

SUPERINTENDENT'S FEBRUARY 2023 REPORT

COMMUNICATIONS TO BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

Park Superintendent's Monthly Report Summary

January came in like a lamb and is going out a bit more like a lion as it relates to the weather. Much colder and snowier weather has created a better opportunity for our historically normal winter recreational opportunities. Skating, sledding, and skiing are all happening with a gusto as our community gets outside while the winter weather cooperates. As mentioned last month, it seems clear that a continued and sustained focused effort on adaptability in our offerings will be key to the future of promoting a great parks system for a range of weather conditions. As we move towards the next Parks and Open Space Plan (POSP) and continue to refine our operations and services plans, this issue of both more extreme and more inconsistent weather will need to be a focal point.

Filling vacancies continues to be a focus of the team and we have made meaningful progress in the last month. A number of positions are in active recruitment status and the goal is to have all existing vacancies filled in the first half of the year. It is important to note that the level of staffing over the past three years and corresponding turnover, while sustaining a significant pace of projects, improvements, and initiatives has created some organizational strain. The Management Team is working together to develop and implement strategies that help garner alignment of the team to an established work plan for the future. This is not an easy task and the team looks forward to continuing to engage with stakeholders, including the BPC, on this as we move forward.

The Lake Monona Waterfront Ad Hoc Committee hosted a very well-attended meeting on January 26, 2023 that was the initial presentation of the three design teams' conceptual master plan designs. The presentations were well received and the information shared led to a robust conversation between the teams and attendees in an open house style after the presentations. The Ad Hoc Committee is now receiving and will be analyzing community input on the conceptual designs over the next six weeks. From there, the Ad Hoc Committee will be charged with selecting the design team to move forward to task of master plan development. I do want to note here that from my perspective the Ad Hoc Committee continues to shine as an example of a specifically empowered committee that is working with both diligence and efficiency towards their goal.

The BPC was briefed in October on a potential land swap opportunity that would impact the Cherokee Marsh – North Unit (see Legistar 74092). The Commission provided general feedback that the potential for exploring this further was warranted. Staff has taken additional steps to evaluate the potential for this swap and has determined the value of ongoing work and effort on this front is not a good investment of Division resources. This decision was made based on a number of factors, including the quality of the woodlot, the impact on the land we currently own, and the input of the Friends of Cherokee Marsh.

Finally, both Parks and MSCR have moved into the Olin building and we are starting to see the activity level rise. There will be lots of future decisions and discussions about the building and surrounding area, but it is good to see both organizations working in the same building and I have high hopes that this will foster a better parks and recreation experience for all Madison residents and visitors.

Future Commission Items

- Golf Enterprise Update – The Golf Team is working to prepare a report to the Golf Subcommittee, Facilities Programs and Fees Subcommittee, and the Board of Park Commissioners on the past 2 years of operations as well as an outlook on future opportunities to continue to implement the Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks’ recommendations. Given recent staff departures and budget actions, the goal is to present additional information to the BPC in the first quarter of 2023.
- Results Madison / Division Work Plan– The City has been working on Results Madison, which moves towards a more significant utilization of data in decision-making, including budgeting for the past few years. Staff will be preparing information on this and the Parks Division’s work plan to present to the Commission. The goal is in the March-April range.
- Land Management Plan Update – The Parks Division team will be working over the coming months to conceptualize opportunities to improve land management standards and the corresponding plan moving forward. The Plan has done a lot of good to move the system forward, but the team feels it is reasonable and appropriate to focus resources on continuous improvement efforts in this area by working with Habitat Stewardship Subcommittee over the coming three months. An anticipated timeframe for the Commission to review a draft update to the Plan is later this winter.
- Subcommittee Structure – Pursuant to the Board’s direction in January, staff have begun initial work to create an Ordinance revision that would modify the subcommittee structure of the BPC. The goal is to have the Ordinance introduced to the City Council relatively soon to allow for consideration by the Board and the public soon. The current plan is to draft a sunset provision into the Ordinance for those subcommittees that would be eliminated as permanent standing subcommittees of the BPC based on workload and feedback.

Section reports

Operations (Greg Genin)

Conservation:

- Partnered with MadNorSki ski club to host a local groomers’ conference on January 17 at Elver. Due to the lack of snow grooming ceased the last week of December.
- Removed invasive woody species from the valley downstream from the “Bonner” storm water pond at Cherokee Marsh South Unit.
- Progressed with contract invasive shrub removal work at several sites including Cherokee Marsh, Elvehjem, Hiestand, Moraine Woods, and Prairie Ridge, and removal of excess woody debris from Knollwood and Owen.

Construction:

- Placed approximately 500 yards of mulch to replenish the surfacing at a number of playgrounds, including Brentwood, Brigham, Lucy Lincoln, Sheridan Triangle, Waldorf, Washington Manor and Woodland Hills parks.
- Removed the old Iron Ranger fee collection boxes throughout the parks system. To date, 14 of 25 have been removed.
- Supported the Streets Division request for general snow plow support.

Facilities:

- Completed facility inspections to prevent freezing and to support preventative maintenance.
- Supported parking lot snow removal, including at the new Olin Facility.
- Fulfilled multiple requests for support as Parks employees transitioned into the Olin Facility.
- Completed work on rebuilding one of the Law Park piers and updating park signature signs.

General Parks:

- Supported snow response and ice maintenance. The weather created a challenge for maintaining skate ice, but the crews worked to maximize the availability when it was safe.
- Cleared brush from a number of park natural areas including Door Creek, Emerson, O.B. Sherry, Elver, Woodland Hills, Thut, and Olin parks. The crews also completed a significant amount of tree pruning, with a focus on Elms and Oaks, which require dormant season pruning. The crews worked together with the Parks Arborists, who completed the technical pruning while the general parks staff hauled the brush to the chipper and removed smaller diameter material.
- Provided support for Groove and Glide at Olbrich Park, the Candlelight Snowshoe Hike at Warner Park, the Groove and Glide event at the Elver ice rink and a Meet and Greet with the Wisconsin Badgers women's hockey team at Vilas Park.

Mall Concourse:

- With the warm weather and limited snow, the crew was able to sweep sidewalks, clean up winter debris, clean bus shelter windows, and power wash light poles, benches, and other furnishings.
- Continued to follow procedures to balance safety and limit salt use to protect the environment.
- Installed the lighting décor after the BID's holiday décor season, adding bright lights to the downtown planters. Minor events continued, including small events at Peace Park.

Olbrich Botanical Gardens

- Retirements –



- Two long-term Olbrich Botanical Garden staff are retiring in early 2023. First up is Volunteer Services Manager Marty Petillo. She is officially retiring on March 3, 2023 after 22 years of service. Her last day in the office was January 19, 2023. During her years of service she worked with over 12,000 volunteers who contributed over 500,000 volunteer hours.



- Director of Horticulture Jeff Epping is retiring in March, 2023 as well. His last day in the office is February 24, 2023. His contributions to Olbrich Botanical Gardens and Madison Parks is visible throughout the Gardens. What started as a turf dominated garden is now a thoughtfully designed space that brings a variety of garden styles and plants together to give us the Gardens we know and love today. Both staff will be dearly missed and challenging to replace.



- **Orchid Escape** – The orchids are returning! Starting January 27, 2023, the Bolz Conservatory will once again be filled with orchids of various shapes, sizes, and colors. This year's theme is Circus and will feature orchid displays in circus themes. Admission is \$8.00. Wednesday and Saturday mornings from 10am-noon offer free admission. Orchid Quest, hosted by the Orchid Grower's Guild, returns (Feb. 4-5, 2023) for the first time since the pandemic.

Community Services – Terrence Thompson

Community Events (Kelly Post):

- At the January meeting, we will present the proposed 2023 Carts in Parks program to the Facilities, Programs, and Fees Subcommittee. The goals of this program are to support local food vendors, increase access to Parks for minority-owned start-ups and entrepreneurs, and to add value to qualified community events.
- We are researching and will be proposing permanent Park permits for Classes in Parks and Day Camps/Care in Parks to the Facilities, Programs, and Fees Subcommittee at the March meeting.

Warner Park Community Recreation Center (Zach Watson):

- We welcomed 60 families and 200 in overall attendance at our January 13th, 2023, Family Fun Night.
- The KNOW Program partnership with the Madison Parks Foundation was awarded \$31,735 for the Northside youth program from the City of Madison Youth Employment Grant as a part of a collaborative funding effort with Vera Court Neighborhood Center and Sustain Dane. Additionally, we were informed by City staff that they would be supporting the program with an additional \$40,000 from a separate funding source that is focused on youth STEM learning and career development, bringing the total funding for the program to around \$70,000.

Recreation Services & Aquatics (Tracey Hartley & Shane Martin)

- Winter Recreation has had a very slow start this season. Elver, Vilas, Olbrich, and Westmorland Hockey have been open, and Parks has plans to have other rinks and lagoons open next week with the cold temperatures coming in. Odana Hills Golf Course opened for ski on 1/28/23 and 1/29/23.
- On 1/17/23, the UW-Madison Women's Hockey team held the Outdoor Skate event at Vilas Park. Unfortunately, we didn't have good ice for skating, but we were able to hold a meet & greet with the players. 96 people came out for autographs and photos with the team.
- Candlelit/light Snowshoe Events:
 - 1/14/23 - 685 people attended the collaborative event with Monona Park & Recreation Department, Aldo Leopold Nature Center, and Madison Parks at the Aldo Leopold Nature Center.
 - 1/21/23 - 275 people were in attendance at Warner Park. The event was a partnership with Friends of Cherokee Marsh and Madison Parks. Thanks to the 24 volunteers from Boy Scout Troops 127 & 7127, who helped do the heavy lifting in putting out and picking up all the lights.
 - Both events were well-received with over 400+ tea lights set out and picked up at each event.
- Learning Series Events:
 - 1/21/23 - A total of 57 people attended 2 Learn to Ice Fish classes at Brittingham Park. The classes were a good partnership with the DNR and their fish mobile.
 - 2/5/23 - Learn to Play hockey is full with 50 participants. We are partnering again with the Madison Capitols, and the event will be held at Tenney Park.

Customer Service (Joanne Austin):

- Customer service staff are diligently processing annual permits and mailing them out as quickly as possible.
- We sent watercraft storage renewal notifications to current customers asking whether they intend to renew for the coming year. Current agreements will expire on March 31, 2023. A few have already let us know they do not plan to renew, which will allow us to establish new storage agreements with those on our waitlist.
- Customer service staff will assist hiring managers with scheduling numerous interviews between now and early summer. We have established a clear process that removes the heavy burden of scheduling interviews.

Rangers (Jason Vroman):

- The new parking ordinance revision was approved by the BPC and adopted by the Common Council. This will allow Rangers to utilize more tools during busy times to help solve problems and ensure equitable access to parks.
- Rangers have a new intern, Dawson Tysver, working with the group for 12 weeks. Dawson will focus on researching commercial use regulations around the US, helping with administrative tasks, and shadowing Rangers to learn about our field work.