

Park Operations December 2020 Quarterly Report

The Operations Team continued to respond to the changing work requirements brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as those brought on by the changing seasons. While there were many challenges, the Operations Team focused on solutions to provide the needed services.

The early cool temperatures gave way to a warmer than normal November, which provided the time needed for fall clean-up and winter preparation. All work continued to be conducted with a minimum of six feet of physical distancing and the use of face coverings. While this is traditionally a busy time of year, increased employee absenteeism due to COVID added some additional challenge.

The seasonal work completed this quarter included removing trash barrels from some parks, collecting picnic tables that are in need of repair, winterizing shelters, preparing warming shelters, removing piers and closing athletic fields. Work was also completed to prepare the park areas for skating, skiing and other winter recreational activities. Land management efforts in parks and conservation lands included removing woody invasive species, mowing meadows, and planting trees.

In response to COVID, staff took many steps to assure safety for both themselves and the community. Stencils designed by local artists were painted in high-traffic areas at a number of parks to remind the public to practice social separation. Winter preparation and the need for open spaces was weighed against employee availability as an increasing number of staff were out due to COVID related illness or contact. Winter work was planned and prioritized, with work related to safety and transportation being the highest priority.

With parks being deemed essential for public health, additional thought was given to safely supporting winter activities. Consideration was given to opening additional interior park pathways to provide more access to open space for walking and other activities. A collaborative approach with other agencies was used to support this consideration. Team collaboration was critical to our success in addressing the COVID response.

The most recent Public Health Madison Dane County Forward Dane Order prohibits indoor mass gatherings and enhanced physical distancing measures in response to increasing positive cases, which resulted in further changes to reporting locations, schedules, and daily work briefings. All indoor meetings were discontinued, and alternative means for communicating daily work plans were implemented. The team adjusted quickly without impact to quality of service.



Physical Distancing stencils painted at parks

CONSERVATION (Paul Quinlan)

Staff worked on late-season invasive species control, including control of honeysuckle re-sprouts, Japanese knotweed, crown vetch, and porcelain berry at Cherokee Marsh, Elvehjem, and Owen. They also planted four additional woodland species favored by deer, inside and outside of enclosures, at Cherokee Marsh, Edna Taylor and Owen. This supported long-term monitoring of the effects of herbivory on the plant community. Contractors began work on several capital improvement projects to restore habitat by controlling woody invasive species at Knollwood, Moraine Woods, Owen, Stricker's Pond and Turville Point.

A rare window of opportunity in late October and early November allowed staff to burn a total of 47 acres across six sites on six different days. A total of five people assisted Conservation staff on different burns, providing cross-training to staff from East Parks, West Parks, Parks Arborists, Park Rangers, and one volunteer.

Staff prepared for snowmaking and cross country ski season. Snow guns were maintained and delivered to Elver Park and the trails were mowed, trimmed, and repaired.

Updated, easy-to read, printable trail maps were developed for ten conservation parks and posted on the Parks website. Maps for the North and South Units of Cherokee Marsh were also incorporated on permanent interpretive signs posted on the new trailhead kiosks there. Thanks to the Friends of Cherokee Marsh for developing these signs.

Paul presented a report to neighbors and supporters of Acewood Conservation Park, via Zoom Meeting, on habitat restoration work completed to date, plans for the coming year, and opportunities for volunteers to contribute in pandemic-safe ways.



Controlled burn during



Controlled burn after

CONSTRUCTION (Rich Bergmann)

Staff completed various projects and closed down major construction projects for the year. The largest project was construction of a drainage diversion with a sediment basin/rain garden at Galaxy Park. This work was required to prevent runoff from affecting adjacent properties. The team also removed and replaced the playground at Woodland Hills, and removed old playgrounds at Brentwood, Whitetail Ridge and

Morrison Park to accommodate the new structures to be installed at these parks next year. The old basketball court and backstop at Orchard Ridge were removed to return those areas back to turf as part of the master plan. The ten newly installed playgrounds were audited for safety compliance and quality control.



Galaxy retention basin



Woodland Hills playground

FACILITIES MAINTENANCE (Jon Landsverk)

The team focused on capital projects and annual fall inspections and shutdown work. The team winterized the pool, community gardens, shelters, restrooms, stadiums, irrigation lines and fountains. They also removed fishing and boat launch piers and the mooring field. The team further supported transforming Warner Park Community Recreation Center into a shelter for the homeless by completing plumbing, HVAC, and carpentry work as well as providing 24/7 on-call support. Repairs were made to James Madison Park shelter due to damage sustained in a fire caused by an arson.

Staff completed planned capital projects including: window replacement at Hoover's Boat House, Park signage and kiosk repair and construction, HVAC replacement at Forest Hill Cemetery and Monona Golf Course, and installation of a new pool lift to improve accessibility.



Hoover's Boat House window replacement



Cherokee Marsh North new kiosk

CENTRAL PARKS (Spencer Werner)

Staff focused on work required by the changing season, including mowing, leaf collection and shelter preparation. All shelters were closed with the exception of Vilas Park, Highland Manor and Gates of Heaven, which are heated. The Goodman and Vilas Parks ice rinks were prepared and the hockey boards will be installed once ice forms on the floating rinks. Staff also continued to work on grubbing stumps of trees removed in response to Emerald Ash Borer.

Staff planted 500 bulbs of various spring flowers in park sign beds. The Landscape Maintenance Workers, in cooperation with the Park's Arborists, planted 260 trees this fall. Eighty of these were from the new Missouri Gravel Bed, which was piloted this year and deemed a success. The bare root trees placed in the bed in the spring remained healthy, developed new root growth, and were safer and more efficient to plant.

Parks provided a young man an opportunity to remove graffiti and pick up trash at the McPike Skate Park. This was not a requirement for him, but something he requested to support in hope of setting a good example for the other skate park patrons.



EAB stump grubbing



New Missouri Gravel Bed

MALL CONCOURSE (Spencer Werner/Mark Kiesow)

The staff continued to adjust to various changing and unplanned events while working within safety protocols and continuing to maintain an attractive downtown area.

Winter décor including the snowflake decorations and seasonal banners, were installed to support the holiday season. The crew worked to return and reposition about 36 planters (30% of the usual) for the BID's holiday decorating program.

Over 1,000 bulbs were planted in the landscape beds for next spring. Additional maintenance efforts, including new plantings, were made to improve the appearance of Peace Park.

Staff worked closely with other agencies in support of the Streatery program and to determine snow removal protocols to maintain public safety. The program was created to help local restaurants by providing outdoor space in response to the pandemic.



Peace Park



Leaf collection

EAST PARKS (Kristin Mathews)

In addition to fall response and winter preparation, staff supported the Conservation section with some of the prescribed burns. This provided needed support for Conservation as well as an excellent cross-training opportunity for staff. Staff also assisted the Mall crew with installing the decorative snowflakes and provided support for WPCRC's Teen Night programming.

The Land Stewardship Technician collected seeds of specific low-growing species from the pollinator garden at Washington Manor and spread them in the prairie at Sherman Village Park. These short-stature plants will improve the prairie without blocking the view of the recreation field.



Prescribed burns support



Stiff Gentian collection – Warner Park

WEST PARKS/ Forest Hill Cemetery (Chad Hughes)

Staff completed their maintenance obligations and a number of projects, a few of which are noted below.

While it is normal to remove the pea gravel and resurface with turf after removing an old playground, the staff had a different idea. The old Flad Park playground area was repurposed as a pollinator garden. The garden is approximately 1,500 square feet and contains 880 plants and 22 different native species. It is anticipated this will become a beneficial location for pollinators for years to come.



Pollinator garden project

Before



After

Considering residents requests and the need for providing opportunities for outdoor activities during the pandemic, staff installed practice disc golf baskets at Westhaven Trails Park and Wexford Park. Old baskets were repurposed for this project and offer a free outdoor activity.

Forest Hill Cemetery staff focused on leaf clean-up, while performing their other duties. This is a monumental undertaking given the size of the grounds and the need to work carefully around the headstones. Leaves were mulched, baled and collected by the City Streets Division.



Wexford practice disc golf



Forest Hill Cemetery leaf clean-up.