

SUPERINTENDENT'S NOVEMBER 2024 REPORT

COMMUNICATIONS TO BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

Park Superintendent's Monthly Report Summary

Fall has definitely arrived and leaves have changed, and now falling. The team is finishing up the closure of restrooms and seasonal facilities, as well as final mowing routes for the system. Fall tree planting is underway as well. The Olin Park planting work around the building is doing well after an early Fall install. It is truly a collaborative effort of many sections of our amazing Parks team. Another area of focus for the team has been to evaluate and monitor leaf accumulation in our parking lots. Our partners in City Engineering led a really innovative [Leaf Collection Study](#) over the past few years that tells us that getting leaves off the paved surfaces before it rains can create an 80% reduction in phosphorous headed directly to our lakes. Our team is taking that research and looking for opportunities to implement operational solutions to help ensure we do all we can for our lakes and water quality.

Olbrich hosted Glean for the 9th time this Fall and it was very well attended and appreciated. This innovative event that brings a whole new experience to the Gardens is a key fundraiser for the Gardens and attracts visitors who may not otherwise visit. We are supremely fortunate to have a partner like Olbrich Botanical Society to make this possible. It would not work without their nimbleness and funding to make such a fun thing happen. It was also a great opportunity to see the Royal Thai Pavilion lit up after the work on it when I visited. Truly an amazing cultural treasure.

The golf season is winding down, with both Monona and The Glen closed for the season in October. The timing of these closures is tied to weather, demand for play, and our staffing model. This year was particularly challenging on the staffing front due to vacancies and the exceptionally early start. Yahara and Odana remain open with Fall rates taking effect in November. We are pricing golf in November very competitively as a thank you to our loyal customers. We are approaching 160K rounds and \$5.5M in revenue for the year, both records, and we want to share the good results with our customers by giving them opportunities to get out and play for a great price to close out the year. We have also been doing significant work at Yahara with work on the future back 9 of the 18 hole course nearing completion. I strongly recommend people take a walk out there to see the beautiful old oaks on the property, particularly the 300ish year old oak along hole #18.

There have been a lot of campaign related visits to Madison this Fall, but there has been limited impact to Parks in this cycle. We have worked with Alliant to close a portion of Quann for the excess parking for the Alliant Energy Center (they have rights to do this), and to ensure that this is communicated as quickly and clearly as possible. Though we never like to see the partial closure, hosting events at Alliant has had benefits to the City as a whole, including Parks. It is also notable that due to the prior work to establish an area of Quann Dog Park that is "always open," we have been able to manage these tight timelines much better than we would have before that work was completed. And though we didn't use some of the administrative approval tools that the Commission has empowered staff with, they were very nice to have available in providing overall assistance to campaigns looking to do things in the Madison area.

Future Commission Items

- Budget – The Finance Committee has reviewed and amended the Executive Budget(s) for 2025. Parks had one amendment at Finance Committee (see bullet point below). The next step in the process is the November full Common Council hearings and adoption of the budget. The Council can amend the budget in any way it sees fit, but the most likely driving force related to impact on our services for 2025 and beyond is the referendum. If the referendum passes, we will anticipate operating with the same level and scale of services as we are in 2024, with the modification below regarding parking. If the referendum fails, the current plan would be to implement the following two cost reduction strategies.
 - Eliminate all services related to ice rinks. This would eliminate the rinks in total, even where volunteer partners support the rinks.
 - Reduce services to the Mall Special Charges district and shift the cost share from 50/50 City/property owners to 75 property owners / 25 City.

- Pay to Park in Parks Pilot – Finance Committee [Amendment #2](#) – Creates a Pay to Park in Parks Pilot program. The program would have a goal of generating \$39,000 in revenue in year one, with a net operational benefit of \$23,900. The current approach is for staff to develop some implementation concepts to bring to the BPC in early 2025. We would then work with the BPC and take public feedback on these ideas to create a policy that can be implemented in time to generate the needed revenue. The program would be studied prior to expansion.

- Alcohol in Parks – Council President Figueroa Cole has requested that we provide a briefing on the regulation of Alcohol in Parks. Staff is working to assemble historical information as well as current data on this issue and anticipate providing this report in December or January.

- Marshall Houses – Parks staff continues to work with Real Estate and the City Attorney's Office to engage with the property owners of the historic homes in Marshall Park. The goal is to bring an update and potential options for moving forward to the Commission in the next couple of months.

- POSP Update – Parks staff is planning to provide an update on the POSP progress to the full BPC in the next two months. The LRP subcommittee has been working diligently on this over the past six months.

- Olin Houses – Staff are working on a management plan for the Olin Houses as we acquire them. We own three of the houses at this point and would like to have a management strategy in place moving forward. The current plan on the three is working towards demolition on one home, extending the lease on a second, and evaluating options with Real Estate on the third. We do anticipate buying more of these and it would be good to begin developing the plan for holding strategy. We are hopeful to have a plan in place in 2025. Given the condition of the one home and imminent demolition this issue is less pressing than we anticipated earlier in the year.

Personnel Updates

Promotions/Hires:

William Goss was promoted from hourly Park Ranger to the position of Parks Worker within Central Parks. Will started his new position on September 29, 2024.

Morgan Matthews hired as the Parks Data Analyst within the Parks Finance & Administration team. Morgan starts her new position on October 28, 2024.

Section Updates

Community Services Report – Terrence Thompson

Community Events (Kelly Post)

- Community Event staff have been busy communicating with annual park events about 2025 dates and entering them into our software in time for when we open shelter reservations to the public on November 1.
- We are working on updates to our online applications, adding new Emergency Action Plan requirements and forms and Accessibility Plan guidelines and forms we developed in 2024 with the Madison Fire Department and the Department of Civil Rights.
- We are also working on updates to our website pages and other application forms in time for the start of 2025.

Parks Alive (Debra Alleyne)

- This year, Parks Alive Fall will feature a partnership with Park Rangers, who are also conducting a pilot youth program centered around ranger core values, including park stewardship and conservation. These fall events will be held in and around Allied, Warner, and Elver parks. In addition to our long-standing partnerships with community groups, we will:
 - Host an autumnal-themed painting activity with a watercolor artist.
 - Explore autumn flora and fauna with local naturalists.
 - The Rangers will pilot the Jr Rangers program, offering a hands-on learning experience. Madison Fire will lead activities that include, but are not limited to, teaching campfire building and safety.
 - Host night sky exploration in partnership with UW Madison Astronomy Club & Madison Astronomy Club.

Customer Service (Joanne Austin)

- Although current permits (Lake Access, Disc Golf, Cross-Country Ski, and Dog) remain valid through this year, 2024 permit sales are wrapping up. In conjunction with Dane County Parks, 2025 annual permits will be available for purchase starting November 1.
- NEW for 2025 - In years past, shelter reservations for the next year started on the 2nd Tuesday in November. We will now begin processing reservations on the first business day in November. Customers can continue to place their reservations online, in person, or over the phone starting at 8:00am on Friday, November 1 (same date permits can be purchased). Staff are very busy updating shelter fees in Rectrac, updating our website, and updating the materials every customer receives when they place a reservation.
- We are making arrangements with our Parks Volunteer Coordinator to have volunteers assist with watercraft storage compliance in 2025. This should reduce the amount of staff time it often takes to confirm storage spaces are vacant when new agreement customers go to secure their watercraft in their agreed-upon spaces.

Recreation Services & Aquatics (Tracey Hartley & Shane Martin)

- On October 19, the Hikes and Hayrides event had approximately 150 participants. We want to extend a special thank you to the Friends of Cherokee Marsh for their support of this event. Additionally, we participated in the WPCRC Halloween Family Fun Night on Friday, October 25, where we provided s'mores, hayrides, and a screening of the movie Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire. On October 30, during the downtown Halloween Night, our table saw around 1,300 visitors, and 300+ people enjoyed the hayrides.
- We are working on winter events such as Groove n Glide, Candle Lit Snow Shoe Hikes, and Winter Prom and hiring staff for winter and special event attendants.
- Elver, Vilas, and Odana will start preparing for winter operations soon, with Tenney being prepared for the winter season after Thanksgiving. Weather cooperating, this winter season will start on Saturday December 21.



Rangers & Volunteers

Rangers (Steve Dray)

- The Elver Disc Golf Course's grand reopening was on Saturday, October 26th, at 11am. We would like to recognize former Disc Golf Ranger Will Goss and former Ranger Supervisor Jason Vroman for their work on the project. Together with designer Patrick Blake, they spent many hours planning and working to bring the course to fruition.

After Will and Jason moved on to new opportunities, current Disc Ranger Matt Norton stepped up significantly. His hard work and expertise have impressed us all. We also thank the many volunteers who contributed their time and effort to support this project.

This truly was a collaborative effort, and we thank everyone involved!



Volunteers (John Weichelt)

- **Native Seed Collection:** We held seed collection events at The Glen Golf x2, Odana Hills x2, Cherokee Marsh, and Prairie Ridge. Over 100 volunteers participated in total.
- **Volunteer Software:** We're pleased to announce that the onboarding process is now complete, marking a significant milestone. The next step involves building out 6 programs: Conservation, Cleanups, Gardening, Golf, Special Events and Community Programs and Leadership. We'll also be finalizing new volunteer applications and qualifications, ensuring a smooth transition for all.
- **Special Event Volunteers:** We secured over 20 volunteers to assist with setup, cleanup, kids activity area, and nature play areas at Cherokee Marsh Hayrides and Warner Park Community Recreation Center's Halloween Family Fun Night.

Warner Park Community Recreation Center (Zach Watson)

- Carie Abaca, WPCRC Customer Service Specialist, received a North Star Award from the Northside Planning Council on October 18, 2024. Her nomination and award acknowledge her service as the first point of contact and welcoming thousands of members and guests into the WPCRC each year. She is vital in ensuring the facility runs smoothly and the public has an exceptional customer experience.
- The KNOW Program partnership with the Madison Parks Foundation has seen a steady increase in youth participating in various program offerings since MMSD schools reopened in September. This increase in participation highlights the program's growing popularity and its positive impact on the youth in our community as we work through the expansion project.
- **WPCRC Expansion Update:** The Vogel Brothers construction company officially began the expansion project on October 10, 2024. They have completed the mobilization process and installed construction fencing. They have also removed all the necessary trees to occupy the space needed for the construction trailer and the expansion foundation to take shape. All the removed trees will be replanted in the park near the center upon completion of the project. The center will remain open during the project; however, we anticipate closing the gym and fitness center for the public beginning in January 2025.

Parks Planning

- Rennebohm Park shelter renovation: work is currently underway at the Rennebohm Park shelter restrooms to add accessibility improvements and upgraded utilities and storage area improvements to the shelter. The contract was awarded to Joe Daniels Construction and is being led by Engineering Facilities staff. Work is anticipated to continue through April 2025.
- Tenney Park beach shelter: the structural steel is now installed, and work began on the roof in late October, after which the remainder of the interior will be completed. Contractor Tri North is on schedule to be completed by late December 2024.
- 2024 Playground Improvements: work is currently underway at Garner and Meadowood Parks and nearly complete at Sherwood Forest Park. Contractor Madison Commercial Landscapes, Inc hopes to complete Manchester prior to the close of 2024 but has until June 30, 2025 to complete the project, if needed.
- The playground at Kestrel Park has been installed and turfgrass established in the park. The playground is open for play. The sun shelter is planned for installation in 2025 to complete the development of the new park.
- Parks Construction has continued construction of the Olbrich Park Nature Play area with installation of the two embankment slides and additional play features.
- The Yahara Hills Golf Course irrigation improvements project has been advertised for bids with a bid opening date of December 19th.

- Parks recently resurfaced the parking lot at Warner Park that serves the dog park and boat launch. This lot was originally constructed in 1986 for additional boat trailer parking. Since that time a dog park was added to Warner Park and additional parking stalls were added for single vehicle parking. The lot surface was in poor condition and the asphalt failing. The 2024 project repaved the lot in its existing footprint and added new concrete curb and gutter. The project was completed under budget and ahead of schedule and is now open for use.



Olbrich Botanical Gardens

- **Unseasonably Warm Fall Weather** – Director of Horticulture Samantha Peckham reports, we are having an unseasonably warm fall at Olbrich. Despite the lack of recent rain, we are still above average for the year, as we have received 41.27 inches to date compared to our average of 32.33 inches. The foliage colors are peaking in the gardens with our collection of *Carpinus* or American hornbeams who are currently stealing the show!
- **Voting at Olbrich Botanical Gardens** – Once again Olbrich Botanical Gardens is a polling place for the upcoming elections. Early voting opened on October 22 with hours at Olbrich from 10:30am-3:30pm on October 22-25 & 28-November 1st. On election day, November 5, 2024, Olbrich Botanical Gardens will be open 7am-8pm. To prepare for the upcoming election, City Clerk Taylor Wall presented to Olbrich staff at the October staff meeting. He presented on how to maintain a safe polling place and what is and isn't allowed at a polling place.

write out

The Tree

Felicity Ejercito, 10th Grade

The tree had stood for a long time. Many years ago, the tree had been a small, shy sapling. As the land had grown and changed, so had the tree. Slowly, the tree grew into a strong, beautiful, healthy tree. The tree had seen many things. It had seen joy, sadness, sunrises, sunsets and so much more. For a while, the tree was content. It stood in a beautiful place with other trees, animals and plants.

After a time, the tree began to feel less content. The tree had been there for ages, yet nothing had ever acknowledged or noticed the tree. Animals would use the tree as a place of shelter or as a home. Plants would grow in the shade of the tree or climb it for support. Yet not a single one of them had ever thanked the tree, or even spoken to it.

The tree began to wait then, for some way to know that it had been seen by others, and was not alone. The tree waited on and on, witnessing life and death and everything in between. Still, the tree went unnoticed, and an ache started growing in the tree, spreading more each day.


As the ache spread to more and more of the once healthy tree, it began to wither. The tree could do nothing to stop the growing ache. All it could feel was the spreading loneliness. The leaves on the tree then yellowed, and the branches became brittle.

On an evening when the tree knew its time was short a small yellow butterfly landed carefully on one of the trees once strong but now fragile branches. The butterfly had flown a long distance, and was grateful for a place to land.

"Thank you," the butterfly whispered to the tree. "You're a kind tree. Every creature around has said this is a good place." The tree felt its heart lighten, and a happiness it had not felt in a long time. The tree sang a "You're welcome," to the butterfly with a breeze through its delicate branches. Feeling full on the joy of being seen, the tree gave a peaceful sigh and fell into blissful oblivion.

Poetry for the Planet
Writing Prompt

There are so many living beings in the gardens.
What are their stories?
What would it be like to experience the garden from their perspective?


- **Write Out: Poetry for the Planet -** Olbrich is participating in [Write Out](#) in partnership with Greater Madison Writing Project. Write Out is a free two-week celebration of writing, making, and sharing inspired by the great outdoors. It is an open invitation to get out and create that is supported with a series of online activities, made especially for educators, students, and families, to explore neighborhoods, parks, and other public spaces. This year's theme is Poetry for the Planet.
- **INSPIRE at Olbrich –** On October 22, 2024, Olbrich Botanical Gardens participated in the City of Madison's [INSPIRE Job Shadowing Program](#). A student from Madison College joined Conservatory staff in the morning to help with morning clean-up and horticulture staff to help plant spring bulbs.

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Parks Operations

Central Park

- Prepared hay wagons for fall hayrides
- Burned Richmond Hills and some areas at Junction Ridge
- Lakeside offices planting including receiving and picking up plants and setting up sprinkler system.
- Beautification plantings at Warner, Allied, Rimrock, Meadowood, Elver (2), Brittingham

Conservation

- Staff continued to work on controlling porcelain-berry and bittersweet at Kettle Pond, Owen, Stricker's Pond, and Turville Point, and began to make fall foliar herbicide applications to biennial weeds including garlic mustard and dame's rocket.
- Secured contracts for several capital improvement projects aimed at improving woodland health. Projects will occur this winter at Acewood, Cherokee Marsh (North, South, and Mendota Units), Moraine Woods and Stricker's Pond.
- Volunteers collected seed at Cherokee Marsh, Edna Taylor, and Owen, controlled buckthorn at Hiestand, and planted acorns at Owen.

Construction

- Completed the playground installation including border timbers, surfacing, landscaping, seed and straw matting at Kestral Park.
- Softball diamond #1 infield at Goodman park was completely renovated including trucking in material from Waupaca Wi.
- Continued work on the nature play area at Olbrich Park, installing the embankment slides and finishing the site work.

East Parks

- Performed clearance and structural pruning of trees in select parks.
- Cleared trails and performed maintenance of wooded areas.
- Continued to pull and wash recycling and waste receptacles.
- Prepared for seasonal change and shelter closings.

Facilities

- Cellular gateways were installed in one elevator at Goodman Maintenance, and two elevators at the Lakeside Parks Offices. Installing these gateways will allow reliable and consistent emergency phone connections.
- One of two boilers at Goodman Maintenance had a substantial amount of repair work performed on it to make sure it's in working condition this winter.
- The Annie Stewart Fountain at Vilas Park was covered for the winter.

Mall Concourse Maintenance

- With help from Parks Construction, staff removed the Top of State Visitor Center and placed into storage.
- Prepared snow equipment for winter usage.
- Performed fall pruning of trees and shrubs including ornamental bed maintenance.

West Parks

- Performed fall aerification on athletic fields.
- Prepared cemetery for Walking Spirits Tours at Forest Hill.
- Work on small brush removal projects.