



Madison Parks Division

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Date: January 6, 2023

To: Board of Park Commissioners

From: Eric Knepp, Parks Superintendent

Subject: Future Structure of Board of Park Commissioners Subcommittees

Background

The Board of Park Commissioners (Park Commission) has unique powers over City of Madison Parks, compared to other City Boards and Commissions. Under Wis. Stat. Sec. 27.08(2), the Park Commission is specifically empowered and directed to govern, manage, control, improve and care for all public parks, acquire park land and, with Council approval, to lease park spaces and sell or exchange park land. Madison General Ordinance Chapter 33 establishes and regulates City boards, commissions, and committees, including subcommittees and defines the BPC's powers under City Ordinances. *The Board of Park Commissioners Rules of Procedure and Basic Policies* (Commission Bylaws) were most recently updated in July 2020 ([Leg File #60340](#))¹ and serve to govern the operation of the Park Commission in accordance with MGO Secs. 33.01(9)(b) and 33.05(3), including defining the composition and areas of responsibility for each of the subcommittees. The Board of Park Commissioners currently has five subcommittees, including the Golf Subcommittee, the Warner Park Community Recreation Center Advisory Subcommittee, the Facilities Programs and Fees Subcommittee, the Habitat Stewardship Subcommittee and the Long-Range Planning Subcommittee. The Park Commission assigns items to subcommittees to assist in managing its broad portfolio, particularly in the areas of long range planning, needs assessments, strategic planning, and level of service standard; to assist in receiving public input and; to make recommendations to the Park Commission.

The Task Force on Structure of City Government (TFOGS)

In September 2017, the Common Council created the [Task Force on Structure of City Government² \(TFOGS\)](#) to examine and make recommendations on elected officials, the structure and powers of the Common Council and its committees, and the structure and powers of the Mayor's office. TFOGS was an 11-member Task Force that met 90 times between the time it was established and the time it released its [FINAL REPORT](#)³ in 2019, consisting of 42 recommendations. As directed by authorizing resolution, TFOGS examined these issues through a specific lens: whether the City's current government structure ensures that municipal decision-makers are representative of and accountable to all of the City's residents, not just to those who have the time, resources, and knowledge to actively

¹<https://madison.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4427397&GUID=511F5BA5-1740-4F4F-A6C4-E165AE8CCD3B&Options=ID|Text|&Search=60340>

²<https://madison.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3140770&GUID=980E2510-9B6F-4B1A-B0FF-5C85E9C20E13&Options=ID|Text|&Search=47707>

³ <https://madison.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=7932512&GUID=3E3B0D9B-5111-4472-8980-73D55A69FDB2>

participate in the City's current government structure. [TFOGS report](#) was accepted by Common Council in March 2020⁴.

In March 2020, Council created the Ad Hoc Task Force on The Structure of City Government (TFOGS) Final Report Implementation Work Group End, which was responsible for organizing the recommendations into prioritized actionable proposals that were to be debated and decided upon by the entire Common Council. Based on the Implementation Work Group's recommendations, those pertaining to Subcommittee Organization and Structure and relevant to this discussion include:

11. Eliminate or combine BCCs that are redundant or have outlived their purpose.
12. Reorganize BCCs to increase accountability.
13. Review BCC enabling ordinances and resolutions to ensure clarity of purpose and authority.

Overview of Subcommittees:

- **Golf Subcommittee** was created to advise the Park Commission regarding golf course policies, rate structure, rules and regulations, capital improvements, user complaints, and operations. It is a seven member body of primarily golf representatives from each of the courses and major user groups that meets quarterly. Along with receiving operational updates and reviewing annual greens fees, some of Golf's recent and ongoing projects include reviewing the final report of the Task Force on Municipal Golf, reviewing The Glen Golf Park Project and Programming Plan and reviewing the Golf Code of Conduct. Upon their review and approval, Golf Subcommittee refers the proposed fees to the Facilities, Programs, and Fees Subcommittee and ultimately to the Park Commission for final adoption. A major focus for the subcommittee going forward is providing input on further implementation of the Task Force on Municipal Golf's recommendations.

Over the past five years the Golf Subcommittee held just under 60% of its scheduled meetings. Attendance at the subcommittee meetings held has been consistent with approximately 92% of members in attendance on average during that time. The Primary reason for cancellation of these meetings is lack of significant agenda items.

- **Warner Park Community Recreation Center Advisory Subcommittee** was created to advise the Park Commission regarding operations, policies and procedures, fees and user concerns, and to make program and budget recommendations at WPCRC. As of 2022, the subcommittee consists of nine members and is expected to meet bi-monthly. In addition to reviewing fees annually and receiving operational reports, WPCRC reviewed and approved the current behavior policy for the WPCRC facility. In the near future, the subcommittee could support the planning efforts for the WPCRC Expansion, oversee further implementation of the KNOW program, help create buy-in within the community for use of services offered at WPCRC, and provide input on building a volunteer program that supports WPCRC activities.

Over the past five years the WPCRC Subcommittee held just under 40% of its scheduled meetings. Attendance at the subcommittee meetings held has been

⁴<https://madison.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4338781&GUID=56DDF39A-4584-4736-A6A7-39EEB380400F&Options=ID|Text|&Search=58656>

inconsistent, with approximately 53% of members in attendance on average during that time. The primary reason for cancellation of these meetings is lack of quorum due to chronic vacancies. In 2021, staff proposed amending the composition of the subcommittee from 11 members to 9 in an attempt to mitigate the quorum issues, which the Park Commission and Common Council supported and adopted. The true impacts of this change have yet to be determined, as two member vacancies still exist along with a current alder vacancy.

- **Facilities, Programs and Fees Subcommittee (FPF)** was established in 2019 to advise the Park Commission regarding operation standards and policies for the entire parks system. It makes program recommendations, approves new and continuing special events, and develops policies as needed. It makes recommendations on new user fees and charges and the annual schedule of fees and charges, including for Golf, Olbrich, and WPCRC. It also reviews proposed fee modifications. The subcommittee consists of seven members and meets at least quarterly. Since its creation, in addition to approving fees annually, FPF has taken on review of all new special events/permits, reviewed several major policies for programming, including The Glen Golf Park Programming Plan, open space gatherings, the Carts in Parks program, and the special event approval process. Additional upcoming work for FPF includes review and recommendations on Parks-sponsored programming, a Qualified Discount Program, fee structure, Parks vending policy, and items pertaining to special events, including public amplification permits. Longer term, FPF will review and advise on programmatic and policy needs of seasonal recreational offerings and physical facility needs.

Over the past four years the FPF Subcommittee held just under 65% of its scheduled meetings. Attendance at the subcommittee meetings held has been relatively consistent with approximately 72% of members in attendance on average during that time. The Primary reason for cancellation of these meetings is lack of significant agenda items.

- **Habitat Stewardship Subcommittee** advises the Park Commission regarding Urban Forestry matters, including reviewing policies and public tree concerns. Habitat Stewardship advises and makes recommendations concerning land management plans and practices for the entire park system. The subcommittee consists of five members and meets quarterly. In addition to serving as the City's Tree Board and issuing tree pruning/removal permits, Habitat Stewardship advises on and reviews policies and reports regarding Integrated Pest Management and habitat management plans for individual parks, as well as oversees community science studies conducted in parks. In the near future, Habitat Stewardship will support in updating the five year Land Management Plan for the division, and work towards a long-term vision of increasing the impact that Parks' land management and land use practices can have on mitigating climate change and influencing climate resiliency.

Over the past five years the Habitat Stewardship Subcommittee held just under 65% of its scheduled meetings. Attendance at the subcommittee meetings held has been relatively consistent with about 78% of members in attendance on average during that time. The Primary reason for cancellation of these meetings is lack of quorum.

- **Long Range Planning Subcommittee (LRP)** advises Park Commission regarding the procedures and policies of the Parks Division. It also solicits input regarding the vision of the Parks Division, provides input on strategic planning, levels of service standards, and provides input on needs assessments. It also solicits input from alders, groups, and residents and when necessary, researches and advises regarding the naming of public parks. The subcommittee consists of five members and meets quarterly. Recent and ongoing policy work of LRP includes Dogs in Parks, Art in Parks, Volunteer, and Adopt Ice policies. LRP will be instrumental in updating the Park and Open Space Plan and will be tasked with advising on guidance and standards pertaining to new amenities and planning processes.

Though the expectation is that LRP Subcommittee meet quarterly, over the past five years the subcommittee scheduled more than 10 meetings per year on average. During this time, LRP held approximately 56% of its scheduled meetings. Attendance at the subcommittee meetings held has been relatively consistent with approximately 84% of members in attendance on average during that time. The primary reason for cancellation of these meetings is lack of substantial agenda items.

Potential Options for Future Structure:

Staff have analyzed the existing structure, duties, responsibilities and available data pertaining to the subcommittees. Taking into consideration the TFOGS recommendations, staff have outlined two options for the future structure of the Park Commission's Subcommittees. The options along with the benefits and considerations for each are outlined as follows:

1. **Maintain Status Quo:** All subcommittees remain functioning and continue to serve the roles they are currently assigned.
 - Benefits:
 - Subcommittees are nearly full, with some members appointed less than six months ago for three year terms.
 - The subcommittees are generally serving the roles they are assigned.
 - Considerations:
 - A maximum member number should be set between five and seven. This includes WPCRC being reduced, as filling vacancies has proven to be very difficult.
 - Clear expectations should be set regarding the number of meetings, as opposed to recommended meetings. For example, LRP Subcommittee would not schedule eight meetings if they are expected to have four. If more meetings are needed for specific projects, work groups can be established by those subcommittees.
 - The amount of subcommittee member time required for meetings is significant and should be factored into the decision. Based on number of meetings defined in the Commission Bylaws, the five subcommittees should have a total of 24 meetings each year, assuming meetings are just one hour and everyone attends, this equates to more than 160 hours per year and does not include travel or members' time spent reviewing materials.
 - Staff time to support the subcommittees is significant, as staff prepare and edit agendas and minutes, compile materials and attend the meetings to

present materials and facilitate. This is not a data point that is readily available, as agenda content and numbers fluctuate significantly among the subcommittees and from meeting to meeting. It can be assumed that at least five to 10 hours are spent by staff for each meeting that is held, easily resulting in over 200 hours per year.

- Ordinance and Commission Bylaw revisions will be required to reflect any changes in composition and some inaccuracies related to specific roles of the subcommittees.

2. Consolidate Subcommittees: Eliminate Golf Subcommittee and WPCRC Advisory Subcommittee, consolidating responsibilities within remaining subcommittees.

- **Benefits:**

- The overall responsibilities of both are redundant with those of the FPF Subcommittee, but both have very narrow focus on uses/facilities compared to the agency's overall services. There are many other services offered and user groups throughout the system that do not have such focused attention by a formal body, yet are still able to have their needs met and input heard.
- Many items that are reviewed by the two subcommittees also require review by the FPF Subcommittee, including fees and programming plans, before final approval by the Park Commission.
- Work planning for three subcommittees compared to five will allow for a more intentional and focused approach by staff.
- The number of committee members that are required to fill total positions for all of the Park Commission subcommittees would be significantly reduced, as the two subcommittees have a total of 16 members. This would reduce the overall request for time commitment from community members and would ideally make filling vacancies more efficient and effective as there are fewer to fill overall. In addition, this would allow for more focused membership development and onboarding.
- The burden on staff time to support and facilitate the subcommittee meetings would be reduced, allowing for more intentional support of the remaining subcommittees and freeing resources to address higher priority work plan needs.

- **Considerations:**

- There are major upcoming projects as discussed previously, that both Golf and WPCRC would typically oversee as currently structured. There would need to be clear venues and methods for stakeholder input for those projects.
- A member representative from Golf and WPCRC Subcommittees could be assigned to the remaining Subcommittees as appropriate to ensure continued representation within the structure for those groups/facilities.
- Ordinance and Commission Bylaw revisions will be required to reflect the structural change and reflect to specific roles of the subcommittees that may be adjusted as a result of this structural change.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommend that the Park Commission consider Option #2: Consolidate Subcommittees, by eliminating both the Golf Subcommittee and WPCRC Advisory Subcommittee and consolidating responsibilities within remaining subcommittees. The consolidation directly addresses the recommendations from TFOGS. Facilities Programs & Fees Subcommittee, which already reviews many of their items, is well suited to absorb the majority of responsibilities of these two subcommittees. This also helps to ensure equitable representation among services provided across the agency. The benefits of making this change as outlined above far outweigh any concerns or considerations.

Timing and process for making this change will need to be determined. Based on major upcoming projects and recent appointments, it may maybe logical to work towards completing the consolidation by the end of 2024. Regardless of the outcome of the structure conversation, Parks staff have significant work to do in the coming years to put processes in place that will help to more effectively onboard subcommittee members, develop staff who are supporting the subcommittees, effectively onboard subcommittee members and ensure that the subcommittees are functioning as intended to achieve maximum benefit for the community.

Potential Actions by Board of Park Commissioners:

At the January 11, 2023 Park Commission meeting, commissioners will discuss this item and may take a number of actions. Potential actions include but are not limited to:

- **Recommend Approval of Either Option:** Park Commission may amend as they see fit. Staff would work with City Attorney's office to draft ordinance revision, which would ultimately be considered by Common Council and Park Commission for adoption at a later date.
- **Refer Discussion to Subcommittees:** Park Commission would need to clarify what input is being sought from the subcommittees and determine timeline for returning the item to Park Commission.
- **Refer Discussion to a Future Park Commission Meeting:** Park Commission would need to clarify what additional information is requested from staff and, if applicable, any additional alternatives that should be analyzed.