

Park Operations Quarterly Report December 2019 - February 2020

It has been said the best way to assess a team is during times of adversity. This year's variable winter weather challenged the Parks Operations team as they deliver basic services and recreational opportunities to residents. The team demonstrated their dedication, commitment, skills, teamwork and hard work during this season's difficult weather conditions. The multiple temperature variations, from below freezing to above 40, and weekend snow storms created significant challenges for winter operations as the team worked to clear snow, maintain both ice rinks and cross-country ski trails, and manage public expectation in the changing weather conditions. The Operations team rose to the occasion and delivered. The premier ice rinks across the City were open an average of 14 days in January and 23 days in February. The natural ski trails were open 18 days in January and 28 days in February. The machine-made loop at Elver was open every day in January and February, as well as 26 days in December, for a total of 85 days this winter. The NiceRinks and machine-made snow on the Elver ski loop and sledding hill held up well in the warmer weather, providing winter recreation opportunities despite the changing climate. Staff supported snow removal from over 441,000 linear feet of bike paths and sidewalks, and from 580 bus stops per snow event. Feedback on the snow removal from the bike paths was favorable from the bike community.

The interview process for hourly employees has started. Staff has attended more job fairs than in previous years to promote seasonal opportunities. The initial results of this have reinforced the concern that the labor market is tight and finding seasonal employees will again be a challenge this year. We anticipate hiring 47 seasonal staff for Parks Operations this year.

The Park Operations leadership team continued to focus on professional development and continuous improvement efforts through micro learning sessions. This quarter included technical topics to build an understanding of the value and use of Cause and Effect diagrams and 5 Why Analysis and the leadership behavior awareness sessions included topics on trust, positivity and effective listening.

CONSERVATION (Paul Quinlan)

The weather in December was conducive to ecological restoration work, and several invasive woody species removal projects were advanced through the collaboration of Parks staff, Operation Fresh Start, and volunteers. Honeysuckle and buckthorn were cleared from approximately 7 acres at Acewood, Cherokee Marsh – Mendota Unit, and Owen Park. Volunteers burned brush piles generated from this work. In addition, contractors were hired with Capital Improvement Project funding to use a combination of forestry mowing and cut-stump herbicide applications to control woody growth on a total of 35 acres at Cherokee Marsh – North Unit, Knollwood, Owen and Turville Point. Follow-up work this spring and summer will entail a combination of hand-pulling, herbicide applications, mowing, and prescribed grazing to control herbaceous invasive species such as garlic mustard and dame's rocket, as well as re-sprouts of non-native woody species.

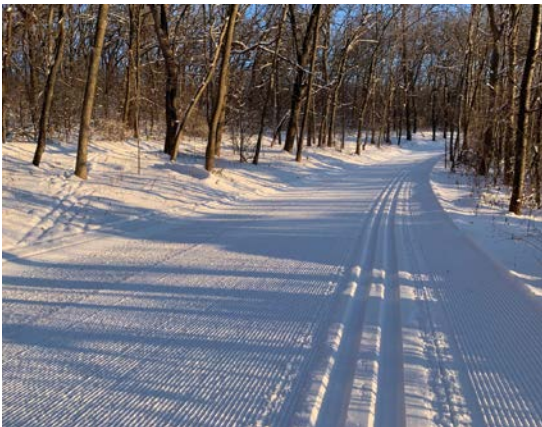
A cold spell during the third week of December allowed staff to make snow for the sledding hill at Elver Park. This complemented the machine-made snow that MadNorSki made for their 1km cross-country ski loop. Both MadNorSki volunteers and Parks staff

groomed the 1km loop through the holidays and the MMSD winter break, despite several days where the temperature was above freezing. Cold temperatures at night and the sun low in the sky helped preserve the snow through this weather and the winter season.

Natural snowfall allowed all other trails to open on January 13, although grooming began on January 19, after we received enough accumulation. At least one site was groomed on each of 21 days on which grooming occurred in January and February. Rain and warm temperatures prevented grooming on 10 days during this period.

Staff cleared trees from around the burial mound at Meadow Ridge as prescribed in our Burial Mound Management Plan for this site. Trees were removed to prevent future threats to the mound from falling branches and trees, and to increase light infiltration to encourage a more vigorous native plant community and help maintain soil stability.

Permits for burning and wildlife management were secured, and staff began preparing for the spring 2020 burn season.



CONSTRUCTION (Rich Bergmann)

The team worked on both capital and non-capital projects. Capital work included reclamation of old playground footprints to turf at both Sherman Village and Segoe parks, and demolition of old basketball courts at Brigham and Sandburg in preparation for new courts that will be installed in 2020. The team also placed large rock and climbing log elements and installed the walking path and mulch at Brittingham Nature Play area.

The non-capital work included completing the audits for safety compliance and quality control at all of the new 2019 playgrounds and fitness equipment repairs at Demetral. The team improved playground appearance and safety by adding mulch at Glacier Hill, Droester, Honeysuckle, Heritage Heights, Worthington, Kingston-Onyx, Demetral, Wheeler Heights, Olbrich, Westport Meadows, Lucy Lincoln, Berkley, Prairie Ridge and Nakoma. They also completed erosion and drainage projects at Forest Hills Cemetery and Sandburg Park.

The team assisted the Streets Division with four general plow events and with removing over 660 yards of snow from the Mall Concourse area. They also moved donated topsoil to storage for future use.



FACILITIES MAINTENANCE (Jon Landsverk)

The team focused on capital projects and annual maintenance work. Several capital projects were completed, including Focus on Energy lighting projects at Wexford ice rink, Garner Park parking lot and Demetral Park parking lot and shelter area. The Parks Department will receive rebates totaling \$2,600 from the Focus on Energy lighting projects completed in 2019. The team also completed the Brittingham Park Nature play elements, repainted the Olbrich Gardens reception area and rebuilt three piers from the Olbrich boat launch.

Annual maintenance work included the removal of 13 piers from area waterways, ice rink preparation, daily facility checks, annual inspections, and park sign maintenance. Project work included new lighting and controls at Lisa Link Peace Park, new shelter sign holders for all reservation shelters and repair work to Gates of Heaven lower level area.

The staff attended the annual Diggers Hotline safety meeting to stay up to date on safe digging practices.



CENTRAL PARKS (Chad Hughes)

The dry and warm December allowed the team to perform pruning and brush clearing operations at Olin and Penn Parks. As the weather cooled, the team focused on clearing snow from sidewalks, bike paths, bus stops, parking lots and skating areas. However, the ice was a little less established this year than normal, preventing the team from performing any significant ice maintenance until the middle of January. Hockey boards are normally installed by late December, but the poor ice delayed this until late January at Vilas. Even with the temperature variations, the 2019-20 snow season has already exceeded the average season snowfall total.

There were a few events in Central Parks, most notably Holiday Fantasy in Lights and Polar Plunge at Olin Park as well as a free kids fishing event at Brittingham Park. The women's Badger Hockey team had a signing event at Vilas shelter, unfortunately we did not have enough ice at the time for people to skate safely. The Parks Division was also able to have a successful Groove and Glide event at Vilas on Valentine's Day.



MALL CONCOURSE (Chad Hughes/Mark Kiesow)

This season's variable weather resulted in varied work for the Mall Team. The lack of snow in December allowed the staff to focus on upcoming spring projects. Wood benches on the Capitol Square were brought in to be refurbished. The process included sanding down the benches, and using teak oil to brighten the look. Trash can lids were removed and sanded in order to prepare the lid for painting to remove blemishes. The team inventoried the condition of bike racks and benches, and ordered replacements where needed.

With the colder and snowy January the team changed their focus to snow almost on a daily basis. Sidewalks, bus shelters, tool lines, and handicap ramps were cleared to make it safe for downtown visitors.

The variable weather continued into February, and some unseasonably warm temperatures helped melt snow and ice, allowing the team to remove nearly all of the snow piled around the Capital Square. After snow removal, the team returned to blowing and sweeping for sidewalk maintenance, cleaned bus shelter windows, and were able to do some general clean-up around the area. Planters were placed back in their summer locations, awaiting the spring pansies, which will be planted in April.

The BID's "Shine On" winter holiday themed event wrapped up, and the downtown snowflakes were removed.



EAST PARKS (Kristin Mathews)

The weather created challenges for weekend snow clearing and ice maintenance. However, staff did a great job of keeping ice open to the degree possible given the temperature fluctuations. The Warner Lagoon was open more days this winter season than in the past few years, as staff was assigned more consistently to ice maintenance. This was well received by area residents. Tenney general rink had good ice, allowing for consistent maintenance, but Tenney hockey rink experienced drainage issues, forcing the rink to be closed for the season. The Groove and Glide community skating events were well attended at both Warner and Tenney.

The team continued to gain experience with the assembly and maintenance of NiceRinks. The NiceRink at Heritage Heights is in its third season of the Adopt Ice Partnership and experienced mixed skating opportunities this season. Olbrich NiceRink is in its second year and the grading improvements made in the Fall of 2019 contributed to improved ice conditions when weather permitted. The team continued to learn about the nuances of grading and rink placement that this site requires, and will apply this knowledge in the future here and at other NiceRink locations. Overall, NiceRinks did provide a better ice surface and faster recovery in varying temperature conditions.

The team reviewed all of the snow plow routes to ensure that all sidewalks and priority bike paths were accounted for and to assure the plow routes were as efficient as possible. The snow equipment used was re-prioritized to make clearing snow more efficient. These changes allowed the East team to free up some additional staff time for ice maintenance.



WEST PARKS/ FOREST HILLS Cemetery (Theran Steindl)

During the warmer days this quarter the team trimmed trees, installed mulch, marked snow paths, collected brush and focused on park cleanup.

New plowing routes were created this fall to maximize staff and equipment available to address the Hwy M snow quadrant expansion and the 40 bus stops added to West Parks snow routes. There will be continued improvement opportunities, but the staff successfully cleared the required areas each snow fall.

Winter Festival at Elver Park had fantastic weather with temperatures in the 40s. The event was well attended and organized. While the ice rinks were a little soft due to the warm weather, those attending were able to enjoy the many great winter outdoor recreation activities Madison Parks offers at Elver, thanks to the efforts of our staff and many volunteers. The warmer weather did cause some minor flooding problems on walking paths, but staff was able to address those concerns without significant disruption to the event. Overall the event was successful.

