

Park Operations Quarterly Report December 2020 - February 2021

All of the parks were extremely busy this past three months. The combination of favorable weather, snow, and the desire for residents to find an outdoor respite from COVID significantly increased park use. While early season warm temperatures challenged the preparation and maintenance of the ice rinks that soon gave way to some outstanding sledding, skating, and skiing conditions. The snow events kept our team busy balancing snow clearing responsibilities with the need to maintain outdoor recreation. With the increased park activity, public expectations were high for both snow clearing and winter amenities. The Parks Operations Team rose to the challenge with a focus on service excellence. Rinks, trails, and sledding hills as well as bike paths, sidewalks, bus stops, and other paths were all well-maintained. This required additional planning, some process changes, and a team focus on service delivery. Overall, public feedback was very favorable.

In an effort to better serve the cross country ski community, we continued our partnership with CXC and MadNorSki. This year, those volunteer groups provided additional grooming support at Elver Park, which allowed the Parks' team to focus on other area trails, which resulted in improved overall ski trail conditions. Hats off to teamwork!

The COVID pandemic continued to be an area of focus, with continued physical distancing and disinfecting surfaces. The Operations Team continued to maintain only one employee per vehicle, use face coverings, and limit number of employees per shift to assure physical distance. Our year-to-date efforts to maintain a safe and healthy work environment resulted in very few COVID-related cases among employees, and an even smaller number that resulted from an exposure at work. While there were periods of concern with employee absenteeism, the Operations group was able to maintain adequate staff to support the work requirements.

The team was further challenged with the need to support the Workshare program. The program took considerable focus to implement. However, based on the flexibility built into the implementation process, service disruptions have been minimal. There continue to be some program challenges, but staff have been patient in working through the issues as they arise.

The spring seasonal hourly hiring process is underway. The initial posting resulted in fewer applicants than for what we had hoped. Additional posting efforts will be made to attract additional applicants.

CONSERVATION (Paul Quinlan)

Contractors made significant progress on capital improvement projects aimed at bringing entire parks under active ecological management. Work to remove woody invasive species from a total of 35 acres at Edna Taylor, Moraine Woods, Owen, and Stricker's Pond was completed, furthering the implementation of management plans for these sites. Specifications were developed and quotes solicited for follow-up work and subsequent restoration phases at these sites.

Staff broadcast native seed mixes at Cherokee Marsh, cut buckthorn at Knollwood, and assisted volunteers with burning brush piles at Prairie Ridge. The Operation Fresh Start

crew returned in January and prepared Acewood for prescribed grazing scheduled for this summer, and burned brush piles at Edna Taylor.



Owen woody invasive removal

Staff made snow on the sledding hill and assisted CXC volunteers with snowmaking for the machine-made ski loop at Elver Park. All other ski trails opened on Dec 29 and grooming continued until interrupted by warm temperatures in the last week of February. Despite repeated and even simultaneous equipment failures, staff and volunteers worked to prioritize and coordinate grooming across all sites, maintaining a high level of service. MadNorSki and CXC volunteers groomed the machine-made loop and natural trails nearly daily at Elver, with occasional assistance from Parks staff. At all other sites, staff were able to groom on 30 out of 57 days between Dec 29 and Feb 23.



Grooming Ski Trails

Permits for burning and wildlife management were secured, and staff began preparing for these activities in 2021.

CONSTRUCTION (Rich Bergmann)

The Construction team supported the Streets Division with five general plows this season to date. The Parks Construction staff is responsible for clearing over 70 lane miles of roads and over 60 cul-de-sacs. In addition, the crew has hauled over 240 loads (3,600 yards) of snow off the Mall Concourse. All of this snow was hauled to the Bowman Park snow dump site.



Snow Dump Site - Bowman Park

When the team was not plowing and hauling snow, they focused on hauling topsoil for future shredding during summer operations. Over 290 loads (approximately 3,500 yards) of top soil have been hauled and staged at Elver Park.

The playground repair documentation is being updated to document repairs needed and performed. This additional information will support the playground replacement schedule.

FACILITIES MAINTENANCE (Jon Landsverk)

Work this quarter focused on capital projects, COVID-related projects, and annual maintenance work. The capital projects included Elvehjem shelter upgrades, Hoover's Boathouse window replacement, and Gates of Heaven floor replacement.

Special COVID-related projects included work to prepare Warner Park Community Recreation Center for re-opening. The Facilities team built sneeze guards and helped with needed painting, plumbing, HVAC, electrical and other carpentry work.

The team also prepared winter recreation sites for safe operation by building improved customer service stations at Elver, Vilas and Tenney ice rinks to reduce the chance of spreading COVID. The work included new storage for skates and skis to faster serve the community and safely store the equipment with added COVID precautions.

The work performed at the Elvehjem Shelter included painting, staining the ceiling, installing new accessible doors and plumbing fixtures in the restrooms, , L.E.D. lighting upgrades, and a new bottle-fill water station.



WPCRC Sneeze Guards



Elver Customer Service Station



Elvehjem Improvement Projects

CENTRAL PARKS (Paul Quinlan)

Staff kept busy responding to snow events. The response followed the pre-planning approach, which included following the priority order for initial snow removal and clean-up.

Central staff completed installation of hockey rink boards at Vilas and had all Central ice rinks initially open by January 6. Ice developed slowly at Goodman and Vilas lagoon, but the shallow “land rinks” - Vilas general rink and Vilas hockey rink – froze faster and provided recreational opportunity early on.

Staff assisted with molding snow into cubes that were then carved into snow sculptures at Brittingham. This was a joint effort between Parks, Sustain Dane and the artist, and part of a community art display sponsored by MSCR and Sustain Dane.



Brittingham Snow Sculptures

MALL CONCOURSE (Mark Kiesow)

Staff kept busy with snow removal the last few months. Temperatures were often below the range at which salt is effective, requiring the crew to constantly broom the sidewalks down to pavement to make the area safe for pedestrians. Hauling the snow off the service area to the snow dump site was a daily task.

Winter décor continued, with “Winter is Alive” artistic posters placed in the downtown kiosks. The Parks Arborists also installed the lighted snowflakes.

The winter Streatery program continued despite the weather, with a few of the restaurants continuing to operate for the entire winter. The staff assisted the businesses as needed with the snowfall events.



Snow Hauling - Capital Concourse



Snow Event – Winter Streatery

EAST PARKS (Spencer Werner)

This winter's seasonal work was a bit different due to COVID. Shelters remained closed for patrons; however, bathrooms were cleaned and available for use at Tenney, Warner and Olbrich Parks.

Considerable staff time and effort was spent on snow clearing and ice preparation and maintenance.



Warner Park Ice Maintenance



Snow Event Clearing

The Arborist crew conducted park surveys of tree health and damage to support work planning for the year.

The Land Stewardship Technician worked to update the no-mow and managed meadow maps and started documenting the work completed in these areas to better manage work activity and land management progress.

Staff supported the creation of a Snow Snake at Warner Park with the help of Bill Quackenbush of the Ho Chunk Nation. Bill shared that the winter game of Snow Snake has been traditionally played amongst the Great Lakes tribes throughout many generations. The game drew many people to Warner Park to watch and play.



Creation of Snow Snake

WEST PARKS/ Forest Hill Cemetery (Chad Hughes)

Staff kept busy responding to snow events and supporting winter recreation.

The new N'ice Rink installed at Elver Park was a hit with the community, and has allowed the ice to be available for more days than in the past. A liner was also installed

on the Elver hockey rink. The improvements to the rinks will significantly reduce water consumption and lengthen the skating season.



Elver General Rink



Elver Hockey Rink

In addition to skating at Elver, the cross country ski trails and the sledding hill saw heavy use. It was common to have difficulty finding a parking spot in the main lot at Elver Park most days.

Staff filled two wooden forms with snow for a local artist to support the creation of snow sculptures at Elver Park. This was a joint effort between Parks, Sustain Dane and the artist, and part of a community art display sponsored by MSCR and Sustain Dane.



Snow Carving Block



Snow Sculpture – Elver Park

Other West Parks ice rinks, including Nakoma, Westmorland, Wexford, Rennebohm, Hillington and Sunset Parks all had outstanding volunteer support. Each site has reported above average use this year.

As a means to create additional outdoor space during COVID, additional internal park paths at Garner and Wexford were cleared of snow this year. Public feedback was very positive. Volunteers at Garner Park also cleared the snow from the pickleball courts to play throughout the winter.



Staff Prepared - Westmorland Hockey



Volunteers Cleared - Pickleball