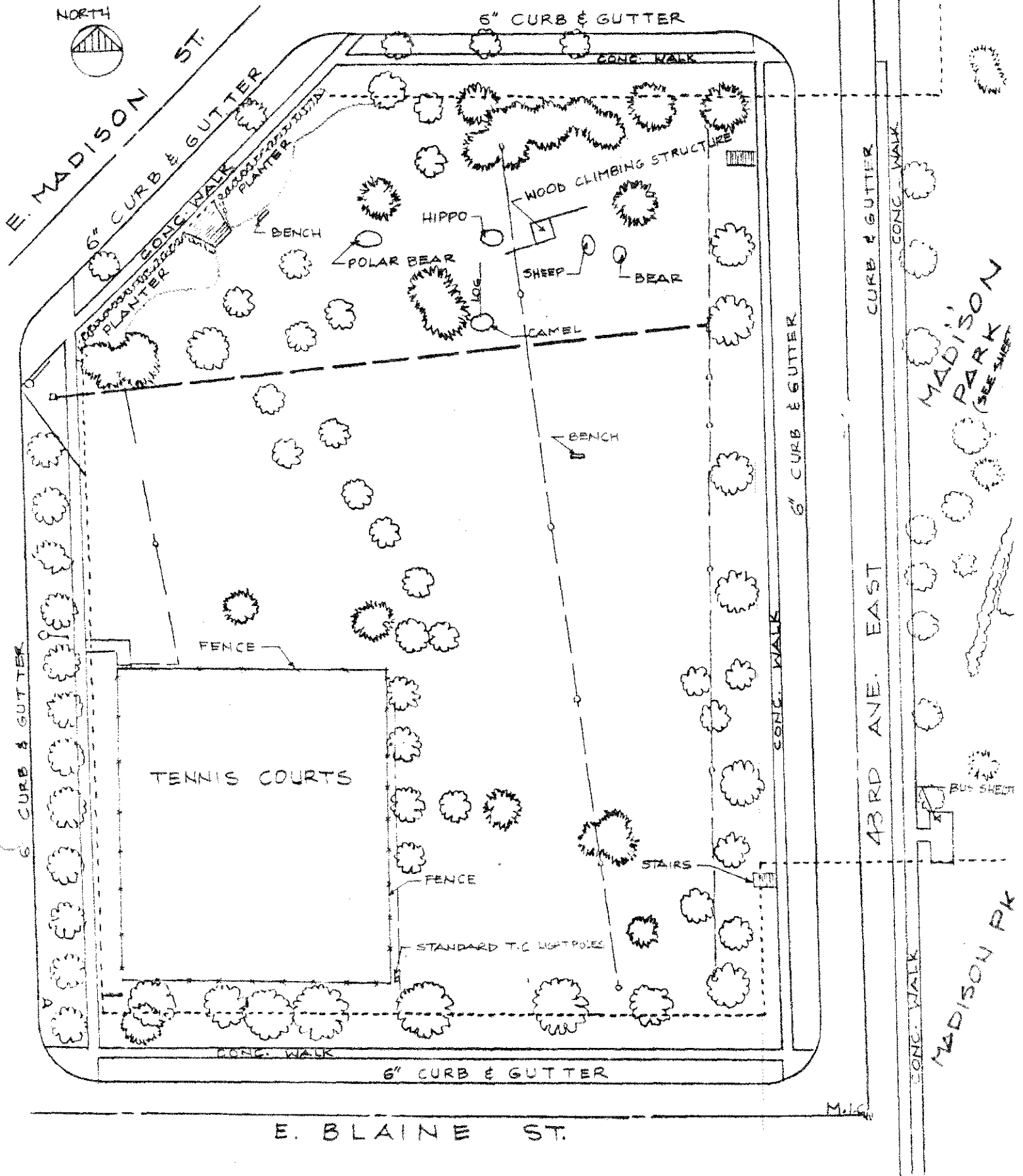
Inner Harbor Line

Outer Harbor Line

Lake Washington

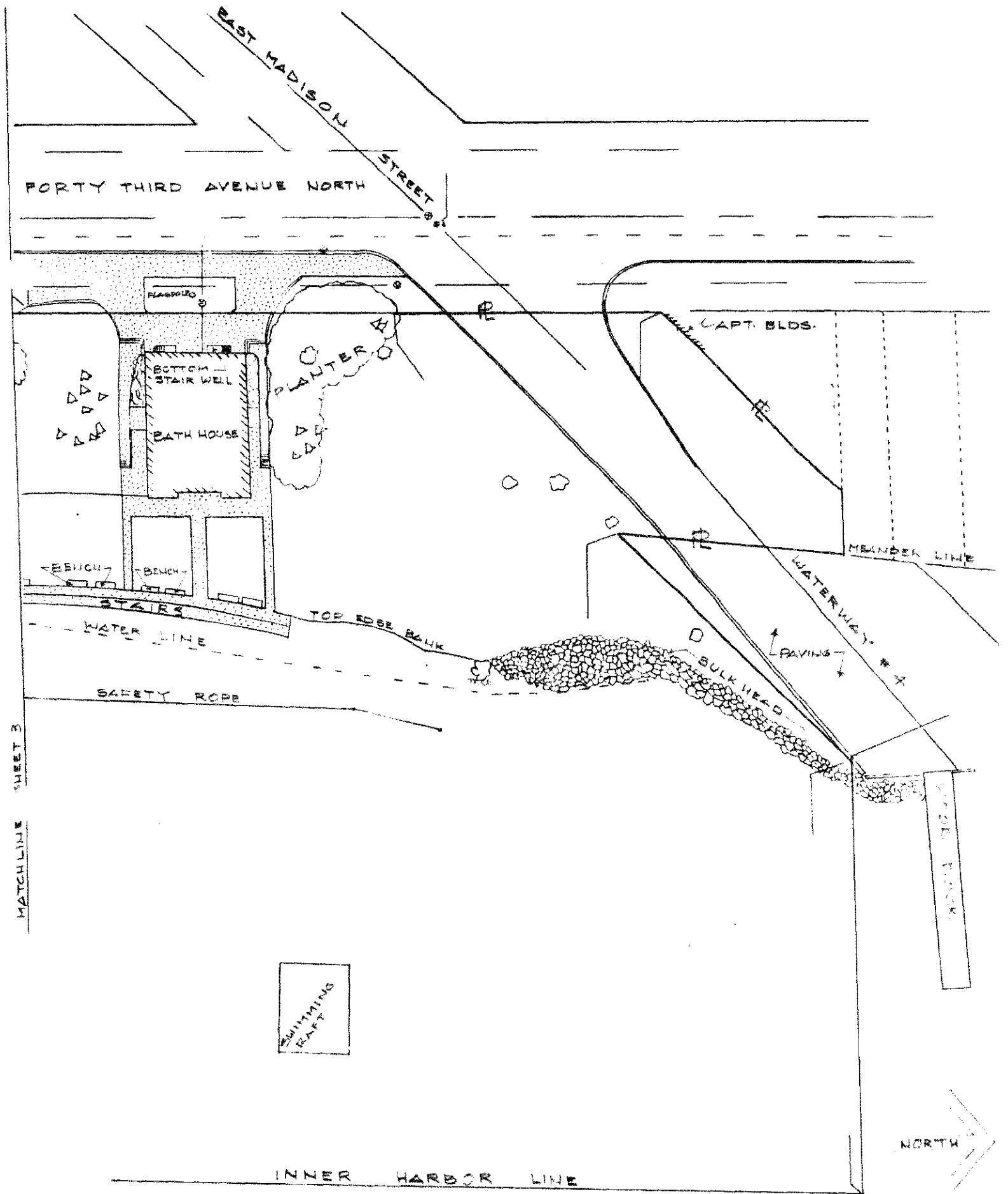
SHEET 1 OF 4

E. HOWE ST.



E. BLAINE ST.

ART PROJECT - 'MCGILVRA'S FARM'  
 ARTIST: RICHARD BEYER  
 YEAR COMPLETED - 1988  
 SIZE OF PROPERTY: 2.1 ACRES  
 ADDRESS: 1906 43RD AVE. EAST



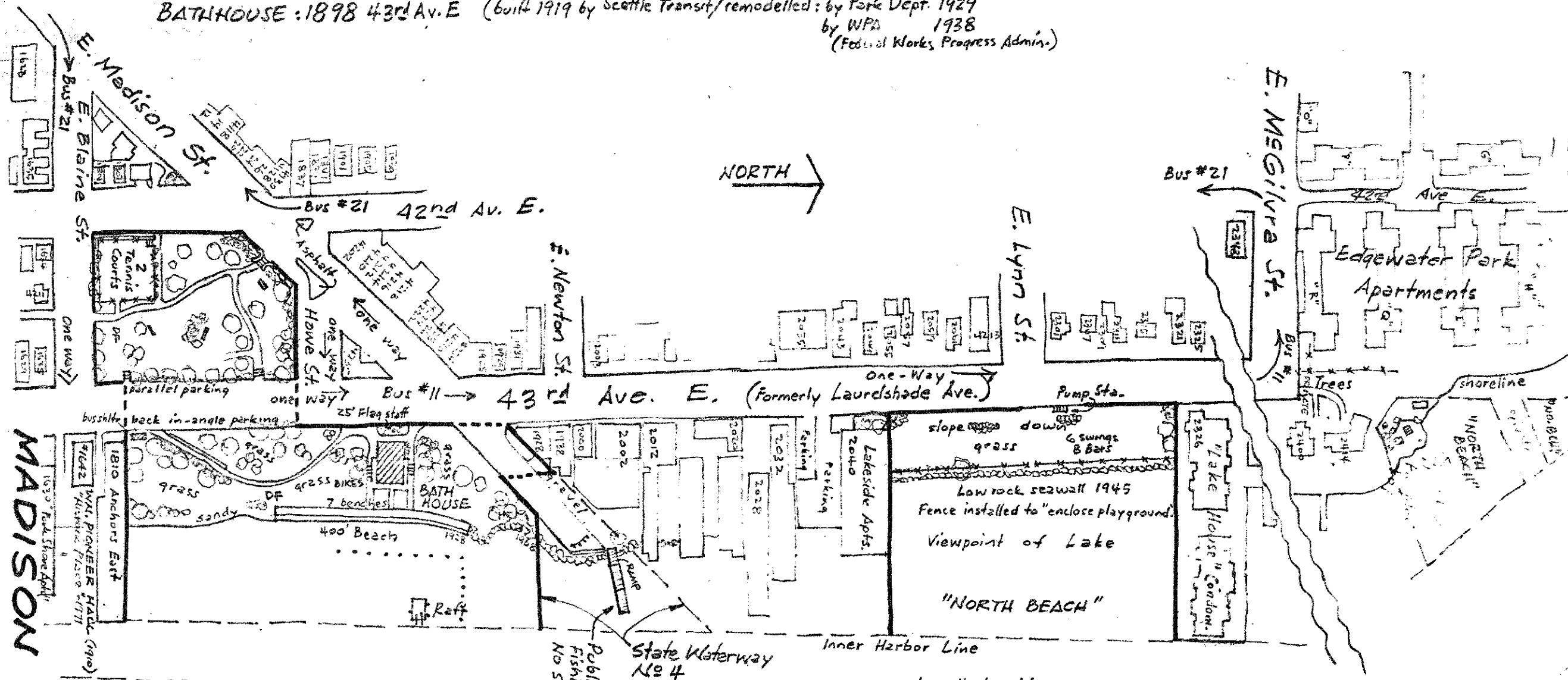
MATCHLINE SHEET 3



12.1 Acres (Incl. 7.2 shorelands)  
(INCL. "NORTH BEACH")

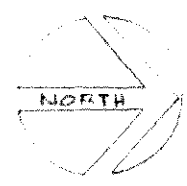
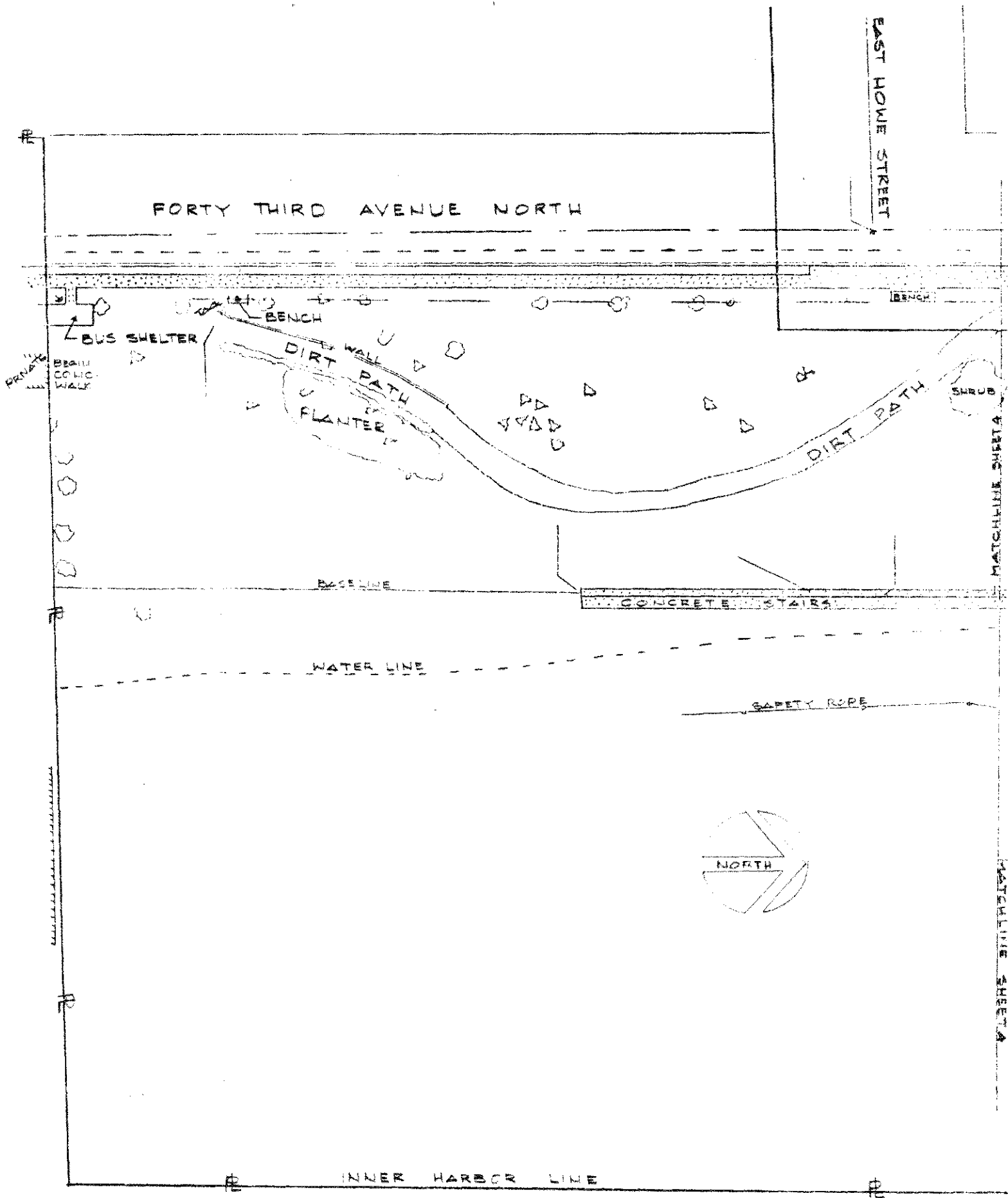
Transf. 1922 (from Transit)

BATHHOUSE: 1898 43rd Av. E (built 1919 by Seattle Transit/remodelled: by Park Dept. 1929  
by WPA 1938  
(Federal Works Progress Admin.))



MADISON PARK  
110376  
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435

Lake Washington



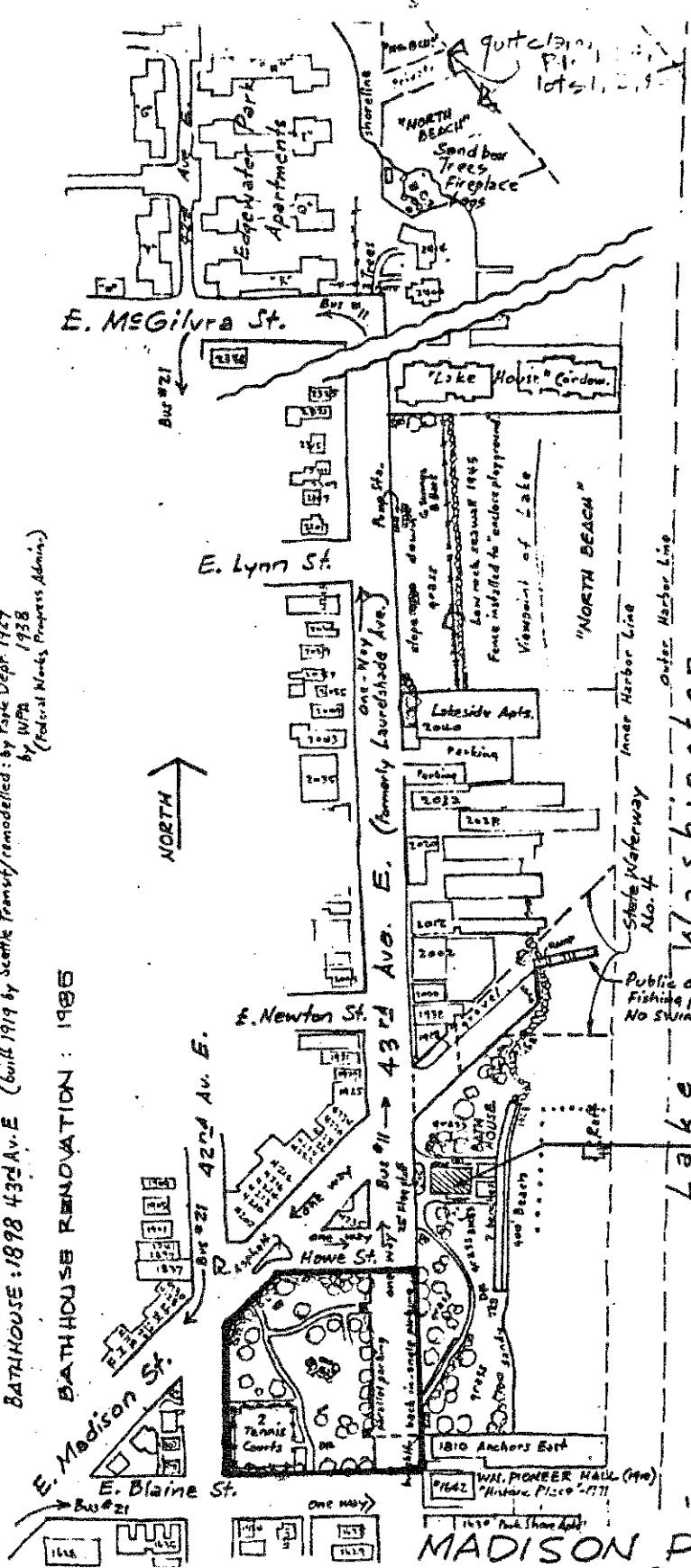
435  
 05 06 86  
 MADISON PARK  
 SHEET 3 OF 4

12.1 Acres (incl. 7.5 shorelands)  
(incl. "NORTH BEACH")

Transf. 1922 (from Transit)

BATHHOUSE: 1898 43rd Ave. E. (built 1919 by Seattle Transit/remodelled: by Park Dept. 1929 by WPA 1938 (Federal Works Progress Admin.))

BATHHOUSE RENOVATION: 1985

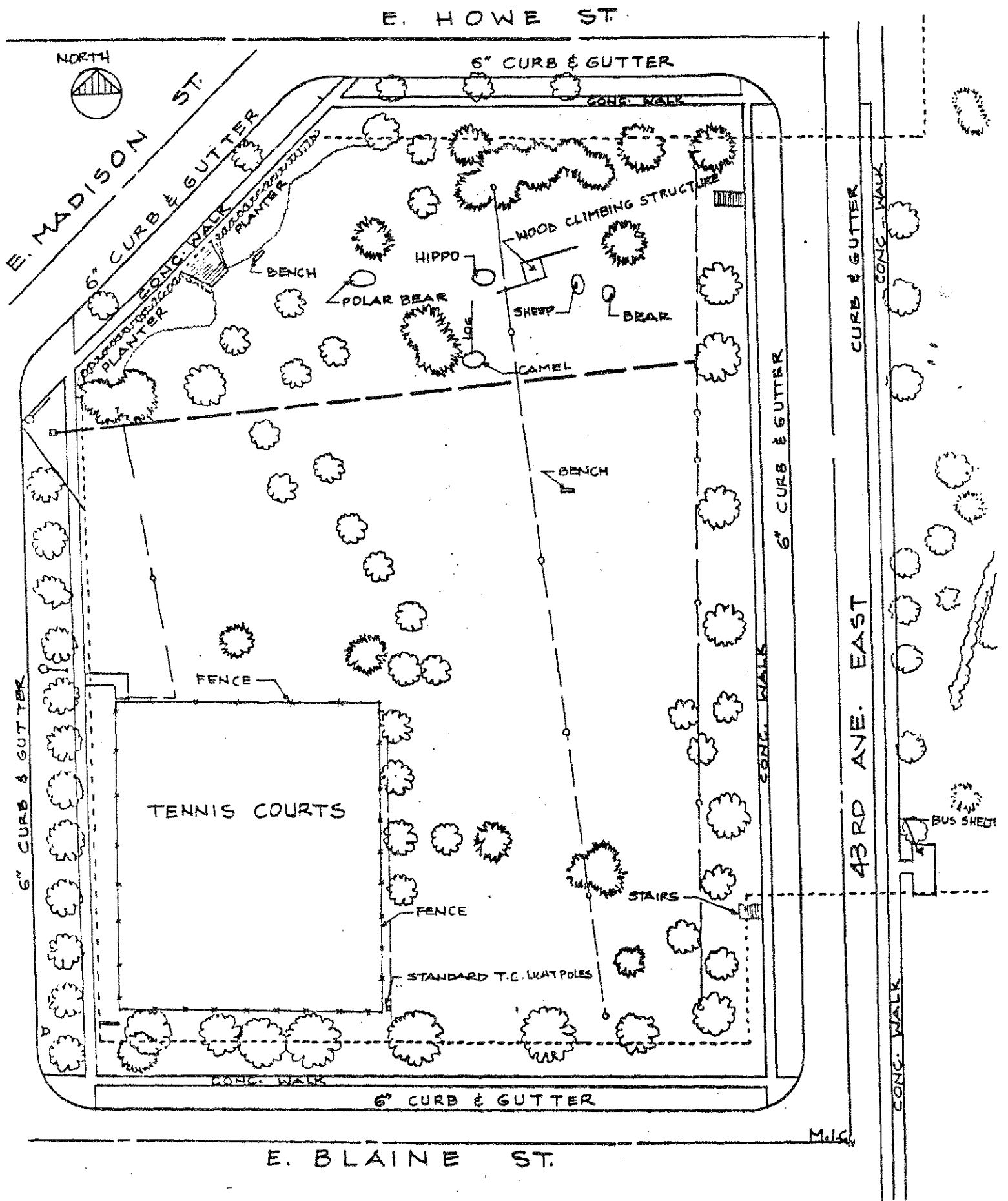


MADISON PARK BATHHOUSE  
COMMUNITY CENTER  
REMODEL.  
SOURCE OF FUNDS: UPART  
TOTAL COST: \$189,014.91

435

110376

MADISON PARK



ART PROJECT - "MCGILVRA'S PARK"  
 ARTIST: RICHARD BEYER  
 YEAR COMPLETED: 1983  
 SIZE OF PROPERTY: 12.1 ACRES  
 ADDRESS: 1906 43RD AVE. EAST