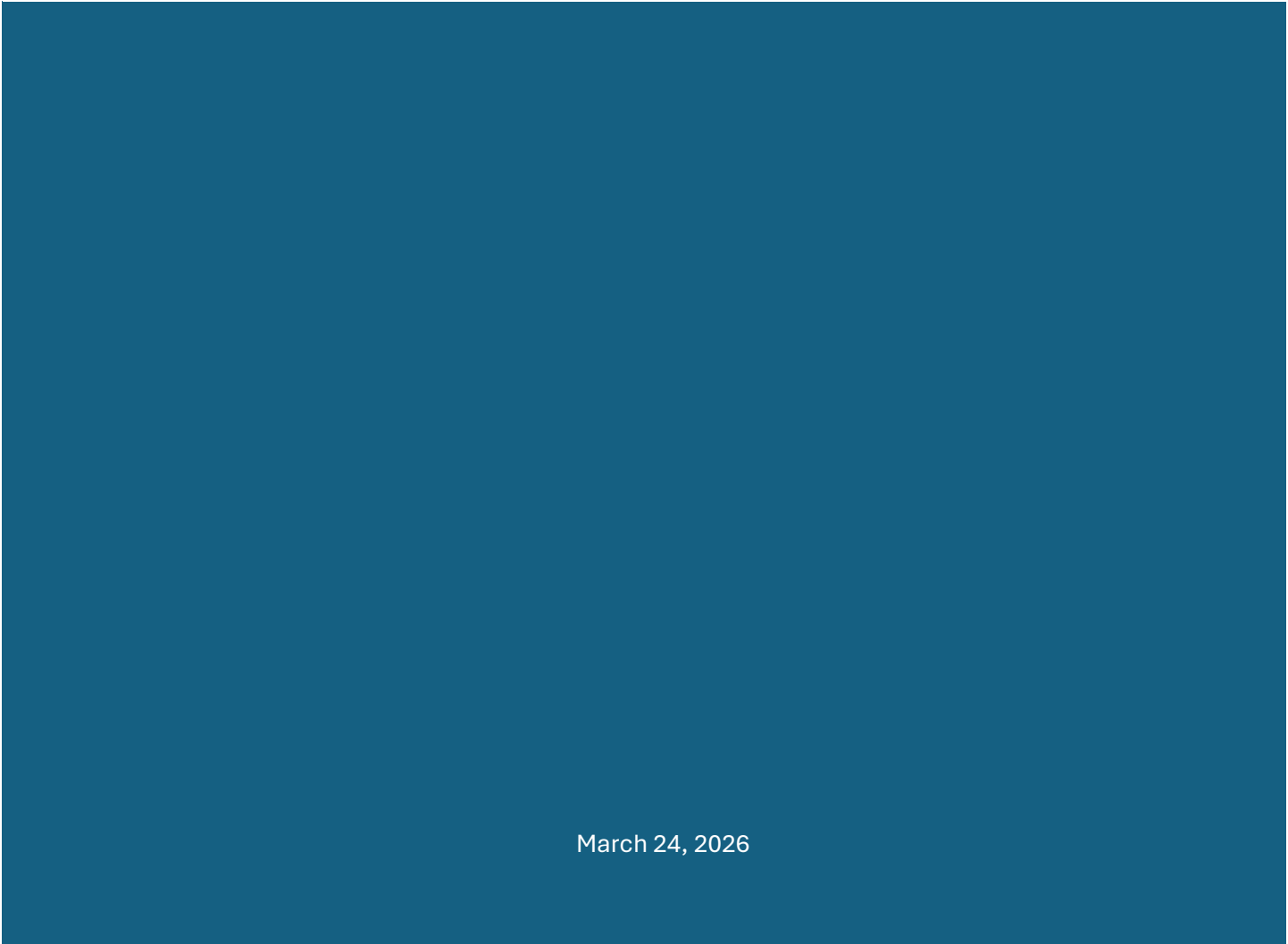




PARKS DIVISION PARKING ASSETS



March 24, 2026

Parks Division Parking Assets

Report to Common Council & Board of Park Commissioners

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1. Executive Summary

Purpose

The Parks Division was directed to provide a report on Parking Assets, per Legistar File #86251. This report provides an overview of the inventory and condition of parking lots in the Parks Division, reviews current parking policies and practices, analyzes costs associated with parking lot maintenance and construction, and evaluates how parking policy in the Madison Parks Division compares with other Midwestern municipalities.

Key Findings

Public off-street parking lots are available at 44 parks in the Madison park system, including at certain neighborhood and community parks, as well as at four public golf courses and Forest Hill Cemetery. In total, the Parks Division maintains 97 public off-street parking lots with a total of 6,094 car stalls and 229 boat stalls.

Parking lot infrastructure in the Parks Division is aging, and investment is needed to maintain the current level of service. When parking lot conditions were last evaluated in 2024, the Parks Division found that 56% of its paved parking lots were in fair or poor condition. The Parks Division's 2026 Capital Improvement Plan includes an estimated \$10 million in parking lot improvements and construction over the next five years. Parks Planning staff estimate that between \$50 to \$60 million in replacement costs will be needed over the next 40 years to maintain current levels of service, excluding any new parking lot construction.

Parking is available for free in Parks Division parking lots, with the exception of Law Park's Blair Lot that is enforced by the Parking Division. A three-hour time limit is posted and enforced at seven parks' lots where persistent issues have been observed. Based on a review of parking policy in large Midwestern cities' park systems, we found that most systems (67%) have some form of targeted paid parking in high-use areas, while a minority have either no paid parking (22%) or widespread system-wide hourly paid parking (11%).

Next Steps

Based on this review of Parks Division parking assets, there is a range of future policy options to consider, including:

- Option 1: Status quo – no paid parking collected by Parks Division
- Option 2: Limited event-day paid parking near Camp Randall
- Option 3: Commuter paid parking, and
- Option 4: Paid parking at high-traffic parks with limited off-street parking.

2. Introduction

This report reviews the inventory and condition of parking lots on land under the purview of the Parks Division, current parking policies and practices, and financial costs associated with parking lot maintenance and construction. For additional context, this report also considers paid parking policies in other large Midwestern cities' park systems. Finally, this report provides an overview of policy options regarding paid parking programs for consideration.

Background: The 2024 Paid Parking Pilot Program Proposal

In 2024, the Madison Parks Division proposed a one-year paid parking pilot program as part of the 2025 Operating Budget. This paid parking pilot program concept was developed in response to a levy reduction exercise required of all agencies for fiscal year 2025 budget deliberations.

The amendment establishing this paid parking pilot program was originally adopted by the Finance Committee on October 28, 2024, and was included in the 2025 Operating Budget adopted by Madison Common Council on November 12, 2024. However, the paid parking pilot program was rescinded by a substitute budget amendment at the Madison Common Council's January 14, 2025 meeting. Instead, Council directed the Parks Division to provide a report on parking assets to the Board of Park Commissioners and Common Council by April 2026.¹

Context: Transportation in the Growing City of Madison

Madison has consistently been the fastest-growing Wisconsin city based on the number of residents in recent years. Madison saw over 36,000 new residents between the 2010 and 2020 census and is expected to surpass 300,000 residents by 2030.² Dane County is expected to grow at a similar pace. Madison is also becoming an increasingly popular tourist destination, as visitors contribute approximately \$1.5 billion to the local economy annually.³

As the city grows in population and number of visitors, it sees new challenges and opportunities for innovation in terms of how we get from place to place. According to the 2024 Madison Transportation Operation Report, the total number of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in the city increased between 2022 and 2024, with an 11% increase in VMT observed

¹ See "[Madison Parks Paid Parking Pilot Program Proposal](#)" and [Legistar File #86251](#).

² See [Wisconsin DOA Population and Housing Estimates](#) and Madison Department of Planning and Community & Economic Development's "[City of Madison Population Projections Through 2050](#)".

³ See [Destination Madison 2024 Impact Report](#)

from April 2023 to April 2024. Since the public health emergency of 2020, there have also been increases in Metro ridership and BCycle utilization.⁴

The City has set safety as a transportation priority in the context of this growth in vehicle use. In July 2020, the City of Madison launched its Vision Zero initiative, which aims to eliminate fatal and serious injuries resulting from crashes on streets, sidewalks, and paths by 2030. Performance metrics for this initiative include reducing total VMT and expanding the total length of protected bike paths.⁵

Literature: Parking Issues in Municipalities

Management of parking assets is an important consideration for municipalities, especially cities like Madison that face increasing vehicle use. Many cities are currently considering both the costs of free parking and the costs of charging for parking.

The National Leagues of Cities' 2022 "Reimagining Parking" report describes the economic, environmental, and social costs of the availability of free parking in cities. For instance, free parking incentivizes the use of vehicles over alternative modes of transportation, which can increase congestion, greenhouse gas emissions, and noise pollution, and reduce turnover of available spaces.⁶

According to the American Planning Association (APA), most cities do not price parking based on the true value of demand and do not adequately enforce regulations like time limits. The APA asserts that cities offering free vehicle parking are losing out on revenue that could be used to improve infrastructure, including improvements that could increase equity and improve access.⁷

While there are costs of making parking freely available, there are also costs of requiring payment to park. Charging for parking on public lands may decrease access for visitors who normally travel to parks by vehicle. A recent example of this concern over access shaping policy decisions can be found in Milwaukee County: When Milwaukee County considered installing parking meters in Milwaukee's green necklace of parks during 2018 budget deliberations to close a \$2 million budget gap for its park system, the paid parking plan did not proceed over concerns about park access. However, without new investments

⁴ See [2024 Madison Transportation Operation Report](#), [2024 Metro Transit Annual Report](#), and Greater Madison MPO [Performance Measures Dashboard](#).

⁵ See [Vision Zero Action Plan 2020-2035](#).

⁶ See National League of Cities Report "[Reimagining Parking](#)".

⁷ See American Planning Association Article "[Poor Curb Management is Costing Cities Billions](#)".

in the Milwaukee County park system, the estimated backlog of capital and maintenance needs in the system has grown to at least \$495 million.⁸

3. Overview of Parks Division Parking Assets

Parking Lots and Stalls

In the Parks Division, there are 44 parks that host 97 public off-street parking lots with a total of 6,094 car stalls and 229 boat trailer stalls, with about 4 percent of stalls designated as accessible. Of the public off-street parking lots, 91 are paved and 6 are unpaved gravel lots. Table 1 summarizes the total number of parking stalls under the purview of the Parks Division.

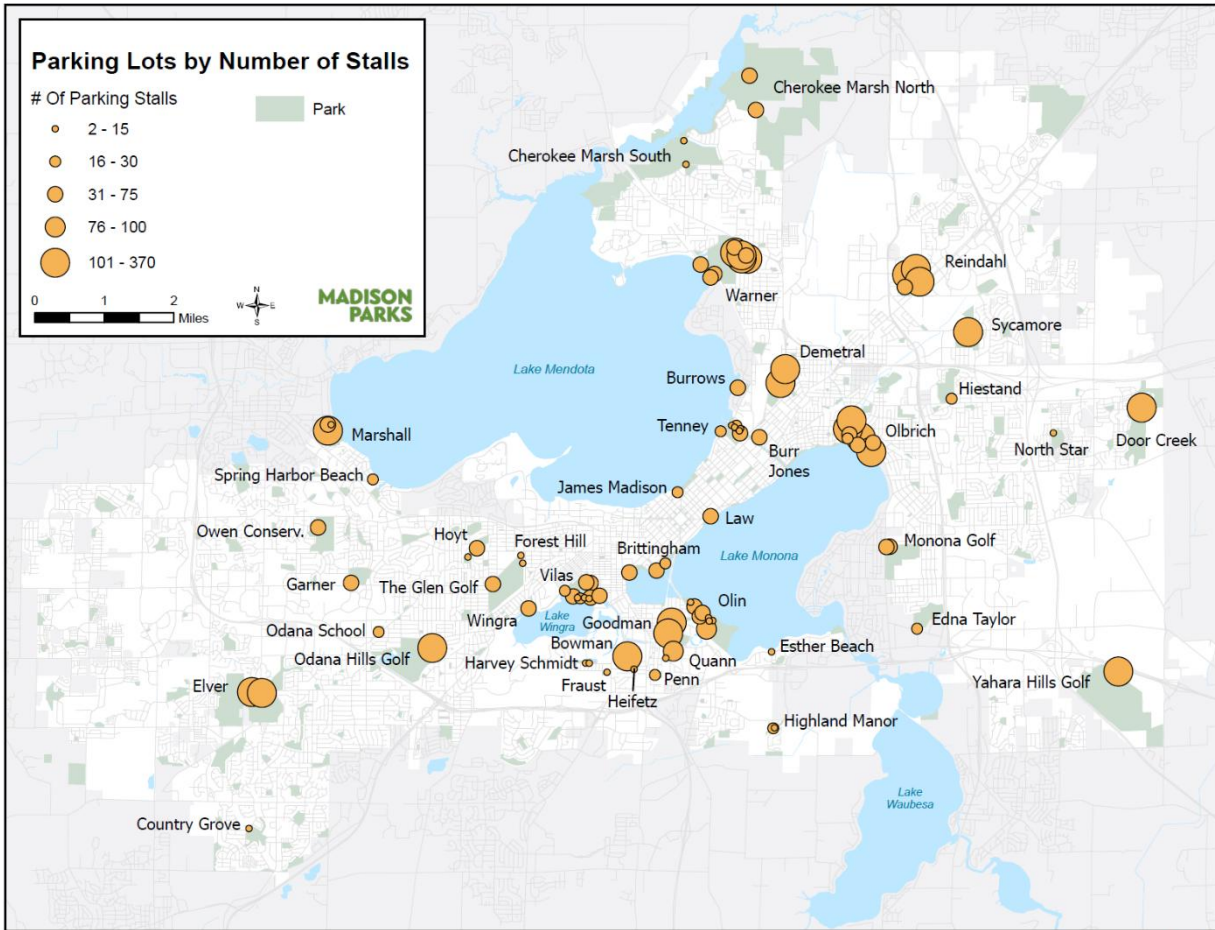
Table 1. Parking Stalls in the Parks Division

<i>Stall Type</i>	<i>Car Stalls</i>	<i>Boat Trailer Stalls</i>
<i>Standard</i>	5,850	222
<i>Accessible</i>	244	7
<i>Total</i>	6,094	229

Off-street parking lots are available at certain neighborhood and community parks, as well as at the four public golf courses and Forest Hill Cemetery. Some large community parks have multiple parking lots. In total, there are 44 parks that provide off-street parking lots. Across the park system, larger parking lots tend to be available in community parks that are intended to serve people from across the city, parks with heavy recreation programming, as well as conservation parks. In addition, small parking lots are provided in several parks to provide accessible parking stalls, particularly where there are unique park amenities designed to be fully accessible. Figure 1 shows the location and size in terms of number of stalls of off-street parking lots.

⁸ See “[County Parks parking meter concept up for discussion at public meeting](#)” and Wisconsin Policy Forum report “[Natural Partners: How Local Collaboration Could Help Fix the Milwaukee County Parks](#)”.

Figure 1. Parks Division Parking Lots by Number of Stalls



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Condition of Parking Lots

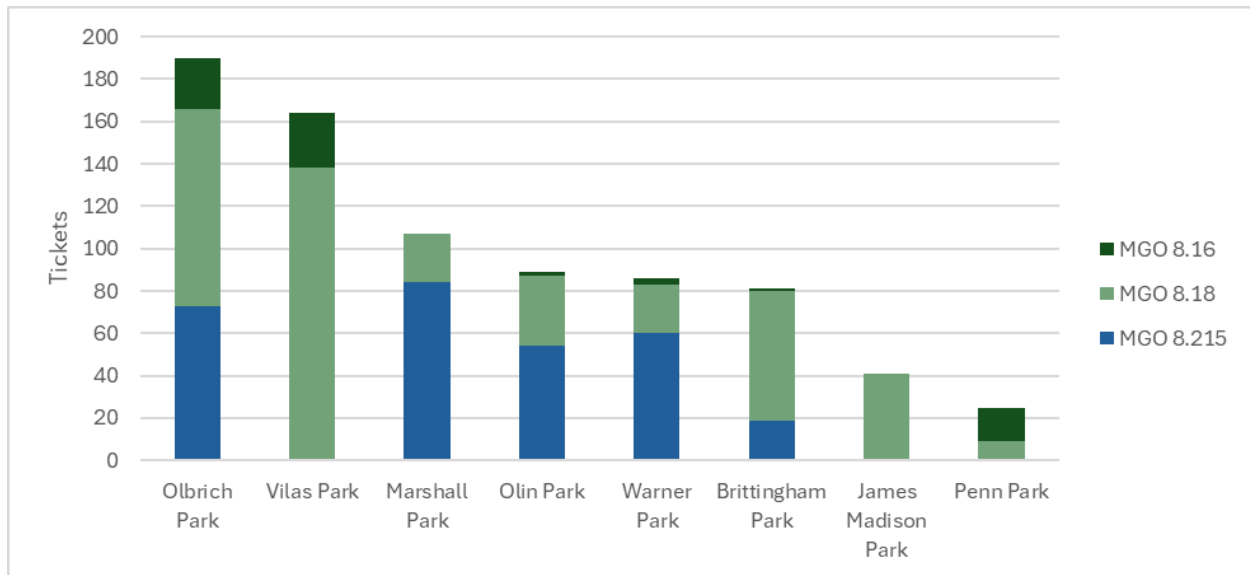
Parking lot conditions are evaluated based on a Pavement Surface Evaluation Rating (PASER) system. Parking lot conditions for 91 paved public lots were last evaluated in 2024. Based on this measure of lot condition, 40 parking lots (44%) were rated as in good or excellent condition, while 34 parking lots (37%) were in fair condition and 17 parking lots (19%) were in poor condition. Figure 2 shows the location and condition of parking lots in the park system.

Table 2. Tickets by Ordinance Violation in 2024

<i>Madison General Ordinance</i>	<i>Tickets</i>	<i>Percent</i>
8.16 - Unauthorized motorized vehicle on public lands	74	8.6%
8.18 - Parking in regulated parks	466	54.3%
8.215 - Use of parks for lake access	318	37.1%
<i>Total</i>	858	100.0%

Figure 3 shows the number of tickets at the parks where most tickets were written in 2024. Over half of all parking tickets written in 2024 occurred at Olbrich, Vilas, and Marshall Parks. A majority of tickets in 2024 at Olbrich (62%), Vilas (99%), Brittingham (77%), James Madison (100%), and Penn (100%) Parks were for parking violations related to unauthorized vehicles and lot use (e.g., parking outside of designated stalls, parking for more than 3 hours, after hours parking), while most tickets issued at Marshall (78%), Olin (61%), and Warner (70%) Parks were for boat launching without a permit from a lot with lake access (see MGO 8.215).

Figure 3. Parks with Most Tickets in 2024



4. Current Parking Policies and Practices

Policies Related to Parking

Policies specific to parking in parks are described in Madison General Ordinance 8.18. Parking is available within marked and designated stalls during park hours, which are 4:00 AM until 10:00 PM. Vehicles are prohibited from being parked overnight when parks are

closed, unless permission is granted by the Parks Division. There is a three-hour time limit to park in parking lots. This regulation is currently posted and enforced at the following parks: Brittingham, Burr Jones, James Madison, Olin-Turville, Penn, Tenney, and Vilas. The time limit has been posted and enforced in these parks because parking issues have repeatedly occurred in these lots. Parking lots at parks near Camp Randall Stadium are often used for parking during UW Football home games, resulting in violation of ordinances. This type of use prohibits people who want to visit the park from being able to access them. Due to persistent issues observed with parking violations during UW home games, the ordinance for parking in parks was amended in 2023 to double the penalty for parking violations at Brittingham, James Madison, Olin, Olive Jones, and Vilas Parks (see MGO 8.18(7)(b)).

Although steps have been taken to update policies and enforcement, Parks staff are aware of certain parking lots that continue to be used for reasons other than park use. For instance, Parks staff have observed parking lots being used for commuter parking at Olin Park, which is in violation of the ordinance that prohibits parking in posted parks for more than three hours.

Parks staff have also noted that parking lots have been used for commuter parking at Odana Hills Golf Course (e.g., for bike commuters) and at Monona Golf Course (e.g., high school students and nearby employees). Parking lots at The Glen Golf Park, Odana Hills Golf Course, Monona Golf Course, and Yahara Hills Golf Course, as well as at the Forest Hill Cemetery, are overseen by the Parks Division, but are not subject to MGO 8.18 as they are not considered to be on park land. Rather, they are more akin to a private parking lot that the Parks Division regulates as any other private owner would. Most of these parking lots also provide parking for adjacent parkland, such as Odana Hills East Park and the Glenway Woods.

Existing Cases of Paid Parking

Although parking is generally free in lots overseen by the Parks Division, there are a few existing instances of paid parking required by ordinance or established through agreements.

Law Park (Blair Lot)

By ordinance, stalls in the Blair Lot of Law Park are metered Monday through Friday between the hours of 6:00 AM and 6:00 PM (see MGO 8.18(5)). Paid parking at the Blair Lot is enforced by the Parking Division. Out of 58 total stalls at this lot, 13 are metered hourly parking, 44 are monthly permit parking, and 1 accessible parking space is unmetered. The hourly parking rate is \$1.00 per hour. Parking permits cost \$125 per month for residents

and \$145 per month for non-residents.⁹ The revenue from Blair Lot meters and permits goes into the Parking Division’s budget.

According to data provided by the Parking Division (see Table 3), the total revenue collected from metered and permitted spaces at the Blair Lot averaged about \$21,000 annually from 2022 through 2024. The total annual revenue collected from this lot has increased each year since 2023.

Table 3. Blair Lot Revenue, 2022-2025

<i>Year</i>	<i>Meter Revenue</i>	<i>Permit Revenue</i>	<i>Total Revenue</i>
2022	\$3,557	\$17,910	\$21,467
2023	\$3,876	\$12,035	\$15,911
2024	\$4,775	\$20,720	\$25,495
2025*	\$4,741	\$31,988	\$36,729

** Note: Data for 2025 is through October 26. Data for all years provided by Parking Division.*

While it is not possible to determine actual occupancy rates, we can estimate occupancy based on the share of total possible revenue collected for the 13 metered spaces and the share of total possible permits sold for the 44 permitted spaces. According to data provided by the Parking Division (see Table 4), estimated occupancy of both metered and permitted spaces in the Blair Lot have increased annually since 2023.

Table 4. Blair Lot Transactions and Estimated Occupancy, 2022-2025

<i>Year</i>	<i>Meter Transactions</i>	<i>Estimated Occupancy**</i>	<i>Monthly Permits</i>	<i>Estimated Occupancy**</i>
2022	2,700	9%	135	26%
2023	2,937	10%	91	17%
2024	3,232	12%	148	28%
2025*	3,122	14%	223	51%

** Note: Data for 2025 is through October 26. Data for all years provided by Parking Division.*

*** Note: Occupancy for metered spaces is estimated by dividing actual revenue by a maximum possible annual revenue of \$40,650 for 13 spaces enforced 6am to 6pm Monday through Friday. Occupancy for permit spaces is estimated by dividing actual permits sold by a maximum possible number of 528 monthly permits for 44 spaces. These estimates were pro-rated for 2025 as needed. Occupancy is only an estimate because the paid time unused and unpaid time used for any given space is unknown.*

⁹ See Parking Enforcement’s page on [Blair Lot](#).

Olive Jones Park (Recurring Permit with Randall Elementary School)

Madison General Ordinances 8.17 allows the Parks Division to authorize vending in public parks through a permit. For decades, the Franklin Randall PTO has applied for and received an annual vending permit to use the paved portion of Olive Jones Park (which includes a basketball court and four-square play area) that is adjacent to Randall School to charge for parking during UW Football events as a fundraiser.

The Franklin Randall PTO charges \$40 per space for approximately 150 spaces, according to their annual permit application. The estimated revenue that the Franklin Randall PTO would raise for a year with six UW home games if all spaces listed on their permit application were filled is \$36,000. The proceeds of the fundraiser are distributed among Madison Metropolitan District Schools and other non-profits, at the discretion of the Franklin Randall PTO Board of Directors. The annual park vending permit fee that the Parks Division collects for this use is \$900. The City, through the Capital Budget, is responsible for all repair, replacement, and upkeep of the paved infrastructure that is intended to serve as a paved playground.

Starting in 2026, the Parks Division will be issuing an event permit, rather than a vending permit, due to the size and scale of the parking events that occur at Olive Jones Park. In 2026, the total fees to be charged to the Franklin Randall PTO for the event permit will be approximately \$1,785.

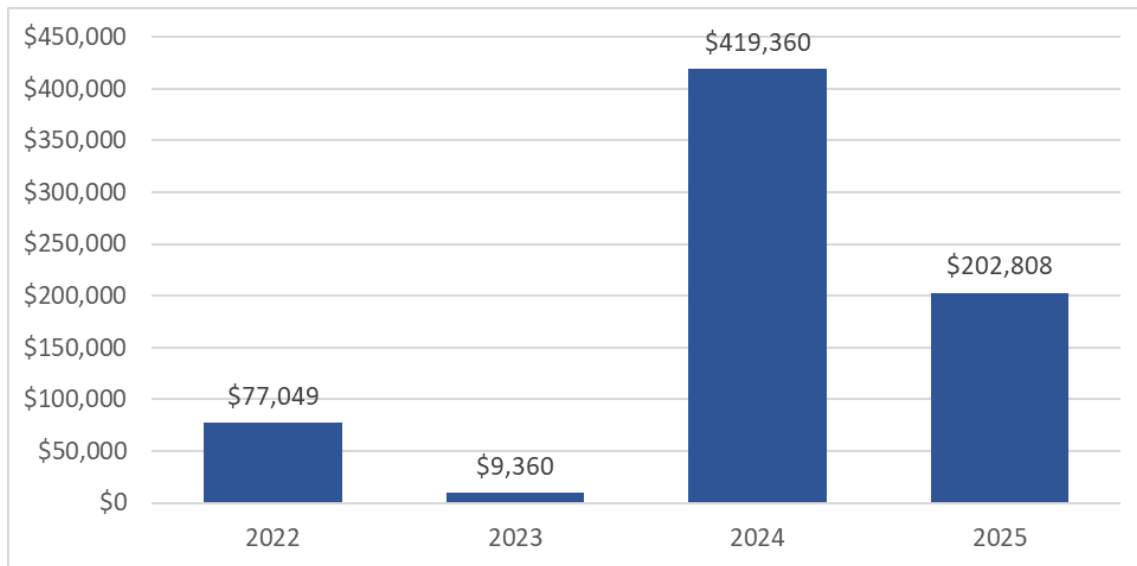
5. Financial Costs of Parking Lot Infrastructure

The Parks Division is responsible for maintaining all parking lot infrastructure on park land. Categories of maintenance that parking lots require range from remarking stalls, to resurfacing pavement in order to extend the life of lots, to reconstructing lots via complete redesigns of the space. This infrastructure maintenance is in addition to regular maintenance such as snow removal in the winter. Based on recent projects, Park Planning staff estimate that the cost to remark a parking lot can range from \$500 to \$1,500; the cost to resurface a parking lot can range from \$100,000 to \$200,000; and, the cost to reconstruct a parking lot can range from \$350,000 to \$1 million, depending on the total area and other amenities required such as lighting and stormwater mitigation features.

From 2022 through 2025, Parks Planning staff estimate that Parks spent \$700,000 on parking lot infrastructure maintenance and construction. This included a major parking lot reconstruction at Warner Park, a new parking lot constructed at Country Grove Park, and parking lot improvements at Door Creek Park and the new Lakeside Street Parks Office, as

well as remarking several parking lots throughout the park system. Figure 4 summarizes the estimated costs of parking lot maintenance and construction from 2022 through 2025.

Figure 4. Parking Lot Maintenance and Construction Costs, 2022-2025

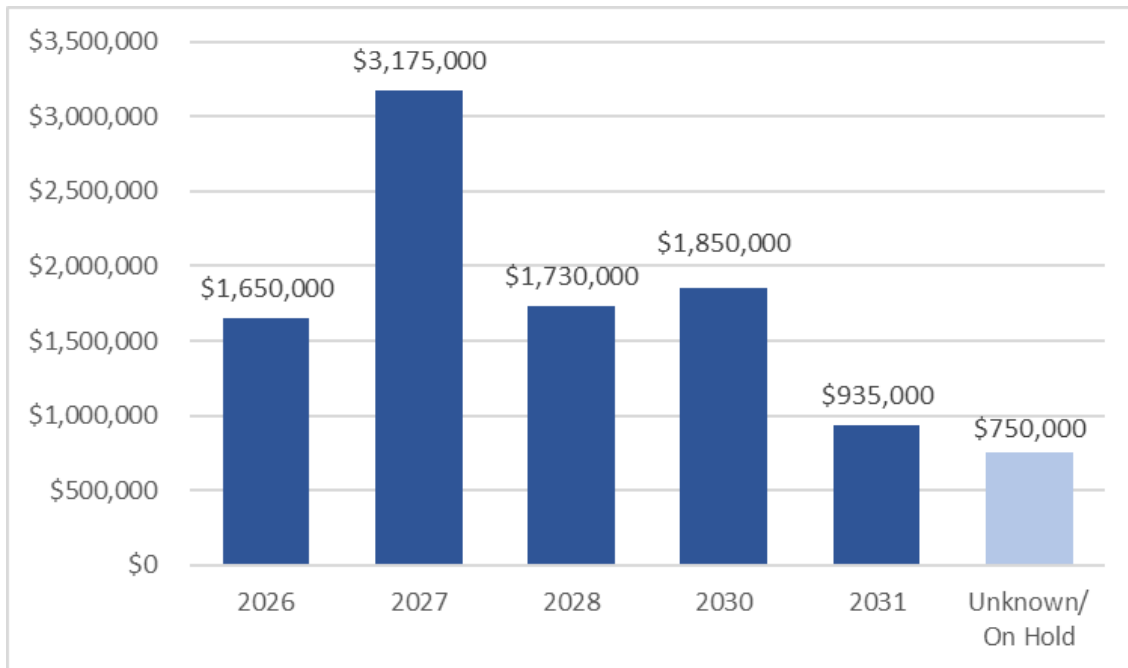


Future Costs

Due to many competing capital investment and infrastructure needs within the park system and Citywide, investment in parking lots has lagged behind what is needed for decades. This is reflected in both the condition and age of parking lots throughout the park system. Though lots are resurfaced and patched to the extent possible, parking lots are aging and in need of replacement.

In order to estimate future costs, Parks Planning staff first considered parking lot projects in the Capital Budget and Capital Improvement Plan, which includes projects planned over the next five years. From 2026 through 2031, Park Planning staff estimate that Parks will invest over \$10 million in parking lot improvements and construction. Figure 5 summarizes the estimated costs related to parking lot projects, both for existing parking lots and to construct new parking lots, that are in the 2026 Capital Budget for the Parks Division.

Figure 5. Parking Lot-Related Costs in 2026 Capital Budget



Parks Planning staff also evaluated lot replacement needs over a longer time horizon. With proper care and maintenance, staff expect a newly constructed parking lot to last about 40 years prior to requiring reconstruction. Staff analyzed cost information from recent construction contracts to determine estimated average per-stall replacement costs. Based on PASER ratings of Parks Division parking lots, Parks Planning staff estimate \$53 million in replacement costs will be needed over the next 40 years to maintain current levels of service (see Table 5). This does not account for any potential new parking needs as the park system continues to develop.

Table 5. Estimated Replacement Costs and Timeframes Based on Condition

<i>PASER Rating</i>	<i>Expected Replacement Timeframe</i>	<i>Estimated Replacement Cost (2026 Dollars)</i>
1 to 5	0 to 10 years	\$30.7 million
6 to 7	11 to 20 years	\$14.7 million
8 to 9	21 to 30 years	\$4.1 million
10	31 to 40 years	\$3.5 million

6. Comparative Analysis of Municipal Park Systems

Overview of Paid Parking in Midwestern City Parks

We reviewed park system parking policies in 18 Midwestern cities with populations over 200,000 in 2024 through online searches and by contacting park system staff. We found that most large Midwestern cities have some form of targeted paid parking policies in high-use areas. Only two large Midwestern cities (Chicago and Minneapolis) had widespread paid parking at many locations throughout the park system, and only four large Midwestern cities (Omaha, Saint Paul, Lincoln, and Toledo) reported having no paid parking in the municipal park system in 2025. Table 6 summarizes where paid parking programs are present in the Midwestern municipal park systems surveyed.

Table 6. Presence of Paid Parking in Large Midwestern Cities’ Park Systems

City	State	2024 Population	Paid Parking?
Chicago	IL	2,721,308	Many locations (44% of spaces)
Columbus	OH	933,263	At Lou Berliner Sports Park**
Indianapolis	IN	891,484	At Eagle Creek Park
Detroit	MI	645,705	At Belle Isle Park**
Milwaukee	WI	563,531	At Wehr Nature Center & Special Events
Kansas City	MO	516,032	Along Boulevards & Parkways**
Omaha	NE	489,265	None
Minneapolis	MN	428,579	Many locations (41% of spaces)
Wichita	KS	400,991	At LW Clapp Park (events)**
Cleveland	OH	365,379	At Gordon Park Boat Launch & Downtown Lots**
Cincinnati	OH	314,915	At Burnet Woods & Sawyer Point
Saint Paul	MN	307,465	None
Lincoln	NE	300,619	None
Madison	WI	285,300	At Law Park** & Olive Jones Park (events)**
St. Louis	MO	279,695	At Forest Park (Zoo & Museum)**
Fort Wayne	IN	273,203	At Hurshtown Reservoir & Community Center
Toledo	OH	265,638	None
Des Moines	IA	213,096	At James Cownie Soccer Complex (events)

* According to intercensal estimates from the US Census Bureau.
 ** Revenue is collected by another city agency or by a partner using park land through an agreement.

Case Studies of Paid Parking Programs in City Parks

Minneapolis, MN

The Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board (MPRB) offers a balance of free and paid parking options throughout its park system. According to MPRB’s website, parking is free in all neighborhood parks, while visitors pay to park in about half of its regional parks.

Additionally, some parkways with on-street parking spaces have parking meters. Out of 5,201 total parking spaces in the MPRB system, 2,132 (or 41%) are paid spaces. Parking operations are managed by MPRB’s Visitor Services office.

In 2025, rates vary by lot from \$1.00 to \$2.00 per hour, and some lots have rates that vary by time of day or season. For instance, the Minnehaha Falls Parking Lot charges \$2.00 per hour on weekends from April through September and otherwise charges \$1.50 per hour. Parking fees for lots may be paid with a mobile payment service. Visitors with handicap plates or placards may park at any lot or on-street meter at no charge.

Additionally, MPRB offers an annual patron parking permit that provides year-round parking privileges at regional parking lots. The annual permit is \$50, with reduced rates for seniors, second permits, and replacements.

According to MPRB's 2025 Recommended Budget, parking lots and meters were expected to generate \$2.8 million revenue in 2025. Revenue from MPRB's parking operations goes directly back into the park and recreation system via its enterprise fund.¹⁰

Cincinnati, OH

While parking is free in most Cincinnati Parks, there are two exceptions where Cincinnati Parks offers paid parking: Burnet Woods Park and Sawyer Point. These paid parking areas target high-use zones where there is a need to manage traffic and turnover.

Burnet Woods Park is a large park adjacent to the University of Cincinnati and Good Samaritan Hospital. Cincinnati Parks sells annual and semester permit parking spaces in Burnet Woods Park to University of Cincinnati students and Good Samaritan Hospital employees. Out of 331 total parking spaces in this park, 156 are permit-only spaces. For 2025-2026, annual parking permits cost \$425 each and semester parking permits cost \$175. If all spaces were occupied each year at the lower semester rate, then \$54,600 could be generated in revenue each year from parking in Burnet Woods.

Sawyer Point is a landmark park in Downtown Cincinnati along the Ohio River with tennis, pickleball, and volleyball courts, walking paths, and public art. The park frequently hosts events that draw visitors above and beyond its typical traffic. Cincinnati Parks Riverfront offers monthly parking passes for \$55.00 per month at this lot. Additionally, parking is available at this lot at a daily rate of \$5.00, or up to \$25.00 for events.¹¹

7. Policy Options and Potential Impacts

The research for this report, including information on the Parks Division's current parking assets and related costs, as well as comparative analysis of parking policies in other Midwestern municipal park systems, indicates that there is a spectrum of policy options to consider, from maintaining the status quo to generating revenue from parking lots through targeted or more systematic opportunities:

- Option 1: Status quo – no paid parking collected by Parks Division
- Option 2: Limited event-day paid parking near Camp Randall
- Option 3: Commuter paid parking

¹⁰ See MPRB "[Parking Information](#)" and [MPRB Superintendent's Recommended 2025-26 Budget](#).

¹¹ See Cincinnati Parks Customer Service "[Permits](#)".

- Option 4: Paid parking at high-traffic parks with limited off-street parking

Implementing any paid parking program would involve opportunity costs *beyond* the cost of staff time to administer and enforce the program. Dedicating existing staff time to parking program development and administration would come at the expense of time that staff could spend working on other strategic priorities. There is also an opportunity cost with respect to use of space: implementing a paid parking program would require the Parks Division to continue to maintain parking lots for that purpose, which could preclude future space redesign options from changing that use of space. Finally, in all paid parking program options, there is a potential opportunity cost with respect to accessibility of parks by vehicle-users.

Below, we consider the spectrum of paid parking program options and their potential impacts. For each of these options, estimates are included based on models for illustrative purposes, and program details could change based on policy discussions.

Option 1: Status Quo – No Paid Parking Collected by Parks Division

Currently, the Parks Division does not generate revenue directly from parking, although the Parking Division collects revenue from one Parks-owned parking lot downtown and outside groups have submitted permits to charge for event parking. One option is to maintain this status quo.

Revenue and Cost Considerations

Option 1 would result in zero additional revenue and zero additional operating costs from managing parking in park lots.

Potential Impacts

Option 1 would result in no change to the current accessibility of parks. Existing issues observed with parking violations and vehicle turnover in high-use parks with off-street parking, such as Olbrich and Vilas, would continue. Future maintenance and reconstruction needed in the Parks Division’s parking lots, including the 17 lots rated in poor condition as of 2024, would need to be funded through the Parks Division Capital Budget.

Option 2: Limited Event-Day Paid Parking Near Camp Randall

Option 2 would involve charging for event-day parking during special events at Camp Randall, similar to the event-based model at Cincinnati’s Sawyer Point Park. This could be conducted by Park Rangers collecting parking fees on the day of events. Parks Division properties near Camp Randall Stadium that have been identified as potential locations for

limited event-day paid parking for UW Football gamedays include Vilas Park, Brittingham Park, Olive Jones Park, and Edward Klief Park.

This option proposes using one of three parking lots at Brittingham Park and all but one parking lot at Vilas Park for event-day parking. At Brittingham Park, the Boat House and Brittingham Boats parking lots would remain freely available to park users during events. At Vilas Park, the South Zoo parking lot would remain freely available to park users during events. All accessible parking stalls would also remain freely available. Additionally, this option proposes using paved park land at Olive Jones Park and turf parking at Edward Klief Park for temporary parking on event days.

Revenue and Cost Considerations

Rates for UW game day and other special event parking in the Vilas-Greenbush neighborhood range from \$20 to \$50 per car stall. Using a rate of \$40 per stall, Table 7 estimates the potential revenue by location, assuming that an average of 75% of stalls could be filled during 6 events per year. Costs for this option include staff time to collect parking fees and initial start-up costs of cones, fencing, and tickets to conduct this parking program. In total, the Parks Division estimates that the total annual revenue net of costs to conduct a limited event-day paid parking program at all potential locations is about \$67,000 in the first year due to start-up costs, and about \$75,000 in subsequent years.

Table 7. Estimated Revenue and Costs for Event-Day Paid Parking Near Camp Randall

Revenue				
Park Name & Lot	Stalls	Rate Per Stall	Events @ 75% Occupancy	Est. Annual Revenue
Vilas Park – Zoo & Playground Lots	86	\$40	6	\$15,480
Vilas Park – Shelter Lot	51	\$40	6	\$9,180
Vilas Park – Boat Launch, Beach & Vilas Park Dr Lots	43	\$40	6	\$7,740
Vilas Park – S Orchard Lot	36	\$40	6	\$6,480
Vilas Park – Edgewood Lot	25	\$40	6	\$4,500
Brittingham Park – W Washington Ave	62	\$40	6	\$11,160
Olive Jones Park – Asphalt Court Area	~150	\$40	6	\$27,000
Edward Klief Park – Open Field	~52	\$40	6	\$9,360
<i>Subtotal Revenue</i>				\$90,900
Costs				
Park Name & Lot	Staff Hours	Hourly Rate	Events	Est. Annual Cost
Vilas Park – Zoo & Playground Lots	8	\$40	6	\$1,920
Vilas Park – Shelter Lot	8	\$40	6	\$1,920
Vilas Park – Boat Launch, Beach & Vilas Park Dr Lots	8	\$40	6	\$1,920
Vilas Park – S Orchard Lot	8	\$40	6	\$1,920
Vilas Park – Edgewood Lot	8	\$40	6	\$1,920
Brittingham Park – W Washington Ave	8	\$40	6	\$1,920
Olive Jones Park – Asphalt Court Area	8	\$40	6	\$1,920
Edward Klief Park – Open Field	8	\$40	6	\$1,920
<i>Subtotal Annual Costs</i>				\$15,360
Start-Up Costs: Cones, Fencing, Tickets, Mobile Devices				\$8,000
Total Estimated Revenue Net of Costs (first year)				\$67,540
Total Estimated Revenue Net of Costs (subsequent years)				\$75,540

Potential Impacts

Implementing Option 2 would affect the availability of free parking for park users at these parks on a limited number of days in the fall. While free parking would still be available at two parking lots at Brittingham Park and one parking lot at Vilas Park, the availability of free

parking would be reduced at these parks for six days during the fall season each year. Although some of these parking lots are already being used by non-park users on UW game days in violation of ordinance, this option would no longer allow this parking to be free.

Additionally, implementing paid event-day parking at Olive Jones Park and Edward Klief Park would involve using park space that is not designed for parking. Allowing cars to park for a limited number of days each year in these parks could stress or damage turf and courts, which would as a result require investment in the maintenance, repair, or replacement of the infrastructure. The City's use of Olive Jones Park for these purposes would also require ending the practice of the Randall Elementary PTO using the park for fundraising.

Option 3: Commuter Paid Parking

Option 3 would involve implementing a commuter permit parking program, with monthly daytime parking permits available to purchase for parking areas where this use has already been observed. This would be similar to the permit program at Cincinnati's Burnet Woods Park and also at Madison's Blair Lot in Law Park. One location where this could be implemented is Olin Park, which is commonly used by commuters due to its proximity to Metro Transit bus routes and the Capital City Bike Trail. Edgewater Court, which offers approximately 60 total spaces in the right-of-way, is the main location used for commuter parking at the park. Although these spaces fall within the right-of-way and are under the purview of the Parking Division, they could be transitioned to paid parking spaces via changes to the Madison General Ordinance.

Burr Jones has also been identified as a location for potential paid commuter parking due to its proximity to Metro Transit bus routes. This lot has previously been used by commuters utilizing Metro Transit, but this activity has since decreased due to increased Park Ranger enforcement of the 3-hour parking ordinance at this location. This parking lot offers 33 total parking stalls.

Designating a portion of the total available stalls for commuter parking during weekdays would allow for revenue generation while still leaving a portion of free parking stalls for park users at these locations on weekdays and not impact availability on weekends. The current analysis designates less than half of stalls at Burr Jones Park and at Olin Park as permit parking, for the purpose of illustration. If this program were to be successful, other parks in proximity to Metro Transit routes or bike paths could be considered, such as Olbrich Park, Garner Park, and Brittingham Park. The final policy would need to weigh the balance of park user and commuter needs.

Revenue and Cost Considerations

Table 8 estimates the potential revenue and costs associated with implementing a paid commuter parking program, assuming a 50% average permit occupancy rate as seen in Blair Lot in 2025. Costs for this option include staff time to process permit applications, issue permits, and enforce permit-only stalls. In total, the Parks Division estimates that the total annual revenue net of costs to conduct a commuter paid parking program at Olin Park and Burr Jones Park is about \$12,000 in the first year due to start-up costs, and about \$15,000 in subsequent years.

Table 8. Estimated Revenue and Costs for Commuter Paid Parking

Revenue				
Park Name	Stalls	Permit Rate Per Stall	Months @ 50% Occupancy	Est. Annual Revenue
Olin Park	30	\$100	12	\$18,000
Burr Jones Park	16	\$100	12	\$9,600
<i>Subtotal Revenue</i>				\$27,600
Costs				
Category	Staff Hours	Hourly Rate	Months	Est. Annual Cost
Administration	10	\$40	12	\$4,800
Enforcement	15	\$40	12	\$7,200
<i>Subtotal Annual Costs</i>				\$12,000
Start-Up Costs: Signage, Permits, Striping				\$8,000
Total Estimated Revenue Net of Costs (first year)				\$5,600
Total Estimated Revenue Net of Costs (subsequent years)				\$15,600

Potential Impacts

Implementing Option 3 would affect the availability of free parking, mainly for commuters who already use these spaces for parking. Since commuter parking has already been observed at Edgewater Court in Olin Park and at Burr Jones Park, the Parks Division does not anticipate a change in use, although this use of space would no longer be free to commuters. This proposal would offer monthly permit spaces at a lower rate than Blair Lot (which had a monthly rate of \$125 for residents in 2025), given differences in proximity to downtown and in order to incentivize these stalls that encourage use of pedestrian and bus infrastructure. To limit impact of a commuter permit parking program on the availability of free parking for park users, this option proposes designating only a portion of stalls at the parks as permit-only spaces.

Option 4: Paid Parking at High-Traffic Parks with Limited Off-Street Parking

Finally, Option 4 would involve implementing an hourly paid parking program at high-traffic parks with limited off-street parking. Parks staff have identified Brittingham, James Madison, Olbrich, and Vilas Parks as frequently visited parks in the downtown, near-east, and near-west sides of Madison that have a limited amount of off-street parking nearby. These parks are large community parks that serve as major tourist destinations due to valued amenities like the Olbrich Botanical Gardens, Olbrich Biergarten, nearby Garver Feed Mill, The Henry Vilas Zoo, Brittingham Boats, and boat launches and beaches for lake access, with visitorship expected to increase. These parks also have high numbers of tickets issued by Park Rangers for parking violations, such as parking outside of designated stalls and parking for longer than the 3-hour time limit.

Paid parking at these locations would encourage more vehicle turnover in the off-street lots, potentially increasing access to closer parking for some park users. Kiosk options that offer cash, card, and app payment options should be considered to improve financial access. To help ensure parking is available for individuals with physical access needs, all officially marked accessible parking stalls would remain freely available.

Revenue and Cost Considerations

The Parking Division's data on revenue from Blair Lot indicates that revenue from an hourly parking program could be variable, although there appears to be a general trend of increasing stall occupancy over the last four years. Additionally, such a paid parking program would involve more significant initial investments in kiosks to collect fees and create enforcement capacity, as well as recurring costs including annual fees for card reader connection, transaction fees, receipt paper, and battery maintenance. Given the larger scope of this option, a new fulltime Ranger position is considered as part of the potential annual program costs.

Table 9 provides low and high estimates of the potential revenue and costs associated with implementing a paid parking program in certain high-traffic parks. These estimates assume enforcement Monday through Friday, from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM, with approximately 250 working days each year excluding holidays. For these estimates, 40 stalls at the Olbrich Gardens Lot and 3 stalls at the Brittingham Boats Lot were reserved for staff and volunteer parking. The hourly rate used to estimate revenue is based on the Parking Division's current rate for Blair Lot. For context, hourly parking rates enforced by the Parking Division range from a low of \$1.00/hour at Blair Lot to a high of \$2.00/hour at Downtown meters.¹²

¹² See [Hourly Parking Rates](#) for the City of Madison Parking Division.

Table 9. Estimated Revenue and Costs for Hourly Paid Parking at High-Traffic Parks

Revenue				
			Annual enforcement from 6am-6pm, Monday-Friday	
Park Name & Lot	Stalls	Rate	Low Revenue (10% occupancy)	High Revenue (30% occupancy)
Brittingham – W Wash Ave Lot	62	\$1/hr	\$18,600	\$55,800
Brittingham – Brittingham Boats Lot	31	\$1/hr	\$9,300	\$27,900
Brittingham – Boat House Lot	16	\$1/hr	\$4,800	\$14,400
James Madison	24	\$1/hr	\$7,200	\$21,600
Olbrich – Olbrich Gardens Lots	164	\$1/hr	\$49,200	\$147,600
Olbrich – Beach Lot	111	\$1/hr	\$33,300	\$99,900
Olbrich – Lakeland Ave Lot	17	\$1/hr	\$5,100	\$15,300
Olbrich – North Boat Launch Lot	139	\$1/hr	\$41,700	\$125,100
Olbrich – Walter St Lot	65	\$1/hr	\$19,500	\$58,500
Vilas – North Lot	86	\$1/hr	\$25,800	\$77,400
<i>Subtotal Revenue</i>			\$214,500	\$643,500
Costs				
Cost Category				Est. Annual Cost
1.0 FTE Park Ranger Position				\$81,990
Annual Service Fees and Infrastructure Maintenance				\$30,000
<i>Subtotal Annual Costs</i>				\$111,990
Start-Up Costs: Kiosks (One per ~50 stalls), Signage				\$200,000
Total Estimated Annual Net Revenue (assuming 10% occupancy, excluding start-up costs)				\$102,510
Total Estimated Annual Net Revenue (assuming 30% occupancy, excluding start-up costs)				\$531,510

Potential Impacts

Implementing Option 4 would affect the availability of free parking at four high-use parks. Parks users at these parks who would like to drive to these parks and park for free would need to look for free street parking in nearby neighborhoods, which may increase traffic in those neighborhoods. This option could have a beneficial impact of increased turnover of parking spaces, as park users may be incentivized to limit their time parked in lots that charge by the hour.

8. Conclusion

Managing parking assets involves balancing both economic and social considerations. Currently, the Parks Division offers free parking in 6,036 of its 6,094 car stalls (99%)

available throughout the park system. The paid parking offered at 58 paid stalls in Law Park is managed by the Parking Division by ordinance and all revenue from that program goes to that division. There are maintenance needs coming due for many of the Parks Division's parking lots. As of 2024, 56% of parking lots in Madison Parks were in fair or poor condition. The Parks Division is budgeted to invest an estimated \$10 million in parking lot improvements and construction over the next five years.

It is important for parking to remain accessible to park users who cannot access parks by foot, bike, or bus. Current use of certain parking lots is not always consistent with this goal when car stalls are used by commuters or event-day visitors in violation of ordinances. Additionally, parking lots in certain parks – such as Olbrich Park, Vilas Park, and James Madison Park – often see issues with turnover of spaces.

In a review of paid parking policies in other large Midwestern cities' park systems, we found that most of these cities have some form of paid parking, although it is usually targeted to high-use areas or event-based programs to collect revenue while managing turnover issues. This understanding of parking policy in other municipal park systems is useful as we consider options for the Parks Division's future parking policies.

Options for addressing the economic and social considerations of the Parks Division's parking assets range from continuing the current model of widespread free parking, to limited event-day or limited commuter-paid parking that is largely consistent with current use, to an hourly paid parking program targeted at high-traffic parks with limited off-street parking. These options have varying potential for generating revenue and varying operating costs, and have different potential impacts that should be considered before determining the policy option that is most in line with needs and priorities.

Appendix A. Parks Division Public Parking Lot Inventory

Park Name	Lot Name	Lot Type	Car Stalls	Boat Trailer Stalls	Paser Rating
Brittingham Park	Boat House Parking Lot	Standard	17	0	6
Brittingham Park	Beach, Brittingham Boats Parking Lot	Standard	36	0	7
Brittingham Park	W Washington Ave	Standard	67	0	6
Burr Jones Park	Burr Jones Parking Lot	Standard	33	0	8
Burrows Park	Burrows Parking Lot	Standard	40	0	3
Cherokee Marsh - North Unit	North Parking Lot	Standard	35	0	N/A
Cherokee Marsh - North Unit	South Parking Lot	Standard	39	0	N/A
Cherokee Marsh - South Unit	South Parking Lot	Standard	6	0	4
Cherokee Marsh - South Unit	North/ Boat Launch Parking Lot	Boat Trailer	0	10	N/A
Country Grove Park	Country Grove Parking Lot	Standard	13	0	10
Demetral Park	Shelter Parking Lot	Standard	124	0	4
Demetral Park	Dog Park Parking Lot	Standard	118	0	5
Door Creek Park	Door Creek Parking Lot	Standard	164	0	7
Duane F. Bowman Park	Bowman Parking Lot	Standard	109	0	3
Edna Taylor Conservation Park	Edna Taylor Parking Lot	Standard	20	0	3
Elver Park	East Parking Lot	Standard	150	0	3
Elver Park	West Parking Lot	Standard	236	0	3
Esther Beach Park	Esther Beach Parking Lot	Standard	11	0	9
Forest Hill Cemetery	Office Parking Lot	Standard	5	0	9
Forest Hill Cemetery	Mausoleum Parking Lot	Standard	5	0	5
Fraust Park	Fraust Parking Lot	Standard	8	0	3
Garner Park	Garner Parking Lot	Standard	72	0	2
Goodman Park	Pool Parking Lot	Standard	205	0	7
Goodman Park	Maintenance Building Parking Lot	Standard	104	0	7
Harvey Schmidt Park	West Parking Lot	Standard	6	0	5
Harvey Schmidt Park	East Parking Lot	Standard	6	0	5
Heifetz Park	Heifetz Parking Lot	Standard	6	0	5
Hiestand Park	Hiestand Parking Lot	Standard	24	0	9
Highland Manor Park	Playground and Basketball Parking Lot	Standard	5	0	8
Highland Manor Park	Shelter Parking Lot	Standard	28	0	8
Hoyt Park	Hoyt Parking Lot	Standard	40	0	3

James Madison Park	James Madison Parking Lot	Standard	26	0	8
Law Park	Law Park Parking Lot (Blair Lot)	Standard	58	0	5
Marshall Park	Beach Parking Lot	Standard	109	0	4
Marshall Park	Boat Launch Parking Lot (Boat Trailers)	Boat Trailer	0	44	6
Marshall Park	Boat Launch Parking Lot (Standard)	Standard	8	0	6
Monona Golf Course	Clubhouse Parking Lot	Standard	67	0	5
Monona Golf Course	Dean House Parking Lot	Standard	43	0	5
North Star Park	North Star Dog Park Parking Lot	Standard	10	0	10
Odana Hills Golf Course	Odana Hills Golf Parking Lot	Standard	140	0	3
Odana School Park	Odana School Dog Park Parking Lot	Standard	20	0	4
Olbrich Botanical Complex	Northwest Parking lot	Standard	151	0	6
Olbrich Botanical Complex	Main Parking Lot	Standard	67	0	6
Olbrich Park	Walter Street Parking Lot	Standard	68	0	10
Olbrich Park	Beach Parking Lot	Standard	116	0	5
Olbrich Park	South Boat Launch Parking Lot	Boat Trailer	0	32	5
Olbrich Park	North Boat Launch Parking Lot	Boat Trailer & Standard	144	9	5
Olbrich Park	Lakeland Ave Parking Lot	Standard	19	0	10
Olbrich Park	Garver Parking Lot	Standard	120	0	10
Olin Park	Olin-Turville Ct and Boat Launch Parking Lot	Boat Trailer & Standard	21	40	4
Olin Park	Boat Launch Parking Lot	Boat Trailer & Standard	21	14	4
Olin Park	Pavillion Parking Lot (West)	Standard	15	0	5
Olin Park	Pavillion Parking Lot (East)	Standard	10	0	5
Olin Park	Pavillion Parking lot (South)	Standard	2	0	5
Olin Park	Turville Parking Lot	Standard	90	0	4
Olin Park	Admin Building Parking Lot	Standard	65	0	5
Olin Park	Edgewater Ct Parking Lot	Standard	8	0	N/A
Owen Conservation Park	Owen Conservation Parking Lot	Standard	34	0	8
Owen Parkway	Owen Parkway Parking Lot	Standard	8	0	3
Penn Park	Penn Parking Lot	Standard	28	0	9
Quann Park	Tennis and Dog Park Parking Lot	Standard	88	0	5
Quann Park	Bram St Parking Lot	Standard	10	0	N/A

Reindahl Park	Soccer Fields North Parking Lot	Standard	112	0	6
Reindahl Park	Soccer Fields and Cricket Parking Lot	Standard	198	0	6
Reindahl Park	Community Gardens Parking Lot	Standard	40	0	N/A
Reindahl Park	Imagination Center Parking Lot	Standard	104	0	10
Spring Harbor Beach Park	Spring Harbor Beach Parking Lot	Standard	30	0	2
Sycamore Park	Sycamore Parking Lot	Standard	135	0	6
Tenney Park	Boat Launch Parking Lot	Boat Trailer	0	25	6
Tenney Park	N Thornton Ave (North) Parking Lot	Standard	15	0	7
Tenney Park	Pavillion Parking Lot	Standard	40	0	7
Tenney Park	Beach Parking Lot	Standard	28	0	8
Tenney Park	N Thornton Ave (Southeast) Parking Lot	Standard	15	0	7
Tenney Park	N Thorntion Ave (Tennis) Parking Lot	Standard	14	0	7
Tenney Park	MSCR Boat Launch Parking Lot	Standard	14	0	3
The Glen Golf Park	The Glen Parking Lot	Standard	48	0	4
Vilas Park	Zoo Parking Lot	Standard	58	0	4
Vilas Park	Shelter Parking Lot	Standard	55	0	5
Vilas Park	Boat Launch Parking Lot	Standard	21	0	4
Vilas Park	South Zoo Parking Lot	Standard	55	0	1
Vilas Park	Edgewood Ave Parking Lot	Standard	27	0	8
Vilas Park	S Orchard St Parking Lot	Standard	38	0	3
Vilas Park	Zoo and Playground Parking Lot	Standard	32	0	4
Vilas Park	Vilas Park Dr Parking Lot (Near Ice Skating)	Standard	8	0	3
Vilas Park	Vilas Park Dr Parking Lot (West side of Beach)	Standard	7	0	3
Vilas Park	Vilas Park Dr Parking Lot (East side of Beach)	Standard	7	0	3
Warner Park	WPCRC Parking Lot	Standard	75	0	5
Warner Park	Beach Parking Lot	Standard	45	0	8
Warner Park	Boat Launch Parking Lot	Boat Trailer	0	36	9
Warner Park	Dog Park Parking Lot	Boat Trailer & Standard	35	19	10

Warner Park	Southeast Area Athletic Fields (West Parking lot)	Standard	328	0	5
Warner Park	Rainbow Shelter & Inclusive Playground Parking Lot	Standard	238	0	5
Warner Park	Mallards Parking Lot	Standard	230	0	5
Warner Park	Football and Soccer Field Parking Lot	Standard	43	0	5
Warner Park	Southeast Area Athletic Fields (East Parking Lot)	Standard	370	0	5
Wingra Park	Wingra Parking Lot	Standard	51	0	8
Yahara Hills Golf Course	Yahara Hills Parking Lot	Standard	280	0	6
Grand Total			6,094	229	