

**SUPERINTENDENT'S FEBRUARY 2021 REPORT
COMMUNICATIONS TO BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
Park Superintendent's Monthly Report Summary**

Madison Parks is in the full swing of winter and already planning for spring and summer. Madison is currently just above the average snowfall and staff have worked hard to clear it from bus stops, pathways, sidewalks, parking lots as well as grooming ski trails across the parks system. The favorable winter weather, the hard work of our staff, and people looking for safe, outdoor activities has meant record numbers at our ski and skate locations. The Workshare program has begun and our staff will be stretched as thin as ever to continue providing our essential services across Madison. I recognize how difficult and stressful this situation is for our staff, while also recognizing the benefits of this program to reduce involuntary furloughs later in 2021. I intend to support consideration of reducing parks staff on mandatory furloughs, if still necessary, as the team has worked together to manage loss of staff now in an effort to not have similar impacts throughout the year. In lighter news, we are working on a project with an incredible donation from Michael Keiser to redevelop Glenway Golf Course in a manner that promotes a better park, environment, and golf. The project is in the early stages, but we hope to move it along expediently to take advantage of the opportunity presented to us.

- Winter operations are busier than ever. As of February 3, more than 3,300 annual cross country ski permits have been sold by Madison Parks, completely blowing away our five year annual average of 1,379 permits and our previous single year high of 1,501 permits. Along with the incredible increase in permit holders we have seen incredibly high rental rates at our ski and skate rental locations. Despite reduced rental hours and elimination of warming shelters and food/drink concessions due to COVID-19 we have brought in more than four times our usual January winter concession income. This year's rental income has surpassed almost all previous years' in only a single month. We hope that continued interest in safe, outdoor activities and favorable weather will mean a strong February of rentals and additional record high sales figures.
- Warner Park Community Recreation Center has re-opened as a park facility and is utilizing a reservation system to allow users to safely use spaces within the center, including the gym, game room, exercise room, and lobby. The gym facility is serving youth who have been without a place to be active for far too long. Programming at WPCRC will continue to increase with COVID-19 safety as a first priority. All new programming is approved by PHMDC.
- Thanks to an incredibly generous offer by Michael Keiser, known for his golf courses that are far more in line with conservancy and connection to nature than to golf, we are preparing to redevelop Glenway Golf Course in 2021. Mr. Keiser has offered to donate the necessary money and work for the entirety of this redevelopment. We are working with a number of community partners, allowing Mr. Keiser to utilize the incredible knowledge of our golf staff, University of Wisconsin, and our community to create what would be a very good golf course in a much improved park property. This kind of work embodies the Wisconsin Idea and is in line with the recommendations the Golf Task Force worked diligently to develop. The redevelopment of the golf course is not only to create a course that is more enjoyable for all to play, but more enjoyable for non-golfers as well. The course is a public park and it is not currently used in all the ways that it could be. We will work to provide spaces for hikers, opportunities for non-golf events, and greater connections to surrounding parkland that will make the entire area more accessible to all. This is a project we are developing, admittedly, very quickly. This can only be done because of the expertise provided by a wide range of talented people working on the project.

Future Commission Items

- Parks Event Ordinance – Parks staff have been working with other city agencies, primarily the City Attorney’s, to develop a draft Park Events Ordinance that would provide a substantially more clear process and requirements for the existing park events process. The existing process has organically grown into a complex web of regulations and permits, which can create a lack of clarity regarding conditions and approval processes. It is staff’s opinion that questions and concerns related to City agency events (e.g. Democracy in Parks) and priority access for returning events (Goodman Pool Dog Paddle) should be addressed as a part of this comprehensive effort. Staff will include information from the City Attorney’s Office related to legal considerations as this Ordinance is prepared and presented.
- IPM Taskforce – The IPM taskforce work has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff is hopeful that work will continue this fall with a target of reporting out over the winter.
- The Law Park Master Plan process is also continuing, though it has been delayed by the pandemic and staff resource constraints. An update to the Commission will occur soon.
- Allied Alcohol Ban – Was referred back to the Parks Commission. A staff team is reviewing the history and providing an analysis of it to be shared with the BPC and the Common Council. Anticipated discussion at BPC in March.

Personnel Updates

As a part of the Mayor’s TeamCity Employee Recognition project, Parks staff with significant service to the City of over 35 years were recognized. The four staff on our team with more than 35 years of service are:

- Mike Mullarkey 48 years
- Pat Hario 39 years
- Rick Trapanese 35 years
- Jeff Williams 35 years

Section Reports

Community Services

Customer Services (Joanne Austin):

- Fantastic winter weather conditions and the desire for people to enjoy outdoor activities has brought increased use of park amenities. Online permits have continued to provide increased revenue to the city and support staff are diligently working to get them mailed out. Cross Country Ski permit sales in particular have seen a dramatic increase. A permit is required at Elver, Odana Hills, and Yahara Hills, as well as at Dane County Park trails. It’s exciting to know that so many park users are enjoying these amenities.



Warner Park Community Recreation Center (Terrence Thompson):

- WPCRC reopened to the public on January 25, 2021 with limited community programming, open gym, game room, fitness room workouts and facility rentals.
- Youth open gym has attracted the most use, and is off to an excellent start. All visitors have been very diligent about adhering to COVID protocols that are in place.

Aquatics (Josh Schmitt):

- Planning is underway for the 2021 Aquatics Season, incorporating lessons learned from the 2020 season and evaluating programs to determining which of them we feel we can operate safely.

Rangers (Josh Schmitt):

- Rangers have been very busy supporting our daily winter operations.
- Off-leash dog parks continue to be heavily used, and with continued snowfalls, the Rangers have been busy clearing the snow and ice at the dog parks entrances. If you are out and about and see a Ranger shoveling out the dog park, thank them for caring so much for the dog parks.

Recreation Services (Tracey Hartley):

- Winter Recreation is at an all-time high with people out enjoying all Madison Parks has to offer this winter season. A special thank you to the Madison Parks Foundation for funds to purchase 16 additional snowshoes to add to the current fleet of snowshoe rentals at Vilas Park. With the additional snowshoe rentals, we are now offering daily snowshoe rentals at Vilas. The new long-term rentals for skis at Elver are doing well; we have rented to 17 people with 30 individual rentals to include skis, boots, and poles.

Community Events (Kelli Lamberty):

- We are working on criteria for event permitting with various attendance/COVID protocol requirements. We have added the "Parks Open Space" permit to Madison Parks' web site and are working on getting a "Commercial Shoot" permit on the web site as well. The on-line Park event application is nearly complete and we hope to have a few organizers test it out soon.

Operations

Conservation:

- Cross country ski grooming continued at all designated sites despite equipment challenges. Volunteers from MadNorSki and CXC supported the grooming efforts at Elver Park.
- Native seed mixes were broadcast in prairie and savanna restoration areas at North Cherokee Marsh.
- Buckthorn at Knollwood was cut. Re-sprouts will be controlled with prescribed grazing this summer.

Construction:

- The crew focused on non-capital projects including moving 3,500 yards of topsoil from a construction site to Elver Park, clearing out recyclable materials from Milwaukee Street houses purchased by Parks and slated for demolition and removing large snow piles from around the Capitol Square.
- The crew also supported the Streets Division with the general plow snow removal.

Facilities:

- Completed a number of projects in support of winter operations to assure shelters and other park amenities that support Community Services provided safe and socially distant spaces.
- Continued capital projects including Elvehjem shelter remodel, Elver furnace replacement, and Hoover's Boat House window replacements.
- Supported the work required to prepare WPCRC for re-opening.

General Parks:

- Skating rinks were open the majority of the month, although there were some challenges with ice due to warm weather.
- Volunteer rinks reported increased use this winter. Volunteer staff have done a tremendous job in maintaining ice.
- Staff kept busy with snow removal. A number of small snow events impacted our area.
- A pilot program of clearing some internal park paths to create additional space for outdoor activity during COVID was implemented. Public feedback has been positive.
- Landscape Maintenance Workers placed orders for spring planting season and performed some routine dormant-season pruning.

Mall Concourse:

- Snow removal and related activities kept the crew busy.
- The Streatery program continued through the elements, with the restaurants assisting with snow removal. There were no Streatery concerns that were not quickly addressed.

Olbrich Botanical Gardens

Attendance

Total attendance for 2020 was 124,347, small compared to 2019's 322,149 attendance. We know it was the pandemic and staff know that those who were able to visit in the past 7 months have been grateful that OBG is open, and have complied with the COVID 19 restrictions as a result.

Bolz Conservatory

Orchids are being moved into the Bolz Conservatory – it isn't quite the Orchid Quest show held by the Orchid Growing Guild held on the 1st weekend in February – which is cancelled in 2021 due to the pandemic. The 'orchid escape' featured orchids will be viewable through the month of February, 2021. Lots of opportunities to see the orchids and still maintain the Bolz Conservatory's 25% capacity.

Education

OBG's education department is offering virtual classes, workshops, and lectures during the winter months and planning to have outdoor offerings as the weather warms. The virtual lecture series, **A Gardener's Call**, showcases sustainable horticulture and the new ethic towards more responsible gardening. Plants, animals, and microbes have an essential role to fill in our gardens and gardeners have a responsibility to recognize and respect these beings' contributions to a healthy garden ecosystem. This 5-part lecture series will showcase how we can support all life in the garden and create a garden where all life belongs.

- *The Bombus Among Us – Bumble Bee Basics* by Heather Holm
- *Diversifying Your Garden Design* by Fergus Garrett
- *Natures Best Hope* by Doug Tallamy
- *Edible Landscaping to Kitchen Gardens: Planning, Planting to Harvest* by Lisa Hilgenberg
- *Answering the Call – Gardening for a Better Life* by Jeff Epping, Erin Presley, & Katey Pratt from Olbrich Botanical Garden's staff



Outdoor Gardens

While volunteer opportunities are fewer during the pandemic – confined largely outdoors and in areas where there is enough space for physical distancing, a new volunteer crew – the ‘Snow Crew’ was formed. They are an on-call force of volunteers willing to come in and assist staff by gently removing built up snow from trees and shrubs. I think they enjoy their work!

