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Executive Summary

Madison residents have recognized the importance of park and open spaces to the community for over 130 years. In addition to protecting natural resources and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation, parks improve the physical, mental and social well-being of the city's residents, and are an important part of the cultural fabric of the community. Parks level the playing field in terms of creating recreational opportunities with fewer barriers for residents within the community. Today, Madison Parks has over 290 parks and 5,700 acres of park land, and over 95% of residents live within a 10-minute walk from a park.

The 2025-2030 Park and Open Space Plan (POSP) serves as the Parks Division's five-year strategic plan. The POSP was developed under the guidance and oversight of the Parks Long Range Planning Subcommittee and approved by the Board of Park Commissioners. The POSP is adopted as a supplement to the City of Madison Comprehensive Plan and is required for participation in state and federal grant programs. An analysis of park land inventory was completed, and the POSP incorporates public feedback received, analyzes park use and trends in recreation, and takes into account overall City, County and State planning efforts to determine park and recreation needs for the community.

Madison is the second largest city in Wisconsin and is expected to grow to a population of over 309,200 with an increase in the number of residential units by 15,000 by the year 2030. The number of parks will need to increase to meet these needs. The population of individuals 65 and older is the fastest growing age demographic and is expected to increase by about 50% by 2040. There continues to be disparities in terms of race, income and housing. Understanding future development needs and these trends helps Madison Parks plan for how to best meet the recreational needs of the entire community into the future.

Multiple public engagement strategies were utilized throughout 2024 to understand how parks are meeting the needs of residents. The top five reasons people visit park spaces include general physical activities such as walking, hiking or running; leisure activities, such as picnicking or nature viewing; attending events and festivals; activities involving the lakes such as boating, fishing and swimming; and biking. Overall, residents place a high value on these spaces and find them to be welcoming and accessible. Residents prefer that existing resources be utilized for addressing deferred maintenance of existing facilities and emphasized the importance of balancing the protection of natural resources with the need for park development. Public engagement efforts did indicate a desire for increased connectivity, more focus on partnerships, improved maintenance of existing facilities, and enhanced spaces and programming to meet the needs of adolescents.

As the largest public landowner within the city, the Madison Parks plays a major role in helping to protect natural resources. In addition to affecting how the Parks Division manages the land, the impacts of climate change are becoming more evident on recreation within the community. Fluctuations in temperatures and extended seasons are resulting in different year-round recreation needs than traditionally offered. The POSP discusses the Parks Division's approach to confronting these challenges.

Despite the high value placed on parks and open spaces, Wisconsin and Madison continue to lag behind the rest of the country in terms of funding outdoor recreation. As the park system grows, additional resources are needed to fund and maintain park facilities and spaces. Aging

infrastructure and increased usage are resulting in an even greater need for resources. Madison's tax-payer funding is not sufficient to resource the funding needs of the park system, and diverse revenue streams and strategic partnerships must be pursued.

The 2025-2030 POSP provides a roadmap for addressing the many challenges faced by the park system. The recommended strategies of the plan are aligned with the 7 elements of a great city as identified in the Comprehensive Plan. POSP recommended strategies call for Madison Parks to:

- Increase connectivity between parks to enhance access.
- Reduce parkland deficiencies and respond to increasing residential density.
- Create welcoming and inclusive park spaces and programming.
- Foster meaningful connections with groups and organizations that advance the vision of the Parks Division.
- Improve public access to lakes and waterways.
- Protect and celebrate the community's cultural richness.
- Protect and enhance natural resources.
- Improve the park system's capacity to adapt to environmental challenges.
- Develop new parks and amenities in a fiscally sustainable manner.
- Secure sufficient resources to sustain service levels across the growing and changing park system.
- Pursue regional solutions to regional issues.
- Promote the physical and social health of the diverse community.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Park and Open Space Plan (POSP) serves as the five-year strategic plan for the Parks Division, providing analysis and recommendations regarding the overall system of parks in Madison. The POSP reviews city-wide parkland distribution, funding mechanisms, and relationships to changing demographics, land development, and future growth across the city. This chapter discusses the purpose of the Plan, provides a summary of the history of Madison Parks, and highlights accomplishment since the previous plan was last adopted in 2018. In addition, this chapter outlines the benefit that park and open spaces provide the community and the process for updating and adopting this plan.

1.1 Purpose of the Park and Open Space Plan

City of Madison parks play a vital role in creating a thriving community. Parks improve the health and wellness of residents of all ages, and in turn contribute to the well-being of the entire community. The POSP informs public policy and system-wide decisions regarding how parks are planned, developed and programmed. This POSP aids City Boards, Commissions, City agencies and staff and other government agencies in decision-making processes and serves as a communication tool for interested residents and volunteers. It helps inform decisions related to park policies, acquisitions, development of parkland and facilities, as well as influences City resource allocation and operations. The analysis and recommendations discussed in this plan relate to park development, management of core facilities, and broad concepts in park system planning.

The POSP is evidence-based and therefore utilizes extensive public input, census data, park use records, geographic information systems mapping, and other informational databases. The plan has been subject to public review, hearings, and is adopted by the Board of Park Commissioners and the Common Council. The POSP is updated every five years to stay current with changing recreational trends, demographics and community needs. Maintaining a current Park and Open Space Plan is also a prerequisite for participation in federal and state park and open space grant programs, which are critical to obtaining the resources required to accomplish many of the objectives laid out in this plan.

1.2. History of the City of Madison Park System

The DeJoie (Four Lakes) region in which Madison is situated today was formed by the retreat of glaciers approximately 13,000 years ago. Evidence suggests humans occupied this area starting as early as 300 A.D.¹. By the time European settlers began to arrive, the Ho-Chunk Nation called this area Taychopera (land of four lakes) and considered it their home.

¹ Historic Madison, Inc. of Wisconsin. (2018). *Madison's Past- Early History*. Retrieved from <http://www.historicmadison.org/Madison%27s%20Past/madisonspast.html> <this link does not work for me> Look for another source or remove this.

In 1829, James Doty visited the Madison area, drew plats for the Four Lakes area and persuaded the territorial legislature to designate Madison as the new capital and name him as its building commissioner (Wisconsin Historical Society). Doty's original plat of Madison included only one public space, a park around the capitol building, but otherwise had ignored opportunities for parks around the lakes².

In the 1860s, a group of men were collaborating to create Madison's first pleasure drive. This first pleasure drive expanded upon a network of farm roads at the University of Wisconsin which were opened to the public in the 1860s. For families and individuals with the means to do so, horse-drawn carriage rides were a popular leisure activity in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The success of the new network led to the formation of the Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association (MPPDA) in 1894. The acres of parkland in the city expanded from just 3 in 1900 to 154 in 1905. Although the MPPDA effectively served as the City's unofficial parks department by, raising private donations to acquire and improve park land, construct additional pleasure drives, and plant trees and shrubs throughout the city, its founders and particularly its president John Olin recognized that long-term sustainability for a park system would require government involvement. To that end, the Common Council hired Emil Mische as its first park superintendent to oversee park operations in 1905. In 1909, the Common Council passed a tax of one-half mill (1/20th of a cent) for park purposes, which brought in nearly \$50,000 per year over the next ten years (approximately \$1.7 million in today's dollars).

In 1909, the MPPDA engaged the services of the Landscape Architect John Nolen to prepare a comprehensive plan for the improvement and future growth of the city. Nolen published *Madison: A Model City* in 1911, in which he recommended that the existing 150 acres of parkland and many miles of pleasure drives be expanded into a coordinated system of parks under the responsibility of an official Park Commission. In 1931, the Madison Park Commission (now the Board of Park Commissioners)³ was created, and the MPPDA transferred full responsibility for the operation, maintenance, and acquisition of all parks and pleasure drives to the City, forming the basis of today's parks system.

In 1961, a Park and Open Space Plan was updated that recommended preservation of natural drainageways and significant natural areas. This plan and subsequent plans called for addressing parkland deficiencies and setting standards around recommended amounts of park land as the city continued to grow. Additional Park and Open Space Plans were completed in 1971, 1977, 1984, 1991, 1997, 2005, 2012 and 2018. The system and services provided continued to evolve over the decades, responding to the needs and priorities of the community along the way. For a more detailed account of the park system history, see Appendix A: History of the City of Madison Park System.

Today, the City of Madison Parks Division manages over 290 parks, totaling more than 5,700 acres of land, and provides a variety of programming services. Additional land managed by the Parks Division includes street ends, right-of-ways and stormwater facilities that are used for park purposes. The Parks Division is also responsible for the operation, maintenance and programming of special facilities such as Olbrich Botanical Gardens, the Warner Park Community Recreation Center, the Goodman Pool, four public golf courses, Forest Hill public cemetery, and

² Janik, Erika (2010). *Madison: History of a Model City*

³ Wisconsin State Statute (Wis. Stat. Sec. 27.08(2)). Establishes roles and responsibility of the Board of Park Commissioners.

the State Street/Mall Concourse. Madison Parks continues to use this plan as a tool to advance the growth of the park system. Madison's historic commitment to public recreation and open space of all kinds provides the public today with a diverse system of parks and open spaces.

Parks and Open Space Plans through the years:

Through much of this time, the Park and Open Space Plan continued to be updated regularly. Additional Park and Open Space Plans were completed in 1961, 1971, 1977, 1984, 1991, 1997, 2005 (an update to the 1997 plan), 2012, and 2018, and all include recommendations to address parkland deficiencies.



1961



1984



1991



1997



2018

1.3 Summary of Accomplishments Since the Last Park and Open Space Plan

The 2018-2023 Park and Open Space Plan included twelve strategies that reflect the values, opportunities and concerns identified through a robust engagement and planning process. The 2018-2023 strategies have served as excellent guidance for staff, Board of Park Commissioners and various subcommittees when making decisions pertaining to day-to-day operations and long-term improvements to the park system. This section provides an overview of accomplishments related to each of these twelve strategies.

2018-2023 POSP Strategy	Accomplishments
Improve public access to lakes	- Acquired multiple shoreline properties, including 346, 354 and 330-342 East Lakeside Street and 16 Lakeshore Court, for an increase of 627 linear feet of shoreline and 4.11 acres of waterfront property. - Installed two beach access mats in partnership with Madison Parks Foundation at Bernie's Beach and Vilas Park. - Installed two ADA-compliant fishing piers in partnership with Madison Parks Foundation at Vilas Park and Warner Park lagoon.

	• Constructed new beach shelters with restrooms and sheltered picnic table areas at Tenney and Warner Parks. • Constructed a clean beach water filtration system at Warner Beach in collaboration with Dane County. • Continued seasonal beach maintenance and partnership with Public Health Madison Dane County to monitor water quality on beaches.
Design park facilities to accommodate diverse activities and populations	• Collaborated with the cricket community to add a full-size cricket field at Elver Park and improve the practice field used by the women's league at Haen Family Park. • Installed three gaga ball pits at Penn and Olbrich Parks and Olive Jones Park in partnership with Randall School. • Incorporated dual striping on sport courts to allow both tennis and pickleball when courts are resurfaced. • Renovated The Glen Golf Park and adopted The Glen Golf Park Programming Plan to accommodate mixed use recreation at the golf park. • Constructed the system's first futsal court at Penn Park. • Collaborated with organizers from Disability Pride, Madtown Mommas and Disability Advocates to review designs for inclusive playgrounds, accessible parking improvements and the Rennebohm Park sprayground. • Designed and installed inclusive playgrounds at Elver, Warner and Rennebohm Parks.
Protect and enhance natural and cultural resources	• Adopted the Burial Mound Policy in 2019, which was updated under the guidance of representatives of the Ho-Chunk Nation. • Completed preservation projects at historic facilities such as Breese Stevens Field, Gates of Heaven, Brittingham Boat House, Hoover Boat House and Normal Hall. • Maintained and preserved historic landscapes in Tenney Park, Hoyt Park, and Forest Hill Cemetery. • Invested \$1 million in capital improvements to conservation parks over the past five years to restore and maintain sensitive habitats. • Created a Conservation Technician Trainee position in the 2022 Operating Budget. • Reallocated existing Parks resources to create the Parks Ecology Team in 2022 to focus on improving and maintaining natural areas in community, neighborhood and mini parks.
Acquire parkland to reduce parkland deficiencies and address increasing population density	• Acquired 245 acres of land to address parkland deficiencies and increasing population density city-wide: ○ East side: Zeier Park and expansion of OB Sherry Park. ○ North side: Hartmeyer Roth Park, Tilton Park, and Whitetail Ridge Park expansion. ○ South side: a portion of 1802 and 1804 South Park Street for a new park, and Olin Park expansion consisting of 16 Lakeshore Court, 354, 346 and 330-342 East Lakeside Street, including the Parks Division's new administrative offices. ○ West side: Moraine Woods Park and Elver Park expansion.

	○ Downtown: 305 S. Bedford Street for the expansion of Brittingham Park. • Reclassified two downtown City-owned properties as parks, including Madison Senior Center Courtyard and the Lakefront Porch Park. • Received dedication of multiple parks city-wide to address increasing populations with new developments, including Kestrel, Eagle Trace, and Canter Parks. • Added Fraust, Heifetz and Harvey Schmidt Parks through the Town of Madison attachment.
Ensure that new park development occurs in a fiscally sustainable way	• Constructed \$12 million in building improvements at Olbrich Botanical Gardens, which included the Frautschi Family Learning Center and replacement of production greenhouses, funded equally through City support and Olbrich Botanical Society capital campaign. • Renovated The Glen Golf Park through a Donation and Development agreement with Michael and Jocelyn Keiser, Supreme Structures and the Madison Parks Foundation, utilizing private funding and resources to create a high-quality golfing experience and expand types of uses of the golf park. • Utilized plastic tiles as a surfacing solution for courts with damaged pavement to extend the life of individual courts as a lower cost option. • Created volunteer-led “All-Wheel Spots” on underutilized paved areas to address needs of the skateboarding community and beyond. • Reinvested a portion of land sale proceeds at Yahara Hills Golf Course to support the capital needs of the Golf Enterprise Program. • Redeveloped the Crowley Water Utility surface to Lakefront Porch Park through a Donation and Development agreement, utilizing private funding to enhance the decking, community garden planters, furniture, and create an overall welcoming feel of the space. • Renovated the Royal Thai Pavilion at Olbrich Botanical Gardens in partnership with the University of Wisconsin, who provided \$1,650,000 in funding towards restoration efforts. • Developed and established a Cooperative Agreement with the Madison LakeWay Partners who will be the primary philanthropic partner for the Madison LakeWay.
Ensure that existing levels of service are maintained and supported through the park system and are increased as new parks and facilities are developed	• Adhered to the benchmark of 95% of Madison residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park as new neighborhoods are built. • Installed 56 playgrounds through the playground replacement program, ensuring that Madison Parks’ current total of 179 playgrounds are no more than 25 years old. • Administered and enforced park land dedication and park impact fee ordinances for new residential development in the city.
Create equitable access and funding for parks	• Sustained growth of the Kids Need Opportunities at Warner (KNOW) Program in partnership with Madison Parks Foundation to create positive experiences for the community’s north-side youth.

	- Continued the Goodman Pool Scholarship program in partnership with the Goodman Foundation and Madison Parks Foundation to reduce barriers to entry. - Developed and grew the Parks Worker Program and other green career pathways to reduce barriers for entry into the workforce. - Utilized the Equitable Hiring Tool in many recruitments as part of efforts to diversify the workforce. - Utilized the City's Equity Analysis tool on major programs, projects and policies.
Improve the park system's capacity to withstand future environmental changes	- Adopted the Parks Division's Land Management Plan in 2023, which included updated strategies to adapt operations to climate change, proactively manage the urban forest and increase resilience of natural areas. - Created the Parks Ecology Team, which leads the effort to diversify park natural areas, landscape beds and urban forest canopy. - Increased the use of existing alternative land management practices, including prescribed burning, prescribed grazing, and the flea beetle predator pilot program. - Collaborated with City Forestry and residents on spongy moth control during the latest population peak in 2023. - Incorporated the use of "Nice Rink" style ice skating rinks to reduce water consumption and lessen the impacts of temperature fluctuations on the skating program. - Increased use of green infrastructure in construction to reduce carbon footprint and mitigate watershed impacts. This includes following the LEED design principles, such as energy-conscious mechanical controls, use of solar panels, and conversion to LED lights. - Converted fossil-fuel equipment to electric where possible, including over 100 pieces of electric handheld equipment and 21 electric Fleet vehicles including trucks, cars, riding lawn mowers, forklifts and UTVs since 2018.
Increase connectivity between parks to enhance access	- Adopted the Madison Bicycle Adventure Trail plan to provide a feasible way to connect parks across the city using existing bicycle infrastructure and park and open spaces. - Planned and constructed recreational biking facilities and features at Aldo Leopold, Sycamore and Sandburg Parks. - Partnered with City Engineering to construct Starkweather Creek Bike Path extension to connect OB Sherry Park with Olbrich Park and future Starkweather Park. - Partnered with City Engineering to construct the Autumn Ridge Bike Path utilizing Heistand Park for connectivity on the east side. - Constructed bridge in Warner Park to better connect Brentwood neighborhood with the park and various services.
Develop a healthy and diverse urban tree canopy within parks	- Invested in TreeKeeper tree inventory software in partnership with City Urban Forestry section. - Completed tree inventory to catalogue 45,000 trees on 215 park properties, including records of the species, diameter and basic condition. - Acquired more than 50 acres of mature forest land with healthy, mature canopies, which include large acreages at Whitetail Ridge (20 acres) and Moraine Woods (20 acres). - Implemented the woodland tier system and initial broadscale restoration efforts based on the adopted 2023 Land Management Plan.

Increase engagement with groups and organizations and develop new ones	• Implemented the Parks Alive program, which is dependent upon collaboration and participation of a variety of City agencies, including the Department of Civil Rights, Neighborhood Resource Teams, Community Development Division, Public Health Madison Dane County, and more. • Established and adopted a cooperative agreement with Madison LakeWay Partners (formerly the Friends of Nolen Waterfront) to support the Design Competition, fundraising efforts and development of the Lake Monona Waterfront Master Plan, now known as the Madison LakeWay. • Reestablished Ride the Drive in 2024 through a Community Steering Committee comprised of various City agencies and community partners, including Madison Parks Foundation, Madison Bikes, Madison Boats, MSCR, Public Health Madison Dane County, Community Development Division, and the Madison Sports Commission. • Collaborated with the Madison Public Library and Engineering Division to design the Imagination Center at Reindahl Park. • Collaborated with various community organizations and small businesses to develop and implement The Glen Golf Park Programming Plan. • Established a new partnership with the Black Men Coalition of Dane County to bring baseball to Elver Park. • Renegotiated the agreement with Madison Mallards to fund the installation of a new artificial turf infield and bring the Madison Night Mares (a women's collegiate softball team) to Warner Ball Park in 2024. • Renegotiated the Cooperative Agreement with the Madison Parks Foundation, building on the strong partnership and establishing stronger communication and collaboration between the Parks Division, the Madison Parks Foundation, and the Board of Park Commissioners.
Pursue regional solutions to regional issues	• Collaborated with Dane County and State of WI officials during several emergency response situations, including the 2018 flooding event and COVID-19 Pandemic responses. • Collaborated with Dane County, Town of Verona, City of Verona and Ice Age Trail Alliance to purchase Moraine Woods expansion and explore additional acquisitions for Ice Age Trail connections. • Collaborated with Dane County to sell a portion of Yahara Hills Golf Course, as recommended by the Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks, for use as landfill expansion and proposed sustainability campus that will serve the future waste management needs of the entire Dane County area. • Acquired Marty Farm in collaboration with multiple City agencies to expand Elver Park and address stormwater and transportation infrastructure needs of the far west side. • Disposed of 231.55 acres of parkland to address broader public needs, including a portion of Yahara Hills Golf Course to Dane County for purposes of Landfill expansion (231.28 acres) and Hughes Park for redevelopment of Centro Hispano (.27 acres).

1.4 Madison Parks Vision and Mission Statements

Madison residents are fortunate to have inherited a park system built by the progressive vision and efforts of previous generations. Today, the Board of Park Commissioners, Madison Parks Foundation, and City of Madison Parks Division continue a mission of enhancing Madison's legacy of diverse parklands; providing green space, safe environments, and recreational facilities; and meeting the changing needs of present and future generations.

The quality of life for Madison residents is influenced by the city's natural resources: parks, greenways, and public access to the numerous waterways which greatly define Madison culture. The vision and mission statements (adopted as part of the 2018-2023 POSP) and other goals in this plan serve to guide the development of policies and facilities in the City of Madison park system.

Vision Statement

Everyone shall have access to an ideal system of parks, natural resources, and recreational opportunities that enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors.

Mission Statement

Provide an exceptional system of safe, accessible, well-planned and maintained parks, facilities, public cemetery, natural areas and public shorelines.

Provide affordable opportunities for recreational and educational experiences.

Preserve and expand our urban forest resources through a well-planned and systematic approach to tree maintenance, planting and natural area management.

Preserve and promote City of Madison Parks' historic legacy, as well as its future legacy.

Provide opportunities for cultural interaction by facilitating community events and through the display of public art.

1.5 Role of Parks and Recreation

Madison is growing rapidly as new developments are occurring around the city and redevelopments are becoming more densely populated. Parks are some of the only free, multi-functional public spaces in the community. Ensuring that sufficient public open spaces remain available and accessible to residents is critical for a healthy, vibrant community. Parks contribute to the physical and mental health of residents in many ways, as well as provide economic benefits.

Public Health Benefits

It is well documented that parks enhance the physical health and mental, emotional, and social well-being of the community. Access to parks and open spaces, as well as free or low-cost programming and volunteer opportunities, creates healthier communities. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) reports that physical activity at any age can improve mental health and reduce the risk of chronic diseases, including obesity, osteoporosis, stroke, and Type 2 diabetes⁴. Likewise, maintaining a healthy lifestyle can save more than \$1,800 per person in annual healthcare costs⁵.

Madison is a very health-conscious city. In 2023 Madison was ranked as the sixth fittest city in the United States according to the American College of Sports Medicine, with 64% of residents categorized as being in excellent or very good health⁶.

Community Well-being

Public parks are hubs for community interaction and neighborhood activity and can foster a sense of belonging. They can be places where residents gather for social events, recreational activities, and meetings about local issues, which increases social interaction, creates an overall sense of community and helps to combat loneliness. The power of parks as a community gathering space was highlighted both nationally and locally during the COVID-19 pandemic, as people flocked outdoors for a safe way to connect with one another during a period of historic social isolation.

Parks are activated through events and programs that are permitted by or sponsored and organized by the Parks Division. The Carts in Parks program brings food carts and trucks into the parks and creates placemaking opportunities. Parks Alive programming activates parks in historically underserved communities (known as Neighborhood Resource Team (NRT) areas) with music, family-friendly activities, and free food

⁴ Role of Parks and Recreation on Health and Well-Being, NRPA. <https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Three-Pillars/role-of-parks-and-recreation-on-health-and-wellness/>

⁵ Ward ZJ, Bleich SN, Long MW, and Gortmaker SL, Association of body mass index with health care expenditures in the United States by age and sex, PLoS ONE, March 2021, 16(3): e0247307. Available through City Parks Are a Smart Investment for America's Health, Economy, & Environment. City Parks Alliance. https://cityparksalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/CPA_3-Infographics_2022.FINAL_.pdf

⁶ American College of Sports Medicine (2023). 2023 Summary Report ACSM American Fitness Index: Actively Moving America to Better Health. American College of Sports Medicine and Elevance Health Foundation. https://americanfitnessindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/2023-American-Fitness-Index-Summary-Report_FINAL-20230629.pdf

with the primary goal of strengthening community ties within these areas. Various festivals, neighborhood block parties and picnics that happen throughout the year are organized by individuals or organizations around the community and provide opportunities to strengthen community ties across the city.

Environmental Health

As the climate continues to warm, public health hazards linked to air pollution, heat waves, and flooding will become more common. The City of Madison is taking these threats seriously, and the parks system is integral to the City's strategy to alleviate some of the adverse effects of climate change. For instance, park and open spaces can help lessen the urban heat island effect and provide natural habitat to support native pollinators. The park system has approximately 1,775 acres of wooded areas and approximately 45,000 trees inventoried which help improve air quality and mitigate the impacts of extreme heat, by reducing air temperatures by up to 10 degrees⁷. Madison has roughly 1,000 acres of parkland identified as managed meadows designed to protect and enhance pollinator habitat; this is in addition to our 1,700 acres of Conservation Parks. In addition, green infrastructure within parks can help mitigate flooding and protect water sources by slowing and absorbing stormwater runoff. These are a few of the many benefits the park system contributes to the environmental health of the community.

Economic Vitality

In some cities, the ability to find housing near parks or open space is a challenge. According to NRPA⁸, 84% of adults in the U.S. sought high-quality parks and recreation when choosing a place to live. Madison's expansive parks system gets more people closer to parks and makes parks more accessible to the community. In 2024 the Trust for Public Land⁹ scored Madison at 93 out of 100 for park accessibility, meaning 93% of Madisonians live within a ten-minute walk from a park.

According to a study completed by the NRPA and George Mason University¹⁰, over 50% of 70 studied communities used parks and recreation images in their economic development materials. The study notes that parks and recreation contribute to economic development through business and talent attraction, retention, and expansion. Park specialty facilities, such as Olbrich Botanical Gardens, and the festivals and events permitted by Madison Parks are key driving factors for local tourism, which contributed towards the \$1.5 billion visitors spent in the Madison

⁷ Taleghani M, University of Salford, Manchester, UK, *Outdoor thermal comfort by different heat mitigation strategies—A Review*, Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews, 81(2018):2011–2018, Available through City Parks Are a Smart Investment for America's Health, Economy, & Environment. City Parks Alliance.

https://cityparksalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/CPA_3-Infographics_2022.FINAL_.pdf

⁸ NRPA (2023). 2023 Engagement with Parks Report. National Parks & Recreation Association.

<https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/257fe28053c6420786927fcffc2f9996/2023-engagement-report.pdf>

⁹ Trust for Public Land (2024). 2024 ParkScore Index: Madison, WI. Trust for Public Lands. https://parkserve.tpl.org/downloads/pdfs/Madison_WI.pdf

¹⁰ NRPA (2018). Promoting Parks and Recreation's Role in Economic Development, National Parks & Recreation Association: as prepared by The George Mason University Center for Regional Analysis. <https://cra.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/nrpa-economic-development-report.pdf>

area in 2023 according to Destination Madison¹¹. Parks also create economic opportunity for local businesses through programs such as Carts in Parks, and also through the various equipment rental, catering and entertainment opportunities that are facilitated through the permitting processes. In addition, Madison Parks utilizes various contracts for park maintenance and improvement projects.

Accessibility

Madison Parks is dedicated to providing park access to everyone in the community. This is done through various means, including paved paths, accessible beach mats, playgrounds designed for users of all abilities, and providing sufficient parking and accessible parking in parks. Paved paths, compared to grass or gravel paths, provide a surface that is more accessible to people with various physical needs. Using paths to connect the general public to parks and recreation facilities, as well as other key community spaces, is critical to encouraging safe alternative modes of transportation. These paths provide important means of travel for those who prefer to bike or walk for health or environmental reasons and can be critical to those who lack other means of transportation due to age, income, or disability. In addition, providing and maintaining a certain level of paved parking lots in parks is essential for individuals who rely on vehicles to access these spaces.

To ensure access to parks for people with disabilities, Madison Parks worked with the Department of Civil Rights to complete an ADA Transition Plan. This plan identifies the facilities that need to be improved in order to provide adequate access under current standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act. See Appendix B: Parks ADA Transition Plan for additional details related to accessibility standards.

Equity and Inclusion

Madison Parks plays a vital role in the City of Madison's Racial Equity & Social Justice Initiative (RESJI). The mission of RESJI is to establish racial equity and social justice as a core principle in all decisions, policies, and functions of the City of Madison. The City is committed to reducing racial disparities as it is well documented that race dictates outcomes for all indicators for success, and that deep and pervasive racial inequities have been created and perpetuated into government at all levels.

African Americans, Latinos, and people living in low-income urban areas across the United States have disproportionately been denied the health, social, and environmental benefits of vital public spaces due to inequities born from historical and current-day policies, systems, and norms. These inequities are the product of policies and practices like residential segregation, redlining, racially biased planning decisions, and exclusionary zoning, as well as problematic narratives and ways of working in the green space field that has often excluded or tokenized Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

In 2018, Madison Parks launched the Parks Racial Equity Change Team ("Change Team") to advance the City's RESJI. The Change Team's mission is to ensure that race will not limit access for BIPOC communities to our parks, natural resources, and recreation opportunities by design or

¹¹ Destination Madison (2024). 2023 Impact Report. Destination Madison. <https://www.visitmadison.com/about-us/>

service. The Change Team’s work centers on the Parks Racial Equity Action Plan¹². This document identifies racial equity priorities and serves as the roadmap of the racial equity work for Madison Parks by providing timelines, accountability, and performance measures. These goals ensure a continued high level of service to the evolving community and staff of Madison Parks Division.

1.6 Planning Process

The planning process for the 2025-2030 Madison Park and Open Space Plan was conducted in three phases:

Data Gathering and Public Engagement

From fall 2023 to March 2025, the Parks Division evaluated current data and existing conditions in the park system, reviewed changes to the park system since the last POSP update and identified key themes and issue areas to explore in the next iteration of the plan. The Parks Division hired a consultant team, MSA Professional Services with subconsultant All Together, to assist with the development and design of the plan and with community engagement. The Parks Division also worked with the UW Survey Center in early 2024 to develop and distribute a survey to randomly selected households throughout Madison. In April and May 2024, the Parks Division held four Public Input Meetings (PIMs) to solicit feedback from the general public on the planning process and priorities for the park system. Focused engagement with communities historically left out or marginalized during planning processes occurred over the summer of 2024.

Plan Development

Over the course of 2024 and into early 2025, the Parks Division and consultant team collaborated to develop the 2025-2030 POSP. Each chapter of the plan, including text, figures, tables, and mapping exhibits, were developed and reviewed by the Parks Long Range Planning Subcommittee. In addition, the data was evaluated against current NRPA and Trust for Public Lands metrics for communities of a similar size. The plan was also made available for review and comment by other City agencies that often collaborate with the Parks Division, such as the Planning Division and Engineering Division.

Plan Review and Adoption

The 2025-2030 City of Madison Parks and Open Space plan is adopted as a supplement to the City of Madison Comprehensive Plan. This plan and any future amendments become official City policy when the Common Council passes, by a majority vote, a resolution to adopt the Plan. See Appendix C: Authorizing Resolution (RES-2025-00XX) related to the 2025-2030 Park and Open Space Plan.

The procedure to adopt the Parks and Open Space Plan is as follows:

¹² City of Madison Parks Division Racial Equity & Social Justice (2025). <https://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/about/racialEquitySocialJustice.cfm>.

Phase 1: POSP Approval by the Board of Park Commissioners

1. The Parks Long Range Sub-Planning Committee (LRP) recommends the draft POSP for adoption by the Board of Park Commissioners (BPC) and refers the draft to the BPC.
2. The BPC reviews the draft POSP; depending on desired changes they may or may not refer to a future meeting.
3. The BPC passes a motion to approve the plan.

Phase 2: Adopt the POSP as a Supplement to the City of Madison Comprehensive Plan

1. The Parks Division introduces a resolution to the Common Council to adopt the POSP.
2. The Common Council refers the plan to the BPC.
3. The BPC passes separate motions to refer the plan to the Board of Public Works and Plan Commission.
4. The Board of Public Works provides feedback and recommends approval of the plan, returning it to the BPC.
5. The Plan Commission provides feedback and recommends approval of the plan, returning it to the BPC.
6. The BPC makes any revisions needed and recommends the plan for adoption by the Common Council.
7. The Common Council passes a resolution to adopt the POSP.

Phase III: POSP Amendments and Updates

Amendments can be made at any time, but the City should generally not amend the plan more than once per year. A common recommended approach is to establish a consistent annual schedule for consideration of minor plan amendments. This plan should be updated every five years to maintain eligibility for Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Stewardship Funding. Unlike an amendment, a plan update would revisit the entirety of the plan content and include more robust opportunities for public participation.

Chapter 2: City of Madison Planning Considerations

Madison is the second largest city in Wisconsin. As the state capital and home to the largest University of Wisconsin campus, a significant portion of its economic vitality and development are linked to the University and Capitol. This chapter outlines various planning considerations related to the demographics related planning efforts, and environmental resources of the Madison community.

2.1 Demographic Overview

The Parks Division recognizes that thoroughly understanding the population it serves is the first step towards developing an inclusive parks system. A focus on equity is critical to the vision of providing an ideal park system to all Madison residents. This section reviews Madison's existing and projected demographics, including population, age, race/ethnicity and income, and the implications of these changes to park planning.

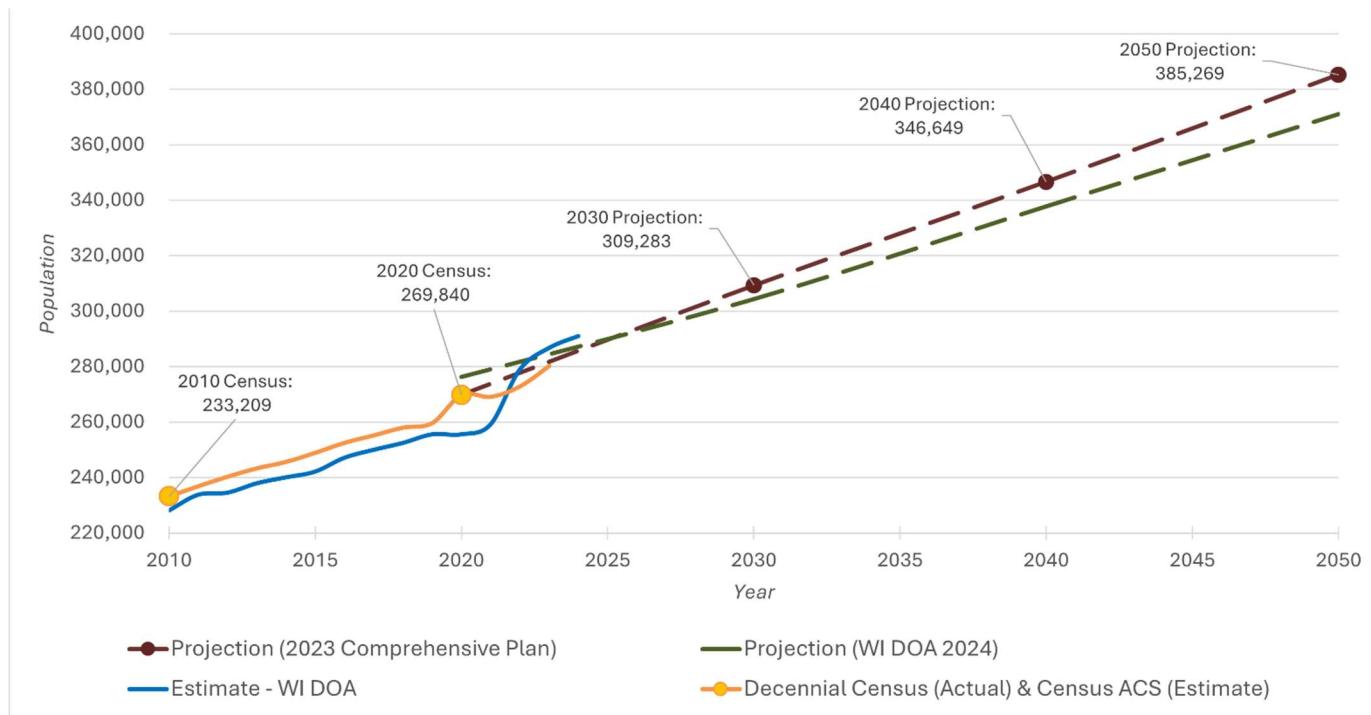
Population

Madison is the second largest city in Wisconsin, having a population of 269,840 according to the 2020 Census that grew to 291,037 in 2024 according to the Wisconsin Department of Administration's estimates.¹³¹⁴ The city's population has increased by 30% since 2000, by 16% since 2010, and is expected to continue to grow rapidly in the near future. The population is expected to exceed 346,000 people by 2040 according to City Planning Division analysis utilizing data from the Capital Area Regional Planning Commission and U.S. Census Bureau, as shown in **Figure 2.1**. According to the 2023 Comprehensive Plan, Madison's population is expected to increase by 115,000 residents and 67,000 households by 2050. Dane County is anticipated to grow at a similar pace. Understanding the pace at which the population is growing is critical to ensuring that the outdoor recreation needs of the community are met.

Figure 2.1: City of Madison Population Estimates and Projections

¹³United States Census Bureau (2020). United States Census Bureau Website: Profile for Madison, Wisconsin. <https://data.census.gov>

¹⁴ Wisconsin Department of Administration (2024). Demographic Services Center's 2024 Population Estimates, accessed at https://doa.wi.gov/DIR/Final_Ests_Summary_2024.pdf



Age Composition

Due in part to the presence of the University of Wisconsin, Madison has a relatively young population compared to the rest of the state. In 2022, the median age in Madison was 32, approximately eight years younger than the statewide median of 40.¹⁵ Young adults aged 20-34 have historically been Madison's largest age segment. In 2022, young adults accounted for over one-third of Madison's total population, compared to the State of Wisconsin as a whole, where ages 20-34 account for only 19% of the total population.¹⁶

The Wisconsin Department of Administration Demographic Services Center provides county-level projections by age. Projections for Dane County show that the population of residents aged 65 and older will increase by 48%, or over 39,000 people, between 2020 and 2040¹⁷. In 2010,

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2022 5-Year Estimates, B01002 Median Age by Sex, City of Madison & state of Wisconsin

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2022 5-Year Estimates, B01001 Age by Sex, City of Madison & State of Wisconsin

¹⁷ WDOA (2024). Population Projections, produced in 2024, based from 2020 Census. State of Wisconsin Department of Administration.

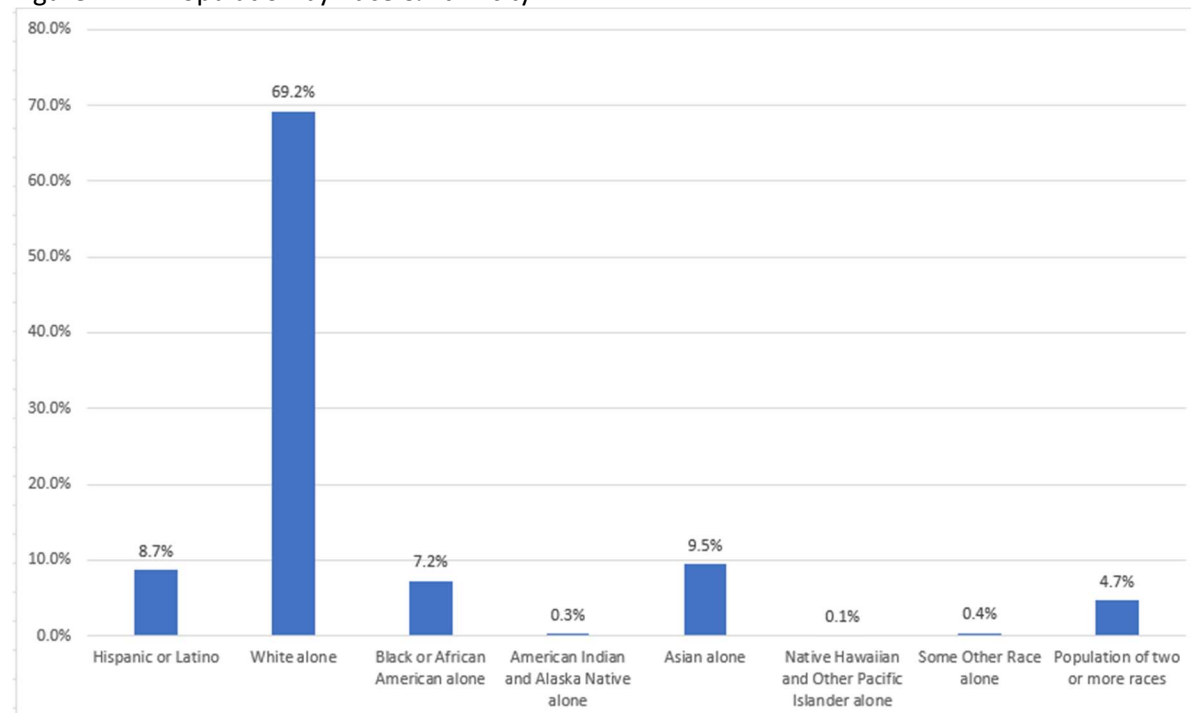
https://doa.wi.gov/Pages/LocalGovtsGrants/Population_Projections.aspx.

the 65 and older age cohort comprised 10% of Dane County’s overall population;¹⁸ in 2040 it is projected to make up 17%. Residents aged 85 or older, who only made up 1.5% of the population in 2010, will account for 3.0% by 2040. According to NRPA, the population of adults 65 and older is one of the fastest growing segments in the nation and is aging more actively than previous generations. It is critical to consider this when planning park spaces and programs.

Race and Ethnicity

According to the US Census Bureau, the population of the city of Madison is predominately White. In 2020, 69% of the population identified as White alone (not Hispanic or Latino). Individuals identifying as Asian alone, Black or African American alone, or two or more races account for approximately 21% of Madison’s population (Figure 2.2). Nine percent of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino.

Figure 2. 2: Population by Race & Ethnicity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census, P9 Hispanic or Latino, and Not Hispanic or Latino By Race

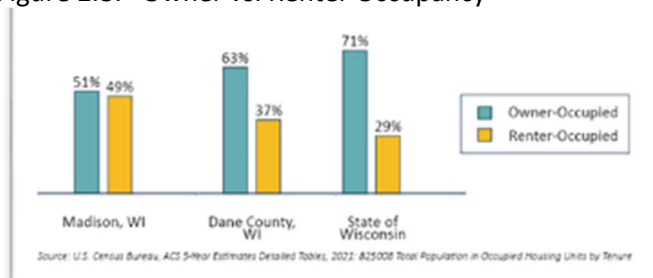
¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010 5-Year Estimates, S0101 Age and Sex, Dane County

Understanding the race and ethnicity of the community is important to eliminating barriers and ensuring that all individuals within the community have access to recreational opportunities. In addition, parks create the backdrop for cultural enrichment and celebration in a variety of ways, as evidenced by the number and purpose of park reservations and special events held throughout the city.

Housing

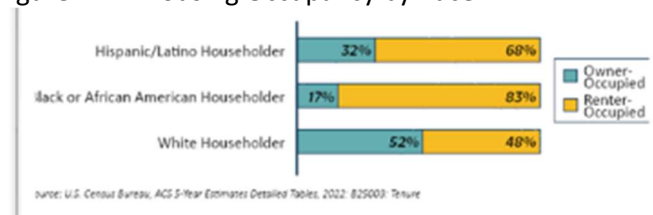
Housing is a basic human need, and neighborhoods are foundational to the city. As shown in Figure 2.3, Madison has about equal numbers of owner-occupied housing units and renter-occupied housing units. Dane County as a whole has a higher proportion of owner-occupied units, at 63% owner-occupied housing units. Wisconsin consists of 71% owner-occupied units.¹⁹

Figure 2.3: Owner vs. Renter Occupancy



The homeownership rate in Madison is lower for communities of color than for white households. While white households are split nearly 50/50 between owner-occupied and renter-occupied households—which matches citywide trends— Black and Hispanic/Latino households are majority renter-occupied (Figure 2.4). The high number of renter-occupied units is attributable in part to the University of Wisconsin Madison and its younger population. However, according to the 2023 Comprehensive Plan, 9 out of 10 new residents are renters.

Figure 2.4: Housing Occupancy by Race



¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates, B25008: Total Population in Occupied Housing Units By Tenure, City of Madison, Dane County, Wisconsin

The City of Madison’s Housing Forward Plan²⁰, launched in 2021, sets goals and priorities to address the housing challenges in the Madison community. Notably, the City has set an ambitious goal of adding more than 15,000 new homes by 2030, which will be accomplished by a variety of housing types, many of which will be high density. Assuming many of the new units built will have little or no private yard space, the need for adequate park space to serve these residents is critical as neighborhoods are developed and redeveloped.

Workforce and Employment

Madison has a substantial professional population, which is largely attributable to its position as the state capital, the presence of the flagship campus of the University of Wisconsin, and headquarters for companies such as Exact Sciences. Health Care and Social Assistance represented the Madison’s largest employment sector in 2022, employing 19.4% of the workforce, followed by Educational Services at 13.7%, and Public Administration at 9.1%. [Table 2.1](#) shows the percentage of the workforce employed by each industry.

Table 2.1: Workforce in Madison by Industry ²¹

Jobs by NAICS Industry Sector (2022)	Jobs (Count)	Share
Health Care and Social Assistance	43,338	19.4%
Educational Services	30,603	13.7%
Public Administration	20,326	9.1%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	19,503	8.7%
Retail Trade	17,245	7.7%
Finance and Insurance	14,754	6.6%
Accommodation and Food Services	14,660	6.6%
Administration & Support, Waste Management and Remediation	11,109	5.0%
Manufacturing	10,130	4.5%
Other Services (excluding Public Administration)	7,532	3.4%

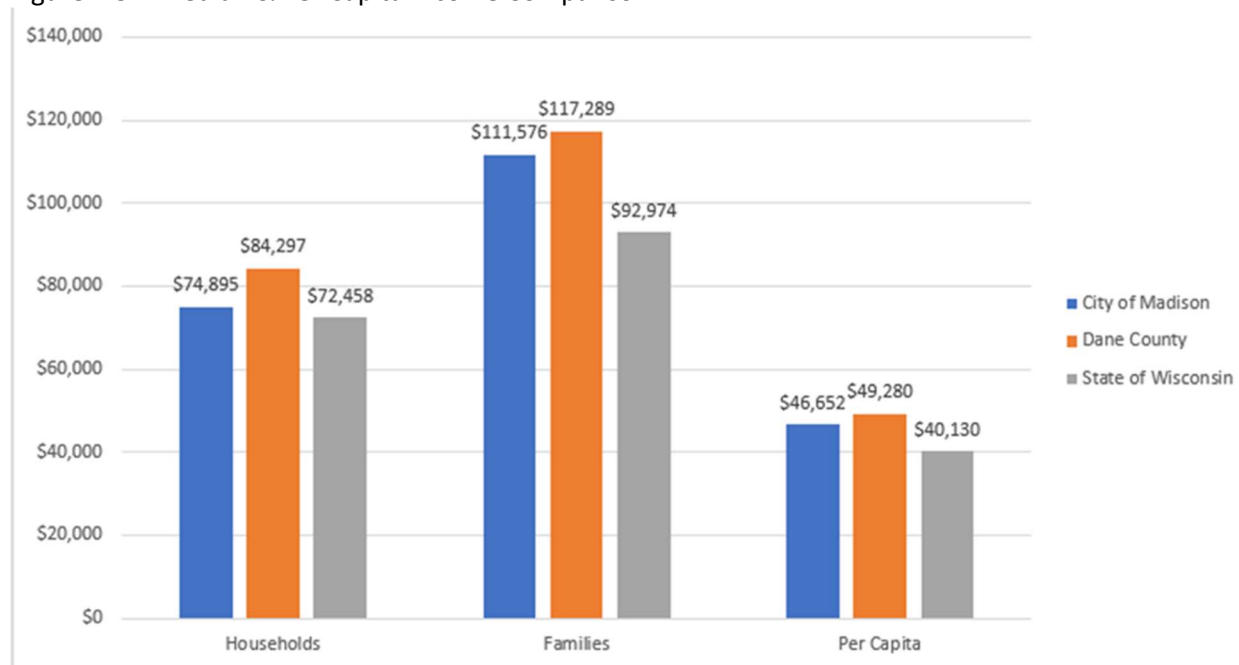
²⁰ City of Madison-Community Development Division (2025). City of Madison Housing Tracker. <https://www.cityofmadison.com/dpcdd/community-development/housing/housing-tracker>

²¹ U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap, 2022. Includes all private and public sector jobs within the City of Madison.

Income

In 2022, Madison had a median household income of \$74,896—a 36% increase from 2015.²² The median family household income was \$111,576, representing a 42% increase from 2015. Households are defined by the U.S. Census as all people occupying a housing unit; a family household consists of a householder and one or more other people living in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption. A family household may also contain people not related to the householder. [Figure 2.5](#) illustrates that Madison’s median income tends to be higher than the state overall, but slightly less than the median for Dane County.

Figure 2.5: Median & Per Capita Income Comparison

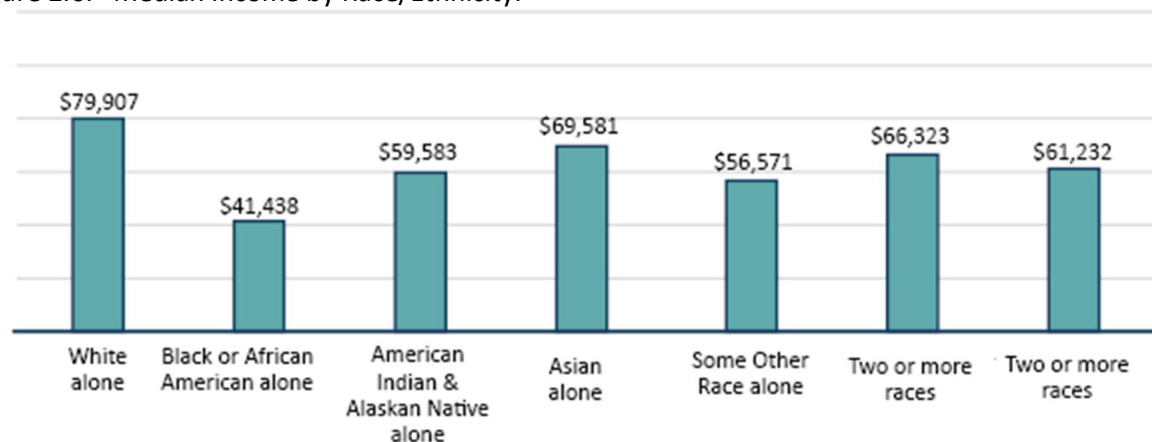


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates, S1901 Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2022 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars), B19301 Per Capita Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2022 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)

White households have a higher median income than all other races at just over \$79,900. Black or African American households have the lowest median income at just under \$41,500 (Figure 2.6).

²² U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates, S1901 Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2022 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) & B19301 Per Capita Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2022 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars), City of Madison, Dane County, Wisconsin

Figure 2.6: Median Income by Race/Ethnicity.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, 2022: S1903 Median Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2022 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars). Note: Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander removed as small population size (<0% of total population) results in significant margin of error.

Despite the high median household and family income, nearly 17% of Madison residents are below the poverty level.²³ This rate is higher than the state and county, which both have poverty levels around 11%.²⁴ Minority populations in Madison also experience higher levels of poverty than White residents. While about 15% of the White population is below the poverty level, every other racial and ethnic group identified by the U.S. Census Bureau had higher levels of poverty (Figure 2.7).²⁵ The population of college students living off campus within the city may increase the poverty rate within the community by approximately 5%.²⁶

Figure 2.7: Percent of Population Below Poverty Level by Race/Ethnicity

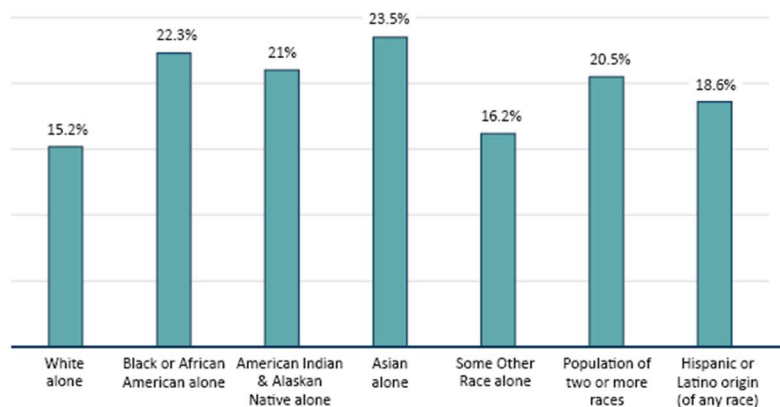
²³ U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates, S1701 Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months, City of Madison

²⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates, S1701 Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months, Dane County, Wisconsin

²⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates, S1701 Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months, City of Madison

²⁶ US Census Bureau (2018). "Small and Large College Towns See Higher Poverty Rates". US Census Bureau.

<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/10/off-campus-college-students-poverty.html>



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, 2022: S1701 Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months.

While Madison may be considered a relatively affluent city overall, that affluence is unevenly distributed, with race and ethnicity being a key differentiator. Parks have the potential to be equalizers by providing spaces and programming that reduce barriers and provide opportunities for everyone within the community to thrive. Identifying the specific needs and desires of underrepresented community members is vital to ensuring equitable park access to all.

Madison's population growth and increase in residential units will result in the need for greater or improved park access. The Parks Division must be able to sustain and adapt to cultural shifts, as Madison is becoming both older and more diverse. Residents of different ages and cultures have distinct values for parks and open space; therefore, these trends have significant implications for park planning. An adaptable, flexible parks system should evolve in conjunction with changes in its user base.

2.2 Related Planning Efforts

In addition to being a supplemental document to the City's Comprehensive Plan, the Park and Open Space Plan works in conjunction with other planning documents, such as citywide, special area, neighborhood, neighborhood development, area, historic preservation, and cultural plans and watershed studies, to inform the growth, development and management of the park system. Figure 2.4 illustrates the relationship of the POSP to other City planning documents that include recommendations or have implications for parkland. This section generally highlights key plans that have been implemented or adopted since the 2018-2023 POSP was adopted.

Figure 2.4: Overview of City Planning Efforts

City of Madison Comprehensive Plan (2024)					
Parks and Open Space Plan (2025-2030)					
Citywide Plans	Special Area Plans*		Neighborhood Development Plans	Neighborhood Plans*	
Madison in Motion: Sustainable Transportation Master Plan (2017)	Central Park (2011)	Monroe Street Commercial District (2007)	Blackhawk (2006)	Allied-Dunn's Marsh (1990)	Hoyt Park Area (2014)
	Cottage Grove Road (2017)	Oscar Mayer (2020)	Cherokee (2007)	Allied-Dunn's Marsh-Belmar (2005)	Marquette-Schenk-Atwood (1994)
Madison Vision Zero Action Plan (2020-2035)	Downtown Plan (2012)	Park Street Urban Design Guidelines (2004)	Cottage Grove (2006)	Arbor Hills-Leopold (2013)	Midvale Heights-Westmorland (2009)
Historic Preservation Plan (2020)	East Rail Corridor (2004)	Royster Clark (2009)	Cross Country (1998)	South Madison Plan (2005)	Mifflandia (2019)
Madison Sustainability Plan (2024)	East Washington Avenue Capitol Gateway Corridor (2008)	Schenk-Atwood Neighborhood Business District Master Plan (2001)	Elderberry (2018)	Brentwood Village-Packers-Sherman Village (1996)	Northport-Warner Park-Sherman (2009)
Madison Cultural Plan (2013)	East Washington Gateway Revitalization - BUILD (2003)	Stoughton Road Revitalization Project	Felland (2002)	Brittingham-Vilas (1989)	Regent Street-South Campus (2008)
Task Force on Equity in Music and Entertainment (2019)	East Washington Old East Side Master Plan - BUILD (2000)	University Avenue Corridor (2014)	High Point - Raymond (2017)	Broadway-Simpson (1986)	Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Worthington (2000)
Area Plans	First Settlement Neighborhood Master Plan (1995)	Williamson Street Design Guidelines (2004)	Junction (2018)	Darbo Worthington Starkweather (2017)	South Madison (2022)
Northeast Area Plan (2024)	Lamp House Block (2014)	Wingra Creek BUILD (2006)	Marsh Road (1999)	Emerson-East-Eken Park-Yahara (2016)	Southwest (2008)
West Area Plan (2024)	Milwaukee Street (2018)	Marquette Neighborhood Center (2000)		Greenbush (2008)	Tenney-Lapham (2008)
				Greenbush-Vilas Neighborhood (2010)	Triangle Monona Bay (2019)
				Hiestand (2006)	
*= Some areas may have multiple adopted plans. In such cases, the most recently adopted plan is the one that remains valid.					

City of Madison Comprehensive Plan

The State of Wisconsin requires that local governments create, maintain, and update a comprehensive plan no less than every 10 years. The City of Madison Comprehensive Plan was initially adopted in 2018, with interim updates in 2023 and 2024, and serves as a guiding document organized by seven elements: Land Use and Transportation, Neighborhoods and Housing, Economy and Opportunity, Culture and Character, Green and Resilient, Effective Government, and Health and Safety. The Comprehensive Plan was developed via a robust community engagement process, with over 15,000 people providing feedback, priorities, ideas, and direction on the type of community Madison strives to be. A key outcome of the planning and engagement process was a set of goals to help guide the city over the next ten to twenty years, as well as the identification of specific strategies and actions geared toward implementing those goals. : In addition to providing specific goals and recommendations, the Comprehensive Plan²⁷ also includes a Generalized Future Land Use Map (GFLU)²⁸ that guides the city's physical development by illustrating recommendations for land use and development intensity.

Several themes emerged from this plan which continue to inform development of park land, including changing demographics, changing preferences in housing and neighborhoods, continued desire for public transportation and trails, strong community value in culture and character of neighborhoods, and continued concerns regarding the environment. Overall, the Comprehensive Plan includes goals for addressing park land deficiencies, providing access to lakes, promoting biodiversity and a healthy urban canopy, providing a variety of programming responsive to the community's needs and collaborating with partners to enhance the recreational needs of the community.

Madison in Motion: Sustainable Transportation Master Plan

The City of Madison Department of Transportation, in close coordination with the Engineering Department, is responsible for developing and maintaining safe, efficient, economical, equitable and sustainable transportation throughout the city. Madison's comprehensive transportation network includes well-maintained streets, sidewalks, biking infrastructure, multi-use paths and public transit through Metro Transit services, including bus rapid transit (BRT). A strong multimodal transportation system is essential to provide residents and visitors access to park spaces. The City of Madison's Sustainable Transportation Plan, Madison in Motion²⁹, outlines a vision for a safer, more accessible, and sustainable transportation network. Key priorities include expanding transit, improving biking and walking infrastructure, and reducing reliance on single-

²⁷ City of Madison Planning Division (2018). Comprehensive Plan. City of Madison. <https://plans.cityofmadison.com/interactive-comprehensive-plan>

²⁸ City of Madison Planning Division (2024). Generalized Future Land Use Map. City of Madison. https://www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/planning/documents/GFLU_2024_Poster.pdf

²⁹ City of Madison Transportation Division (2017). Madison in Motion: Sustainable Transportation Master Plan. City of Madison. <https://www.cityofmadison.com/transportation/studies/madison-in-motion>

occupancy vehicles. Additionally, Madison’s adopted Complete Streets guide, Complete Green Streets³⁰, provides a consistent process for planning, designing, building, and operating streets in a way that reflects our community values and increases safety and equity.

Enhancing multimodal connections to expand access to parks is considered in project design and selection, ensuring that residents can easily reach parks by walking, biking, or transit—ideally in a way that is well-integrated with the path network through parks. Recommendations for transit-oriented development and high-frequency transit routes may improve connectivity to parks, particularly for residents without personal vehicles. Efforts to increase pedestrian safety and multimodal access could also lead to infrastructure enhancements such as improved crossings, multi-use paths, and better integration of transit stops near parks.

Madison Sustainability Plan

The Madison Sustainability Plan³¹ was adopted in the fall of 2024 as an update to the City’s previous 2011 plan. The Sustainability Plan is a roadmap for ensuring that Madison is a healthy and resilient place to live and work today and for future generations. The Sustainability Plan includes 24 goals organized into eight elements, which are designed to be ambitious yet attainable achievements that will make Madison a more resilient place today and into the future. Each goal is also accompanied by a set of actions—policies, programs, or projects that, together, help accomplish the goal. Goals from the Sustainability Plan most relevant to the parks system generally include providing access to natural areas, providing educational opportunities, preserving and restoring natural areas, utilizing Integrated Pest Management and expanding the urban forest tree canopy. The City also established the ambitious goal of reaching 100% renewable energy and net zero carbon emissions for City operations by 2030 and community-wide by 2050.

Historic Preservation Plan

The City of Madison Historic Preservation Plan³² was adopted in 2020 and aims to celebrate and preserve Madison’s rich heritage, including cultural resources, historic buildings, and established historic districts. The Preservation Plan emphasizes the role of historic preservation in maintaining the city's unique identity and enhancing quality of life for residents and provides context related to historically underrepresented communities, including African American, First Nations, Hmong, Latinx, LGBTQ, and Women. The Preservation Plan generally recognizes the various indigenous archaeological resources throughout the city and highlights the importance of promoting opportunities for cultural enrichment and celebrations.

³⁰ City of Madison Transportation Division (2009). Complete Green Streets. City of Madison.

<https://www.cityofmadison.com/transportation/initiatives/complete-green-streets>

³¹ City of Madison (2024). Sustainability Plan. <https://www.cityofmadison.com/sustainability/climate/sustainability-plan>

³² City of Madison (2020). Historic Preservation Plan. <https://www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/planning/documents/Madison%20HPP%20Final%202020.pdf>

Madison has 61 parks that have features or the park itself is on the National Register of Historic Places and 20 parks with facilities that are designated City Landmarks (see Appendix D – Historic Resources). Madison Parks recognizes the parks system is rich in archaeological resources and is committed to responsibly stewarding this sacred land. In addition to the recommendations of the Preservation Plan, in 2019, the Board of Park Commissioners adopted the Burial Mound Maintenance Plan, which was updated under the guidance of representatives of the Ho-Chunk Nation. The plan provides procedures and guidelines to assure that the mounds are treated with the utmost respect and managed in a manner that protects the integrity of the mounds. Throughout the lifespan of this plan, staff will continue to engage with representatives of the Ho-Chunk Nation and Wisconsin Historical Society for additional training related to cultural resource preservation.

Madison Cultural Plan

The 2013 Madison Cultural Plan³³ explores the arts, history, and the sciences. It focuses on the work of individual artists, creative workers, and institutions in the commercial and non-profit sectors. The plan intentionally defines culture broadly. It includes individuals and organizations who are students, amateurs, and professionals. They work in varied fields. These fields include artisan food production, digital production, architecture, history and heritage, environmental programming, and more. Some recommendations address the need of optimizing the use of city parks and streets for fairs, festivals and special events including outdoor concerts.

Task Force on Equity in Music & Entertainment Report

The Task Force on Equity in Music and Entertainment Report³⁴ was accepted by the Common Council in 2019. It included 31 recommendations that aim to increase access to Hip Hop and all genres of music to public spaces such as city parks, block parties and festivals. It also highlights the importance of building our music infrastructure, and support artists. Based on these recommendations, an Economic Impact Analysis was completed in 2021. The consultant firm Sound Diplomacy is working on an action plan to build an inclusive music ecosystem.

Special Area Plans

Special Area Plans focus on specific areas within the city that are likely to see significant growth or have unique functional use. There are currently 22 active Special Area Plans on file, four of which contain recommendations for a total of about 35 acres of new parkland development. For example, the Oscar Mayer Special Area Plan, adopted in 2020 following the closure of the Oscar Mayer plant in 2017, proposes a significant increase in high density housing, incorporates bicycle trail connectivity between Sherman Ave and Ruskin St, maintains a balance of passive and active uses in the space, and provides a buffer for the adjacent wetland on the southern edge. The Oscar Mayer Plan

³³ City of Madison (2013). Department of Planning Community and Economic Development. Madison Cultural Plan: https://www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/planning/documents/Cultural_Plan.pdf

³⁴ City of Madison (2019). Task Force on Equity in Music and Entertainment Report: https://www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/planning/documents/Arts_112818_TFEME_Final%20Report.pdf

proposed a 16-acre park to address the park needs of the increasing population within the area, which resulted in the acquisition of Hartmeyer-Roth Park in 2024.

Area Plans

The City's Planning Division has implemented a new planning framework since the adoption of the 2018-2023 POSP, which divides the city into 12 discrete areas to be utilized for planning boundaries moving forward. As Area Plans are developed for each of these 12 areas, previous plans are archived and no longer used for planning efforts. This new framework was developed to replace Neighborhood Plans and Neighborhood Development plans and avoid issues from the previous system in which some sub-areas had overlapping plan boundaries, while other neighborhoods were left out entirely. As of 2024, the City has adopted the Northeast and West Area plans and has a tentative schedule to develop the remaining 10 plans between 2024 and 2030. The Southeast and Southwest Area planning processes started in late 2024.

The Parks Division is working in tandem with City Planning's efforts to create Park Development Plans for the mini and neighborhood parks within each of these areas. The Northeast and West Area plans include specific recommendations for addressing parkland deficiencies through acquisition or expansion in key areas, as well as reinforcing the importance of interconnectivity between parks and greenspaces with existing or future infrastructure. In addition, the plans identified strong community desire for strategic partnerships and specific amenities for a variety of year-round activities, such as dog parks, building facilities, shelters, playgrounds and biking, among others.

Neighborhood and Neighborhood Development Plans

Even though the new planning approach has replaced and will replace Neighborhood Plans and Neighborhood Development Plans with Area Plans, many of the existing plans remain relevant. Neighborhood plans have provided a roadmap for building the community and anticipating growth within 23 well-established neighborhoods. As infill or redevelopment happens within these neighborhoods, the population density generally increases. Recent plans, such as Mifflandia, Triangle Monona Bay and South Madison call for significant redevelopment and revitalization of these neighborhoods. Each of these plans examined the park access availability and recreational needs of the planned community. Within infill areas, there are fewer opportunities to acquire undeveloped land to meet the park needs of these residents, calling for creative means of addressing park land deficiency within these areas.

On the other hand, Neighborhood Development Plans (NDPs) have addressed the growth and development of the city's peripheral urban expansion areas where development is expected to occur in the foreseeable future. There are 19 NDPs that identify up to 44 new parks and expansion of 11 existing parks along the city's periphery, totaling approximately 500 acres. Roughly 25% of the proposed new park parcels are proposed in the Northeast Neighborhood NDP (Table 2.2).

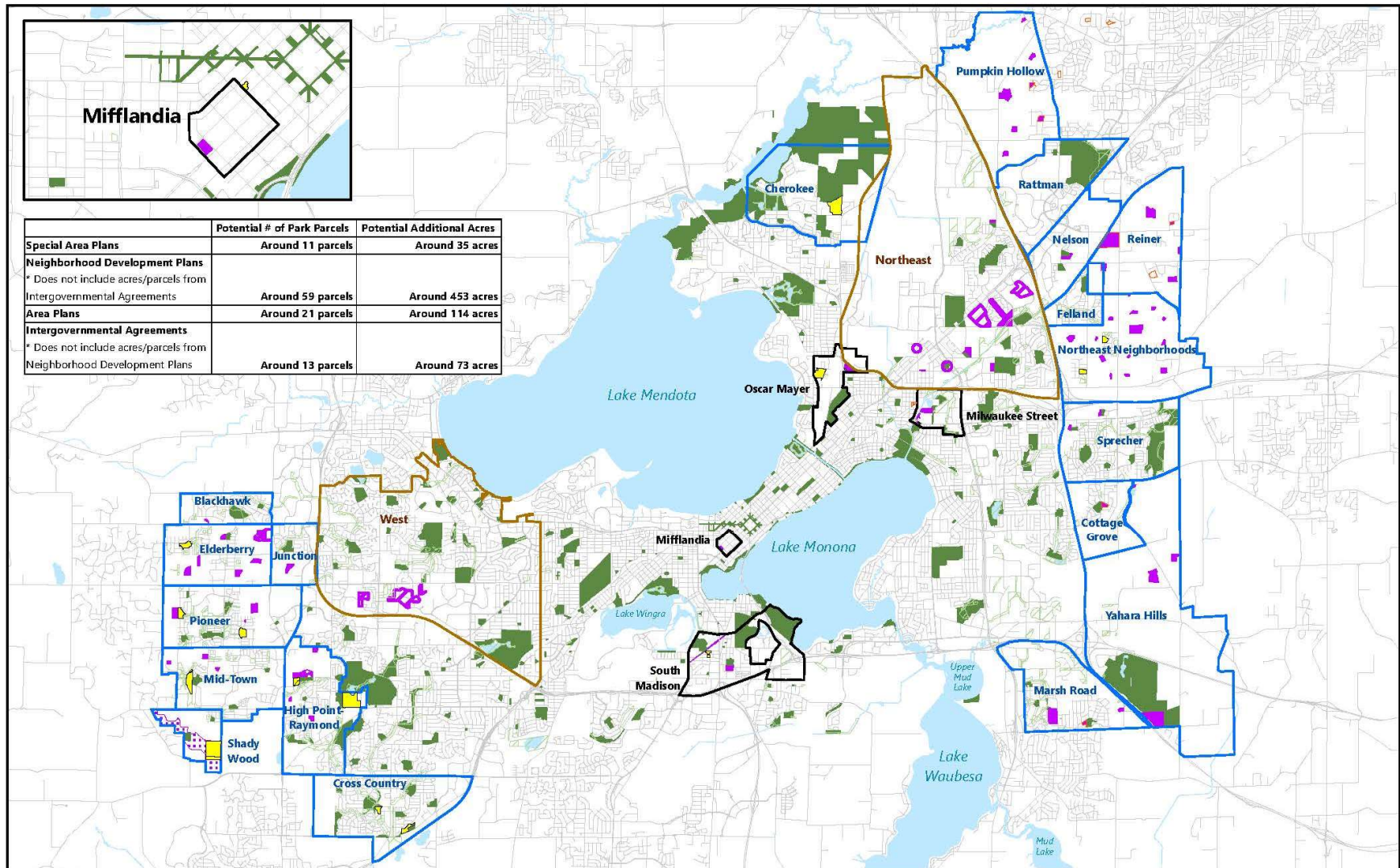
Table 2.2: Parks Projected in Neighborhood Development Plans

Neighborhood Development Plans	Estimated Population at Full Buildout	Existing City of Madison Mini, Neigh., Comm. & Open Space Parkland	Proposed City of Madison Parkland	Mini, Neigh., Comm. & Open Space Parkland at Full Build Out	Park Acreage per 1,000 Residents
Cross Country (1998)	9,000	96.8	0	96.8	10.8
Marsh Road (1999)	5,000	17.4	29.8	47.2	9.4
Felland (2002)	4,000	13.5	2.6	16.1	4
Blackhawk (2006)	3,300	32.2	1.2	33.4	10.1
Cottage Grove (2006)	3,700	10.3	3.8	14.1	3.8
Cherokee (2007)	5,000	65.9	0	65.9	13.2
Pumpkin Hollow (2008)	10,800	0	39	39	3.6
Northeast Neighborhoods (2009)	20,500	9.5	50.5	60	2.9
Midtown (2011)	6,700	35.2	7.9	43.1	6.4
Sprecher (2012)	9,800	204.6	4.4	209	21.3
High Point – Raymond (2017)	16,500	381.7	26.4	408.1	24.7
Elderberry (2018)	16,100	14	54.5	68.5	4.3
Junction (2018)	4,500	14.3	7.1	21.4	4.8
Pioneer (2018)	20,700	51	22.4	73.4	3.5
Nelson (2019)	9,000	11.1	6.8	17.9	2
Yahara Hills (2022)	8,900	86.5	65.4	151.9	17.1
Rattman (2023)	6,000	241	0	241	40.2
Reiner (2023)	26,500	0	76.3	76.3	2.9
Shady Wood (2023)	3,900	2.2	0	2.2	0.6
TOTAL	159,900	1287.2	398.1	1685.3	134.3

Intergovernmental Agreements

In addition to parkland dedicated in conjunction with new residential development, the City of Madison acquires existing parkland in neighboring communities as part of intergovernmental agreements. In 2022, the City acquired 3 new parks with the final attachment of the Town of Madison. Currently Madison has intergovernmental agreements with the Towns of Blooming Grove, Burke, and Middleton, which anticipates 11 additional parks by 2036, including three Town of Blooming Grove parks in 2027 and eight Town of Burke parks in 2036. Many of the parks contain amenities (e.g. playgrounds) that may or may not have been maintained to the same standard as similar Madison park amenities. Exhibit 1 identifies the locations of new parks that will be added due to these neighborhood plans and intergovernmental agreements.

Exhibit 1: New Parkland Identified in City Planning Efforts and Intergovernmental Agreements



MADISON PARKS

Data Sources:
City of Madison GIS Data (2025)

Notes:
* In West Area Plan, acquire minimum of 5 acres in Western General Future Park overlay (out of 13 acres shown) and minimum of 10 acres in Eastern General Future Park overlay (out of 45 acres shown), in either one or two contiguous areas.



0 0.5 1 Miles

- Area Plan Boundary
- Neighborhood Development Plan Boundary
- Special Area Plan Boundary
- Specific Future Park Area
- General Future Park Area*
- Future Conservation Corridor
- Future Park Area Identified in Intergovernmental Agreement
- Park Identified in Plan Acquired Since 2018
- Existing City of Madison Parkland
- City of Madison Pond/Greenway

New Parkland Identified in City Planning Efforts and Intergovernmental Agreements

Park and Open Space Plan 2025-2030
City of Madison, Dane County, Wisconsin

Printed By: jphg, File: MMapParks GIS Planning 2025 Park and Open Space Plan Future Parkland Map (WSP) and Other Plans Map.aprx Print Date: 3/6/2025

2.3 Environmental Factors

Madison is well known for its unique physical characteristics, waterways and natural resources. The city's core downtown is situated on an isthmus that divides Lake Mendota and Lake Monona. A topographic map found in Appendix E illustrates the city's terrain and natural features. The natural geography of the region is composed of a variety of soil types (as shown in Appendix E) that provide the basis for the various habitats across the park system. This section discusses the implications of climate change, the Parks Division's approach to land management, the urban forest and water quality issues as they pertain to the park system.

Climate Change

While climate change impacts the entire community, research is affirming that climate change is disproportionately impacting vulnerable communities, highlighting racial and ethnic minorities³⁵. Those with greater economic, social, and political resources are more likely to succeed in both managing and adapting to future climatic changes³⁶. Meanwhile, those in poorer living conditions will become increasingly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, such as heat waves, poor air quality, and flooding. Climate change has the potential to further increase disparities in health outcomes. For example, lower-income neighborhoods that lack trees and green space are at a greater risk of heat-related illness. This necessitates that sustainability and adaptability initiatives recognize, and subsequently emphasize, an additional focus towards assisting these vulnerable and disadvantaged communities.

The effects of climate change have already become apparent in the form of warmer temperatures, increased precipitation, milder winters and air quality concerns. Over the past century, temperatures throughout the state have increased by an average of two degrees Fahrenheit³⁷. By 2050, statewide annual temperatures are likely to be 2-8 degrees above the current averages³⁸. Lake Mendota, which used to remain frozen for four months out of the year in the 18th century, could experience winters with no ice coverage at all in the coming years³⁹.

³⁵EPA. (2021). Climate Change and Social Vulnerability in the United States: A Focus on Six Impacts. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. <https://www.epa.gov/cira/social-vulnerability-report>

³⁶ NCBI. (2015). The Impact of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States: A Scientific Assessment. National Center for Biotechnology Information. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4690946/>

³⁷ NOAA. (2024). Climate Change: Global Temperature. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-temperature>

³⁸UW-Madison. (2024). Climate Change and Public Health: A Comprehensive Review. University of Wisconsin-Madison. <https://uwmadison.app.box.com/s/qi5evkp4nac87chjmfxa6kn9840sh35>

³⁹Nature. (2019). Widespread loss of lake ice around the Northern Hemisphere in a warming world. Nature Climate Change. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-018-0393-5>

Annual precipitation has increased by five to ten percent in the Midwest over the last half century. This trend is anticipated to continue in upcoming years, and the rain events that do occur are likely to be more intense⁴⁰. In 2018, over 11.6 inches of rain fell within the city in 24 hours, costing the City over \$1.6 million in emergency response and repairs. The City of Madison Engineering Division is working to develop 20 individual Watershed Studies across the city to model various storm events and identify solutions to mitigate flood damage. Many of the Watershed Studies identify improvements that may impact park land, in recognition that parks infrastructure can play a key role in helping address these issues.

With the current and future changes to our climate, the way that park users interact with the system will change as well, which the Parks Division is anticipating and preparing for. As noted, with temperatures rising in the state, the winter season is beginning to shorten, which prompts residents to desire spring and fall outdoor activities for longer parts of the year. Therefore, installing dark-sky friendly lighted fields and courts to accommodate the extended playing season will be an important investment. The Parks Division has already noted a downward trend in the number of ice skating and skiing days and therefore will shift resources from ski trail and ice rink maintenance to natural area and trail maintenance to give park users a high-quality outdoor experience in the winter, even without ice rinks or ski trails.

Land Management

The Parks Division's Land Management Plan⁴¹ () provides a foundation for stewarding the natural resources contained within the 5,700-acre park system in an era of climate change. The Plan recognizes the unique habitats that exist within the system and provides actionable strategies for managing invasive species and creating and protecting pollinator habitat.

As environmental conditions change, ecosystems begin to shift and natural habitats begin to evolve, creating opportunities for invasive species to take hold. Invasive plants, insects and animals threaten the quality of native habitats, by creating potential for competition and disease pressures. Plants such as Japanese knotweed, buckthorn, and garlic mustard compete and crowd out native vegetation. Invasive species are difficult to remove, often requiring multiple herbicide applications for full eradication. Invasive pests such as the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) and jumping worms have substantial environmental impacts with significant implications for public health.

Pollinators such as bees, moths, butterflies, bats, and hummingbirds provide vital services to our ecosystems. The state's bumblebee and monarch butterfly populations have decreased in recent years⁴². Between 75 to 95% of all flowering plants rely on these organisms for

⁴⁰EPA. (2016). Climate Change Indicators in the United States: Fourth Edition. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2016-08/documents/climate_indicators_2016.pdf

⁴¹ City of Madison (2025). Parks Division Land Management Plan. <https://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/documents/LandMgmPlanAdopted2025.pdf>

⁴² "The Monarch Butterfly Problem," Bug of the Week, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Field Station, 2024, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://uwm.edu/field-station/bug-of-the-week/the-monarch-butterfly-problem/>.

pollination⁴³. Roughly one out of every three bites of food a person eats is a result of pollinators^{44 45}, and pollinators are estimated to add \$217 billion annually to the global economy⁴⁶. Additionally, about 75% of the world's food crops rely on pollinators⁴⁷. Over the last decade, the United States has experienced a dramatic decline in honeybee hives resulting from habitat loss, pesticides, parasites, and climate change⁴⁸. The Land Management Plan is rooted in principles of Integrated Pest Management (IPM), with an emphasis on the use of sustainable practices that promote biodiversity of flora and fauna in an era of climate change. The Land Management Plan emphasizes the importance of species selection when restoring habitats to historic Wisconsin landscapes and recognizes that species traditionally suited for zones to the south will be able to tolerate and thrive in Madison's new climate. Many objectives listed in the Land Management Plan are classified as "cultural" practices within IPM, which promote robust, resilient stands of vegetation that are more resistant to weed establishment. Where direct control of invasive species is required, the Plan outlines various methods of mechanical, biological, and chemical control of pests.

The Land Management Plan facilitates clear communication with stakeholders and is the framework to which staff, volunteers, and the community can refer regarding the management and maintenance of vegetation in parklands, whether turf, horticultural plantings, or natural areas. Each section contains a brief description of the types of vegetation that occur throughout the system, and documents goals, objectives, and best management practices for those landscapes. The Land Management Plan provides a baseline for managing the park system and creating more detailed plans, such as work plans for athletic fields and Habitat Management Plans for individual parks.

For additional details, see Appendix F: Madison Parks Sustainable Land Management Practices and Reduction of Our Carbon Footprint.

Urban Forest

Urban forests provide a variety of benefits to cities, making trees an especially useful tool for managing the effects of climate change. Urban trees help filter out many common air pollutants, including nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, ozone, carbon monoxide, and particulate air pollutants. A well-designed urban tree canopy can substantially lower cooling and heating costs during the summer and winter months. This is particularly important in counteracting the urban heat island effect, which occurs when asphalt and concrete absorb and radiate solar heat, causing cities to be five to ten degrees warmer than their surrounding areas.

⁴³Ollerton, J., Winfree, R., & Tarrant, S. (2011). How many flowering plants are pollinated by animals? *Oikos*. Nordic Society Oikos.

<https://nsojournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1600-0706.2010.18644.x>

⁴⁴Galloway, L. F., & Fenster, C. B. (2006). The effect of plant mating system on adaptation in the wild. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 273(1609), 1359-1363. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2006.3721>

⁴⁵Buchmann, S. L., & Nabhan, G. P. (1996). *The forgotten pollinators*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press/Shearwater Books

⁴⁶Gallai, N., Salles, J.-M., Settele, J., & Vaissière, B. E. (2009). Economic valuation of the vulnerability of world agriculture confronted with pollinator decline. *Ecological Economics*, 68(3), 810-821. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2008.06.014>

⁴⁷Hannah Ritchie (2021) - "How much of the world's food production is dependent on pollinators?" Published online at OurWorldinData.org. Retrieved from: '<https://ourworldindata.org/pollinator-dependence>'

⁴⁸"Bumble Bee Declines," Bumble Bees of Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin-Madison, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://wisconsinbumblebees.entomology.wisc.edu/about-bumble-bees/bumble-bee-declines/#climate-change>.

Urban trees also play a large role in reducing stormwater runoff. According to the U.S. Forest Service, a medium-sized maple tree (16" sugar maple) intercepts 1,550 gallons of stormwater per year. Urban forests are critically important for the public health of residents. For example, street trees in urban areas are associated with lower asthma rates among children⁴⁹. The shade created by tree canopy also plays a vital role in protecting residents from harmful UV rays⁵⁰. Studies have shown that living near urban forests can reduce physical and emotional stress among individuals⁵¹.

There are approximately 11,000 acres of public and private tree canopy in the City of Madison, accounting for 22.4% of the city's entire land area. A comprehensive tree inventory of trees on City-owned land was conducted in 2024 per a recommendation from the 2020 Urban Forestry Task Force's Report⁵². Approximately 45,000 park trees, utilizing the Davey TreeKeeper software system, were inventoried. Not only does Madison's tree canopy provide environmental benefits, but the aesthetic value of trees raises property values and can help reduce neighborhood crime¹⁷.

Water Quality

Madison is positioned between the two largest bodies of water in Dane County, Lake Mendota and Lake Monona. The current city limits include shoreline frontage on four of the five interconnected lakes, Mendota, Monona, Wingra and Waubesa. With five distinct lakes, monitoring and managing water quality is unquestionably a significant priority for the community. The five Madison lakes themselves include 58 miles of shoreline and 22 public beaches. While Madison's growth as a city has posed problems for local water quality, recent decades have seen major improvements in pollution reduction and runoff management.

Threats to the health of Madison's waterways stem mainly from the introduction of pollutants such as phosphorous and nitrogen, both of which often enter the watershed from far outside the city limits. Blue-green algae blooms, which can be caused by excess phosphorous levels and warm water temperatures, have plagued Madison's urban waterways for years. These algal blooms decrease water quality and have the potential to cause serious illness. Additionally, harmful bacteria (e.g., E. Coli) and heavy metals drain into Madison's lakes and rivers every year via stormwater runoff. As water quality science advances, additional hazards, such as PFAS (Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances), are identified. These pollutants impact not just environmental quality, but also recreational activities and the ability to consume fish safely, which impacts how parks are managed.

⁴⁹Lovasi GS, Quinn JW, Neckerman KM, Perzanowski MS, Rundle A. Children living in areas with more street trees have lower prevalence of asthma. *J Epidemiol Community Health*. 2008 Jul;62(7):647-9. doi: 10.1136/jech.2007.071894. Epub 2008 May 1. PMID: 18450765; PMCID: PMC3415223.

⁵⁰Hang Ryeol Na, Gordon M. Heisler, David J. Nowak, Richard H. Grant, Modeling of urban trees' effects on reducing human exposure to UV radiation in Seoul, Korea, *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, Volume 13, Issue 4, 2014, Pages 785-792, ISSN 1618-8667, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2014.05.009>.

⁵¹Wolf KL, Lam ST, McKeen JK, Richardson GRA, van den Bosch M, Bardekjian AC. Urban Trees and Human Health: A Scoping Review. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2020 Jun 18;17(12):4371. doi: 10.3390/ijerph17124371. PMID: 32570770; PMCID: PMC7345658.

⁵² City of Madison (2020). Urban Forestry Task Force Report, adopted by Common Council on January 1, 2020, Legislative File ID#55206, RES-20-00072

Long-term exposure to these pollutants can increase the risk of serious health conditions, including heart disease, kidney disease, and cancer⁵³. Further improvements in reducing phosphorous and other harmful agricultural runoff will be vital towards stemming future algal blooms and dangerous bacteria, particularly as annual precipitation and temperature levels in Madison are projected to increase in upcoming decades.

Chapter 3: Parkland Inventory

Madison's park spaces play a significant role in providing the community with a variety of outdoor recreation assets. In addition to providing an overview of the park classifications, facilities, and amenities developed on lands owned by the Parks Division, this chapter outlines various other park and open spaces owned by other local and regional public entities, including the University of Wisconsin, Dane County, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Exhibit 2 illustrates all City of Madison parks and greenways, as well as other public open spaces.

Exhibit 2: Park and Open Space Inventory

⁵³Public Health Madison & Dane County (2024). "Not Just Hot Air: Let's Talk About Poor Air Quality," July 9, 2024, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://publichealthmdc.com/blog/2024-07-09/not-just-hot-air-lets-talk-about-poor-air-quality>.

3.1 City of Madison Park Classifications

The Madison Parks system offers a wide variety of spaces and recreational opportunities. As shown in Table 3.1, each park is classified according to property characteristics such as size, service area, amenities offered, programming, or special purpose. Exhibit 3 Illustrates the geographic distribution of City of Madison parks by their classification.

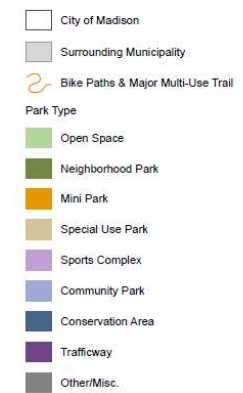
Table 3.1: City of Madison Park Type Classification Descriptions

Classification	General Description
Mini Park	Fewer than 5 acres and used to address limited, isolated, or unique recreational needs.
Neighborhood Park	Five acres or greater, neighborhood parks remain the basic unit of the park system. These parks serve as the recreational and social focus of the neighborhood.
Community Park	Typically greater than 20 acres, these parks serve a broader purpose than a neighborhood park. They focus on meeting community-based recreation needs, as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces.
Conservation Parks	Lands set aside for preservation of sensitive and/or high-quality natural resources.
Greenways	Public land owned or administered by City Engineering for stormwater purposes. Greenway acreage within parks is counted as parkland for purposes of inventory.
Open Space	Typically land that is not suited to develop as a conservation or active use park with facilities.
Other	Non-park facilities such as the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District Pump Station 8 which is located on land owned by the Parks Division.
Special Use	Parkland that serves unique recreation opportunities (e.g., Olbrich Botanical Gardens, golf courses, Forest Hill Cemetery).
Sports Complex	Heavily programmed athletic fields and associated facilities whose primary purpose is programmed active recreation.
Trafficway	Public right-of-way used as parkland. Development of this land is limited. Trafficway acreage is counted as parkland for the purposes of inventorying acreage and number of parks.

This is a detailed map of the City of Madison, Wisconsin. The map shows the city's layout, including major roads, parks, and water bodies. The city is situated on the western shore of Lake Monona, with Lake Mendota to the north and Lake Kegonsa to the south. The map includes an inset showing the city's location relative to Lake Mendota and Lake Monona. The map is titled "City of Madison, Wisconsin" and "Map of the City of Madison, Wisconsin".

17.00 x 11.00 in

City of Madison
Dane County, Wisconsin



Data Sources:
Dane County GIS (2023)
City of Madison GIS (2025)

MADISON
PARKS

Mini, Neighborhood and Community Parks

Mini, neighborhood, and community parks form the core parks of most communities throughout the United States. The facilities in these parks usually provide some type of play equipment, athletic field or sport court, and open green space. Amenities within each park are developed based on the park development planning process, specific physical land constraints, and fiscal resources. Depending on the size and classification of the park, these parks can also include facilities such as community gardens, off-leash dog parks, and ski and hiking trails. A joint use agreement with Emerson School allows for the school grounds to be included as a mini park for inventory purposes and allows residents to use the space as public park when not in use by students. Table 3. 2 provides an overview of amenities potentially available for development by each park classification type.

Table 3.2: Park Amenities Potentially Available by Park Classification

Park Facility	Park Classification		
	<i>Mini</i>	<i>Neighborhood</i>	<i>Community</i>
Park sign	X	X	X
Park kiosk/info board			X
Benches	X	X	X
Landscaping	X	X	X
Picnic area(s)	X	X	X
Open play area	X	X	X
Open play area with space for reservable field(s).		X	X
Field Complex (soccer, football, softball, baseball, cricket, etc.)			X
Sport Court (basketball, tennis, pickleball, futsal, volleyball, etc.)		X	X
Sport Court Complex (basketball, tennis, pickleball, futsal, volleyball, etc.)		X	X
Playground	X	X	X
Playground for both 2- to 5- and 5- to 12-year-olds			X
Community gardens (based on space available and guidance from our partner Rooted)		X	X
Accessible path system		X	X
Recreational biking		X	X
Open air shelter		X	X
Reservable shelter with restrooms			X
Drinking fountain			X
Small parking area, if programmed		X	X
Large parking area			X

Over time, parks may have been developed with amenities that may not align with current park development practices and services, based on the current park classification as outlined in Table 3.2. As Park Development Plans are created using the Area Planning Framework, efforts will be made to identify equitable distribution of sufficient amenities within mini and neighborhood parks within each of the planning areas around the city. The Park Development Plan process evaluates the unique natural characteristics of park land along with the needs of the surrounding community. Plans for some parks may include atypical amenities in order to provide for the unique needs of the community in a particular area of the city.

Conservation Parks

The City of Madison has 21 conservation parks, consisting of approximately 1,830 acres of conservancy land. Conservation parks are managed to preserve native plant communities, wildlife, and significant natural resources. To preserve native plant and animal habitat, access is limited to foot traffic only (along with motorized wheelchair and mobility assistance devices) and dogs are not permitted. These facilities are acquired based on high quality environmental or unique geological characteristics of the land. Madison places high priority on the preservation of these areas and will continue to acquire conservation land to preserve and protect sensitive and high-quality natural areas in the future.

Greenways

Greenways are public land managed and administered by the City of Madison Engineering Division. They include lands such as detention ponds and drainage corridors. Greenways are sometimes considered part of the park (e.g., the drainage ponds at Owen Park), but can also be completely separate from Madison Parks (e.g., the retention pond on Mineral Point Drive). The Parks Division occasionally shares mowing and plowing responsibilities with the Engineering Division for greenway properties.

Open Space

The classification of open space denotes land that does not have active recreation facilities but provides vital space for the community. This category includes 21 different parcels of lands that function as a park such as former landfill Mineral Point Park, land adjacent to waterways such as the Mud Lake Fishing Access, Period Gardens, and heavily wooded slopes such as Highlands East Open Space.

Other

Non-park facilities include the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District Pump Station 8 which is located on land owned by the Parks Division adjacent to Bowman Park.

Special Use Parks

Specialized facilities intended to serve a unique function are classified as Special Use Parks. These include golf courses, maintenance facilities, Forest Hill Cemetery, Olbrich Botanical Gardens, Warner Park Ball Park, and the Henry Vilas Zoo (operated by Dane County).

The City's four golf courses comprise the largest percentage of land utilized for a special use. The four courses managed by the Madison Parks Division include Yahara Hills, Odana Hills, Monona, and The Glen Golf Park. This open space is used for year-round recreation by golfers, walkers, joggers, and cross-country skiers.

The next largest special use facility is Olbrich Botanical Gardens, which operates as a public-private partnership between the Parks Division and the non-profit Olbrich Botanical Society (OBS). The facility features 16 acres of various outdoor gardens, the Bolz Conservatory, state-of-the-art production greenhouses and Frautschi Family Learning Center, along with the newly refurbished Royal Thai Pavilion (a gift to the University of Wisconsin-Madison from the Wisconsin Alumni Association-Thailand). The gardens showcase a variety of displays related to sustainable horticulture practices, including raingardens, gravel gardens and a variety of native plantings.

Sports Complex

This category primarily includes Duane F. Bowman Park and Breese Stevens Athletic Field, which function as venues for athletic games and practice. In addition to serving as the home field for the Madison Forward semi-professional soccer team, Breese Stevens Field also serves as a destination entertainment venue.

Trafficways

City of Madison trafficways are road right-of-ways that function as a public park. These include areas such as the Edgewood Pleasure Drive, certain street ends, and the State Street/Mall Concourse. The City of Madison has nearly 27 acres of parks classified as trafficways, but there are also areas that are road right-of-ways within larger classified parks (i.e., the non-vacated Esther Beach Road right-of-way within Esther Beach Park). The largest trafficway is the area known as State Street/Mall Concourse, which includes State Street and Lisa Link Peace Park and encircles the State Capitol grounds. It has five performance areas, walkways, fountains, biking routes, and numerous passive recreation facilities built into its design. With the shops and restaurants that line State Street, it is a primary destination for students, visitors, downtown employees, residents, and major community events.

3.2 City of Madison Park Facilities

The City of Madison park system has over 290 public parks that generally provide typical park features such as basketball courts and playgrounds, as well as beaches, community gardens, ice skating rinks, pickleball and tennis courts, golf courses, and the nationally renowned botanical gardens. There are over 8,000 assets within the system; some examples include athletic fields, restroom buildings, and drinking fountains. For a breakdown of the park system's different facilities, see Appendix G: Madison Park Facilities.

Madison Parks has traditionally ranked well when compared to other cities of similar size across the nation. Each year, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) gathers data from the 100 most populated cities in the nation. Among other categories, the TPL ParkScore compares the abundance of

facilities that tend to be popular among diverse user groups. In 2024, Madison scored above average for overall park facilities but scored particularly high for basketball hoops (9.7 per 10,000 residents), dog parks (4.06 per 100,000 residents), and playgrounds (7.05 per 10,000 residents).⁵⁴

3.3 Other Park and Open Space Facilities

In addition to the more than 290 parks offered by the City of Madison, Madison residents also have access to a number of other outdoor public recreation spaces. A variety of university, school, county, and state facilities add to the availability of park and open space within the City of Madison. These facilities are shown in Exhibit 4. This section outlines the various outdoor spaces available to within the Madison community.

Exhibit 4: Other Parks and Open Space Inventory

⁵⁴ Trust for Public Land (2024): 2024 ParkScore Index: Madison, WI. Trust for Public Lands. https://parkserve.tpl.org/downloads/pdfs/Madison_WI.pdf

University of Wisconsin

The University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW) contributes both athletic facilities and natural areas to the available open space in the City of Madison. The primary UW public facilities consist of the UW Arboretum and the UW Lakeshore Nature Preserve. These two areas provide over 1,500 acres of publicly accessible land for use.

The UW's Arboretum totals 1,262 acres of conservation land. It includes gardens, prairies, savannas, deciduous forests, conifer forests, wetlands, and horticultural gardens. The UW Arboretum provides opportunities for hiking, biking, picnicking, jogging, skiing, snowshoeing, and nature viewing.

The Lakeshore Nature Preserve contains 300 acres of preserved land along four miles of the southern shore of Lake Mendota. The Lakeshore Nature Preserve provides opportunities for nature viewing, swimming, picnicking, hiking, jogging, biking, fishing, and has opportunities for launching kayaks, canoes, small boats and accessing the lakes for winter recreation.

The UW's private recreational facilities (e.g. the Nicholas Recreation Center, Camp Randall Sports Center, and Bakke Recreation and Wellbeing Center) include indoor/outdoor tennis courts, an indoor racquetball court, swimming pool facilities, tracks, softball diamonds, soccer fields and basketball courts. These facilities are reserved for the over 60,000 students, faculty, and staff affiliated with the University. Additionally, the UW Library Mall and Memorial Union Terrace are popular outdoor spaces within the UW Madison campus complex enjoyed by students and the general public alike.

Dane County Parks

Dane County owns and manages over 12,000 acres of park and open space areas throughout the County. These areas are designed to offer recreational opportunities on a regional scale. Some of these parks lie within or partially within the City of Madison limits. These parks are typically conservation-oriented and have specific recreational facilities related to preservation or education regarding cultural and natural resources. Nearby County parks and facilities that serve Madison residents are described briefly below, with full details available on the County's website.⁵⁵

- **Badger Prairie County Park:** This Park serves as the center of the National Scenic Ice Age Trail Junction Area. The park has a shelter facility, mountain bike trails, a playground, a dog exercise area, and an aero-modeling field, and provides access to Military Ridge State Trail. The Madison Area Youth Soccer Association, who utilizes many of Madison soccer fields, also leases 60 acres of land on the north side of the park for use as a soccer complex.

⁵⁵ Dane County Parks (2025). Dane County Park System. Dane County Parks. <https://www.danecountyparks.com/ParkSystem/List>

- Blooming Grove Drumlins Natural Resource Area: This Area preserves glacial drumlin features that remain from the last glaciation, and provides opportunities for hiking, fishing, cross-country skiing, wildlife observation, foraging, nature study, as well as hunting and trapping.
- Capital City State Trail: The Trail is used for bicycling, walking, jogging, and in-line skating. Dane County Parks maintains the 9-mile segment of Capital Trail that traverses through the Capital Springs Recreation Area from Verona Road to Industrial Drive and provides multiple links around and through Madison between the Military Ridge State Trail and the Glacial Drumlin State Trail.
- Jenni and Kyle Preserve: The Preserve focuses on providing children and persons with disabilities a place to enjoy outdoor activities. Visitors can learn about natural environments through accessible trout and pan fishing, wildlife observation, wheelchair swings, and a picnic shelter building.
- William G. Lunney Lake Farm County Park: The Park is a unit of the Capital Springs Centennial State Park & Recreation Area, which also includes the Lewis Nine Springs E-Way, Capital City State Bike Trail, and Lower Yahara River Trail. The park offers three shelter facilities, play equipment, a barrier-free boat launch with fish cleaning facility, two accessible fishing piers, wildlife pond, overlook tower, hiking and cross-country ski trails, and a campground with group camping sites. The park also includes the Lussier Family Heritage Center, which serves as a hub for environmental education programs to participants of all ages and abilities.
- Lake View Hill Park: This heavily wooded park is the highest point on the north side of the City of Madison and contains restored savannas and prairie.
- Lewis Nine Springs E-Way: The E-Way creates an environmental corridor extending from Dunn's Marsh to Lake Farm County Park to the south of Madison, which includes cultural and natural features of wetlands, prairies, sedge meadows, native forests, large springs, and Native American mound sites. It offers opportunities for jogging, hiking, biking, nature study, photography, and cross-country skiing.
- Lower Yahara Trail: The Trail provides an off-road trail connection between the city of Madison and the Village of McFarland, running along Lake Waubesa to connect the Capital City Trail at Lake Farm County Park with McDaniel Park in the Village of McFarland. The trail includes an accessible fishing pier, rest stops, and multiple observation areas with picturesque views, including along the shore of Lake Kegonsa and banks of Door Creek.
- Yahara Heights County Park and Cherokee Marsh Natural Resource Area: The Marsh is the largest remaining wetland, contains some of the best examples of burial mounds in Dane County, and is crucial to the water quality of Madison's chain of lakes, including by preserving valuable wildlife habitat. The recreational park offers a 20-acre dog exercise area, hiking trails, and a canoe and kayak launch.
- Tenney Lock: The lock and dam has been operated and maintained by Dane County since 1981. The lock structure allows boats to pass between Lake Mendota and Lake Monona and accommodates approximately 10,000 boats annually. In addition to providing recreational benefits, the lock and dam are used to manage flood waters within the Madison chain of lakes.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) owns and manages a variety of natural resources. Governor Nelson State Park, located on the north shore of Lake Mendota, is in the closest proximity to Madison. The conveniently located park provides a sand beach, boat launch, picnic areas, prairie restorations, and approximately 8 miles of hiking/cross-country ski trails.

Other Parks/Conservancy Areas

There are several other public parks and conservancy areas under the jurisdiction of Madison's neighboring communities that are used by City of Madison residents, including but not limited to the cities of Fitchburg, Middleton, and Monona. Fitchburg parks such as Huegel Jamestown, Western Hills and Belmar Parks are adjacent to City of Madison parks. These parks can also provide unique opportunities for partnership in order to meet the needs of residents from both communities.

National Park Service Resources

The Ice Age National Scenic Trail spans 1,200 miles, traverses some of Wisconsin's finest geologic and glacial features, and passes through the ancestral lands of 15 indigenous tribes. The Trail, located only in Wisconsin, was designated as an official unit of the U.S. National Park Service in 2023 and is one of only 11 National Scenic Trails in the country. The Dane County segment of the trail is 44.2 miles long, plus an optional 24.2 miles of connecting routes. The trail passes through the west side of the county, from Lodi Marsh to the Brooklyn State Wildlife Area. The Trail is built, managed and maintained by dedicated volunteers, Ice Age Trail Alliance, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, local partners, and the National Park Service. The Parks Division continues to work with Dane County Parks and the Ice Age Trail Alliance to acquire lands to expand Moraine Woods Park and provide a vital connection for the Ice Age Trail.

Private Recreational Facilities

Private recreational facilities provide recreational opportunities to Madison residents who can afford and desire to seek out specialized facilities such as private gyms, pools, and tennis/pickleball facilities. Additionally, there are several privately owned spaces within the city that are used as public amenities. These areas often provide local neighborhood open space and are owned by private organizations. These facilities have not been included in this plan.

Governor's Island located along the north shore of Lake Mendota is another unique outdoor recreation space. Wisconsin's first Governor, Leonard J. Farwell called the area home during his tenure, and the land was donated to the State of Wisconsin by the state's second Governor to be used for the first State Hospital for the Insane, now the Mendota Mental Health Institute. The Institute now owns the property, but the public is welcome to traverse paved walking paths and take in scenic views near rocky bluffs.

Madison residents are fortunate to live in a place with outstanding natural resources and recreational amenities. Understanding resources provided by others and fostering partnerships around outdoor recreation needs will help ensure that unique natural resources are preserved, and a variety of opportunities are available for the enjoyment of area residents.

Chapter 4: Engagement Strategies and Recreation Facility Demand

This chapter examines recreational needs, demands, and concerns based on community engagement processes. The POSP planning process incorporated multiple engagement strategies to understand park use and concerns amongst Madison residents. Multiple methods were utilized to reach as many residents as possible; new engagement strategies helped to reach new voices during the planning process. Madison Parks strives to engage all residents to help ensure the concerns and input of all residents are represented. This chapter provides an overview of engagement efforts used in the planning process and analyzes facility use to inform the recommendations of the POSP.

4.1 Community Engagement

A two-part engagement strategy was utilized for this planning process: city-wide engagement, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and youth focused engagement. Historically, in Madison and across the U.S., BIPOC communities are often marginalized or left out in planning processes due to the legacies of racism. Therefore, special focus and intentionality was given to engaging with Madison's Black and brown communities, as well as young people considering they are a core demographic of park user. All Together, a creative agency based out of Chicago that specializes in equitable public engagement, was hired to design and implement engagement activities specifically intended to welcome BIPOC and youth voices into the planning process. A summary of all the engagement activities and their results can be found in Appendix H.

Overall, the community engagement activities for this POSP update included:

- A city-wide survey conducted through the University of Wisconsin Survey Center
- Four Public Input Meetings open to the general public
- Four Youth-focused "Pop-Ups" held at Parks Alive events
- Three Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) (held virtually) and Youth Focus Groups (held in-person)
- Fourteen 'Wish Boxes' distributed to libraries and community centers across Madison to gather comment cards
- A supplementary Youth and BIPOC-focused online survey, promoted via the wish boxes and pop-up events

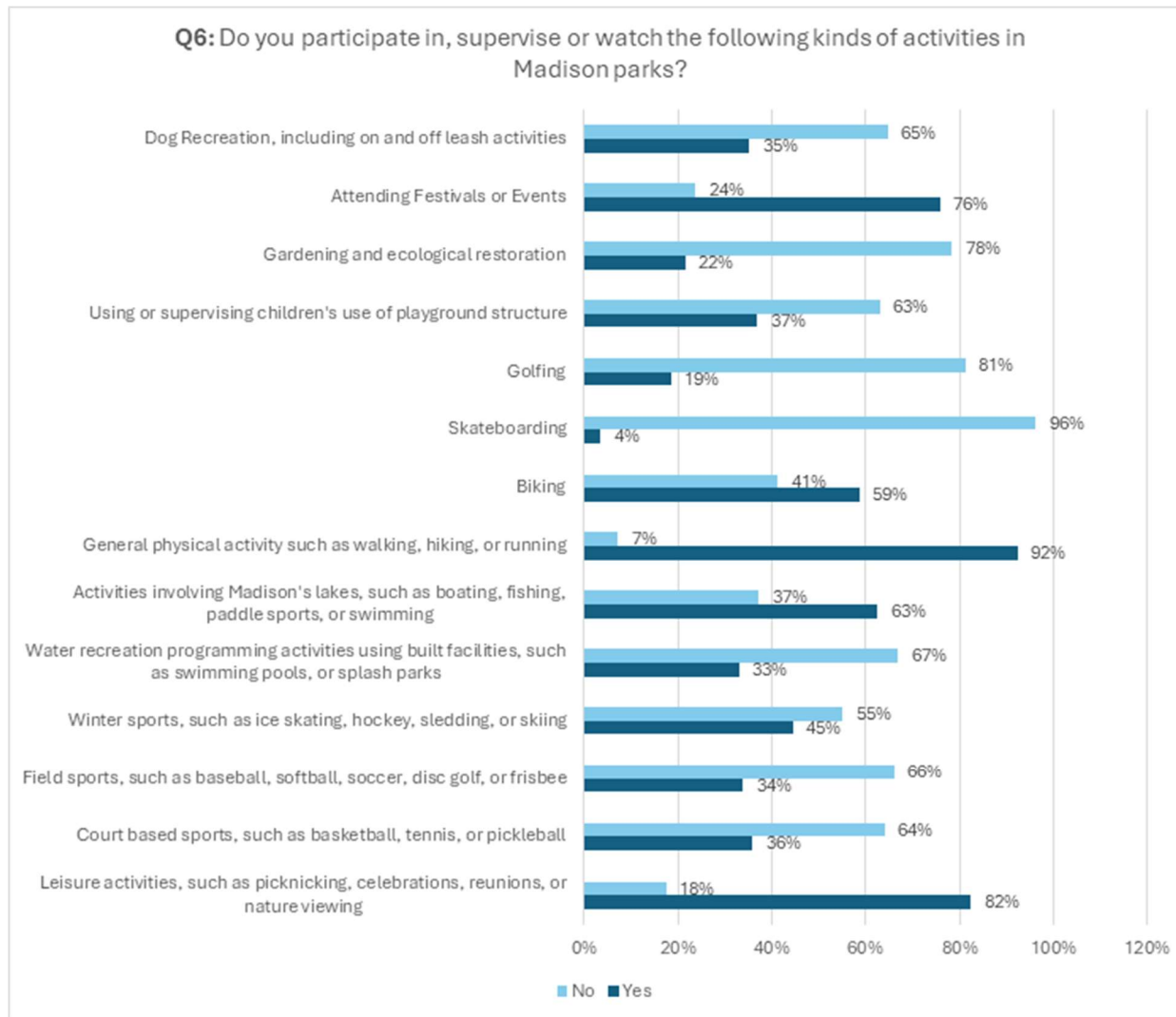
City-Wide Survey

In the fall of 2023, the Madison Parks Division hired the UW Survey Center to assist in the development and administration of a large-scale survey. The intent of the survey was to gauge satisfaction with Madison's park and recreation amenities and learn more about how residents use those facilities. Surveys were mailed to 5,000 randomly selected Madison addresses; of those, 898 households completed the survey (18% response rate). General demographic information shared by those responding to the survey indicated the median age of respondents as 50, with the predominant age group of 65-74; this is a relatively normal age distribution but skewed slightly older. In addition, 57% identified as female, 41% as male, and 2% identified as nonbinary or other.

Over half of survey respondents reported visiting Madison neighborhood parks within a 10-minute walk of their home on a weekly or daily basis. For City parks outside of one's neighborhood requiring transportation, more than half of the respondents reported visiting monthly or yearly. More than half of the respondents also reported visiting larger natural or conservation areas such as Cherokee Marsh and Edna Taylor Park on a monthly or yearly basis, which was similar to frequency of visits to larger regional parks. Based on the survey, the majority of park visitors either walk or take private motorized vehicles to the parks that they visit most often.

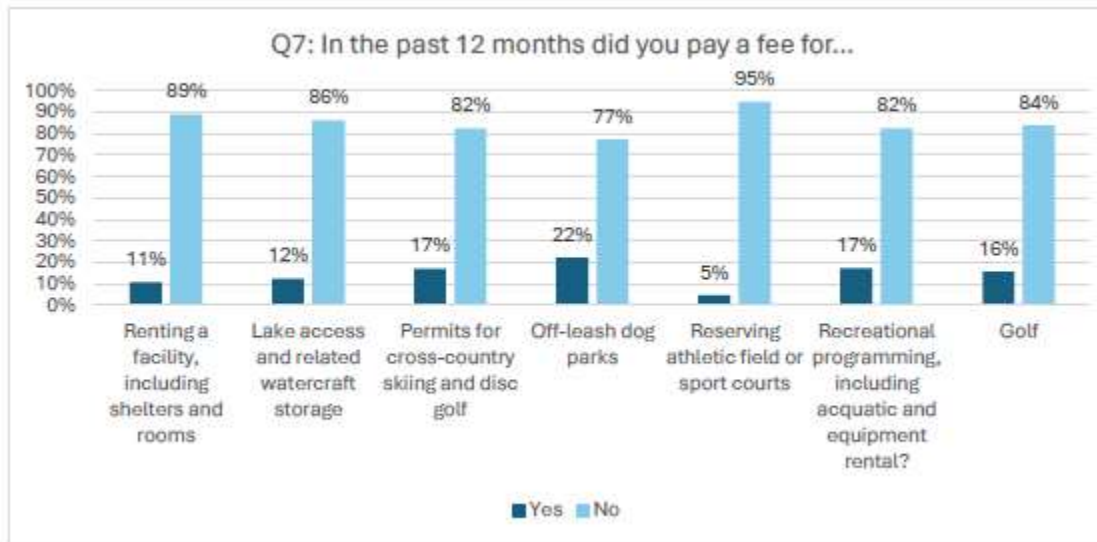
The top activities respondents reported participating in, supervising or watching activities were general physical activities such as walking, hiking or running and leisure activities such as picnicking, celebrations, reunions or nature viewing (Figure 4.1). Other top park uses included attending festivals or events, activities involving Madison lakes, and biking. This diversity suggests that parks cater to a broad spectrum of interests and activities, making them inclusive spaces for all visitors. Most respondents found the park system to be safe, accessible spaces where they felt welcome.

Figure 4.1: Survey Response to Activities Within Madison Parks



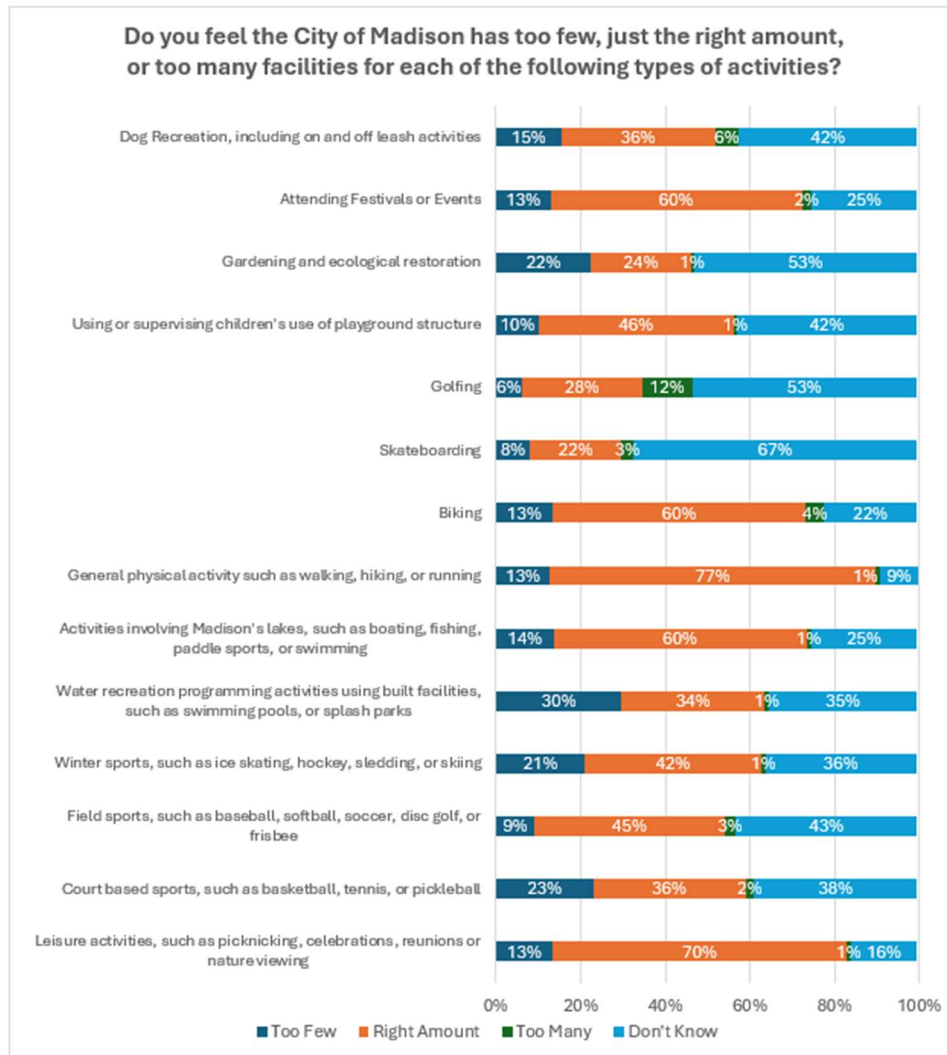
Most residents responding to the survey had not paid a fee for any park amenity, and those who did pay fees most commonly paid for off-leash dog park permits. According to the survey, the least common fee paid was reservations for athletic fields or courts (Figure 4. 2) Most respondents found the fees charged by Madison Parks very affordable.

Figure 4.2: Survey Response to Fees Paid to Use Madison Parks



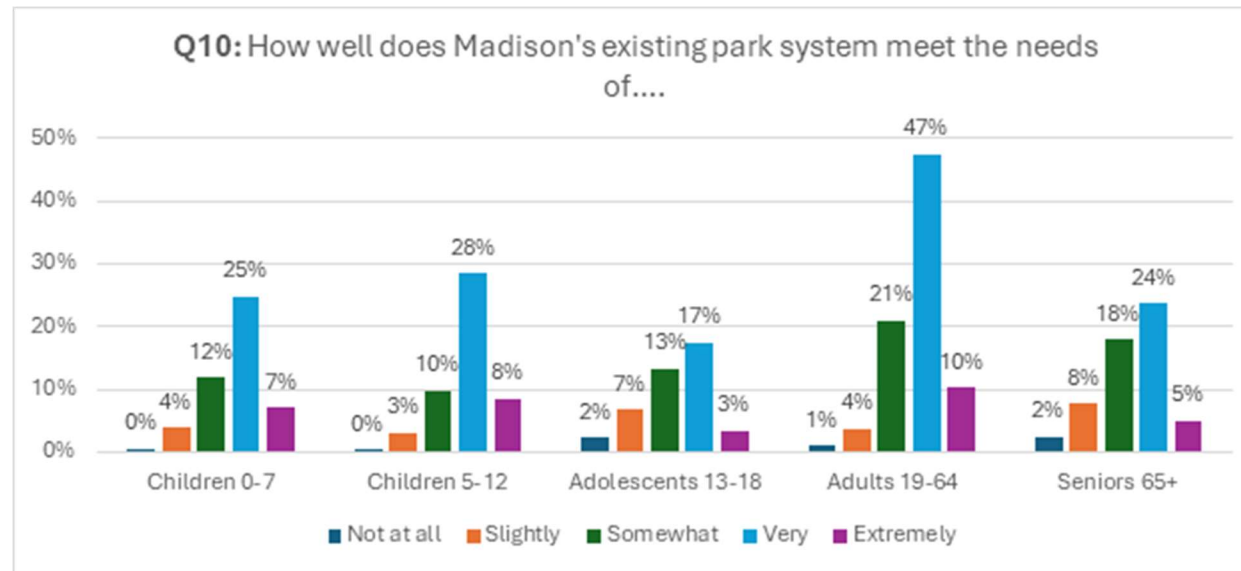
When asked about availability of recreational facilities, most respondents felt Madison had just the right amount of facilities for general physical activities, leisure activities, biking, activities involving the lakes, and festivals or events. Some respondents indicated a desire for more water recreation programming activities using built facilities such as swimming pools or splash parks; more court-based sports facilities such as basketball, tennis or pickleball; and increased winter sports facilities for activities such as ice skating, hockey, sledding or skiing.

Figure 4.3: Survey Results Regarding Amount of Recreational Offerings



The survey results revealed that most respondents felt the parks met the needs of all age groups, particularly for adults and young children. Respondents indicated that the park system is not meeting the needs of adolescents (ages 13-18) quite as well compared to other age groups. Overall, the results suggests that while parks are largely successful in catering to various age groups, there may be room for improvement in addressing the specific needs of teenagers (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4: Survey Results Regarding Meeting Needs Based on Age

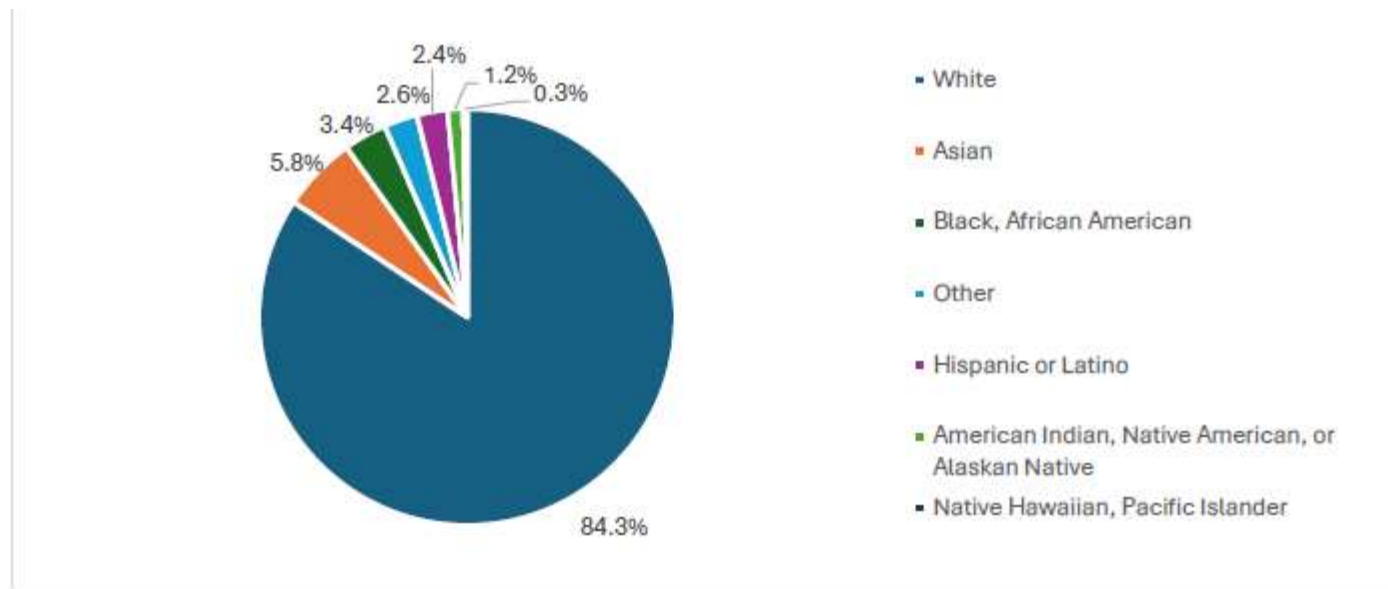


The majority of the respondents found all park features highlighted in the survey to be very important for a variety of reasons and recognized that parks and open spaces improve their quality of life. Land for recreation or preservation and natural open spaces and conservation areas were identified as some of the most important parts of the park system.

Respondents were asked to identify funding priorities for the various services throughout the park system. Maintenance, repairs and replacement of existing park amenities were ranked highest among funding priorities by respondents. Ecological management received the second highest scores for funding priorities, and respondents emphasized that policy makers and staff should give high priority to providing resources towards damage to the environment, habitat loss, and climate change.

An additional analysis was conducted to evaluate how perceptions differed across different demographic categories, including race and ethnicity, housing tenure, income, and self-reported disability status. Overall, 84.3% of survey respondents identified as white with the rest identifying as either Asian (5.8%), Black/African American (3.4%), Other (2.6%), Hispanic/Latino (2.4%), American Indian/Native American/Alaskan Native (1.2%), or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.3%). (Figure 4.5)

Figure 4.5: Race/Ethnicity of Community Survey Respondents



Regardless of race, income, housing status or ability, respondents overwhelmingly recognize the role parks and open spaces play in improving their quality of life. In general, most respondents find Madison's parks and open spaces accessible; however white participants felt more strongly favorable regarding this than BIPOC respondents. While the majority of respondents indicated they do not avoid parks due to safety concerns, more BIPOC participants shared that they avoided a park because they felt unsafe. Likewise, for those respondents who identified as a person with a disability (9% of survey respondents), the majority found parks and open spaces to be accessible, though those who identified as disabled responded overall slightly less positive to accessibility than those without a disability.

The median household income range of the survey respondents was between \$75,001 and \$100,000. Income did not seem to be a major consideration in terms of accessibility to the park system. Individuals whose income was over \$100K paid for special uses at a slightly higher rate than those who make under \$100K. Regarding housing, 71% of respondents identified as homeowners and 28% identified as renters. In comparison to homeowners, renters had a slightly less positive response in general to the accessibility of Madison parks and open spaces, though both felt that Madison parks and open spaces were accessible. There is almost no difference between renters and homeowners in terms of whether or not they paid a park fee in the last 12 months.

Public Input Meetings

Between April and May 2024, Madison Parks and MSA Professional Services, Inc. held a total of four Public Input Meetings (PIMs) around Madison to kick-off the POSP and begin gathering input for the update of the plan. These meetings were open-house sessions, with a short presentation given at the beginning of the meeting and stations placed throughout the room with activities designed to engage attendees on their priorities for, and opinions about, the park system. These meetings were held at locations across the city:

- Vel Phillips Memorial School (west side)
- Warner Park Community Recreation Center (north side)
- Olbrich Botanical Gardens Atrium (east side)
- Madison Parks Office (south side)

During the event, QR codes placed on flyers located at the activity stations collected voluntary demographic information about the attendees. As is often the case for open invitation public meetings in Madison, attendees at the open houses were generally older (36% fell within the 41-55 age range, 21% were 56-70 and 34% were 70 or older), and 84% identified as “white” in Race/Ethnicity, with 8% Hispanic/Latinx, and 2% Asian/AA. Attendees also overwhelmingly reported regular park usage: 32% reported daily usage and 52% selected weekly usage.

Meeting attendees participated in a number of activities designed to gauge resident’s priorities. These included a mapping exercise, a voting exercise regarding budget categories and funding, and the opportunity to provide comments on boards connected to different topics and facility usage.

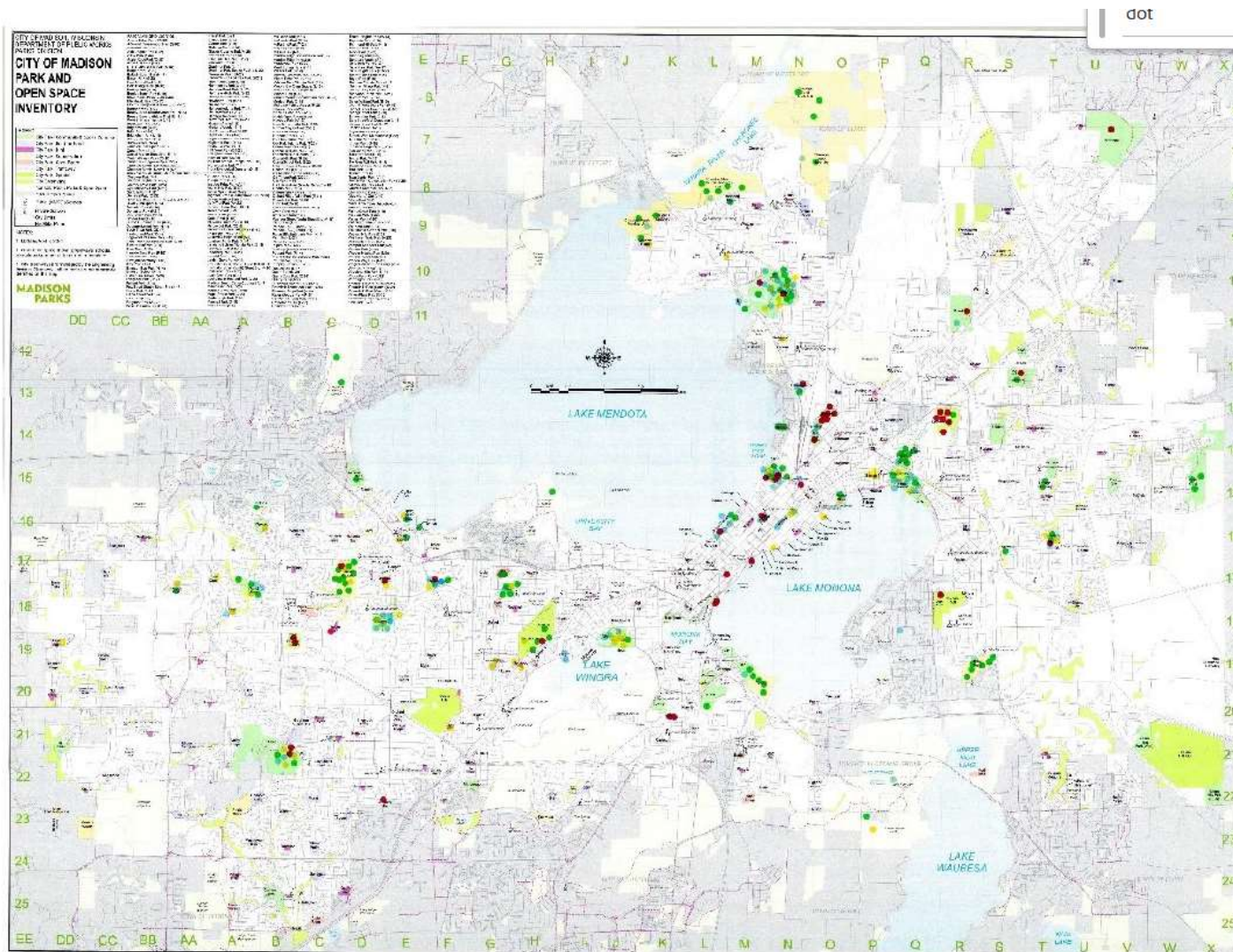
The mapping exercise (Exhibit 5) was used so attendees could select parks or areas that they visited using colored dots to identify specific information:

- Green dots were for their favorite park to enjoy nature.
- Red dots could be placed at the park they felt was most in need of improvement.

- Blue dots were used for their favorite park to go to with children.
- Yellow dots were used to identify the park that they felt was the best for group activities.

In total, 275 dots were placed on the map by participants cumulatively across all four meetings. Through this exercise Warner Park and Olbrich Park were identified as favorite parks to enjoy nature and go to with children. Owen Conservation Park was identified as a favorite space for enjoying nature. Warner Park and Vilas Park were ranked as the best parks for group activities. Demetral Park and Starkweather Park were parks identified in need of most improvement.

Exhibit 5: Mapping Madison Activity



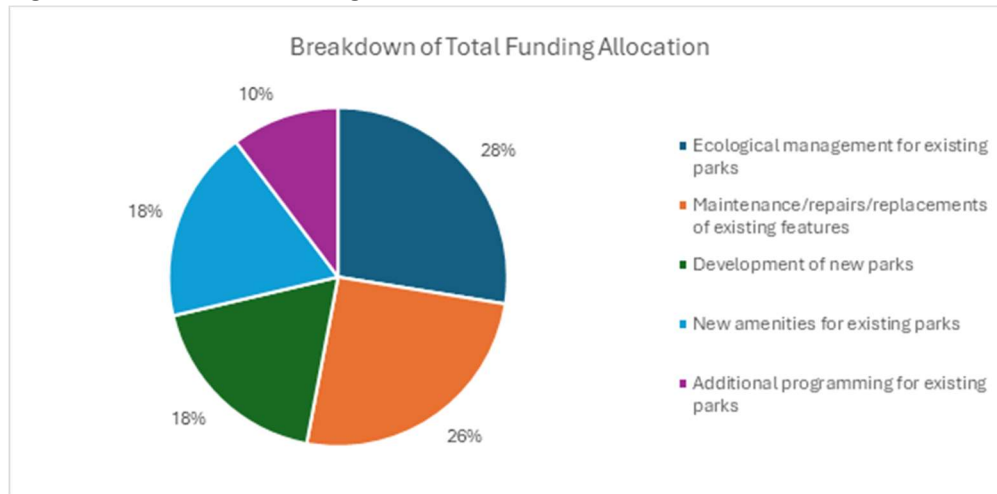
Over 60 residents participated in the “Balance the Budget” exercise that was offered at the meetings. Each participant was allocated \$100 in funds that could be distributed in \$10 increments across five different spending categories:

- Development of new parks
- Additional programming for existing parks

- Maintenance/repairs/replacements of existing features
- New amenities for existing parks
- Ecological management for existing parks

The highest percentage of funding was directed towards ecological management for existing parks, with maintenance/repairs/ replacements receiving the second highest funding allocation. This suggests that attendees prioritized investment into existing facilities and land over new development. Equal amounts were designated for development of new parks and new amenities for existing parks. Additional programming for existing parks received the lowest funding allocation, through this exercise, which is similar to the results of the city-wide survey (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6: Balance the Budget Exercise



Meeting attendees were provided 158 comments on boards related to six different Ongoing Initiatives of the Parks Division:

- Activating Parks
- Climate Resilience
- Golf
- Lake Monona Waterfront
- Recreational Biking
- Volunteers in Parks

Common interests for Activating Parks included skateboarding, pickleball, and dog parks. Additionally, there was community interest for cultural events, to help ensure that Madison Parks are a hub for cultural celebrations for diverse residents, and cultural education for the public. With respect to Golf, participants expressed both excitement and concerns about the future of golf in Madison parks. While some respondents expressed concerns about limited usage and the financial costs and benefits of the courses, others noted the financial accessibility of an otherwise costly sport and the potential to bring in revenue for the Parks Division. Regarding Climate Resilience, overarching themes included support for maintaining natural areas, preservation of tree canopy, reduction of hard surfaces, and special attention to habitats for pollinators and birds. Participants showed interest in an interconnected system of bike paths throughout Madison and extending connections into surrounding municipalities but emphasized the importance of being environmentally sensitive to natural habitats. Participant comments on the Lake Monona Waterfront focused on protection of nature and ecological health. Meeting participants wanted to see improved access to information and stronger interorganizational collaboration pertaining the Parks Volunteer Program. See Appendix F: Ongoing Initiatives of the Parks Division to learn more about each of these topics.

Staff asked participants to indicate on a presentation board which park facilities that they or a member of their household had utilized in the past 12 months. The majority of responses were for leisure activities, general physical activity like walking and running, and attending festivals and events. This feedback was consistent with the information received as part of the city-wide survey.

BIPOC and Youth Engagement Focus Groups

Madison Parks, MSA Professional Services, and All Together held a total of 3 focus groups (2 virtual and 1 in person in July 2024) to collect feedback from community members that often are less likely to participate in typical community planning processes. These focus groups were designed to engage underrepresented voices, including Hmong residents, BIPOC advocacy groups, and youth and were held during the summer. Participants provided valuable insights on their experiences, needs, and aspirations for Madison's parks, helping to shape a more inclusive and responsive park system for the entire community.

Virtual focus group meetings were conducted via Zoom with service providers from the local community working with youth of color and members of the Hmong community. Focus group participants indicated they regularly participate in park programming or visit parks. Suggestions for improvements included adding more restrooms and drinking fountains and seating to accommodate larger gatherings; this would also improve access for families of young children. Some participants noted that crowding in popular areas can be a deterrent, including with playgrounds. Participants also noted the need for better communication and information with the Parks Division on how to rent park shelters, suggesting the information could be provided via posters or QR codes in the shelters themselves.

A youth focus group was held at Warner Park and included a kinesthetic cone activity and another facilitated group activity. Most youth participants indicated they spend a lot of time in parks, while some indicated they attend special events in the parks. The youth indicated a desire for more park facilities and events that are welcoming of teens. Some members of the youth focus group shared that lack of safe access across busy streets and the presence of police that may deter youth from using the parks. Some youth participants noted a need for better lighting for evening use and the need for more facilities geared specifically for teenagers. The facilitated activity provided recommendations for incorporating art, promoting fitness, improving the environment, increasing the number of community events and improving safety and connectivity to and within the parks.

Pop-Ups & Wish Boxes

Madison Parks, MSA Professional Services, and All Together held a total of four pop-up events at Parks Alive events in June and July. Parks Alive events are held at park locations within Neighborhood Resource Team (NRT) areas⁵⁶. Allied, Aldo Leopold, Worthington and Warner Parks were the sites of these events. The Pop-Ups were an opportunity to attend events happening in neighborhood parks and connect with BIPOC families to hear their thoughts related to parks and open space in Madison. The Pop-Ups included activities designed to engage participants in describing both what they liked best and items they felt were missing from City of Madison parks. An estimated 144 kids engaged with the Parks Division's pop-up booth over the summer of 2024. Kids were asked to write their favorite things to do in the parks as well as their "wishes" for making the parks a better place. The most popular activities amongst the kids were swings and slides.

Fourteen Wish Boxes were placed at libraries and community centers. These provided residents an opportunity to share ideas for changes or additions to parks, and the boxes provided a link to an online survey participants could use to give more feedback. Results were obtained from nine of the locations, while unfortunately five boxes were lost, and another box had no responses. People who engaged with the wish boxes expressed a desire for more accessible playground features for those with disabilities; additional sports courts and fields; more shade structures and trees; wildlife and habitat protection; open space preservation; more drinking fountains and restrooms; and additional pool and splash pad facilities.

Online Survey

A brief online survey (provided in both English and Spanish) was intended as a supplement to the survey produced through the UW Survey Center and was promoted via the four Parks Alive Pop-up events and the fourteen Wish Boxes. The supplemental survey was also sent directly to numerous community organizations within Madison. The survey was available from June through the beginning of September; sixty-four people took the supplemental online survey.

⁵⁶ City of Madison: Neighborhood Resource Team <https://www.cityofmadison.com/civil-rights/programs/neighborhood-resource-teams>

This survey was designed intentionally to be short, simple, and easier for teenagers to take. Though these questions were optional, over 50% of respondents indicated they were 18 yrs old or less. Respondents who took the online survey also identified in a higher percentage as Black/African American and two people took the Spanish language survey. Though not everyone completed this section of the survey, for those that did respond roughly two-thirds identified as female and the remainder identified as male, non-binary or something else. The majority of respondents visited parks on a daily, several times a week, or a few times a month basis. Hanging out/relaxing, walking, playing on the playground, and playing sports received the highest number of scores when asked what do you like to do when you visit a park. When asked if they ever felt unwelcome in a park, 85% answered 'no.' Of those who indicated they didn't feel welcome, they could select as many multi-choice options as they wanted for the reason why; the majority responded they felt judged or stared at or didn't feel safe. These survey takers also believed adding more shade and places to sit, fun events, and more bathrooms would help improve Madison parks. A summary of this survey and other engagement efforts is available in Appendix D.

Key Takeaways

Overall, Madisonians place great value on their park system and the important role it plays in their day to day lives. They are passionate about protecting parks and open spaces and see them as integral to the city's character. At times, the desire for environmental protection is somewhat at odds with developing more facilities and amenities, especially additional playgrounds, bike paths and sport courts. Across the different engagement activities, residents expressed a desire for more basic park facilities such as benches, picnic tables, shade and shelters, drinking fountains, and restrooms, and additional specialty facilities such as skateparks, pools and splash pads.

From the BIPOC and youth focused engagement, it is clear that there is still work to do to ensure all Madisonians feel comfortable, safe, and welcome within the parks. This can be addressed in part through improved communication regarding park policies, especially regarding sound/music and shelter reservations. There is also a need for more facilities and events geared specially for the teenage age cohort.

4.2 Recreation Facility Demand

A recreation facility demand analysis is used to identify and prioritize future planning efforts and identify capital expenditures for natural areas and outdoor recreational resources. The assessment combines information obtained during public engagement processes, and examines past, present and projected future needs in order to create informed recommendations. This section reviews data obtained from facility and athletic field reservations and permit sales⁵⁷, along with results of the survey conducted with local athletic organizations and information provided by various stakeholders to understand trends, use and preferences within the system related to recreational needs.

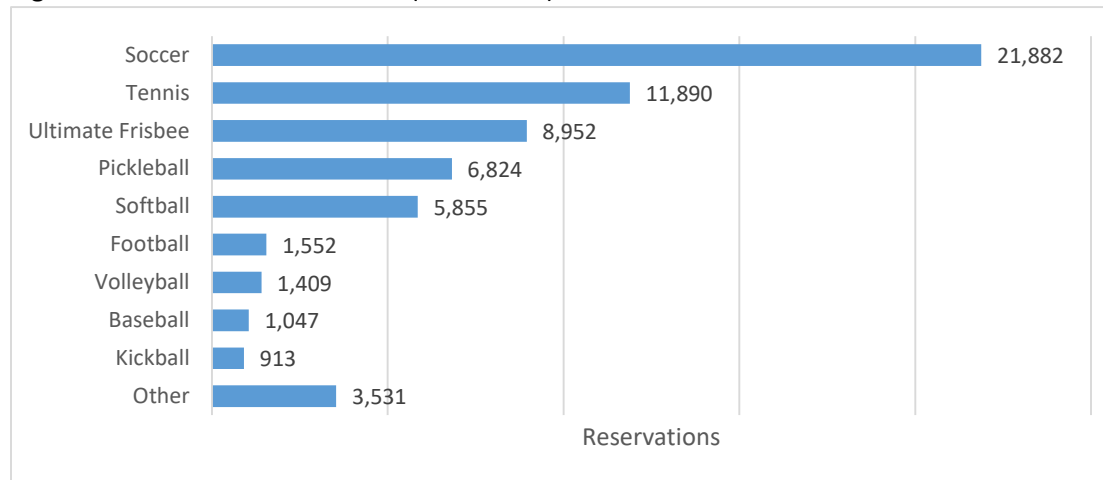
⁵⁷ RecTrac is the reservation software currently used by the Parks Division. From 2018-2023, the Parks Division used Spotz for athletic field reservations, which was the successor to the start-up software called Gym dandy.

Athletic Facility Reservations

The City of Madison provides and maintains facilities for year-round athletic use within the park system but does not directly manage recreation league athletic programs. The City partners with Madison School & Community Recreation (MSCR) and other recreation organizations such as Madison Ultimate Frisbee Association (MUFA), Liga Latina y Latinos Soccer Association, Chavitas Soccer Club, Madison Area Youth Soccer Association (MAYSA), and Southside Raiders Youth Football to program the athletic fields.

A review of the Madison Parks' reservation data from 2018-2024 identifies that the activities with the highest number of reservations included soccer, tennis, ultimate frisbee, and pickleball (Figure 4.7). Pickleball appears for the first time in the top 4 for Park Reservations by Sport, which can likely be attributed both to its nationwide popularity and also to the availability of online court reservation system which allows players to quickly reserve court space, including for same-day play. Sports with fewer than 900 reservations are grouped within the “Other” category and include activities such as cricket, lacrosse, basketball and bike polo. Demand for athletic facilities continues to grow for ultimate frisbee, lacrosse, and cricket, which share facilities with other historically popular sports.

Figure 4.7: Athletic Reservations (2018-2024)

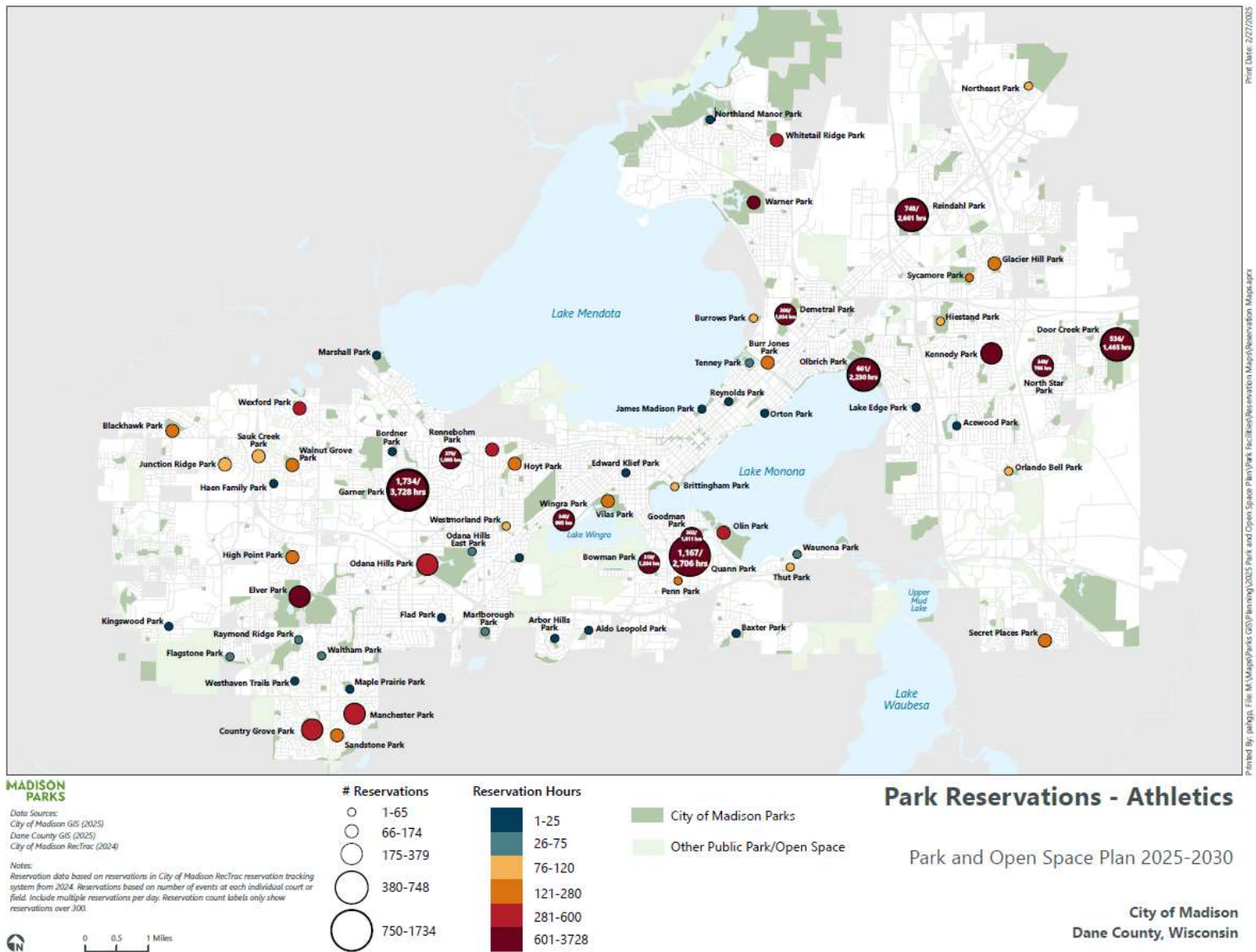


As was the case for the previous version of the POSP, athletic reservation data continues to indicate that the most frequently reserved parks are community parks with multi-field and/or multi-court complexes (Table 4.1). Facilities of this type allow users to host practices, games and tournaments in a single location as opposed to requiring multiple parks for these uses. Reservation Data is also shown by park location on Exhibit 7.

Table 4.1 Top Three Most-Reserved Parks by Sport (2018-2024)

Sport	Park	Reservations
Soccer	Reindahl Park	3,380
	Wingra Park	1,548
	Rennebohm Park	1,337
Tennis	Quann Park	6,618
	Rennebohm Park	2,339
	Door Creek Park	737
Ultimate Frisbee	North Star Park	1,510
	Manchester Park	1,121
	Midtown Commons Park	899
Pickleball	Garner Park	5,391
	Door Creek Park	699
	Tenney Park	418
Softball	Olbrich Park	1,816
	Goodman Park	1,286
	Duane F. Bowman Park	1,103
Football	Warner Park	687
	Penn Park	346
	Thut Park	149
Volleyball	Olbrich Park	1,071
	Demetral Park	169
	Garner Park	50
Baseball	Duane F. Bowman Park	405
	Warner Park	283
	Elver Park	251
Kickball	Demetral Park	661
	Olbrich Park	131
	Duane F. Bowman Park	69

Exhibit 7: Athletic Reservations by Park Location (2024)



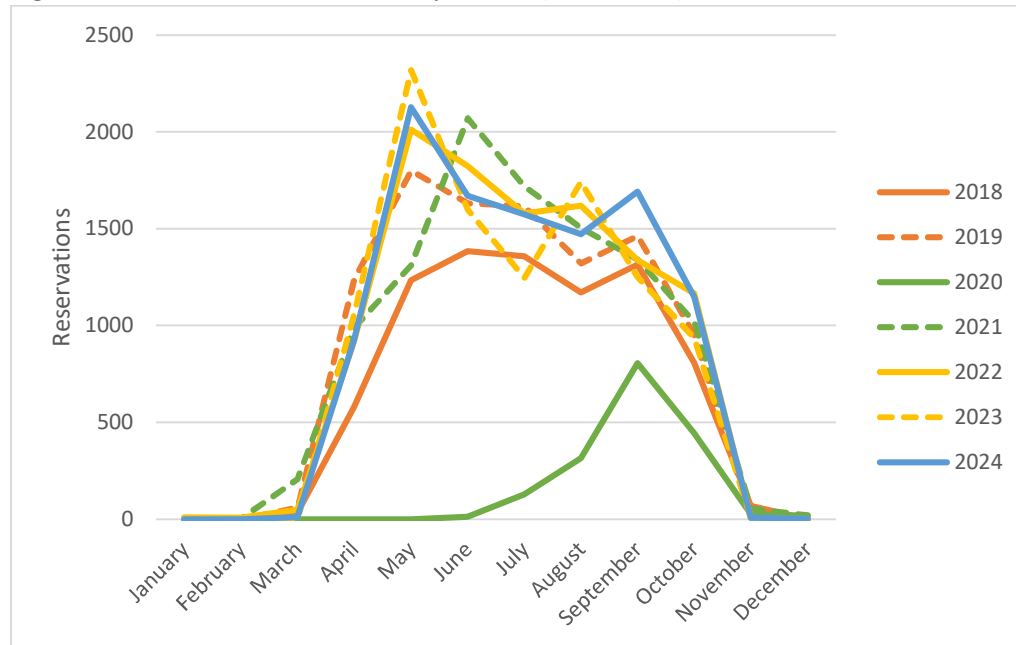
Athletic fields are occasionally rested for renovation, which temporarily impacts their availability for reservations. When this happens, play is rotated to other fields. As facilities age and their conditions impact playability, reservations are either reduced or not allowed, as evidenced by the declining condition of Vilas and Warner tennis courts. Total reservations for these two parks decreased from 541 in 2018 to only 62 in 2021; both have since been closed and are awaiting replacement.

As part of this plan update, Madison Parks conducted two surveys of athletics organizations in 2023. The first athletics survey asked park users the following questions: “What type of sports do your participants play?”, “What is the average cost per year to each participant?” and “What is the age range of the majority of your participants?”. The second survey was intended to serve as an athletic facility assessment that sought to further understand specific facility needs from organizations that reserve athletic facilities. The athletics survey received 40 responses from the 240 groups asked to participate and the athletic facility assessment received 7 responses from 36 organizations asked to participate. A summary of these surveys can be found in [Appendix I](#).

Several of the respondents to the 2023 athletic facility assessment (ultimate, adult women’s softball and soccer) indicated that they had to turn away registrants from their respective leagues due to a lack of available space to schedule practices and games. The need for more full-size courts (specifically tennis, basketball, and volleyball) was also described by participants during the plan outreach efforts led by All Together. The Hmong community Focus Group sessions and comments placed in the Wish Box at Alicia Ashman Library mentioned support for more cricket and soccer fields as well as basketball courts. The value that Madison residents give to open field spaces for athletic use was also supported by the UW-developed survey sent in fall of 2023 to randomly selected addresses within the city of Madison: 37% of respondents answered “Very” to the question, “How valuable do you find open fields for games such as such as Ultimate Frisbee, soccer and softball?”

The Parks-conducted athletic facility assessment and discussions with local leagues and event planning staff indicate that there is also demand for more lighted fields and facilities capable of hosting large scale events with restroom and concession buildings. There is also high demand for athletic field and sport court lighting for sports such as pickleball, soccer, ultimate frisbee, flag football, and volleyball. Madison Parks currently has facility lighting at a number of locations, including two dual-striped pickleball/tennis courts, two basketball courts, twenty softball diamonds, two baseball diamonds, one premium soccer field, one football field, one futsal mini pitch and one sand volleyball court. Users currently take advantage of off-season softball outfields as lit spaces for ultimate and flag football. Players have been observed at the system’s only dedicated pickleball facility at Garner Park stringing small LED lamps on the court fence to extend play into the darker spring and fall evenings. Reservations for athletic fields are starting earlier and ending later each year (Figure 4. 8).

Figure 4.8: Athletic Reservations by Month (2018-2024)



Respondents to the athletic facility assessment continue to place value on the ability to reserve multiple fields or courts at one park location to accommodate large leagues and host multi-game events such as tournaments, and these sentiments were echoed by staff at Destination Madison’s Sports Commission familiar with state- and national-level large athletic event requirements. The Madison Area Sports Commission hired Victus Advisors to conduct a study in 2022 of regional sports needs, and the study found there was an opportunity for an indoor/outdoor sports complex that would address the local athletic demand as well as attract regional tournaments, and events that could raise revenue to support the facility. **INCLUDE PHOTO OF LARGE SPORTING EVENT BY MASC**

Shelter Reservations

Madison Parks currently has 89 reservable shelters consisting of 34 shelters with restrooms, one combined concession/restroom building and 55 open-sided “picnic” shelters without restrooms. Shelters with restrooms are available mid-April through mid-October. Picnic shelters are available year-round. Shelters are reserved for wedding celebrations, family reunions, association/ business picnics, and community events. Shelters are typically booked for weekday evenings and weekends. Madison Parks has more than 2,000 shelter reservations each year. The most reserved shelters in the park system are the shelter at Garner Park, the shelter at Highland Manor Park, and the shelter at Brittingham Park.

Highland Manor, Gates of Heaven, and John Wall Pavilion at Tenney Park are available for indoor rental space year-round (Figure 4.9). The geographic location of the shelter reservation data for 2024 is also shown in Exhibit 8.

Figure 4.9: Top 20 Reserved Park Shelters (2018-2024)

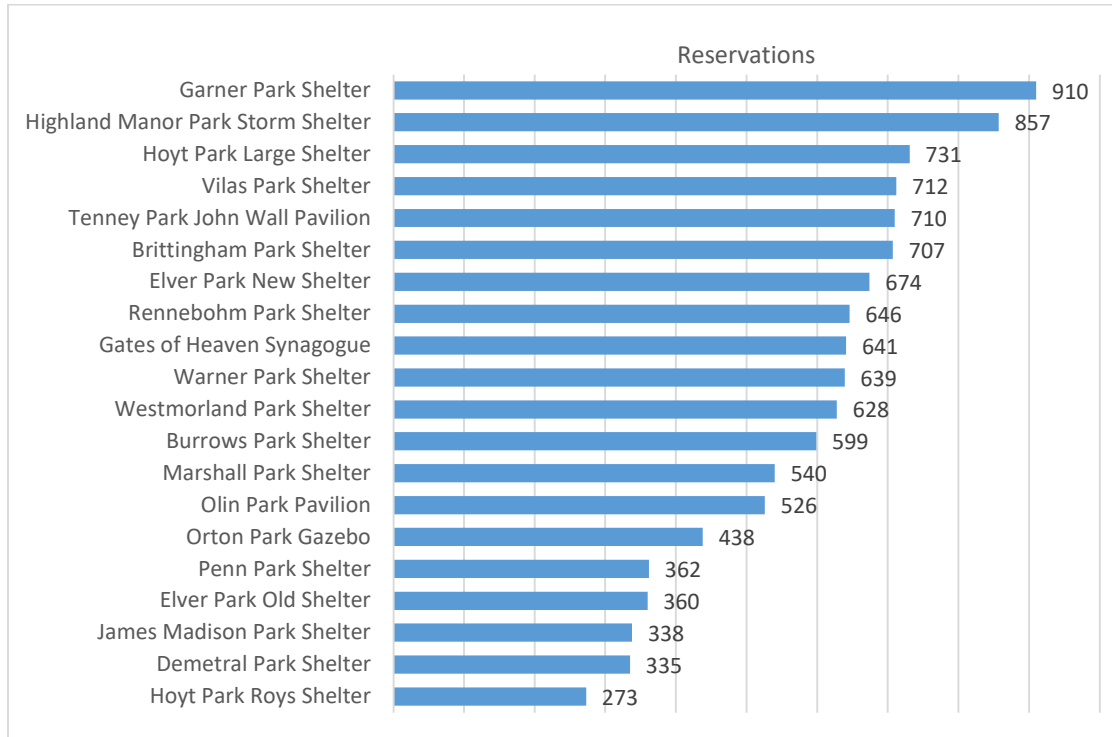
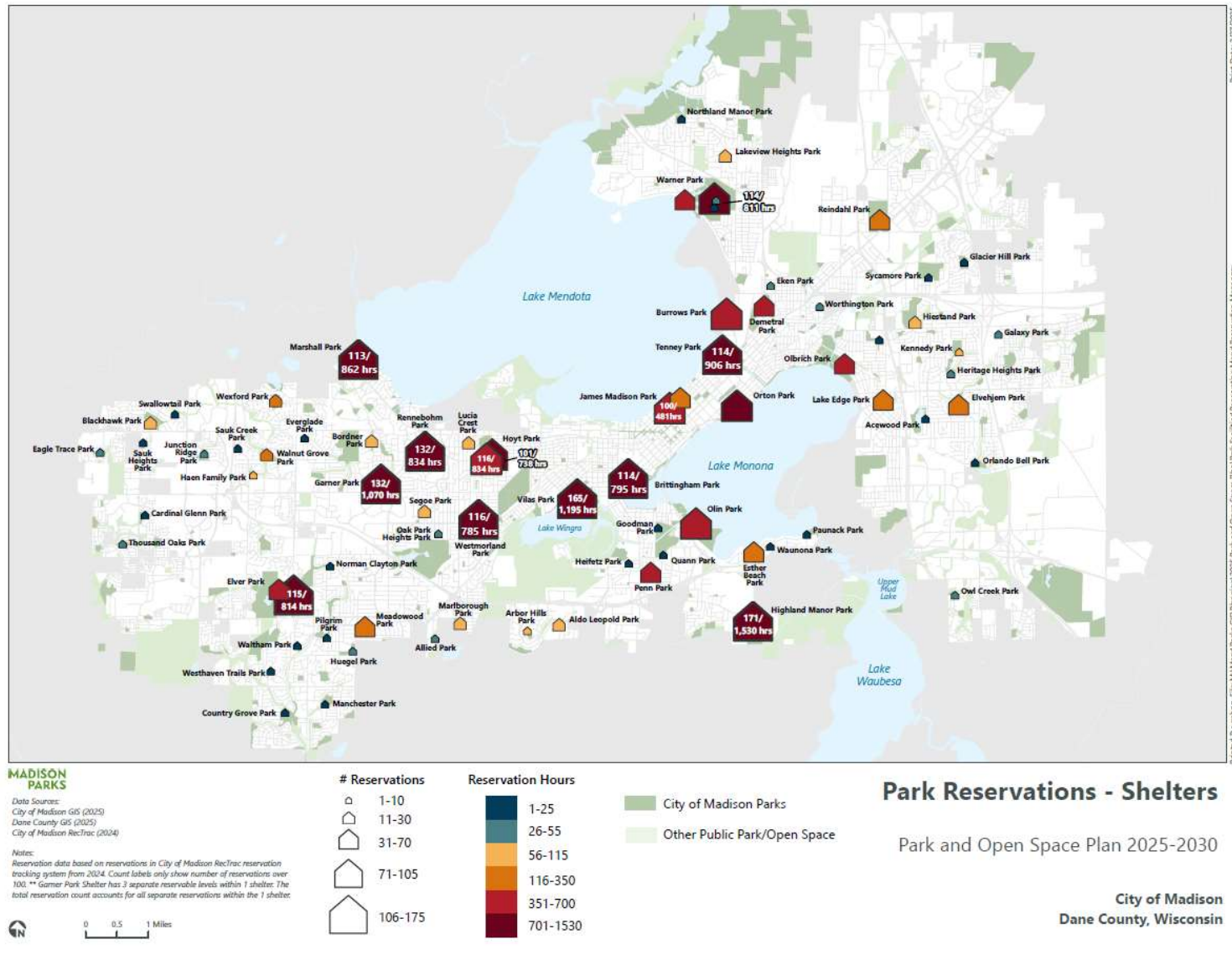


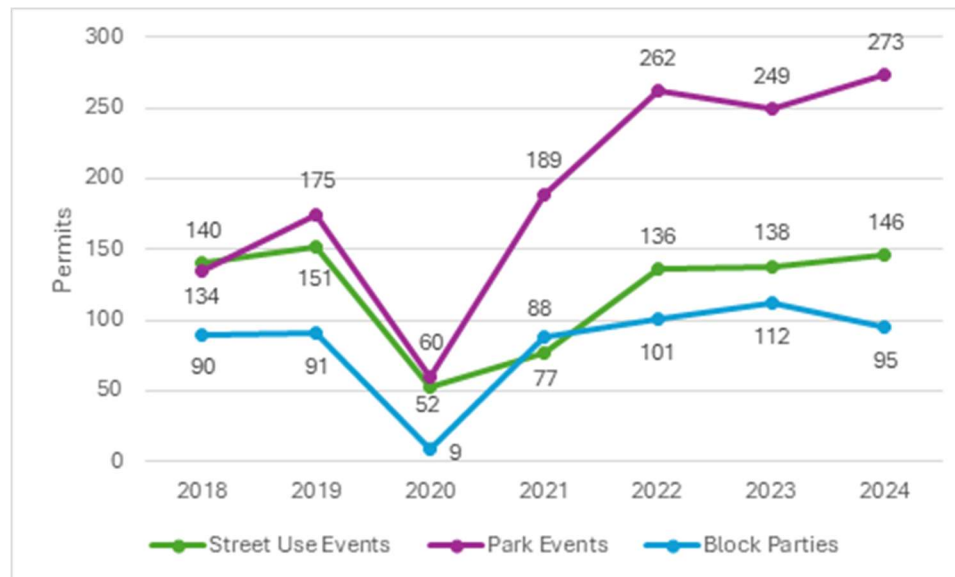
Exhibit 8: Shelter Reservations by Park Location (2024)



Park and Street Use Event Reservations

The Parks Division is responsible for permitting events that happen both within parks and on the street. Street Use and Park Event permits allow for event organizers to host many of the events that make Madison so unique. These events draw not only residents, but also visitors from around the region and country to visit Madison. Street Use permits are required for closing or rerouting traffic from any portion of a street or sidewalk to hold an event or activity. Park Event permits are required for events taking place in parks that anticipate large numbers of participants and require extensive set-up, include vending, or charge admission. The number of permitted park events has nearly doubled since 2018, while the number of street use and block parties has remained relatively constant (Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10: Community and Street Use Events (2018-2024)

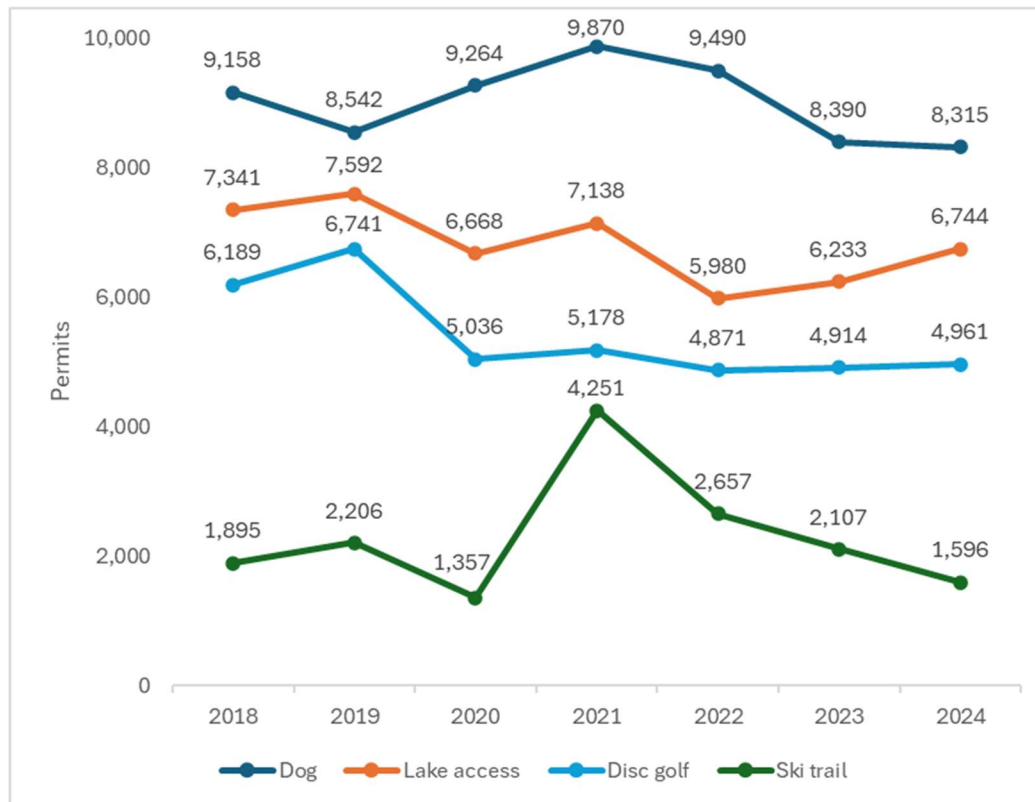


Park Permit Sales

The City of Madison requires an annual or daily permit for cross-country skiing, disc golf, dog parks, and lake access for boating. Cross-country ski and lake access permits are joint permits for use on any designated site within the City of Madison, City of Monona, and Dane County. Disc golf permits are required for each of the City of Madison courses: Elver, Hiestand and Yahara Hills Golf Course. The dog park permit can be used at any City of Madison on-leash or off-leash dog park, Dane County Parks, the City of Middleton, and the City of Sun Prairie pet exercise areas.

The City of Madison Parks Division continues to directly collect permits and track them in the resource management software program Accela. Figure 4.10 identifies annual and daily permit sales from 2018-2024. As was the case for the time period covered during the last POSP, Park permit sales generally remained steady, with the major exception of the years 2020-2021, when permit sales across all four areas experienced major increases as residents were pursuing outdoor recreation during the COVID19 Pandemic. Permit sales have returned to at or below pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 4.10: Total Permit Sales (Annual and Daily) (2018-2024)



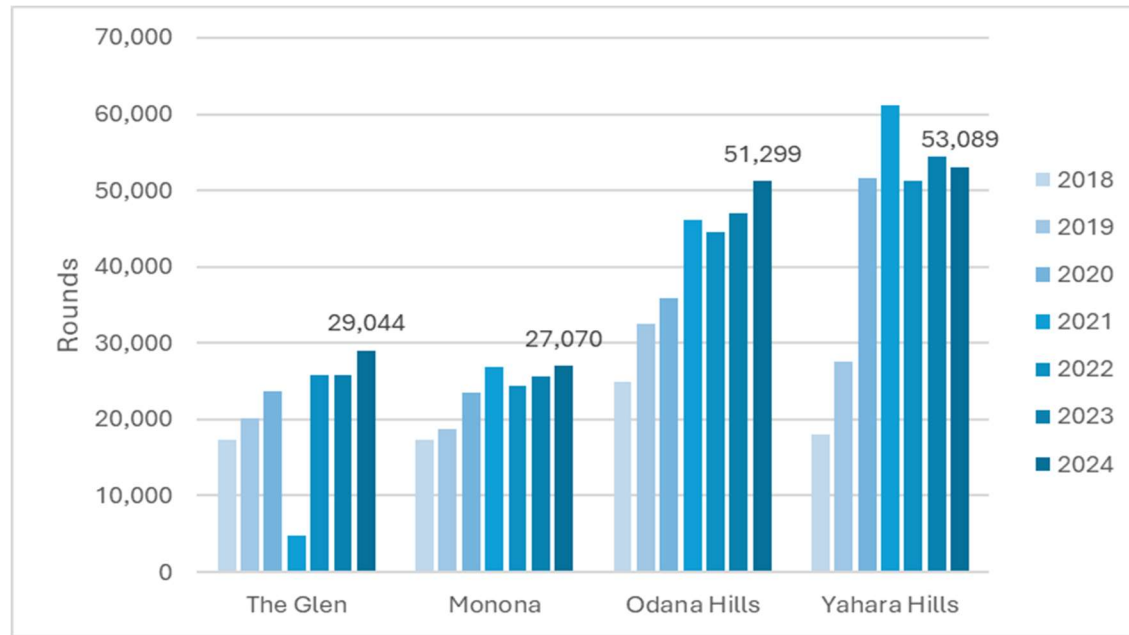
Warner Park Community Recreation Center

The Warner Park Community Recreation Center (WPCRC) works to build community, foster fellowship, and create a safe place for youth to gather. The center is one of the most important assets of the Madison Parks Division. Located on the northeast side of Madison, the center is a multi-purpose facility for community activities, including recreational, educational, and cultural programs and events. The facility includes a gymnasium, exercise room, game room, art room, meeting rooms, and a community room. In 2024, WPCRC reported nearly 160,500 visits, which does not include participation in NewBridge programming for seniors. The “out of school time” program titled Kids Need Opportunities at Warner (KNOW) provides meaningful opportunities for Northside teens to engage in a variety of structured and unstructured recreational programs at the WPCRC. This program was developed in partnership with the Madison Parks Foundation and serves approximately 100-150 youth (duplicated) per week, and in 2024 provided 257 days of KNOW “out of school” programming.

Golf and Golf Park Programming

Recreational demand for golf shifted significantly during the pandemic and continues to grow. The Golf Program consists of four unique courses, offers a total of 72 holes (with a plan to reduce to 54 holes by 2026) and involves all aspects of golf course operations and programming in addition to providing space for events programmed by Madison Parks and others. The pandemic reinvigorated the game of golf nationally, and the Golf Program averaged 146,000 rounds of golf between 2020-2024, ending the 2024 season with the fifth consecutive year of record-breaking revenue with over 160,500 rounds of golf played (Figure 4.11). In addition, 25 unique golf park programming events ranging from family fun movie nights, live music fitness classes, and volunteer activities were held at The Glen Golf Park with over 1,500 participants for the year. The Glen Golf Park was closed for renovations during the majority of the 2021 season. See Appendix F: Ongoing Initiatives - Madison Parks Golf Program for more information.

Figure 4.11: Rounds by Course (2018-2024)



Olbrich Botanical Gardens

Olbrich Botanical Gardens, which is operated as a public-private partnership between the Parks Division and the non-profit Olbrich Botanical Society (OBS), has significantly increased the number of visitors each year. The number of visits increased from 340,000 in 2023 to over 370,000 in 2024. Olbrich Botanical Gardens offers the community a broad range of programs, activities and events, including an education program for all ages. Olbrich Botanical Gardens also offers a number of special events, including GLEAM: Art in a New Light; Blooming Butterflies; a year-round concert series; Crackle: Fire and Froth; and several annual indoor specialty flower shows. Throughout the year, various online plant sales are offered featuring bulbs, trees and shrubs, native plants, and pollinator mixes. The growth in visits at the Gardens has inspired OBS to fund a Comprehensive Master Plan Study in 2025 to determine how to sustainably grow and fund the garden footprint and programming.

Key Takeaways

The Madison Park system is well-activated throughout the year. To learn more about how park spaces are activated, see Appendix F: Ongoing Initiatives - Activating Parks. Overall, the use of park spaces continues to increase, and the typical season for park usage continues to extend farther into the spring and fall seasons. Resident use of park spaces has evolved over time, and it is important to anticipate and prepare for the ever-changing recreational needs of the community.

Chapter 5: Outdoor Recreation Needs Assessment

As outlined in previous chapters, Madison’s park system is part of an interconnected network of local, regional, state and national parks, open spaces and trails. Various methods were used in Chapter 4 to determine how well Madison’s existing park and recreation facilities satisfy current and future needs. This chapter provides an outdoor recreation needs assessment through both quantitative and geographic analysis to identify needs within the park system, and incorporates needs identified within regional and statewide outdoor recreation planning efforts. The qualitative analysis provides a comparison of existing parkland acreage and population projections in relation to park and recreation agencies across the US. The geographic analysis evaluates the geographic distribution of park facilities within the city.

5.1 Quantitative Analysis – Park Acreage and Parkland Per Capita

Mini, neighborhood, and community parks are intended to meet the core recreational demands for playgrounds, fields, shelters, and sport courts. NRPA uses the number of park acres per 1,000 residents to determine if a community has enough parkland resources. The City of Madison has approximately 5,755 acres of parkland or approximately 19.77 acres per 1,000 residents based on the 2024 Wi DOA population estimate of 291,037, compared to peer agencies across the country, where the median is 10.6 acres per 10,000 residents⁵⁸. Table 5.1 includes the distribution of park types in the Madison park system.

Table 5.1. Parkland Acreage by Category

Park Type	Total # Parks	% Of Total Parks	Acres	% Total Park Acreage
MINI	103	35%	202.83	3.52%
NEIGHBORHOOD	84	28%	834.28	14.50%
COMMUNITY	31	10%	1,941.86	33.74%
Subtotal	218	74%	2,978.97	51.76%
CONSERVATION	21	7%	1829.67	31.79%
TRAFFICWAY	22	7%	27.77	0.48%
OTHER	1	0%	0.62	0.01%
OPEN SPACE	21	7%	112.35	1.95%
SPECIAL	10	3%	777.82	13.52%
SPORTS COMPLEX	2	1%	27.89	0.48%
Total	295.00		5,755.09	

⁵⁸ NRPA (2024). 2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review- Madison (City of) Parks Division

Of the core park types, there is a higher number of mini and neighborhood parks in the Madison park system than larger community parks. Mini parks are typically small parks, less than five acres in size. Madison's high number of mini parks contributes to a system with an abundance of smaller-scale park amenities such as playgrounds and half basketball courts. Parks less than five-acres in size can be valuable open space; however, they typically lack larger recreational amenities such as sport courts and multi-use fields. Maintaining multiple small parks also requires more resources than maintaining the same acreage contained within a larger park.

5.2 Geographic Analysis – Population Density and Parkland Access

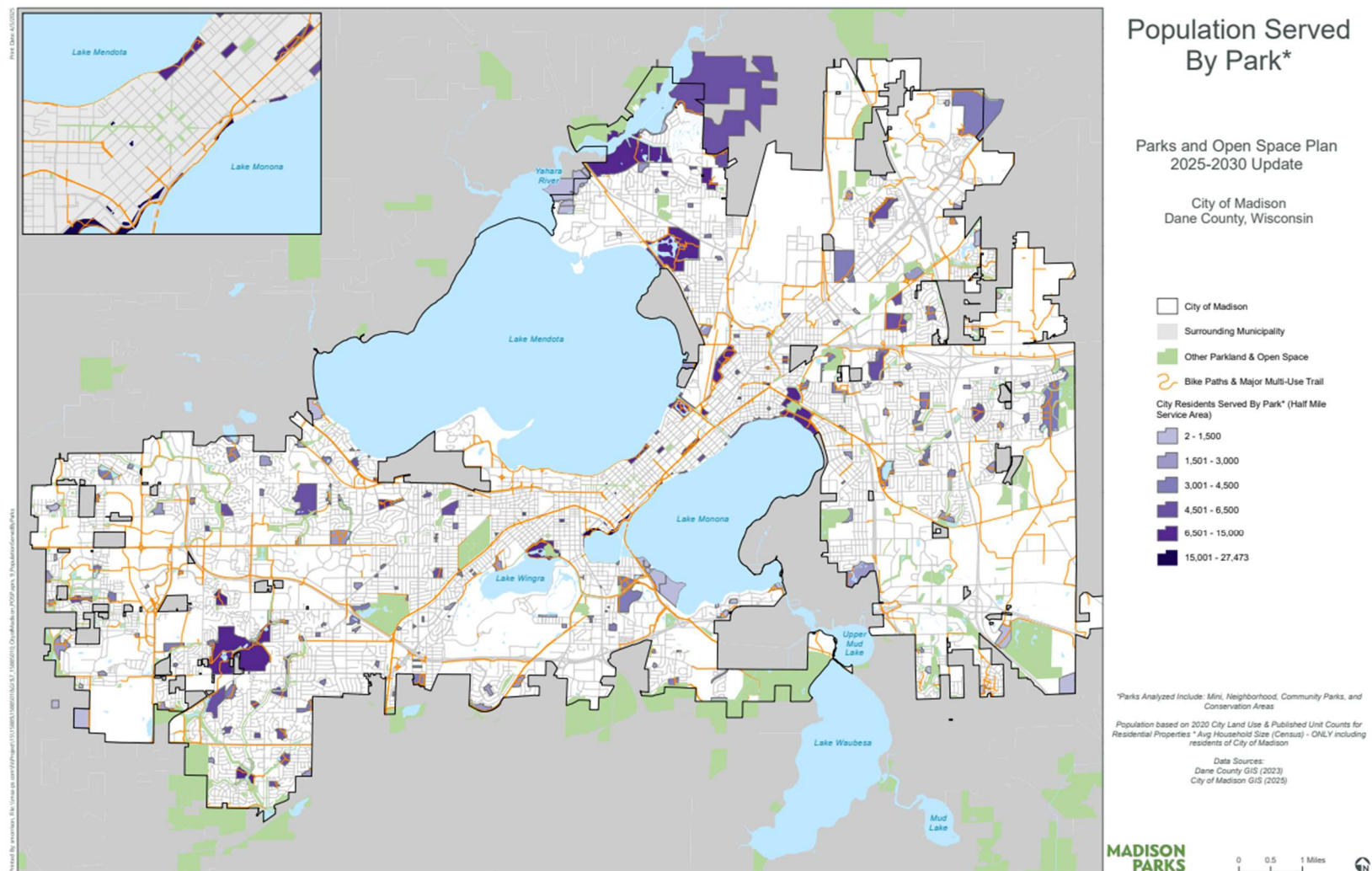
Increasing density and shifts in housing trends affect which parks have the highest neighborhood demand. Using population data from the US Census, Table 5.2 illustrates which parks have the highest number of people within a half mile of the park, potentially creating an increased demand for the use of these park facilities.

Table 5.2: Parks with the Highest Number of People Within a Half Mile

Park Name	Approx. Population Served
Madison Senior Center Courtyard	27,473
Brittingham Park	23,498
Peace (Elizabeth Link) Park	22,879
Law Park	22,497
Proudfit Park	18,474
Elver Park	13,152
James Madison Park	12,907
Reynolds Park	11,177
McPike Park	10,979
Demetral Park	10,895

Exhibit 9 illustrates the population density served by each park. Many of the parks located on or near the isthmus are surrounded by a higher density of residents and experience greater demand for recreational space and amenities than the parks located on the periphery of the city.

Exhibit 9: Population Served by Park



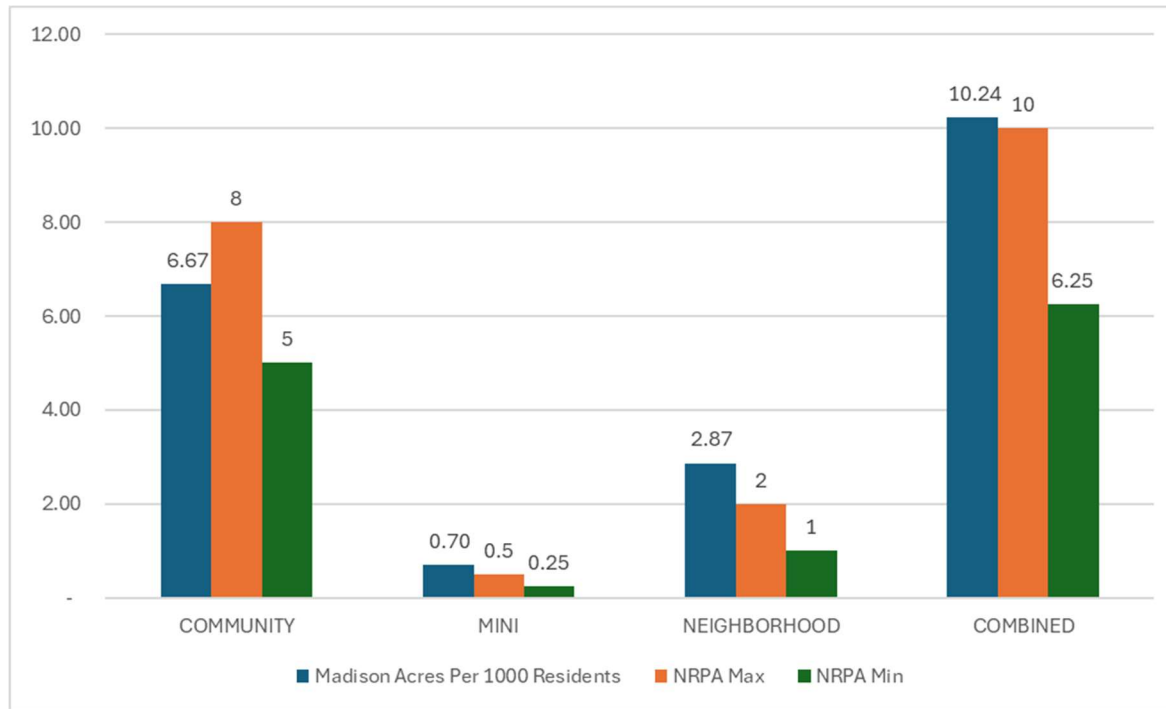
The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) developed a set of standards over two decades ago for the amount of parkland a community should try to achieve. NRPA recently has shifted away from the use of park standards because no single set of standards can take into account the uniqueness in each community across the country. NRPA now collects information from park and recreation departments across the country to provide an opportunity for those departments participating in the survey to compare themselves to other communities of similar population size.

Table 5.3 includes the park classification, size, service areas, and historic NRPA standards, which were adopted by the City of Madison in its last POSP. The service area analysis is conducted to identify existing gaps in traditional core facilities. This analysis only evaluates service areas for parks classified as mini, neighborhood, or community. Special parks, conservation parks, trafficways, greenways, open space or other are not covered in this analysis.

Table 5.3 Table 5.3: Park Service Areas by Type

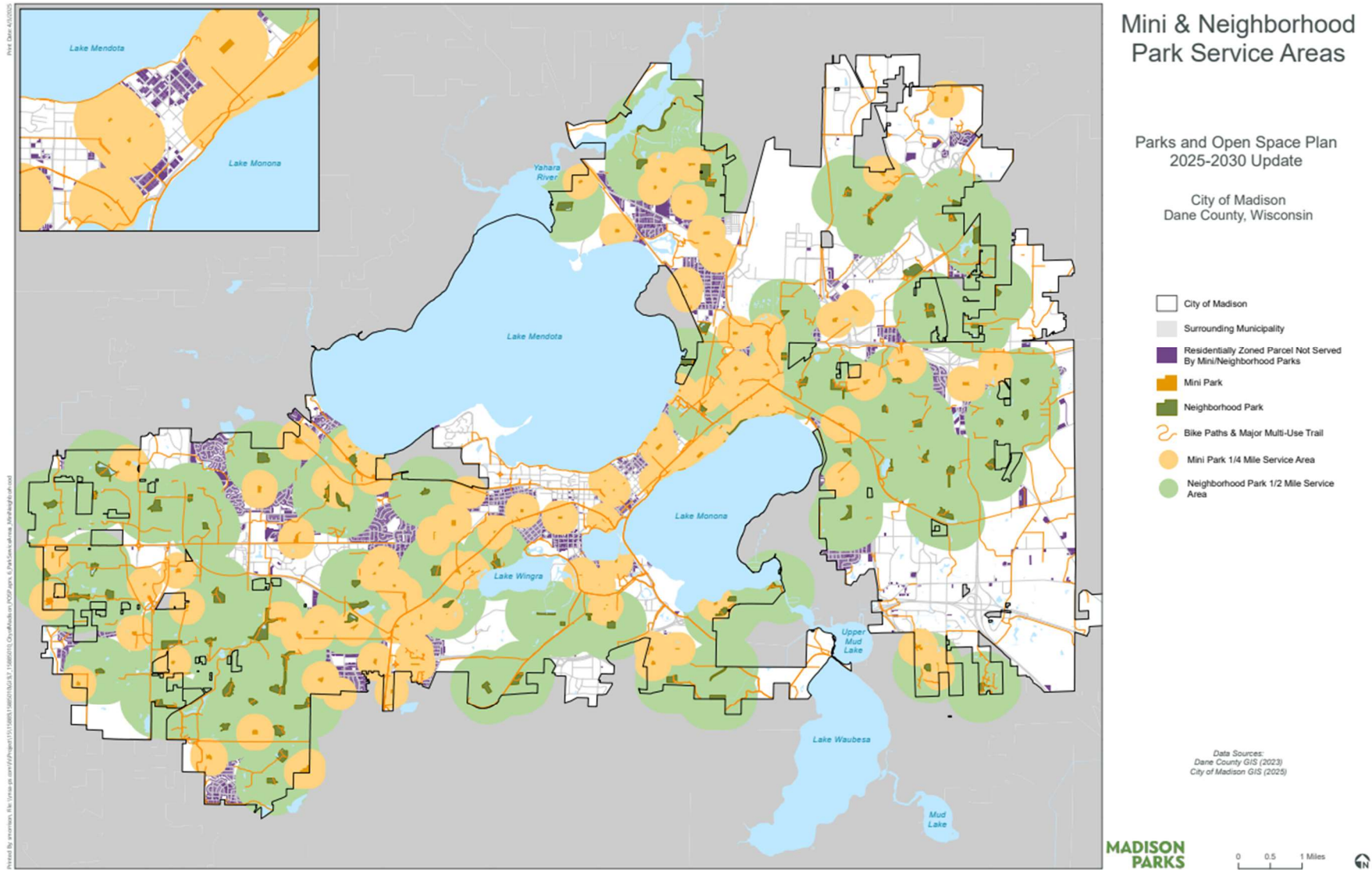
Park Type	Service Area	Size (Acres)	City Adopted Standards Acres per 1,000 Residents	2024 Actual Acres per 1,000 residents
Mini	¼ Mile	<5	As appropriate	0.70
Neighborhood	½ Mile	5+	3.75	2.87
Community	2 Mile	20+	6.25	6.67
Total			10+	10.24

Figure 5.1: NRPA Guidelines Compared to City of Madison



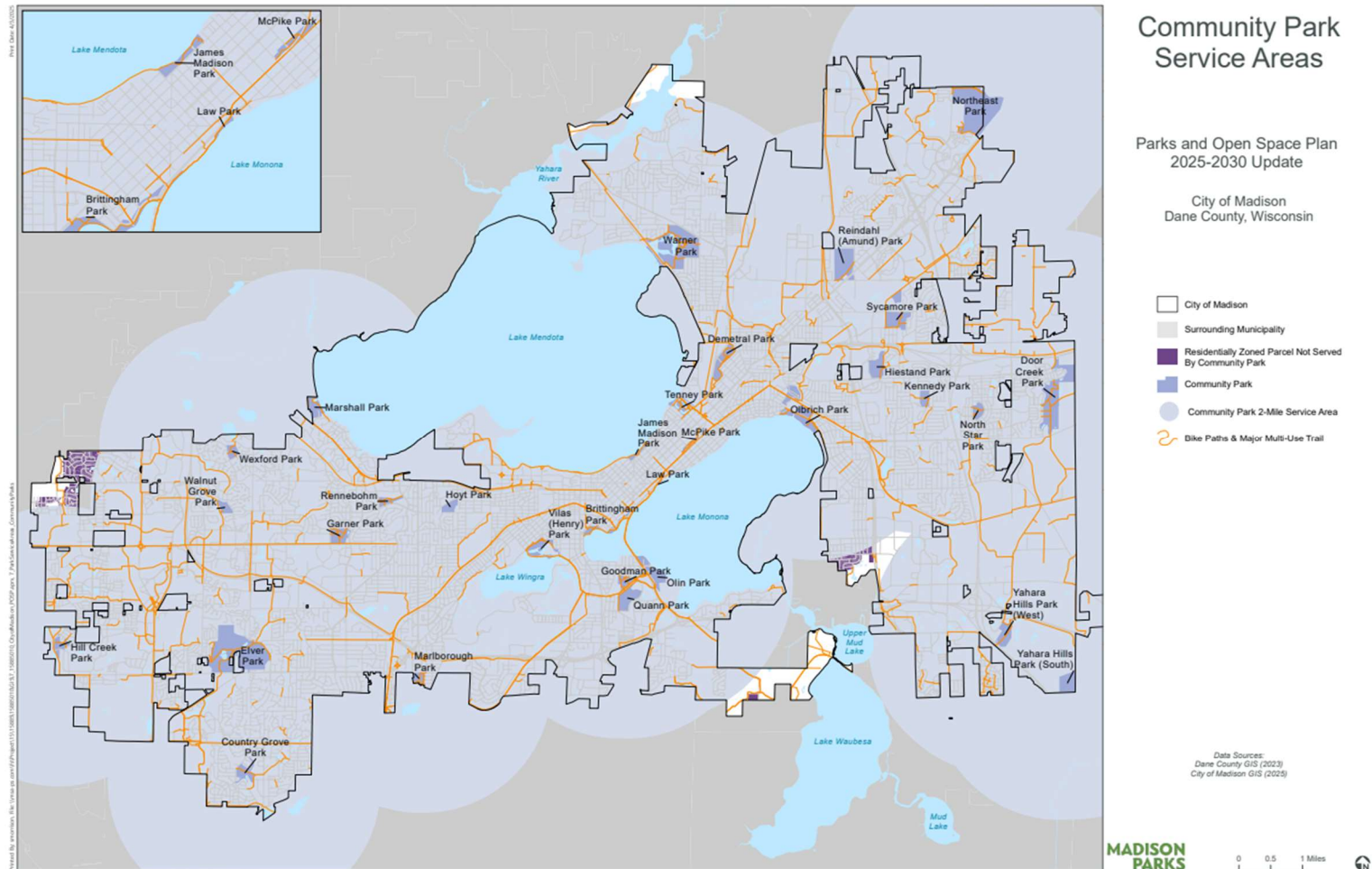
Mini and neighborhood park deficiencies are present if a residential area is not within a quarter-mile radius of a mini park or a half-mile radius of a neighborhood park. The City of Madison provides most core facilities in neighborhood parks; mini parks are intended to fill voids between neighborhood park service areas, or in areas where land uses or geographical boundaries limit development of larger neighborhood parks. Nearly all residential parcels have mini and/or neighborhood park coverage. The residential areas that lack mini and neighborhood park coverage are shown in dark purple on Exhibit 10. These areas are predominantly located on the north side of Madison in the Sherman and Kennedy Heights neighborhoods, and on the west side within the Wingra Park and University Hill Farms neighborhoods and between Highway 14 and N Gammon Rd near the border with Middleton.

Exhibit 10: Mini & Neighborhood Park Service Areas



The City provides community park service area coverage for approximately 97% of all areas of residential land use. Areas that are deficient in community park coverage are shown in dark purple on Exhibit 11. Residential parcels not served by community parks are concentrated in the northwest corner of the city and on the edge of Madison that is to the east of the City of Monona. However, both of these areas are served by non-city parks.

Exhibit 11: Community Park Service Areas



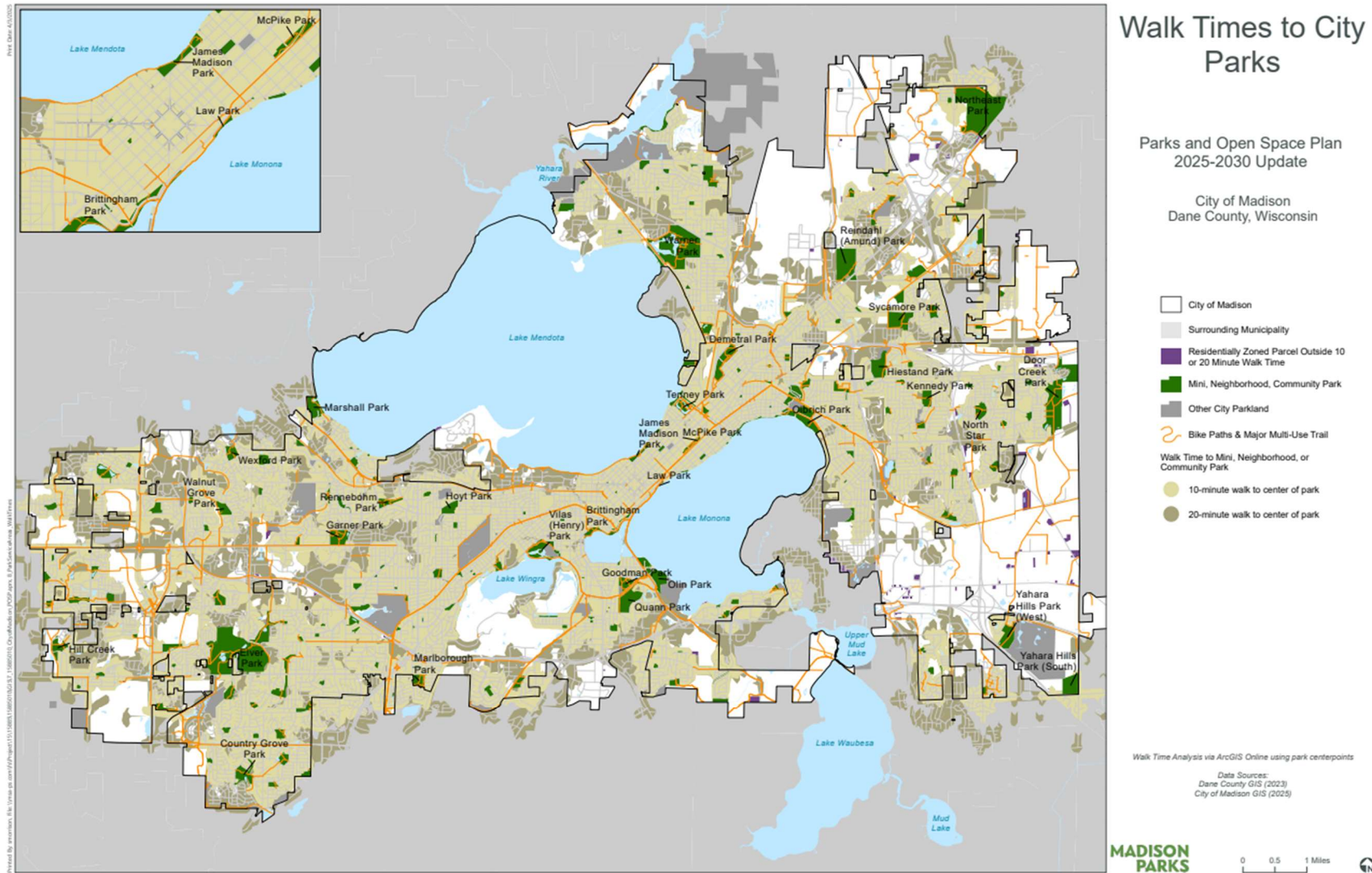
To improve equitable access to parks, it is important to identify which residents can reach a park within a 10-minute walk. According to the NRPA, distance is a deterrent to park use—and disadvantaged communities are more likely to live farther away from parks.

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) conducts annual analyses of City parks, grading each city on acreage, access, investment, amenities, and equity. In 2024, Madison received 93 out of a total of 100 points for accessibility, as 95% of the city-wide population was residing within a 10-minute walk of a public park⁵⁹. Walkability considers both the distance from a park, as well as the conditions for pedestrians. Typically, walkability analysis excludes walking routes where the pedestrian must cross a road with speeds greater than 35 mph and only evaluates walkability within residential or mixed-use areas along sidewalks and paths. In addition, this evaluation excludes agricultural, military, or industrial properties and properties owned by Dane County, other municipalities, or the University of Wisconsin.

A geographic analysis of walkability for mini, neighborhood, and community parks reveal that most residential neighborhoods in Madison are within a 10- or 20-minute walk to a mini, neighborhood, or community park (Exhibit 12). Areas that lack walkable access to these facilities are identified in dark purple on Exhibit 12. Overall, the residential areas are served very well with only a few small pockets on the east side that are underserved. These deficiencies should be addressed by future development.

⁵⁹ Trust for Public Land (2024). 2024 Madison, WI ParkScore Ranking. Trust for Public Lands. <https://www.tpl.org/city/madison-wisconsin>

Exhibit 12: Walk Times to Mini, Neighborhood, and Community Parks Map



5.3 Regional and Statewide Planning Efforts

In addition to City of Madison parks, Madison residents utilize park and open space facilities owned and managed by both Dane County as well as the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Major recreational uses of facilities under control of these organizations were outlined in Chapter 3 as part of the overall parkland inventory in the Madison area. This section provides an overview of the respective plans, including the broader recreational needs of the state and region, implications for the local system, and potential collaboration opportunities for Madison Parks.

State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2025-2030)⁶⁰

Every five years, states are required to develop a State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) for eligibility to participate in the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) State Assistance Program. SCORPs are intended to evaluate outdoor recreation trends and issues of statewide importance and set forth ideas about recreation's future role in the state. The 2025-2030 SCORP is a reference document describing recreation needs, trends, and opportunities to address gaps in our outdoor recreation systems across the state. The SCORP is guided by three overarching goals:

- Ensure that all Wisconsinites have equitable opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation, regardless of where they live or their ethnicity, gender, income, abilities, or age.
- Maintain and expand the sustainability of recreational opportunities in our state, ensuring that existing opportunities are well funded and have the support to grow and expand where needed.
- Grow the collaborative partnership approach across federal, state, regional and local agencies and private non-profit organizations and businesses to provide high-quality outdoor experiences for all Wisconsinites.

The SCORP provides a summary of engagement efforts used to gather feedback from Wisconsin residents to determine which factors affected participation in outdoor recreation and visiting parks. Respondents across major demographic groups were motivated to participate in outdoor recreation for the benefit of physical, mental and social health as well as connection with nature. The SCORP was informed by a robust public engagement process, including a survey sent to a random sample of 7,000 Wisconsin households, focus groups, and additional survey of county, city, and village park and recreation agencies.

Despite an increase in outdoor recreation compared to a decade ago, the SCORP identifies systemic barriers to outdoor recreation that disproportionately impact specific demographic groups, such as inadequate transit options and personal safety concerns. Based on engagement efforts, barriers to park usage generally includes:

⁶⁰ Wisconsin DNR (2024): State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2025-2030), https://widnr.widen.net/s/jkhvkb6sh/fl_mp_scorp_2025_2030_documentonly

- Individuals with no formal education or a high school diploma may not be able to afford the costs of outdoor recreation.
- BIPOC and Hispanic individuals are more likely to lack proper equipment and unawareness of or proximity to recreational options.
- Younger respondents in urban areas may be less likely to be aware of options that exist.
- Those with disabilities and those over 71 years old are more often faced with accessibility concerns related to outdoor recreation.
- Women and LGBTQ+ individuals reported concerns over personal safety and harassment and are less likely to visit a park alone.

Compared to other states, Wisconsin historically outperforms the national average for outdoor recreation participation. Highest statewide participation rates were for walking/hiking/running, swimming in lakes, ponds, or rivers, and wildlife watching/nature photography. The number of hunting and fishing licenses sold over the last decade has decreased, while the number of annual stickers and day passes sold at state parks has increased since 2020.

Much like within the City of Madison, State funding for parks and outdoor recreation has not kept pace with the demand for these resources. Annual bonding authority for the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, which funds park development around the state at the local and regional level, has decreased from \$86 million in 2010 to \$33.25 million in 2024. Wisconsin spends less per capita on state park operations than nearly every other state, despite the park system being a major driver for outdoor recreation and tourism⁶¹. State parks are experiencing issues related to deferred maintenance, which are intensified by increased demand for these facilities and may impact the ability to support tourism and best manage natural resources.

The Department of Natural Resources divides the state into eight discreet regions, with the SCORP develops regional insights. The City of Madison is located in the Southern Gateways Region, and the DNR has identified several future challenges for the region resulting from climate change, including ecosystem damages resulting from a longer growing season, and increased health risks with urban recreation as the temperatures rise. Survey respondents from the Southern Gateways Region reported an increase in nearly all activities identified in the survey, with the highest increases in participation in ATV or UTV riding, visiting dog parks and firearm ranges. The only decreases were modest declines in basketball, tennis, and ice skating. Target archery and firearm ranges, soccer, basketball, 4WD off-roading, and dual-sport motorcycle racing were identified as activities with lower availability within the region.

The SCORP provides 10 strategies with actions that local, regional, and state agencies can act on. (Figure 5.1). Examples of actions include selecting climate resilient species of vegetation, shifting recreation in response to climate change, improving accessibility to park facilities for

⁶¹ Stein, J. & T. Byrnes. (2023). This Land is Our Land; the past and future of conservation funding in Wisconsin. Wisconsin Policy Forum.

individuals with disabilities, ensuring facilities are clean and welcoming, and improving communications through signage and creating awareness of recreational opportunities.

Figure 5.1 2025-2030 SCORP Strategies

1. Provide more opportunities for outdoor recreation close to home.
2. Provide needed recreation facilities.
3. Improve affordability of participation.
4. Support, develop, and enhance mentoring programs.
5. Create more welcoming outdoor spaces.
6. Improve the distribution of information on recreation opportunities.
7. Expand and diversify funding sources.
8. Adapt to new environmental conditions both in terms of participation in outdoor activities as well as the management of recreation opportunities and facilities.
9. Lead by example on climate change mitigation.
10. Create an implementation plan that identifies desired outcomes as well as the partners to coordinate and advocate for outdoor recreation throughout Wisconsin.

[Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan \(2025-2030\)](#)

Similar to the City of Madison, Dane County prepares a Parks and Open Space Plan (POSP) update every five years. The goal of the County's 2025-2030 POSP is to identify significant cultural, historical, and natural resources to be considered for protection, preservation, or restoration. In addition, the plan seeks to analyze recreation needs and demands on a county-wide level.

Dane County is the fastest growing county in the state, and the population of adults ages 65 and up will continue to be the fastest growing demographic. Understanding the population helps plan for future regional park locations, park acquisitions and regional trail connections. The County POSP recognizes that with the aging population, there will be increased need for multi-generational spaces and enhanced access to recreation. The County POSP identified that over 70% of individuals participating in recreation on county lands are white and emphasized the need to reduce barriers and diversify recreational programming to encourage participation by BIPOC and Latinx individuals.

Top recreational activities within Dane County Parks include access for dogs, biking, hiking, boating, fishing, camping, outdoor education and disc golf. These are consistent with the top five national trends of running, walking, hiking, biking and fishing, which also increased dramatically during and post-pandemic.

Overall, recommended actions within the County POSP relevant to Madison Parks includes work addressing winter recreation needs in the changing climate, effectively managing the increased use following the pandemic in order to protect and preserve park facilities and lands, improving outdoor education opportunities, implementing strategies to better serve underprivileged youth, and developing career pathways in environmental stewardship, among many others. The County POSP provides potential partnership projects with the city to enhance access to natural resources within the community (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2: Potential City County Partnership Opportunities (2025-2030)

Blooming Grove Drumlins Natural Resource Area	Planning with Madison Parks for new future recreation park on Northeast Quadrant of county. Partner with City & DNR to implement connection between Glacial Drumlin and Capital City Trails. Partner with Parks to expand hiking and cross-country ski trails at Door Creek Park.
Cherokee Marsh Natural Resource Area	Collaborate with Madison Parks, DNR and Friends of Cherokee Marsh to acquire lands within the Area. Continue vegetative management practices within Area to control invasive species. Consider future trail connections too Westport Drumlin Area.
Starkweather Creek Natural Resource Area	Planning with City Planning for trail connection to Token Creek County Park.
McPike Park	Continued consideration for Conservation Fund Grant Program dependent on Master Plan.
Madison LakeWay	County is funding \$2 million of Phase 1 improvements. Consider future partnership opportunities between County and City.
Rodefeld Landfill	Partner with Madison Parks and other surrounding communities on plans to convert landfill to recreational space, including planning for future recreational programming.

Exhibit 13: Dane County POSP 2025-2030

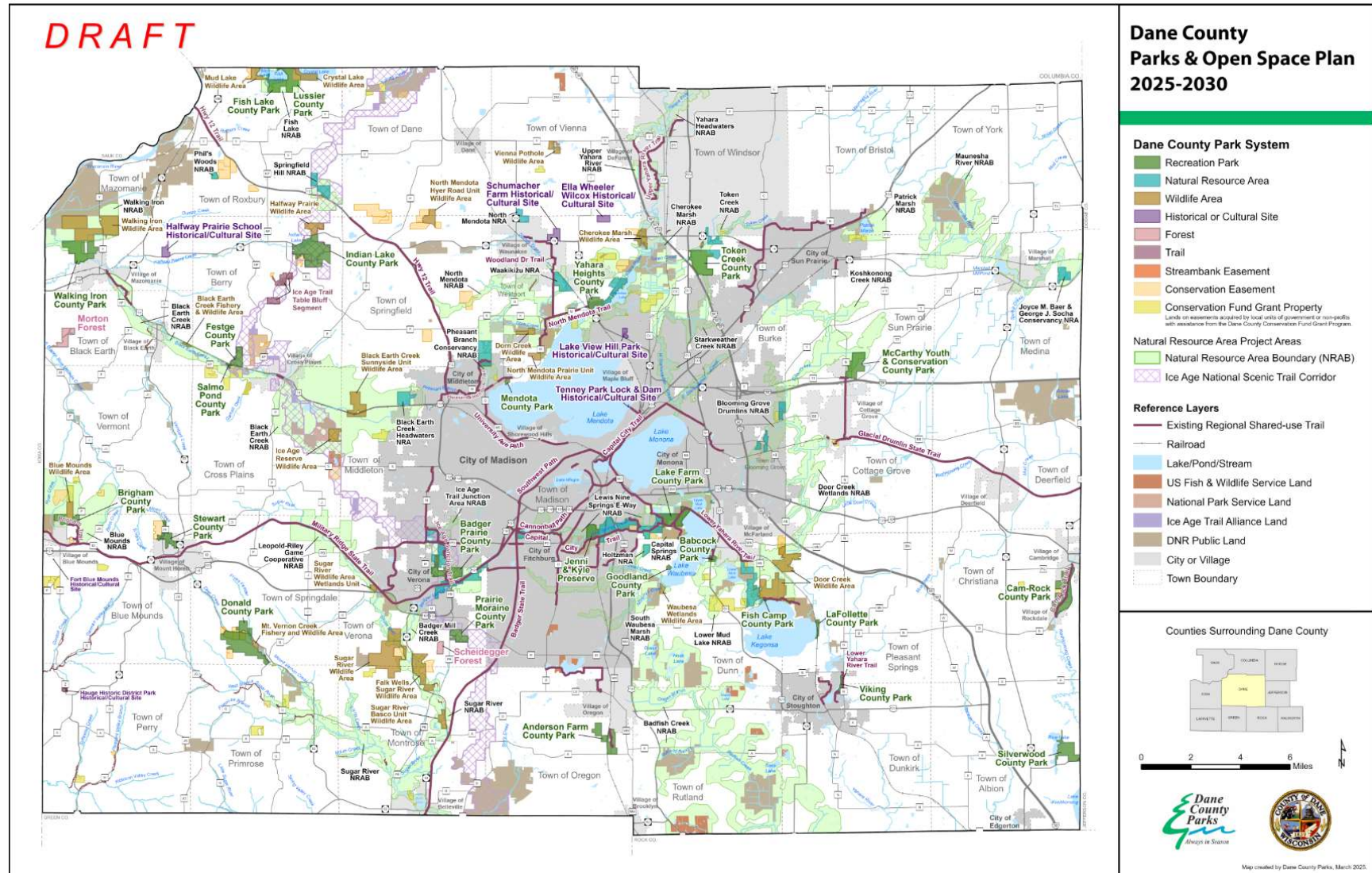
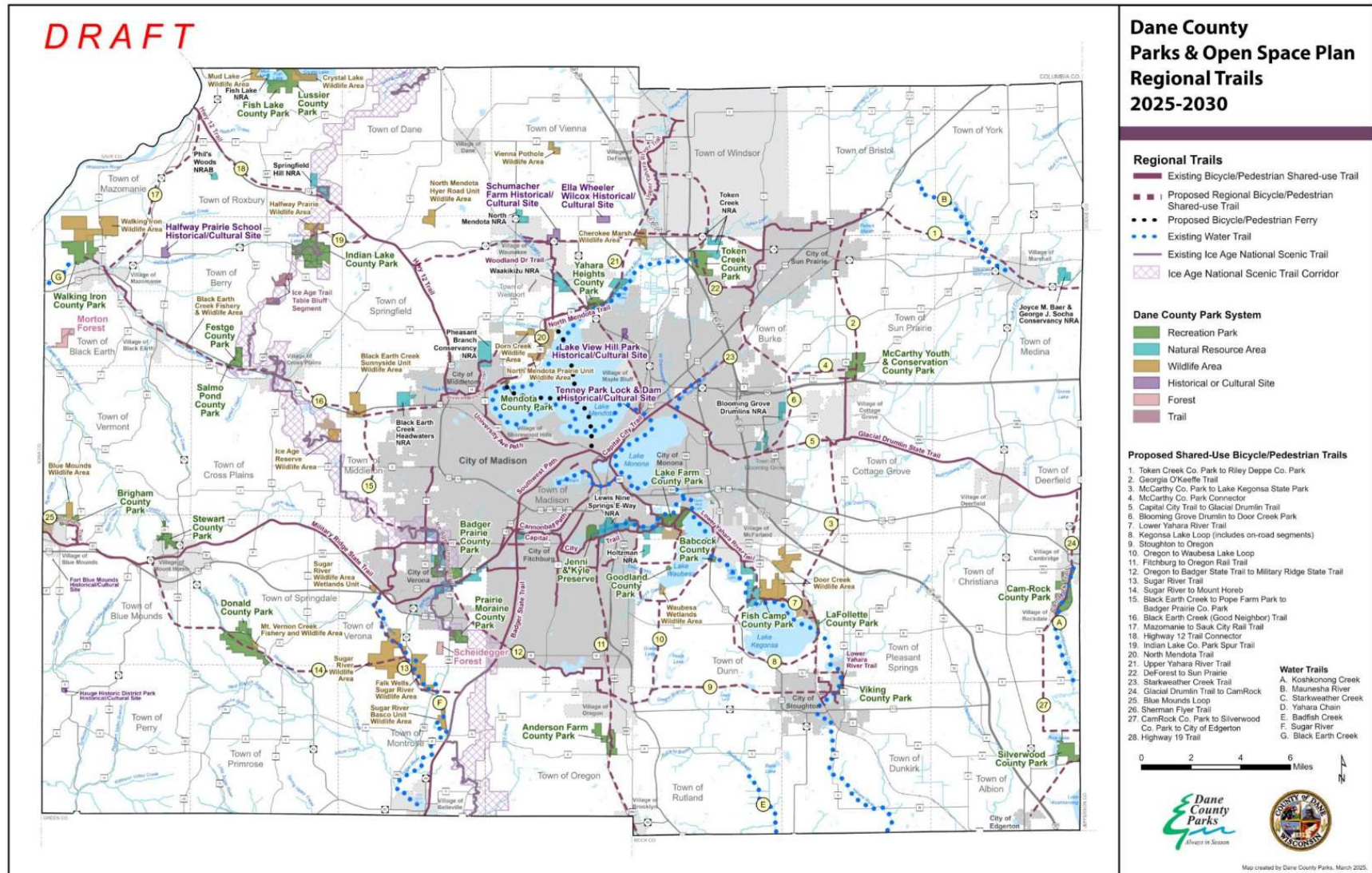


Exhibit 14: Dane County POSP Regional Trails 2025-2030



Chapter 6: Funding Mechanisms

The City of Madison continues to grow in terms of population and geographic region. As it does, the Parks Division must be prepared to respond to the growing demands of the park system. Maintaining the existing system and building new spaces and facilities requires significant resources to meet the park access and outdoor recreation needs of the community.

Overall, there are five primary factors impacting development and operational funding resources:

- Long-standing, reliable funding sources are not increasing at corresponding levels of resource demand.
- is experiencing rapid population growth and increased housing density, which requires the development of new parks to maintain service standards.
- Increased daily use and longer seasons require more resources.
- Historic facilities and aging infrastructure require increased maintenance.
- Facilities and programming have been added responsive to the needs of the community.

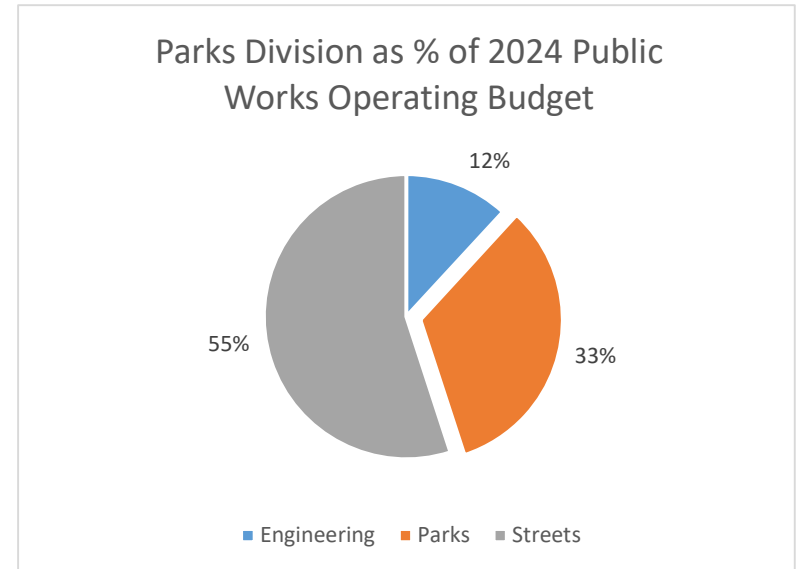
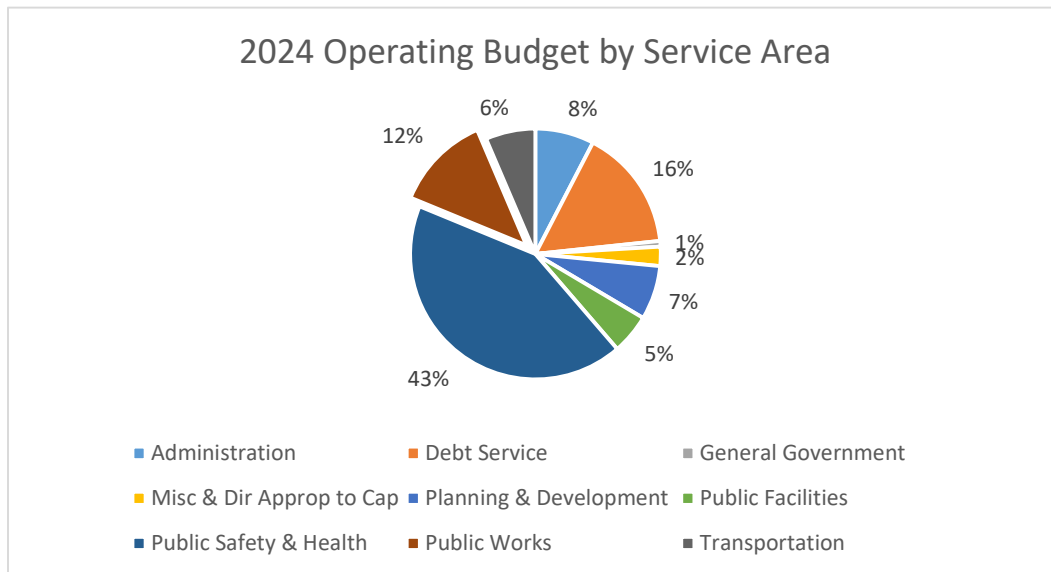
The City of Madison's General Fund budget is \$432.5 million, of which \$17.3 million (3.99%) is allocated to the Parks Division through the annual Operating Budget (Figure 6.1). The City of Madison's annual Capital Budget is \$426.5 million, of which \$15.5 million (3.6%) is allocated to the Parks Division as part of the Department of Public Works (Figure 6.2). Based on this level of support, the City of Madison is lagging behind peer systems across the country when it comes to investment in the park system. According to these metrics based on a three-year average, Madison is investing approximately \$112 per resident annually for both parks operational and capital resources, when a system of this size and complexity should be closer to \$248 per resident annually⁶².

⁶² Trust for Public Land (2024). 2024 ParkScore Index: Madison, WI. Trust for Public Lands. https://parkserve.tpl.org/downloads/pdfs/Madison_WI.pdf

Figure 6.1: City of Madison Operating Budget 2025



Figure 6.2: City of Madison Overall Capital Budget 2025



This chapter examines development and operational resources, along with alternative funding sources and considerations related to system growth. The analysis explains why current resources are struggling to align with trends in population growth. In order to sustain and grow services across the system and create a system that is more resilient to external factors, staff and policymakers must pursue alternative funding sources. Figure 6.3 provides an overview of the chapter.

Figure 6.3: Funding Mechanisms Overview

Funding Purpose	What is Funded	Sources of Funding	Concerns Regarding Funding
Development of Parks (Capital Budget)	Construction of new parks & facilities Replacement, maintenance, and improvements to existing facilities Acquisition of new parks	General Obligation Borrowing Impact Fees (Development) County, State, and Federal Funding Tax Incremental Financing Private and In-kind contributions	Reliant on debt service, paid by property tax Directly dependent on residential development Dependent on specific projects and grantee programs available TIF District must be able to support the work financially and geographically Dependent on ability to fundraise
Park Operations (Operating Budget)	71% of Operating Budget funds salaries and benefits Day-to-day operations and maintenance of the park system Programming and permitting of the park spaces Fees for utilities serving park facilities	General Property Tax Levy Earned Revenue - generated through permits, fees, and agreements Private and in-kind contributions	Property tax limits create a gap between allowable levy and needed growth Dependent on park uses, external weather events, and facility conditions Dependent on ability to fundraise

6.1 Park Development Resources

Park development resources are needed to build new parks, improve and maintain facilities, and update infrastructure within the system. The Capital Budget is the primary funding mechanism that supports these projects. Each year, the Parks Division develops and updates its Capital Budget and corresponding five-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)⁶³. The CIP and Capital Budget are based on a review of existing and emerging infrastructure needs, planned development, and resident and alder input. This section discusses the Capital Budget funding sources, trends between 2018-2024 and outlook for 2025-2030.

The Capital Budget is funded by multiple sources including general obligation bonds, impact fees, and other revenues such as county and federal funding sources, tax incremental financing (TIF) funds, special assessments, revenues from leases, and donations/contributions. The funding make-up varies from year-to-year depending on the types of projects within the Capital Budget and CIP, however general obligation bonds and impact fees are consistently the largest funding sources. Each of these funding types are described in further detail within this section. The full 2025 Adopted Capital Budget and Capital Improvement Plan is available in Appendix F.

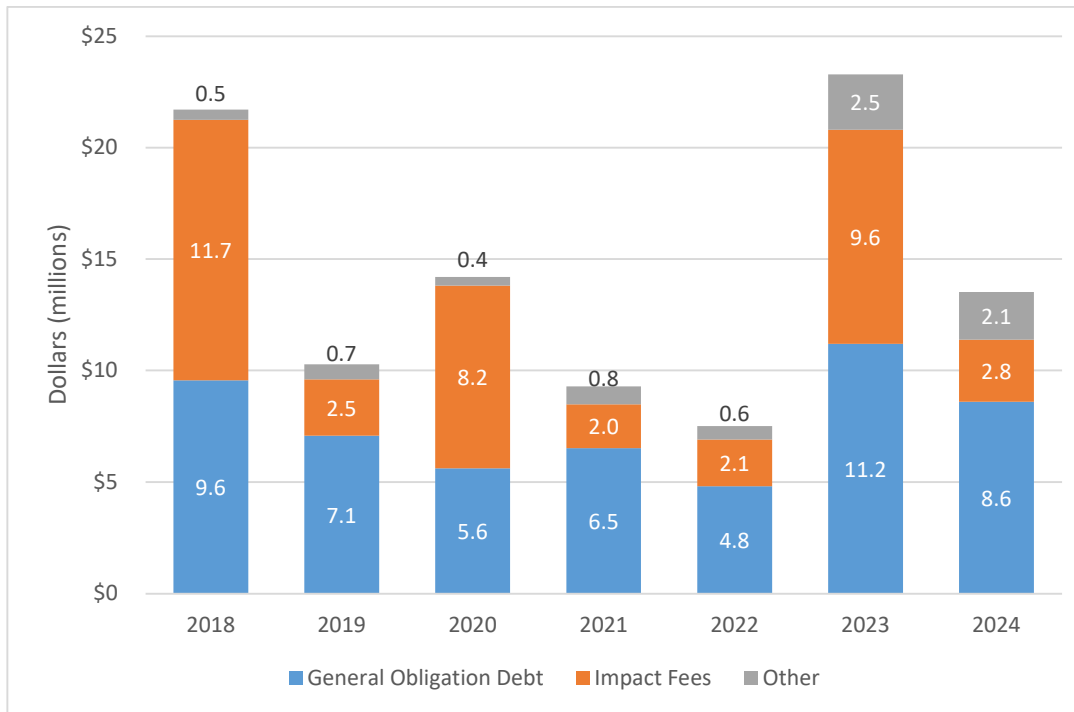
GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS

A major source of funding for capital improvement projects is general obligation (GO) borrowing, which is debt borrowed by the City through 10-year bonds and paid back using property tax levy shown as debt service as part of the overall City of Madison Budget. The amount of GO borrowing within the Parks Division's budget can vary from year-to-year. In 2024, approximately 64% of the adopted Capital Budget was funded through GO borrowing.

Figure 6.4 shows the adopted Parks Capital Budgets from 2018 through 2024. Over this time period, two years were budgeted with higher resource inputs for unique circumstances. In 2018, \$9 million was budgeted for potential land acquisitions, and in 2023 the Capital Budget included funding for expansions of Elver Park and Warner Park Community Recreation Center and new shelter construction projects at Door Creek and Country Grove Parks. Meanwhile, between 2022 and 2024, approximately 45% of the Parks Division's Capital Budget was used to address deferred maintenance needs and replacement of existing infrastructure in the park system.

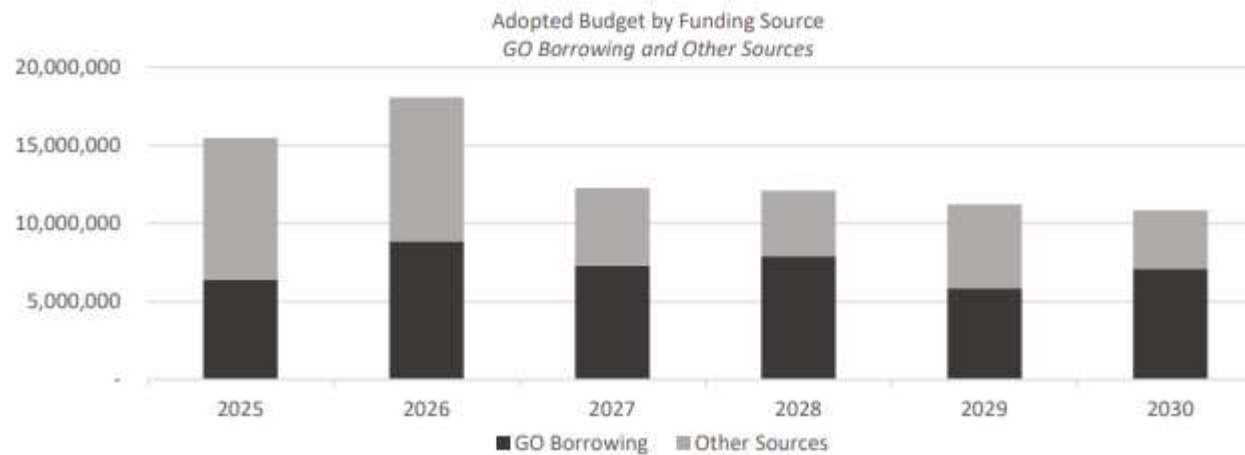
Figure 6.4: Adopted Capital Budget by Funding Source (2018-2024)

⁶³ City of Madison Budget: details of Parks Division's Capital budget available at: <https://www.cityofmadison.com/finance/budget>.



The adopted 2025-2030 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) shown in Figure 6.5 is a plan of future expenditures for Parks capital needs. The CIP is subject to annual appropriation as part of the City's Capital Budget process. The 2026 CIP contains large projects, including replacing the Brittingham Park beach house, implementing the Madison LakeWay Improvements project, as well as golf improvements funded by the Golf Program. Several of these projects contain significant funding other than GO borrowing, including private donations, grants, or reserves applied. According to the 2025-2030 CIP, the Parks Division anticipates spending approximately 59% of capital resources on deferred maintenance and replacing existing facilities. In an effort to manage debt service and the overall Operating Budget within defined property tax levy limits, the Parks Division's Capital Budget GO borrowing during the 2025-2030 period is expected to be an average of \$6.85 million per year compared to \$7.63 million during the 2018-2024 period which is a reduction of 10 percent.

Figure 6.5: Adopted 2025 Capital Budget and 2026-2030



PARKLAND DEDICATION AND IMPACT FEE OVERVIEW

Impact fees have and will continue to account for the second-largest funding source in the Parks Division’s Capital Budget (Figure 6.4)⁶⁴. Park Impact Fees⁶⁵ are based on a 2016 Needs Assessment and include a requirement of either parkland dedication or a Park-Land Impact Fee (also called impact fee-in-lieu of dedication) to accompany new residential units. New residential units are also required to pay Infrastructure Impact Fees. Impact fee funding identified in the Capital Budget varies and is contingent upon fees received and anticipated projects. Impact fee funds accounted for 39 percent of the Capital Budget during the 2018-2024 timeframe.

The Impact Fee funding is tied directly to the housing market within Madison. All park impact fees and parkland dedication are calculated based on the number of housing units added to ensure sufficient park resources are available to serve the residents. The City’s Community Development Division estimates that the city has added approximately 22,000 homes or housing units in the last decade. According to the

⁶⁴ Wisconsin State Statute Section 66.0617 authorizes local governments to enact ordinances requiring developers to provide land (or fees in lieu of) and impact fees for the development of public parks. The City of Madison codified these developer obligations in Chapter 16: General Planning and Chapter 20: Impact Fee Ordinance.

⁶⁵ City of Madison: Park Impact Fees <https://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/about/impactFees.cfm>

City of Madison's Housing Tracker, Madison has set a target of creating 15,000 new homes by 2030 to address the city's challenges related to housing costs and supply.⁶⁶

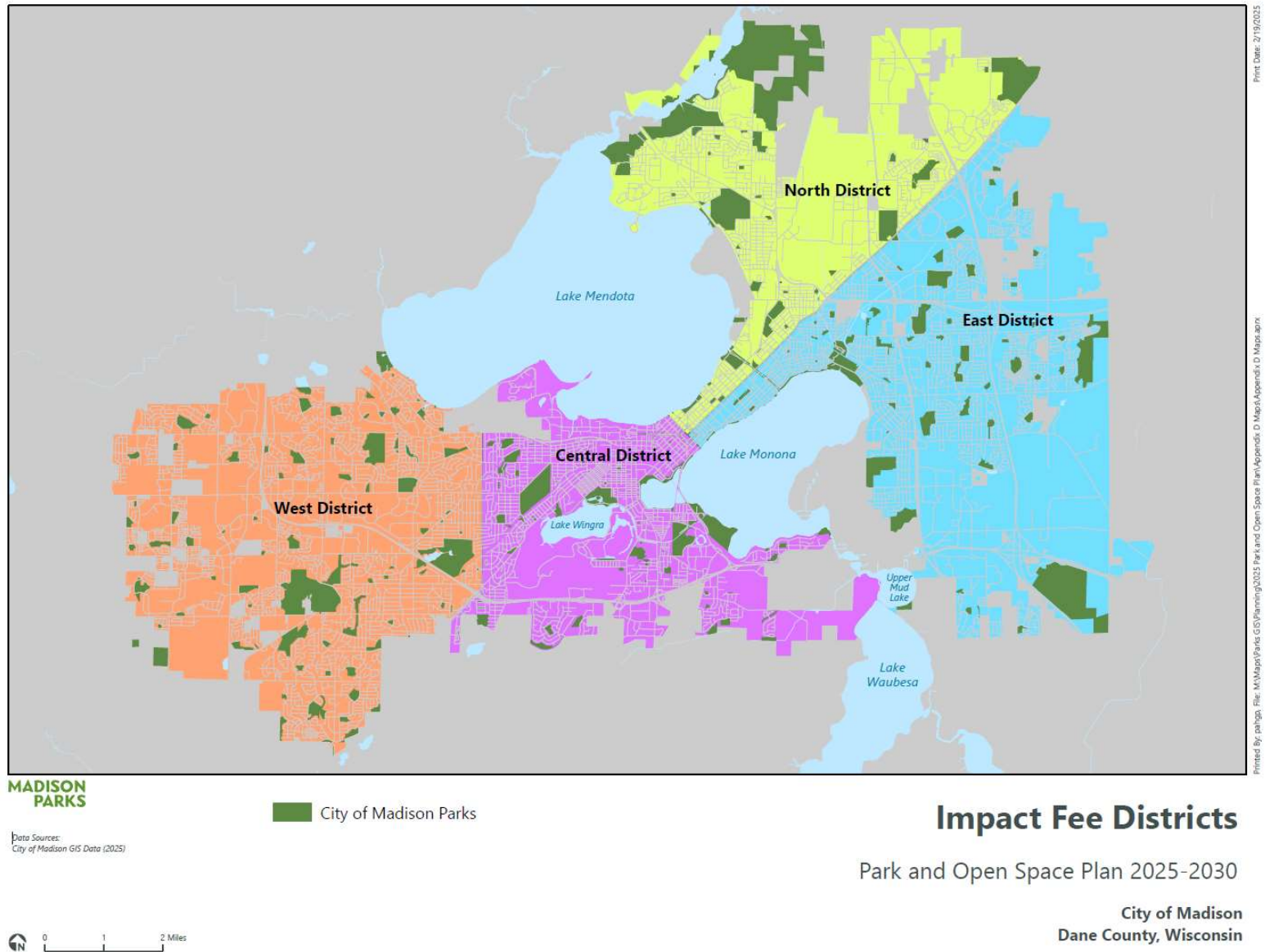
2016 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The "Park Impact Fee and Land Dedication Policy and Public Facility Needs Assessment" completed in 2016 is the basis for the current parkland dedication, park impact fee in lieu of dedication and park infrastructure impact fees requirements⁶⁷. These changes went into effect on January 1, 2017, were implemented over a three-year period (80% in 2017, 90% in 2018, and 100% in 2019 and beyond), and includes annual adjustments for inflation. The new impact fee ordinance added a category for large multifamily units (four bedrooms or more) and updated the requirement for age-restricted units and group living quarters reflective of housing development trends. The current impact fee ordinance also provides exemptions for low-cost housing and updated requirements for accessory dwelling units, which became permissible with enactment of the new Zoning Code in 2013. One of the most significant changes as a result of the Needs Assessment was the move from 11 to 5 benefit districts. The current park infrastructure impact fee districts are North, East, Central, West, and City-wide (Exhibit 15)

⁶⁶ City of Madison-Community Development Division (2025). City of Madison Housing Tracker. <https://www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/community-development/housing/housing-tracker>

⁶⁷ City of Madison Common Council (November 1, 2016) Madison General Ordinance Revision (ORD-16-00091), Legislative File ID# 43500

Exhibit 15: Impact Fee Districts



An update to the Needs Assessment is anticipated to be completed by end of 2026. The level of service requirement for parkland dedication is among the items that are subject to change with an updated Needs Assessment. The Needs Assessment will be prepared using data gathered from around the nation and within Wisconsin, along with the information presented in the adopted 2025-2030 Park and Open Space Plan, and the City's existing park inventory.

PARKLAND DEDICATION

Parkland dedication mandates that developers of residential properties dedicate a specific amount of land area for public parks as part of the plan approval process. The parkland dedication requirements ensure that new residential development provided parkland at the level of service of 10+ acres per 1,000 residents. The Capital Budget does not account for parkland dedication but does typically include funding for development of facilities in new parks that were created through parkland dedication.

IMPACT FEES USED FOR PARK ACQUISITION

In situations where the City of Madison determines it is not feasible or desirable to acquire additional parkland through parkland dedication, developers are required to pay a monetary amount (the Park-Land Impact Fee) in lieu of land dedication. The Park-Land Impact Fee ensures that when a development does not dedicate parkland within its property, the developer provides funding to the City to independently purchase parkland. The fee in lieu of land dedication amount is determined using a formula based on the number of proposed dwelling units. This requirement assures that the City has funding to purchase parkland outside of the property tax levy to meet park demand introduced by new dwelling units; this is critical to maintaining the existing service level of 10+ acres per 1,000 residents. Park-Land Impact Fees cannot be used for anything other than the acquisition of park land.

Park-Land Impact Fees have been a reliable source of park acquisition funding between 2018 and 2024. Figure 6.6 illustrates the annual Park-Land Impact Fees collected from 2018 through 2024

Figure 6.6: Park-Land Impact Fees Collected (2018-2024)

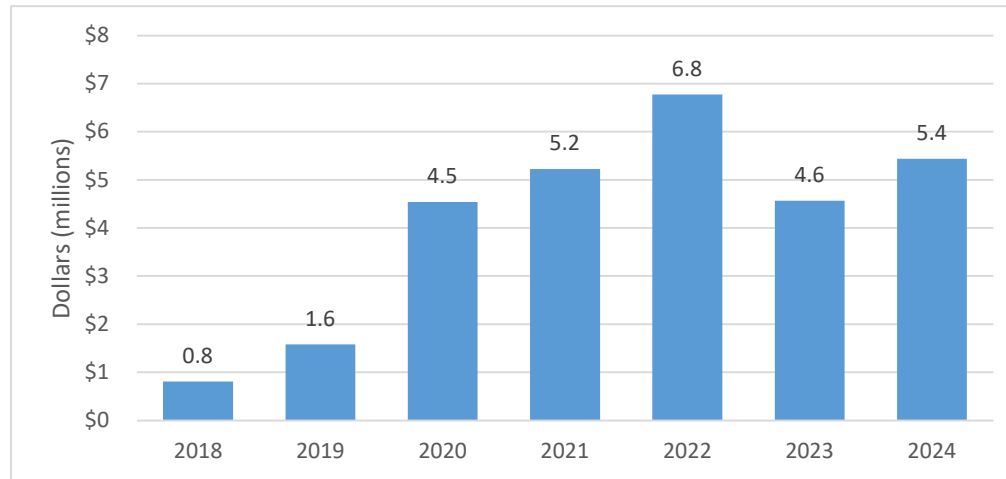


Table 6.2, includes a list of parkland dedications and/or acquisitions utilizing Park-Land Impact Fees have resulted in the following park acquisitions or park expansion since 2018:

Table 6.2: Parks Acquired and/or Expanded (2018-2024)

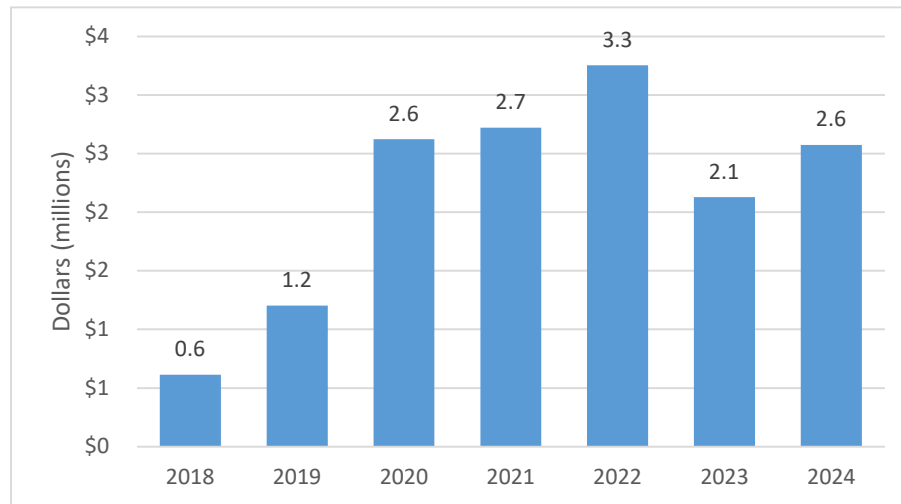
Acquired Through Dedication	Purchased Using Park-Land Impact Fees	Acquired Using Combination
Acacia Ridge Park	Apple Ridge Park	Hartmeyer-Roth Park
Canter Park	Brittingham Park	Elver Park
Country Grove Park	Cherokee Marsh-North Unit	
Eagle Trace Park	Hill Creek Park	
Midtown Commons Park	Moraine Woods Conservation Park	
Old Timber Park	OB Sherry Park	
Sunshine Ridge Park	Olin Park	
	Tilton Park	
	Whitetail Ridge Park	
	Zeier Park	

The Park-Land Impact Fee is determined based on the city-wide average assessed value of the certified tax roll. This calculation does not fully account for the higher cost of land in the downtown area and other rapidly developing urban areas. As Madison continues to grow, additional parkland will be required to meet community needs. The city is already experiencing increased park demands with new residential infill development in the downtown area and East Washington Avenue corridor. Increasing density and infill development are identified in both the Downtown Plan and the Imagine Madison Comprehensive Plan. As Madison plans for the future, it is important to note that the cost for parkland to meet these needs will be more expensive than the cost of land on the periphery of the city and will disproportionately consume the land acquisition budget.

IMPACT FEES USED FOR PARK INFRASTRUCTURE

Park-Infrastructure Impact Fees provide a significant source of funding for construction of park facilities and amenities in the Capital Budget. This impact fee funds park development at a comparable level to existing park facilities and is assessed based on the number of units and type of housing developed. The Park-Infrastructure Impact fee schedule was updated based on the 2016 Needs Assessment and is adjusted annually based on the Construction Cost Index. Figure 6.7 identifies Park-Infrastructure Fees collected from 2018-2024. The yearly variations reflect the differing number and type of new residential development projects that are approved and constructed each year.

Figure 6.7: Park-Infrastructure Fees Collected (2018-2024)



Park-Infrastructure impact fees must be spent in the district from which they are acquired: Prior to the 2016 Needs Assessment, the impact fee ordinance defined 11 impact fee (or benefit) districts. This resulted in some districts receiving significantly higher levels of impact fees than others due to residential development trends. The ordinance changes implemented in 2017 reduced the previous 11 benefit districts to 5 benefit districts to create a more equitable distribution of impact fee funding. A city-wide benefit district was also created where 20% of all Park-Infrastructure impact fees are placed in a fund which can be used anywhere throughout the city. The end result of these changes to the benefit districts has created a more equitable distribution of impact fee utilization throughout the city. Notably, low-cost housing park infrastructure impact fee exemptions since 2017 are equivalent to nearly \$12 million in foregone revenue for park system improvements.

The City's Annual Capital Budget includes statements regarding each impact fee district, including fees collected and expenditures. The Parks Division prepares an annual Impact Fee report that shows revenues and expenses from each district

While Park Infrastructure impact fees help to offset park development costs, they typically only offset park development costs by an average of 30-50% of total costs, depending on the type of housing development. Table 6.3 includes general costs associated with the development of various sizes of parks.

Table 6.3 Potential Park Development Costs

Mini Park (<5 ac)		Neighborhood Park (>5 ac)		Community Park (Typically >20 ac)	
Master Plan	\$10,000-25,000	Master Plan	\$25,000-40,000	Master Plan	\$100,000-250,000
Site Engineering	\$12,000-20,000	Site Engineering	\$25,000-35,000	Site Engineering	\$300,000-400,000
Grading and Site Prep	\$25,000-100,000	Grading and Site Prep	\$60,000-150,000	Grading and Site Prep	\$120,000-200,000
Finish Grading & Restoration	\$12,000-15,000	Finish Grading and Restoration	\$120,000-150,000	Finish Grading and Restoration	\$200,000-350,000
Landscaping	\$12,000-25,000	Landscaping	\$50,000-75,000	Landscaping	\$80,000-150,000
Utility Services	\$6,000-10,000	Utility Services	\$12,000-25,000	Utility Services	\$25,000-75,000
Playground	\$100,000-150,000	Playground	\$120,000-175,000	Playground with play equipment for 2-5 and 5-12	\$200,000-300,000
Park Furnishings	\$25,000-40,000	Park Furnishings	\$45,000-70,000	Park Furnishings	\$75,000-100,000
(Approx 1/4 mi) Paved Trails	\$77,000-150,000	Backstop	\$6,000-8,500	Lighted Courts	\$2-5 million
		Picnic Shelter / Open-Sided Shelter	\$100,000-150,000	Lighted Fields	\$1-2.5 million
		Soccer Fields	\$20,000-75,000	Shelter building with restroom	\$2-5 million
		Small Parking Lot	\$125,000-250,000	Picnic Shelter / Open-Sided Shelter	\$100,000-150,000
		(Approx 1/2 mi) Paved Trails	\$155,000-250,000	Large Parking Lot	\$500,000-2 million
				(Approx. 1 mi) Paved Trails	\$350,000-500,000
REPRESENTATIVE TOTAL	\$280,000-535,000		\$860,000-1.5 million		\$7-17 million

Impact fees provide a much smaller fraction of park development funding when considering improvements to community parks or historic parks. Community parks often provide specialized amenities such as splash pads, skate parks, and boat launches. These facilities are more costly to both construct and operate compared to mini and neighborhood parks. Historic facilities owned the Parks Division require significant resources to manage and maintain. Additional levels of review are required before infrastructure needs can be addressed and improvements must meet strict local and national guidelines, resulting in higher costs to maintain and restore these facilities compared to typical park facilities. Examples of historic restoration projects completed since 2018, include the interior and exterior preservation of Gates of Heaven, exterior preservation of Garver Cottage, interior and exterior preservation of the Catlin Chapel at Forest Hill Cemetery, and significant work at Breese Stevens Field.

The Park Impact Fee ordinance has a provision that allows developers to construct a new park, built to City standards on parkland dedicated through a subdivision plat rather than pay Park-Infrastructure Impact Fees. This process allows developers to use funds that would have been paid as fees to construct the park along with the subdivision development, rather than having the City develop the park. Since the 2018-2023 Park and Open Space Plan, the City has entered into development agreements for the construction of Thousand Oaks (2018) and Old Timber Parks (2024). As high-density housing is built at a rapid pace, developers and the City are interested in having parks that can serve those residents, likely resulting in more park development agreements.

Accommodating Madison's rapid growth will be an important aspect of future parkland development. Madison is growing both in the number of single-family homes on the periphery of the city, but also in the number of new multifamily residential complexes in the city's existing urban areas and historically commercial areas such as East Towne and Westgate Malls. Parkland on the periphery will likely be acquired through parkland dedication within areas identified in neighborhood development plans. However, as the city continues to increase the density of existing developed areas, it may rely more heavily on acquisition of previously developed sites for parkland as opposed to agriculture land. Converting an existing developed property to parkland (especially in the downtown area) will incur significant costs including acquisition, demolition, and potential site remediation. As can be seen in Appendix E – Exhibit 16 DNR Inventory of Contaminated Properties, properties in developed areas may have contamination issues. Depending on the proposed construction and existing contamination, remediation of the site can cost anywhere from several thousand to several hundreds of thousands of dollars per acre.

OTHER CAPITAL FUNDING SOURCES

The use of other funding sources within the Capital Budget has increased over recent years, with 2% other funding sources used in 2018 compared to 16% in 2024 and 48% in 2025 as shown previously in Figure 6.4. Other funding is project specific and varies from year to year.

Donation funding received through various partnerships is accounted for within “Other Funding Sources” and is described in more detail in Alternative Funding Sources. This section outlines the various other methods for funding the development of the park system.

Tax Incremental Financing (TIF)⁶⁸ is a governmental finance tool that the City of Madison uses to provide funds to construct public infrastructure, promote development opportunities, and expand the future tax base. TIF funding is captured as areas within Tax Improvement Districts (TIDs) are redeveloped in accordance with approved TID plans. As rapid redevelopment is happening in areas, the City has begun more actively establishing TID districts and using some of the proceeds for park improvements. The adopted 2025-2030 CIP includes \$6,660,000 in TIF Funding for projects within multiple TID plan areas, including funding for improvements for parks in South Madison and Breese Stevens Stadium.

The 2024 Capital Budget and the adopted 2025-2030 CIP includes funding sources from Revenue Reserves, which is golf-specific funding from the sale of a portion of the Yahara Hills Golf Course in 2023 and surplus revenues from operations that is being used to fund capital improvements to the courses and facilities. The adopted 2025-2030 CIP also includes \$2.4 million of non-general fund GO borrowing, which is debt similar to GO borrowing, but instead of being repaid through the tax levy, it will need to be repaid by the Golf Program.

County, State and Federal funding sources vary from year to year. This funding is typically received through grants, which are dependent on funding availability from the grantor and whether or not the grant application is awarded. Table 6.4 illustrates significant grant awards that Madison Parks received for capital improvements between 2018-2024.

Table 6.4: Summary of Grant Funding Received (2018-2024)

Year	Amount	Source
2018	\$26,895	State of Wisconsin for Central Park Skate Park
2020	\$13,000	US Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service for invasive species control and native seeding at Owen Conservation Park
2021	\$125,000	Dane County Parks’ PARC and Ride Grant for the Aldo Leopold Park Paved Pump Track Project
2022	\$1,500	Dane County Land & Water Resources Department for prescribed burn crew tools and PPE
2024	\$62,500 \$25,000	Dane County Parks’ PARC and Ride Grant for the Aldo Leopold Park Shred to School Project State of WI Vibrant Spaces Grant for Crowley Station

The 2025 Capital Budget includes \$2 million of funding from Dane County to support the Madison LakeWay Improvements project. In addition, the Parks Division has an agreement in place for another Dane County Partners for Recreation and Conservation (PARC) and Ride Grant for up

⁶⁸ City of Madison: Tax Incremental Financing <https://www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/economicdevelopment/tax-incremental-financing/415/>

to \$187,500, to be used towards a recreational biking project at Country Grove Park. Staff continue to work with potential grantors and the City's Grants Supervisor to evaluate and apply for potential funding sources suitable for individual projects. **Appendix X Table XX** summarizes key state and federal grant programs available to municipalities to support major park and outdoor recreation capital investments.

6.2 Park Operational Resources

The Parks Division is responsible for planning and maintaining the entire park system that covers over 5,700 acres of parkland and more than 290 parks. Additionally, the Parks Division programs park spaces through permitting special events, reserving facilities, and coordinating Parks-led events. As part of the City's Department of Public Works, the Parks Division also shares responsibility for snow removal on bike paths, sidewalks, and bus stops, as well as litter pick-up and mowing/trimming street-ends and other City-owned greenspaces. The City of Madison's Operating Budget⁶⁹ is funded by property tax levy support, revenues generated by park operations, and other funding sources. The Operating Budget provides the resources needed for daily operations, including staff salaries, purchased supplies, and services.

Since 2018, the Parks Division has undergone significant organizational change in addition to facing extreme challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, that are reflected as major reductions in operating revenue between 2019 and 2020. As part of the 2020 Operating Budget, the entire Forestry section moved to the Streets Division to increase efficiencies and align with resource support offered by the Streets Division's crews. Additionally, the Public Works Laborer program was created in 2023, which transferred maintenance of medians from the Parks Division to the Streets Division. The shift of this work (along with corresponding revenues and expenses) to the Streets Division allows Parks staff to better focus on mission-related work within the park system. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way people use parks, which impacted available resources and therefore the services that the Parks Division provides. On top of these changes and challenges, the system has continued to evolve and grow with regards to acreage, number of parks, and programming.

For budgetary purposes and beginning in 2025, the work of the Parks Division is split into four (4) major service areas which include Community Recreation Services, Olbrich Botanical Gardens, Park Maintenance and Planning & Development (Table 6.7). This chapter discusses the operational resources, including various revenues and expenses, partnerships, and volunteer resources, that are necessary to meet the needs of Madison's growing park system.

⁶⁹ City of Madison Budget: details of Parks Division's Operating Budget available at: <https://www.cityofmadison.com/finance/budget>.

Table 6.7: Parks Division Operating Budget Service Areas

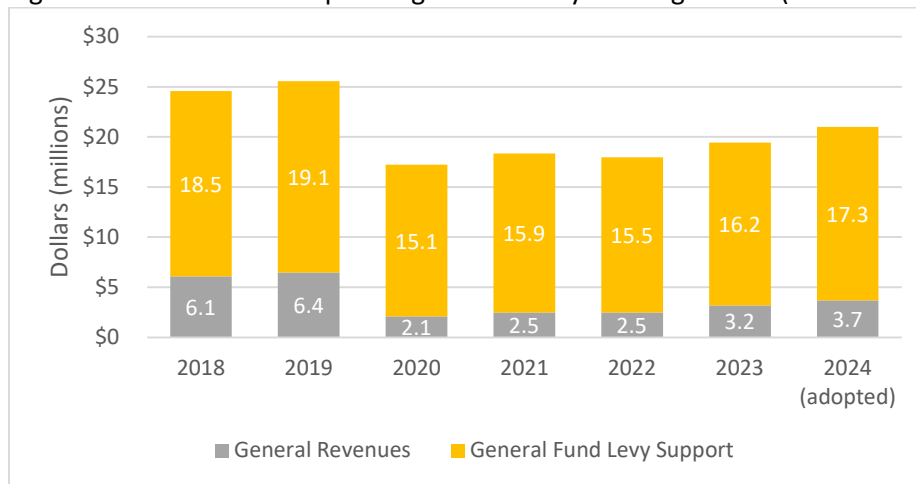
Service Area	Summary of Services Provided
Community Recreation Services	
	Permits all special events and festivals in parks, on streets, and at Mall Concourse Schedules athletic field, shelter, and open space reservations Administers permits for lake access, dog park, disc golf, ski trails, vending, and public amplification Provides front line customer service, education, and policy enforcement through the Park Ranger program Administers park and facility use agreements with community partners Coordinates and leads all parks-sponsored events, including coordinating and hosting Parks Alive events Manages operations of aquatics program at the Goodman Pool and beaches Coordinates the volunteer program within park system Provides facility rentals, a variety recreational services to youth, families, and senior citizens, and maintains and operates the Warner Park Community Recreation Center
Olbrich Botanical Gardens	
	Maintains outdoor public gardens, tropical conservancy, and production greenhouses Schedules facility rentals and events, as well as maintains rental facilities Manages guest experiences Facilitates a public-private partnership with Olbrich Botanical Society, who generally creates and manages events, education programs, exhibitions, and donor development Coordinates the volunteer program to support all aspects of garden operations
Park Maintenance	
Operations	Oversees and performs all aspects of park maintenance, including mowing, shelter cleaning, and athletic field maintenance Conducts preventative maintenance and repairs of building envelope and mechanical systems Conducts beach and shoreline clean-up and maintenance of piers, docks, boathouses, and boat storage facilities Operates and maintains Forest Hill Cemetery and Mall Concourse Conducts ecological restoration and maintenance of conservation parks and natural areas within parks Maintains winter recreation facilities, including skating rinks and cross country ski trails Maintains and performs safety audits on playgrounds Removes snow from paths, sidewalks, bus stops, and parking lots Prunes, plants, and manages trees within parks

<i>Finance & Administration</i>	Manages payroll, budgeting, purchasing, revenue billing, and administrative policy Coordinates hiring procedures and human resource-related functions Manages Geographic Information System (GIS) and performs land and asset management Manages park system data
<i>Public Information</i>	Manages Division's communications, including website, blog posts, and social media platforms Manages photo library, publications, and annual report Coordinates responses to media inquiries and news releases
Planning & Development	
	Manages all aspects of park planning, design, and construction Manages implementation of the Capital Improvement Plan Coordinates with City Planning staff on area plans and long-range planning Prepares park development and master plans Manages review of private development and assessment of Park Impact Fees

Parks Division Operating Revenues

The Parks Division's annual Operating Budget between 2020-2024 averaged just over \$18.5 million (Figure 6.8; 2018-2019 included the Forestry section and is therefore not representative of the Parks Division's current operating budget). General Fund levy support accounted for approximately 85% of the Parks Division's overall funding support over this period. The Parks Division's Operating Budget also relies on multiple other revenue sources, referred to as General Revenues.

Figure 6.8 Parks Division Operating Revenues by Funding Source (2018-2024)



GENERAL FUND LEVY SUPPORT

State legislative changes in 2013 enacted levy limits that define the maximum amount a town, village, city, or county may implement. Under these limits, a municipality may increase its levy over the amount it levied in the prior year only by the percentage increase in equalized values from net new construction. These levy limits created gaps in funding available through General Fund levy support compared to the resources required to maintain existing levels of City services. The transfer of the Forestry Section from the Parks Division to the Streets Division in 2020 accounted for a reduction in revenue and corresponding expenses of just under \$3.9 million. During this time, there were increases in levy support to cover cost of living adjustments, add several new positions, and provide limited additional resources for new facilities and programs. Following the extreme disruption caused by COVID-19, levy support was reduced by 1% in 2021. In 2024, the Parks Division, along with all other General Municipal City agencies, was directed to manage within 99% of their adopted budget. To continue current service levels, City of Madison voters passed a referendum to increase its tax levy limit by 7.4%; this increased the levy revenue by \$22 million for the 2025 Budget.

GENERAL REVENUES

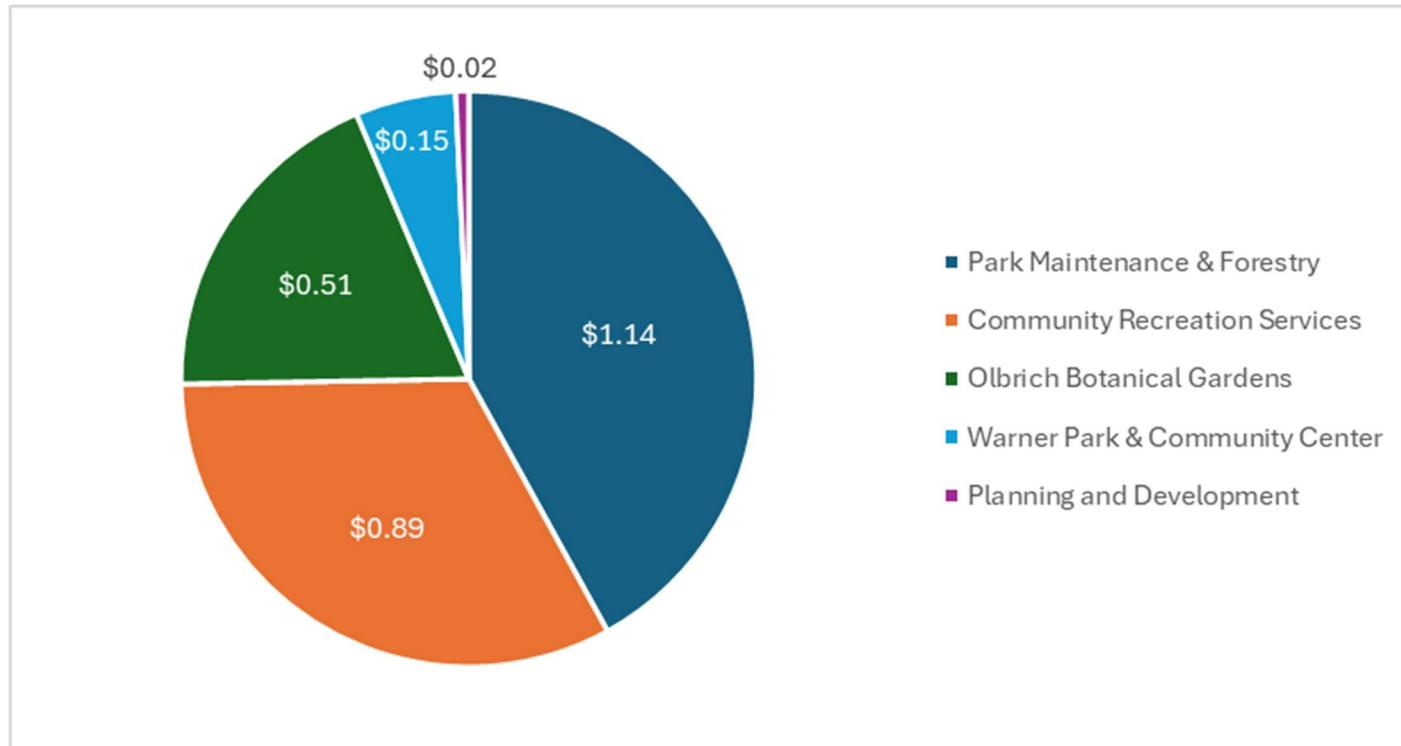
General Revenues are funds that the Parks Division generates from doing business and are a critical funding source for maintaining the park system. Table 6.6 describes each General Revenue Category and provides examples of sources for each of these revenues.

Table 6.6 General Revenue Categories

General Revenue Category	Description of Revenue Sources
Inter-Governmental Revenues	Payments from the University of Wisconsin for Thai Pavilion annual expenses
Charges For Services	Park Use charges, Boat Launch charges, catering concessions, facility rental, admissions, lessons, program revenue, memberships, and reimbursement of expenses
Licenses and Permits	Cross Country Ski Permit sales
Fine Forfeiture Assessment	Assessments to Mall Concourse property owners for services provided
Investment Other Contribution	Private donations, generally through Madison Parks Foundation
Miscellaneous Revenue	Ordinance Violation fees
Other Finance Source	Trade-in revenue from equipment leased
Transfer In	Urban Forestry Special Charges, Dog Park funds, Disc Golf funds, Madison Ultimate Frisbee Association, Cemetery Perpetual Care Fund, and Room Tax

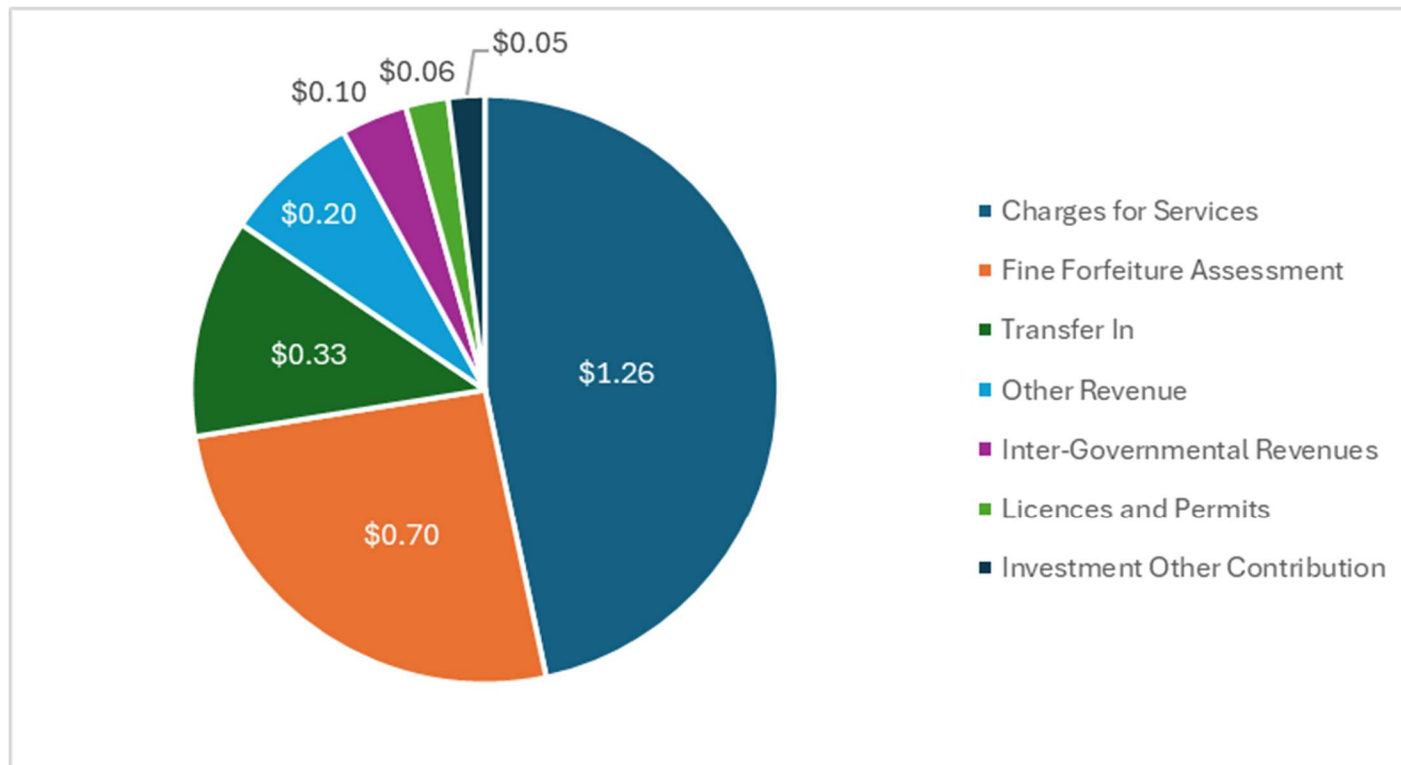
Average annual revenues generated from 2021 through 2023 by each Major Service area are shown in Figure 6.9.

Figure 6.9 Average Annual Revenue by Service Area (in millions) (2021-2023)



As shown previously in Figure 6.8, COVID-19 had significant impacts on General Revenues: almost all reservations, events, and activities were cancelled, and those that were held were significantly modified, resulting in little-to-no revenue from normal uses. Room Tax revenue, which is dependent on hotel revenue from tourism, funds approximately \$350,000 of Olbrich's revenues. Room Tax revenue was not available to be shared in 2020, was removed entirely in the 2021 and 2022 Operating Budgets, and was later restored in the 2023 Operating Budget. General Revenues surpassed pre-pandemic levels in 2023 with the return of events. Donation support has increased since 2018 due to the support of Madison Parks Foundation and others. Figure 6.10 shows the average annual revenue by Major Revenue category between 2021 and 2023.

Figure 6.10 Average Annual Operating Budget by General Revenue Category (in millions) (2021-2023)



OPERATING BUDGET EXPENSES

The Parks Division's Operating Budget expenses are broken down into five major categories within each of the Service Areas. These expenses account for the necessary staffing, benefits, supply, and service resources to efficiently operate the system. Parks Maintenance and Forestry is the largest of the five major service areas and has significantly more expenses, even without the inclusion of the Forestry section since 2020. Figure 6.11 shows the actual expenditures per Service Area and Figure 6.12 shows the breakdown of expenses by service area within the Parks Division for 2018-2023 and the revised adopted budget for 2024. This section explains the various types of operating resources.

Figure 6.11: Parks Operating Expenses by Service Area (2018-2024)

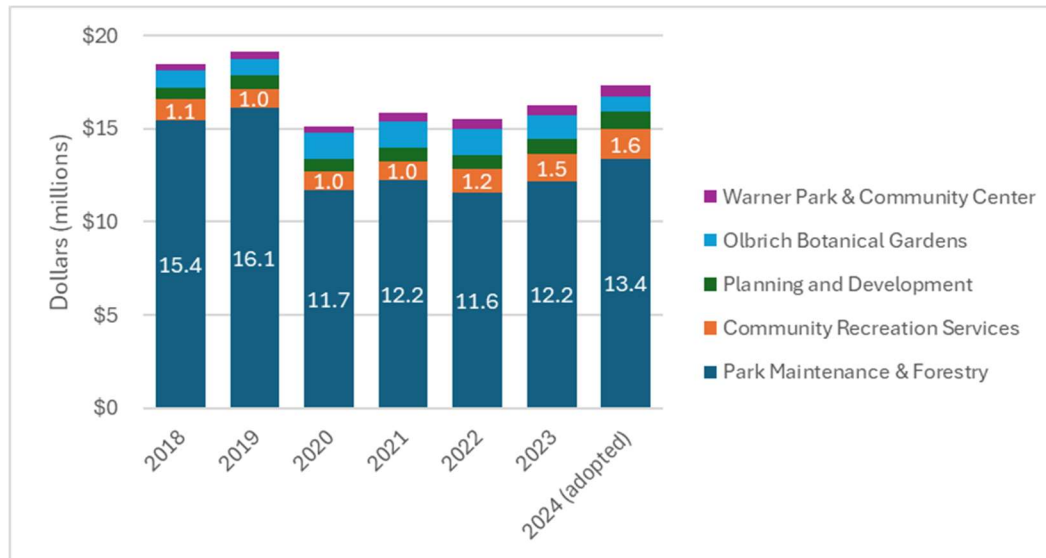
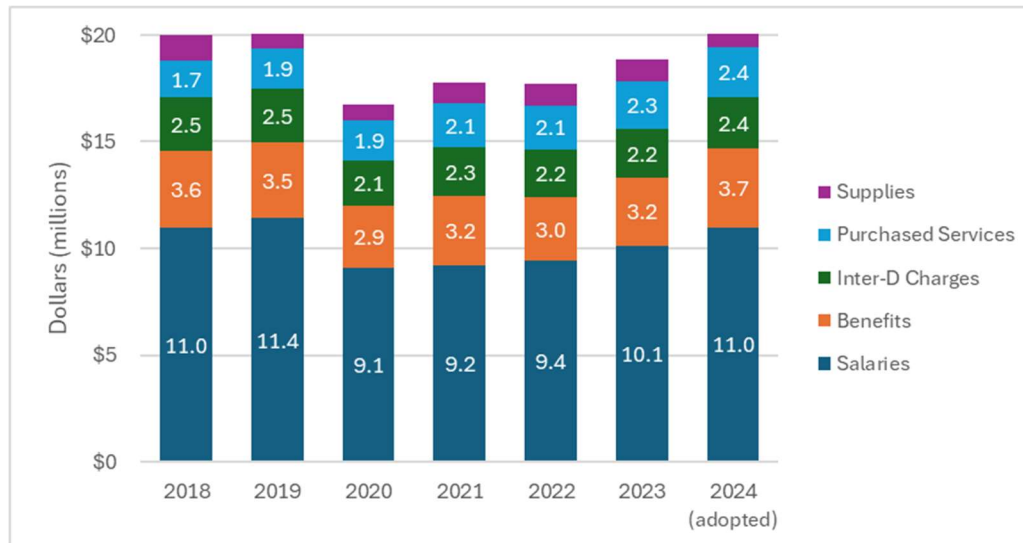


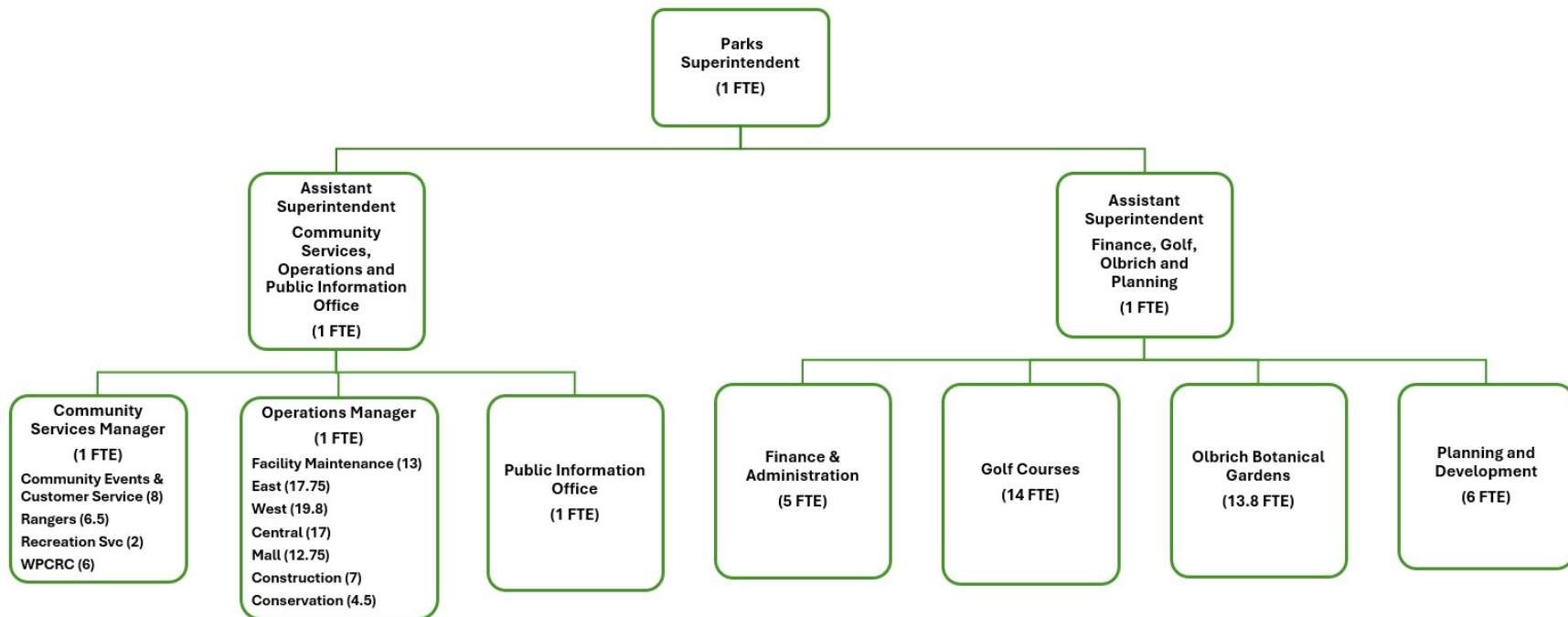
Figure 6.12: Parks Operating Expenses by Expense Category (2018-2024)



PARKS DIVISION STAFFING RESOURCES

Staffing resources, which include salaries and benefits, are the largest expense incurred by the Parks Division and accounted for approximately 70% of the Operating Budget's annual expenses from 2018-2024. The biggest change in number of full-time employees between 2019 and 2020 was due to the transfer of the Forestry section, which included 34 employees, to the Streets Division. In 2022, a Conservation Technician Trainee and Recreation Services Program Coordinator was added. In 2023, the Parks Division added 5.7 full-time employees (FTE), including Parks Alive and Volunteer Coordinators, a GIS Specialist, and a Facilities Maintenance Worker. The Parks Division had a total of 144.85 authorized full-time employees in 2024 (Figure 6.13). These added positions reflect how priorities in services and programming have evolved during this time. While some of these positions were added through additional funding support, a number of them were funded by converting hourly wages to permanent positions. Each year, the Parks Division employs approximately 300 seasonal hourly employees with varying schedules and responsibilities.

Figure 6.13: Parks Division Organizational Structure



OTHER OPERATING EXPENSES

Other annual operating expenses include purchased services and supplies as well as Inter-Departmental charges. Supplies include work and safety equipment and programming materials to support the various needs of the Division. Purchased Services have accounted for between \$1.7 million and \$2.4 million of the Parks Division's annual Operating Budget and include utilities such as power, electrical, sewer, and stormwater charges and contracted services necessary to operate the park system, such as portable toilet rentals. Inter-Departmental Charges are expenses paid to other City agencies, with Fleet Services being the largest charge in the category. Fleet costs cover the cost of equipment repairs, fuel costs, and depreciation and have typically been between \$1.7 million and \$2 million per year for the entire Parks Division from 2018-2024.

Golf Enterprise Program

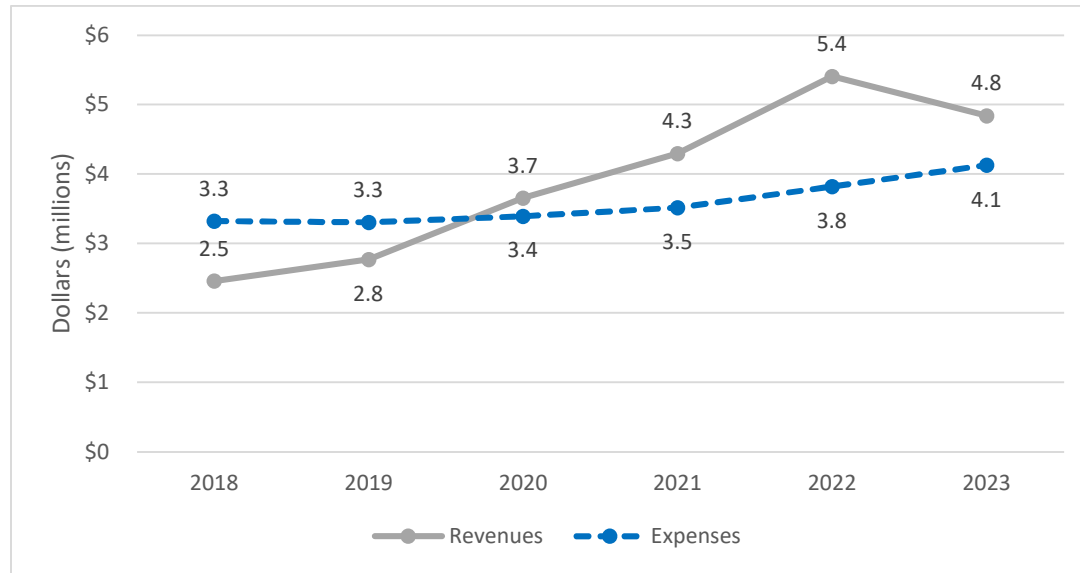
The Madison Parks Golf Enterprise Program (Golf) is operated as an enterprise, meaning it is expected to cover all of its expenditures with its own revenues, and it does not receive levy support. Golf is responsible for all aspects of golf course maintenance, clubhouse operations, and improvements. The Golf Enterprise Operating Budget sustained losses in most years between 2003 and 2019, which prevented reinvestment in the courses. Following historic financial losses in the 2018 and 2019 seasons due to extreme rain events, Golf received a loan of nearly \$900,000 from the General Fund and the Mayor and Common Council created the Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks in June 2019 to evaluate the Golf Enterprise Program and make recommendations regarding its future. The Task Force's Final Report, which contains 10 recommendations and continues to serve as a guiding force for the program⁷⁰.

GOLF PROGRAM REVENUES

Golf generates revenues through greens fees, food and beverage sales, cart rentals, events and outings. Over half of the revenue generated by Golf comes from greens fees, which are fees charged to customers using the courses. Food and beverage sales, along with cart rentals account for approximately 30% of the program's revenues. Figure 6.14 details the 2018-2023 Golf Operating Budget for the four golf courses (The Glen Golf Park, Monona, Odana Hills, and Yahara Hills). In 2023, Golf sold approximately 231 acres of the Yahara Hills Golf Course to Dane County for use as a future landfill, compost site, and sustainable business park; the figure below excludes that substantial additional land sale revenue of \$5.5 million for that year. Net revenue is transferred to a Revenue Reserves account to be used for future investments of Golf and to cover overages in expenses in years when expenses exceed revenues.

⁷⁰ City of Madison: Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks Report adopted by Common Council in January 2021 (Legislative File ID #61936).

Figure 6.14: Golf Enterprise Operating Budget (2018-2023)



GOLF PROGRAM EXPENSES

Golf operating expense categories are consistent with those of the Parks Division. Staffing expenses account for approximately 35% of expenses. Golf's 2023 Operating Budget authorized a total of 14 full-time employees, 10 of which are permanent, and 4 of which are limited-term employees assigned to work on the golf improvement. Golf also hires over 100 seasonal hourly employees each year. Utilities, including water expenses account for approximately 20% of operating expenses, while supplies account for approximately 15% of total operating expenses. Golf pays Interdepartmental charges for Fleet Services similar to the Parks Division, but unlike Parks, also pays charges for services provided by central City agencies and a Payment in Lieu of Taxes. Overall Interdepartmental charges are approximately 12% of total operating expenses.

This is a pivotal moment within Golf, as it has continued to sustain financial success following the COVID-19 pandemic. To guarantee future success, Golf will need to invest revenue reserves wisely and sustain and generate net revenue. See Appendix F: Ongoing Initiatives - Madison Park Golf Program to learn more about the transformation happening within Golf.

MADISON PARKS VOLUNTEER RESOURCES

Volunteers play a crucial role in maintaining a vibrant park system in Madison, committing either on a one-time basis or with ongoing contributions. Madison Parks strives to involve individuals and organized groups such as neighborhood associations, corporations, Friends groups and other affiliated organizations to commit on an ongoing basis to a specific park or project. While the role of volunteers is important to assisting with park maintenance and events, significant coordination is required by staff to manage these volunteer resources and ensure mutually beneficial outcomes. Volunteers at Olbrich Botanical Gardens contributed average of 20,000 hours of service annually between 2018-2024, and Park volunteers contributed nearly 29,670 hours in 2024. The value of volunteer contributions in 2024 is approximately \$1.66 million⁷¹. See Appendix X Volunteers in Madison Parks for additional information on importance of volunteer efforts.

6.3 Alternate Funding Sources

In addition to the annual Operating and Capital Budgets, the Parks Division relies on resources from a variety of partners to help create and program the park system. This section discusses key partnerships that help create some of Madison’s popular park facilities.

MADISON PARKS FOUNDATION

The Madison Parks Foundation (“Parks Foundation”) plays a significant role in securing donations for Madison Parks. The Parks Foundation is a private non-profit 501(c)3 organization founded in 2003 as the non-profit partner of Madison Parks. The intended purpose of the Parks Foundation is to acquire financial resources via private donations, grants, and other contributions to make park improvements. The resources of the Parks Foundation are not intended to replace or substitute for tax revenues generated for the annual ongoing maintenance activities of the Madison Parks Division. The Parks Foundation supported neighborhood fundraising for a number of projects since 2018 (Table 6.7).

Table 6.7 Capital Improvements Supported by Parks Foundation (2018-2024)

Inclusive Playgrounds	Playground Improvements	Accessibility Improvements	Other Key Improvements
Brittingham Park Elver Park Rennebohm Park Warner Park	Doncaster Park Lake Edge Park McGinnis Park Sunset Park Baxter Park Westmorland Park Olbrich Nature Play	Accessible Fishing Pier at Vilas Park Beach Mat at Bernie’s Beach Beach Mat at Vilas Park Beach	The Glen Park renovation Pickleball at Garner Park Bike skills pump track at Aldo Leopold Park Lakefront Porch improvements

⁷¹ Independent Sector (2024): Value of Volunteer Time. <https://independentsector.org/resource/value-of-volunteer-time/>

Table 6.8 identifies the total donations and contributions received from 2018 through 2024. To learn more about the programming supported by Madison Parks Foundation, see Appendix XX: Ongoing Initiatives-Activating the Parks

Table 6.8: Donations/Contributions Collected from Parks Foundation (2018-2024)

Category	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Donations/Contributions	\$119,520	\$3,848,192	\$4368	\$40,559	\$2,951,300	\$1,223,205	\$838,888

OLBRICH BOTANICAL SOCIETY

The Madison Parks Division and Olbrich Botanical Society (“the Society”) work in tandem to support and operate the Olbrich Botanical Gardens. This longstanding partnership has played a key role in allowing the Gardens to grow and flourish over the years. The Society is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit and operates under its own \$4 million annual operating budget to lead fundraising, programming, education classes, events, and a membership development at the Gardens. In 2018, the Society committed \$6 million in matching funds for the Frautschi Family Learning Center and production greenhouse project, which was completed and opened in 2021. The partnership has created world-renowned Gardens that continue to be a top tourist destination for visitors, attracting over 340,000 visitors annually. The Society is funding a Comprehensive Master Plan study in 2025 that will help inform the future development and operations of the Gardens.

MADISON LAKEWAY PARTNERS

The Madison LakeWay Partners is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to fundraising and supporting the implementation of the Madison LakeWay master plan. The reimagined waterfront, spanning 1.7 miles of shoreline and 17 acres of land along Lake Monona, will become a welcoming destination for all Madison residents and visitors. For additional information regarding this partnership, see Appendix XX: Ongoing Initiatives-The Madison LakeWay.

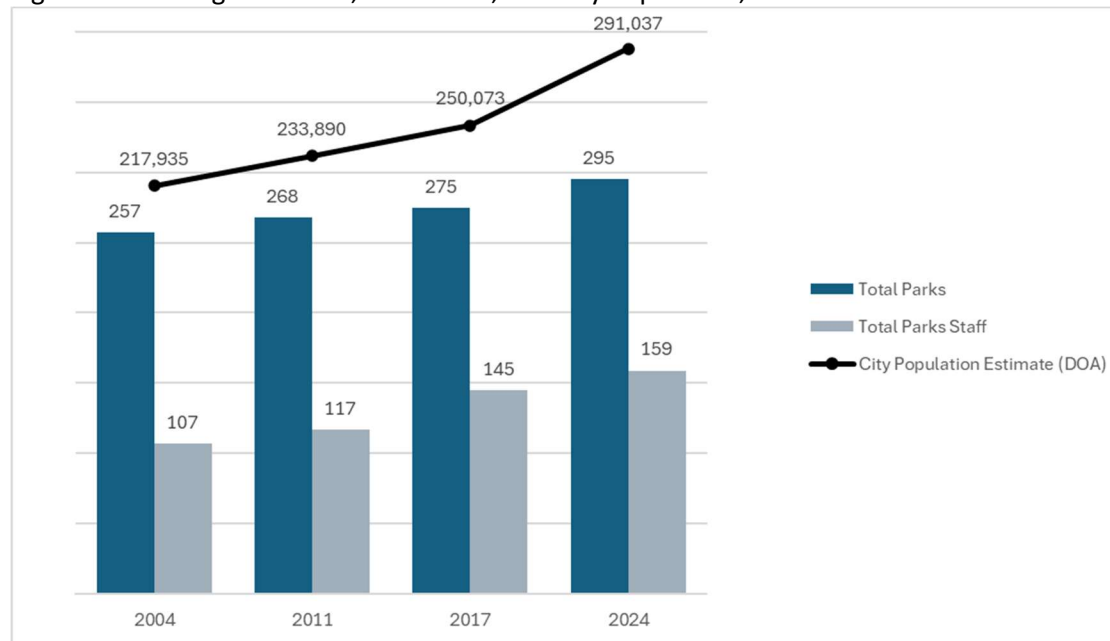
OTHER PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Over the past several years Madison Parks has been successful with creative place-making initiatives, and many of these place-making projects would not have been possible without public-private partnerships. These partnerships aid in repairs to aging infrastructure. Entities that enter into agreements/contracts with Madison Parks for these types of uses are held to high standards and specified goals, operations, and reporting procedures. Several of the city’s most popular destinations are enhanced by these partnerships including Olbrich Botanical Gardens, Warner Park Community Recreation Center; Mallards Stadium; boat rentals at Wingra, Olbrich, Marshall, and Brittingham Parks; the Biergarten at Olbrich Park; Garver Feed Mill; and athletics and events at Breese Stevens Field. Several of these groups are required to invest their own funding into improving existing park facilities specific for their needs including expediting upgrades to electrical and plumbing systems, bathroom fixtures, painting, and landscaping, which prolongs the life of these facilities with fewer investments from the City. To learn more about these partnerships, see Appendix F: Ongoing Initiatives - Activating the Parks.

6.4. Park System Growth Considerations

Over the last four Parks and Open Space plan cycles, 38 parks were added to the park system (Figure 6.15). Despite this expansion of the park system, the population-adjusted number of parks declined from 1.2 parks per thousand residents in 2004 to 1.0 parks per thousand residents in 2024, largely due to a notable increase in city population since 2017. The City's adopted Comprehensive Plan, numerous Neighborhood Development and Downtown Plans, and multiple Intergovernmental Agreements project that the number of Madison parks will grow by 25% at full build-out, with a combined 67 new parks identified in these plans. While development of these parks is incremental, the past several years saw rapid growth in both new and infill development that has outpaced the increase in operational funding. As these additional parks are designed and constructed, additional resources will be necessary to maintain, schedule, and coordinate activation of these spaces.

Figure 6.15 Changes in Parks, Parks Staff, and City Population, 2004-2024

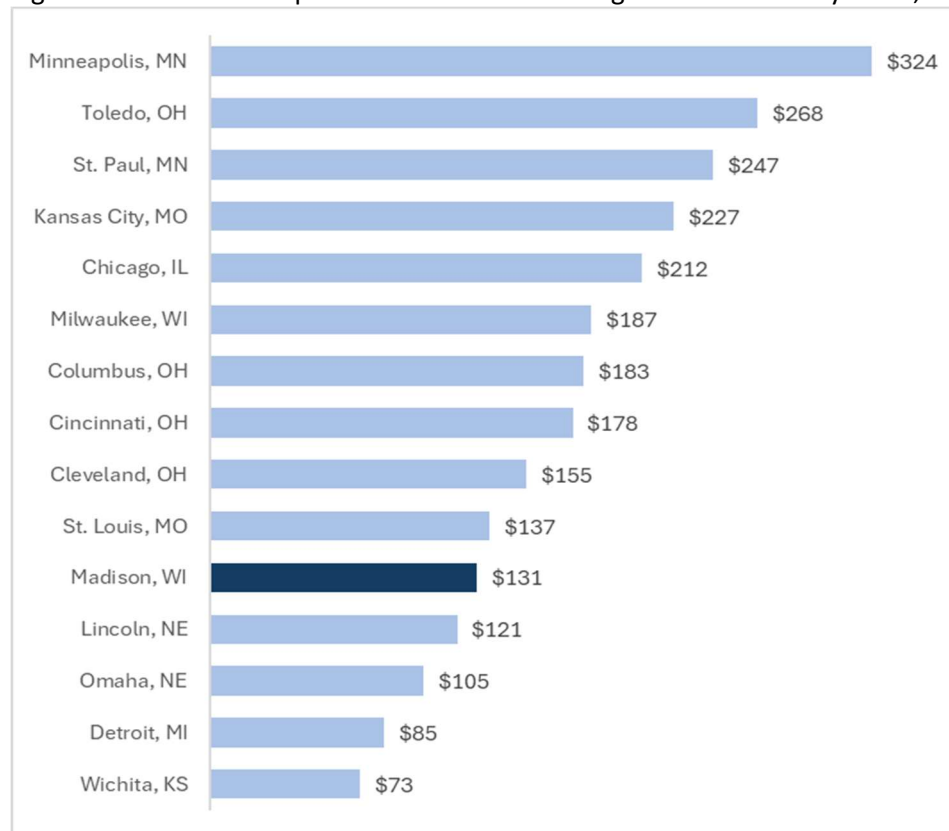


City-wide development also increases demand on operational resources to maintain bike paths, bus stops, medians, and sidewalks. In 2010, the City of Madison Streets Division, Engineering Division, and Parks Division divided maintenance of these transportation-based City facilities. Since 2018, the number of transportation-based facilities maintained by Madison Parks has increased, including an additional 216 bus stops and over 175,883 linear feet of sidewalk and bike paths. As these new facilities develop, they draw upon resources in the Parks Operating Budget.

Certain recreational facilities that have higher maintenance demands also require more operational resources. Park facilities such as dog parks, ice rinks, shelters with restrooms, and splash parks require higher levels of maintenance. Additionally, athletic fields for popular sports such as flag football, ultimate frisbee, and soccer require more intensive maintenance for the turf to remain playable throughout the year.

Compared to other large Midwestern cities, Madison's investment in its park system is relatively low. According to the Trust for Public Land, Madison ranked 11 out of 15 among large Midwestern cities in terms of the amount of per capita public and private dollars invested in its City parks in fiscal year 2023 (Figure 6.16).

Figure 6.16 Total Per Capita Dollars Invested in Large Midwestern City Parks, FY 2023⁷²



⁷² Trust for Public Land (2025). 2024 City Park Facts, using 2023 Fiscal year, accessed from <https://www.tpl.org/city-park-facts>

Madison Parks needs to continue to evaluate how future development and increasing numbers of facilities impacts operational resources. Operating facilities and staff needed to serve Madison's growing park system must grow as development continues along the periphery of the city. For example, parks on the far west side, such as Thousand Oaks Park, are approximately seven miles from the Madison Parks facility that houses the staff and equipment needed to maintain this park. In response to the ongoing growth of the city, planning for the South Point Public Works Maintenance Facility is currently underway. The City's Engineering Facilities staff is leading a long-term Facilities Needs Assessment which will set up a 5-year assessment cycle for every Park Division structure to inform replacement and maintenance budgets. Improvements in technology and efficiency will likely play a role in reducing staff hours, and metrics such as Results Madison and Performance Excellence should be used to inform a comprehensive analysis of operational needs and resources to maintain an expanding park system.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Historically, the primary funding sources of the Capital Budget have been GO borrowing through property taxes and impact fees from residential development. These two sources are no longer adequate to address the deferred maintenance needs of a large and aging park system as well as development of new parks and facilities. Ongoing concerns with the tax levy limits have proven to create significant challenges to the availability of GO borrowing support for these improvements. Impact Fee funding from new residential development has continued to generate funding for infrastructure and land acquisitions; however, it is important to recognize that this revenue source is directly dependent on a healthy economy. In addition, the effectiveness of the Impact Fee funding and any pertinent adjustments must be evaluated through a new Needs Assessment to ensure the needs of both the growing and existing park system are met. Strong partnerships are more important now than ever to the future of the park system.

General Fund levy support within the Operating Budget is not sufficient to sustain the existing and growing park system along with the other City facilities the Parks Division is responsible for maintaining. Despite voters approving a \$22 million referendum in the fall of 2024 to increase General Fund levy support for the 2025 budget, alternative funding sources are critical to ensure that the Parks Division is able to continue to address the demands of an ever-growing population with diverse needs.

The City must actively pursue sufficient resources, both financial and in-kind, to cover additional development and operational resource needs necessary to design, construct, maintain and operate these parks and ensure park access standards are maintained now and into the future. The pursuit of these sufficient resources will likely require innovative and diverse strategies to ensure an excellent park system that can sustainably serve the community's needs into the future.

Chapter 7: Recommended Strategies

The 2025-2030 City of Madison Parks and Open Space Plan (POSP) is supplemental to the City of Madison Comprehensive Plan. The most recent Comprehensive Plan was initially adopted in 2018, with interim updates in 2023 and 2024. The Comprehensive Plan translates community input and ideas into policies and actions. The Plan is organized by seven elements which are major topic areas that influence the quality of life in the city:

- Land Use and Transportation: Compact Land Use | Efficient Transportation
- Neighborhoods and Housing: Complete Neighborhoods | Housing Access
- Economy and Opportunity: Growing Economy | Equitable Education and Advancement
- Culture and Character: Cultural Vibrancy | Unique Character
- Green and Resilient: Natural Resources | Parks and Recreation
- Effective Government: Efficient Services | Community Facilities | Regional Transportation
- Health and Safety: Equitable Health Outcomes | Safe Community

The Madison Parks system is integral in the quality of life for residents within the city, as such the recommended strategies in the 2025-2030 POSP are organized within these seven elements. The POSP incorporates information from the engagement process, recreation needs assessment, relevant planning documents and various recognized park metrics into actionable data-informed strategies. As the city and park system continue to grow, develop and evolve, these strategies will provide a roadmap towards achieving an ideal park system for everyone.

Land Use and Transportation
Strategy: Increase connectivity between parks to enhance access. • <i>Create a comprehensive system of greenspace connections by means of pedestrian, biking, and water trails through parks.</i> • <i>Increase connectivity with and through parks to key neighborhood facilities and public transportation methods.</i>
Neighborhoods and Housing
Strategy: Reduce parkland deficiencies and respond to increasing residential density. • <i>Make data-informed park planning decisions through evaluation of changing city residential population needs, market trends, and walkability standards.</i> • <i>Preserve, protect and advocate for sufficient undeveloped land for open space.</i> • <i>Acquire new parkland on existing developed properties where feasible in areas of high residential density.</i> • <i>Identify demand for additional parkland and sufficient improvement resources for Area Plans to address future residential density.</i> • <i>Pursue joint use agreements with owners of other public recreation spaces, such as school properties, to improve access in areas where there is no walkable access to mini, neighborhood, conservation, or community City-owned parkland.</i>

Economy and Opportunity

Strategy: Create welcoming and inclusive park spaces and programming.

- *Develop parkland and amenities that are reflective of the diverse recreational needs of the community.*
- *Reduce barriers to use of park spaces, participate in programming and support local business.*
- *Pursue alternative funding sources that support programmatic needs of the division and provide opportunities to business owners.*
- *Incorporate public engagement methods and partnerships during the park planning process to ensure projects are representative of the diverse community.*
- *Develop and implement a comprehensive communication plan to educate and inform the public about options and services available within the park system.*
- *Create and promote awareness around relationship between good parks and a strong economy.*

Strategy: Foster meaningful connections with groups and organizations that advance the vision of the Parks Division.

- *Nurture and create opportunities to strengthen the intrinsic value of parks within the community.*
- *Develop a programming plan to grow and sustain relationships with existing partners, identify opportunities to address gaps in equitable distribution of services and programming across the city, and create frameworks to engage with future partners.*
- *Encourage connection with parks and nature through Friends Groups and other volunteer groups while aligning efforts with identified land management strategies and master plans.*
- *Support volunteers and recognize their contributions in planning, developing, programming and maintaining park spaces and facilities.*
- *Cultivate relationships and partnerships that boost the overall economy within the region by supporting placemaking and tourism.*

Culture and Character

Strategy: Improve public access to lakes and waterways.

- *Engage the community in the design process to increase water access on public lands.*
- *Provide opportunities for year-round water recreation.*
- *Support efforts of partners and stakeholders to improve water quality in Madison's lakes and waterways.*
- *Encourage creative placemaking opportunities to connect the community to water.*

Strategy: Protect and celebrate the community's cultural richness.

- *Respect and protect tribal sacred sites.*
- *Continue to recognize, preserve, and enhance historic parks.*
- *Pursue opportunities for cultural enrichment through community events and promotion of community building activities.*
- *Evaluate operational resources for park and street use events to promote balance between park uses and support the needs of the system.*

Green & Resilient Strategy: Protect and enhance natural resources. • <i>Improve biodiversity by managing invasive species and promoting areas of native plant habitats and ecosystems.</i> • <i>Acquire conservation parkland to preserve unique habitats.</i> • <i>Preserve iconic and special landscape views.</i> • <i>Preserve, promote and expand the urban tree canopy.</i> Strategy: Improve the park system’s capacity to adapt to environmental challenges. • <i>Incorporate of plant species that thrive and adapt to environmental changes with fewer resource inputs.</i> • <i>Integrate facilities, equipment and materials that reduce the carbon footprint of park operations.</i> • <i>Use best management practices for stormwater runoff and infiltration to address increased storm severity.</i> • <i>Support year-round outdoor recreation and extended season use through activities that are not impacted by climate change.</i> • <i>Develop an opportunistic approach to maintenance and programming that adapts the unpredictable nature of climate change by developing an opportunistic approach to maintenance and programming.</i> • <i>Create spaces and adapt programming to keep the community safe, healthy, and emotionally resilient in the face of stress and uncertainty.</i>
Effective Government Strategy: Develop new parks and amenities in a fiscally sustainable manner. • <i>Implement comprehensive data-based decision making in strategic planning and investment.</i> • <i>Secure adequate funding for infrastructure improvements within existing and future parks.</i> • <i>Revise parkland dedication and park impact fees every ten years to maintain adequate levels of parkland and funding.</i> • <i>Require parkland dedication of parks five-acres or more for new residential developments where feasible.</i> • <i>Expand existing park land where appropriate and feasible in accordance with adopted plans</i> • <i>Seek out and utilize innovative sources to expand and develop existing parkland and amenities.</i> • <i>Fund and construct necessary infrastructure improvements in parks acquired through annexations and cooperative plans.</i> Strategy: Secure sufficient resources to sustain service levels across the growing and changing park system. • <i>Preserve public funding to maintain current levels of service in the Parks Division’s Operating and Capital budgets.</i> • <i>Allocate funding equitably to maintain and upgrade existing infrastructure and develop new facilities.</i> • <i>Pursue opportunities to diversify and increase revenue streams that support services.</i> • <i>Evaluate staffing and location of operational facilities to optimize resources for new City facilities.</i> • <i>Provide technical and administrative support to volunteers whose work supplements park maintenance, programming and improvement.</i> • <i>Implement Results Madison and develop an asset management system to aid in data-informed decisions related to resource allocation.</i>

- *Encourage public interaction and participation with the Parks Division's governing bodies.*
- *Develop appropriate professional development and recruitment programs to attract and retain employees committed to advancing the vision of the Parks Division.*

Strategy: Pursue regional solutions to regional issues.

- *Enhance or develop regional recreation facilities, where possible, as identified by the Wisconsin SCORP for the Southern Gateways Region to address supply shortages.*
- *Continue joint planning efforts with Dane County Parks to implement recommendations of the Dane County Park and Open Space Plan within the City of Madison.*
- *Collaborate with park advocacy organizations and surrounding municipalities to meet park and recreation demands.*
- *Pursue strategic partnerships to provide tournament-scale venues.*

Health and Safety

Strategy: Promote the physical and social health of the diverse community.

- *Incorporate amenities that promote active recreation and social interaction for all skills and abilities, especially youth and seniors.*
- *Provide flexible multipurpose spaces that can respond to changing recreational trends.*
- *Provide sufficient fields, courts, and other facilities to accommodate larger competitions.*