

Park Operations Quarterly Report June - August 2021

This quarter brought a return to more normal operations as compared to last year over this same period. Although some COVID precautions continued, the parks were busy and the staff focused on supporting the many service needs. In addition to the normal maintenance demands of mowing, trimming, weeding, invasive removal, planting, and construction projects, staff supported a significant increase in events throughout the park system with a commitment to service excellence.

Work planning and execution varied, often week to week given the fluctuating weather, from near drought to rain that brought rapid plant growth. Staff adjusted and completed the more traditional summer work as well as meeting the high demand for watering newly planted trees and plants, and many projects to improve the facilities and grounds.

Hiring seasonal staff was again a challenge this summer, requiring a considerable investment of time and resources to support the hiring process. Work plans and schedules were modified to adjust for the inadequate level of seasonal staffing attained. Despite significant effort by staff and support from HR, we had to continue to work on hiring into the end of this quarter to support the late summer and fall work requirements as college students returned to school.

The winter planning work started with a review of snow response priorities, and a review of the work responsibilities and coordination efforts with the other Public Works Divisions. Additional staff attended the Salt Wise training, which is designed to help staff better understand the impact of over salting, the proper use of salt, and how to properly apply salt to reduce the environmental impact.

CONSERVATION (Paul Quinlan)

Staff worked on seasonal invasive species control, including spot-mowing crown vetch, Japanese hedge parsley, sweet clover, wild parsnip, and raspberries and other brush. Porcelain berry was mowed to suppress seed production, and larger vines were flagged for future basal bark treatments. Trails were mowed and trimmed regularly, and downed trees were removed after a few storm events.

A draft Habitat Management Plan for Acewood Conservation Park was presented to the Habitat Stewardship Subcommittee, and work began on development of a plan for Sandburg Woods.

Prescribed grazing was used again this year, and expanded to 43 acres across four parks – Acewood, Knollwood, Owen, and Turville Point. Goat grazing defoliates the shrub layer and reduces the abundance of woody species over time, helping to reduce shading and allow for increased herbaceous plant diversity and abundance in woodlands and savannas. Our goal is to shift the woody/herbaceous species ratio with grazing, then maintain it with prescribed fire, once we re-establish the appropriate native herbaceous plant community.

The Friends of Cherokee Marsh (FOCM) participated again this year in the Prairie Partners internship program sponsored by Madison Audubon Society. FOCM volunteers led the interns in removing Japanese hedge parsley and surveying plants at Cherokee Marsh. The Friends of Owen held weekly volunteer workdays to support invasive plant control, and also sampled vegetation monitoring transects and monitored monarch caterpillars and bumble bees.

A 600-foot section of trail was established at Edna Taylor to restore a “loop” in the northeast portion of the park, after a significant portion of trail was closed last year to protect the burial mounds there. Thanks to volunteers with the Friends of Edna Taylor Conservation Park for helping to establish this trail.



Grazing underway at Owen.



Goats can reach about 6 feet high.

CONSTRUCTION (Rich Bergmann)

Staff supported many capital improvement projects, including: rebuilding the path at Orlando Bell, installing concrete pads for new benches at Burrows, Warner, Mayfair, Sugar Maple and Wingra parks and for the new kiosk at Owl Creek Park. Staff also removed the old playground at Swallowtail Park in preparation for the new playground, constructed the City’s first GaGa ball play areas at Olbrich and Penn parks, and started construction on the new nature play area at Paunack Park. The team also supported multiple Glenway Golf Course construction project requests.

Staff also supported non-capital projects, including sand restoration work at all City beaches and at Olbrich, Edward Klief and James Madison volleyball courts. Staff installed a wheelchair accessible mat at Bernie’s Beach, making it the City’s first accessible beach. This project was supported through a Parks Foundation donation and further demonstrated Parks’ commitment to improving park system accessibility. Staff removed old backstops from Marlborough and Warner Parks, and began work for the “POP UP” park at Warner. The team also installed playground mulch at Shorewood Forest, Wexford, Olive Jones, Valley Ridge, and Dominion parks to improve safety and appearance.



New Tenney Park Bike Rack New Mayfair Park Bench Warner Park Gaga Ball Pit

FACILITIES MAINTENANCE (Jon Landsverk)

Staff conducted daily inspection work and responded to facility work orders as well as completing a number of capital and special projects. The work included building picnic tables and benches to support Madison Parks Foundation donations.

The capital projects included painting the shelters at Elvehjem, Marlborough, Goodman, Elver, Vilas, Everglade, Northland, O.B. Sherry, and Wirth parks, and the doors at Goodman Pool. The team also built or restored kiosks at Cherokee Marsh, Owl Creek, and Door Creek parks. The team installed new signature signs at Raymond Ridge, Apple Ridge, Hollister Triangle, Demetral, Galaxy, and Sherwood Forest, and replaced deteriorated roofs on shelters at Marlborough, Goodman, and Kennedy Parks.

Staff coordinated with the City Engineering team on renovations to Gates of Heaven that included work on the exterior stone, replacement of the interior wood floor, and window refurbishment. Coordinated efforts also included the completion of the Warner Park beach shelter and the installation of Tenney Park pavilion acoustical improvements.



New Kiosks

Gates of Heaven Improvements

CENTRAL PARKS (Jake Schneider)

In addition to the summer maintenance demands, staff supported the many events that returned this year, large and small, to Central Parks. Some new events included the twice-weekly markets at Penn Park organized by the Latino Chamber of Commerce, and the Bacon and Brews festival at McPike Park. Aldo Leopold Park was also the site of weekly community nights that included a football camp hosted by the YMCA. These new events were joined by annual traditions including the Great Taste of the Midwest at Olin Park and the Sessions at McPike.

The Vilas Park and BB Clark beaches were heavily used, which required staff's continued support with beach maintenance. Staff worked in conjunction with the Facilities team to open the Bernie's, Vilas, and BB Clarke beaches throughout the week.

The Landscape Maintenance Workers spruced up planting beds at a number of parks including Reston Heights, Warner, Garner, and Elver. Staff also improved the appearance of Kenneth Newville Park by repairing and painting benches and removing the heavily worn kiosk. In addition, the Construction staff installed new basketball courts at Baxter and Badger parks.



Elver Park – Signature bed beautification – before and after

MALL CONCOURSE (Mark Kiesow)

Staff's efforts to maintain State Street and the Mall Concourse increased as the public activity levels picked up. Returning Mall events included Maxwell Street Days, Jazz on State, Mad Lit, and the perennial Farmer's Market. In addition, flowers and plants demanded increased watering due to the long dry periods, but with irrigated turf, mowing and turf operations continued. Staff also supported the sidewalk power-washing program on State Street and the Expansion area, with over 85% of the area completed. With the State Street sidewalk repairs underway, staff assisted regularly with moving benches, trashcans, and bike racks.

Olbrich Gardens assisted with the transition of the downtown flower planters from spring to summer annuals and the Peace Park landscape beds were updated. Both efforts created beautiful stunning displays of summer annuals. Seasonal light pole banners were also changed to "summer" banners, all of which created an inviting downtown area.

The annual UW student move-in/out "event" began in August, keeping the Mall Crew busy with large item removals on State Street and the surrounding Expansion area.



Concourse and State Street planter – summer annuals

Concourse turf repair

EAST PARKS (Spencer Werner)

Staff remained busy maintaining the parks with the return of more normal operations. In addition, staff completed project work including clearing brush and weeds from tree lines and fence lines at Burrows Park and Warner Dog Park. Pickleball lines were added to the Kennedy Park tennis courts, allowing them to be dual-purpose courts.

The Land Stewardship Technician continued to make progress with our land management efforts by removing invasive species in no-mow and managed meadow areas. Of note, the newly established prairie at Portland Park is doing well and invasive removal has continued to allow the planted native species to fill in. With the support of Conservation and Planning staff, preparations were made to use prescribed grazing in Door Creek Park in 2022. This work will focus on restoring a portion of woods that has many large oak trees in the canopy.

The Parks Arborist crew was busy supporting many storm-related calls in general parks and conservation lands. In addition, they removed over 100 trees in support of the Glenway Golf Park project.

The organic turf renovation work, supported by the Stonyfield grant, continued at the Olbrich and Flagstone Park athletic fields. Olbrich softball field number 1 and Flagstone Park soccer fields were aerated monthly and organic fertilizer was applied twice this year.



Burrows tree line – before/after



Warner Dog Park fence line – before/after



Portland Park – prairie at time of planting and one year later

WEST PARKS (Chad Hughes)

Crews worked on maintaining park grounds during the extended dry periods. Although mowing and trimming never stopped, the staff was able to complete some additional project work.

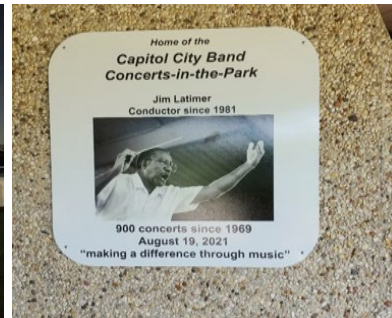
Staff also kept busy supporting the significant increase in summer events. The July 4th weekend was very busy with clean up, and staff reported fireworks refuse in the majority of parks. After the 2020 COVID cancellation, the Opera in the Park returned to Garner and was well attended. The opera has been a tradition at Garner Park since 2002. Elver Park hosted the Mad City Disc Golf tournament, which was also very well attended. West Parks’ longest running event, the Capital City Band Concerts, also returned to Rennebohm Park. The concert was especially significant this year as it was the band’s 900th performance in a career dating back to 1969. Jim Latimer was honored at the event with a special sign, placed in the shelter, signifying him as the band’s conductor since 1981. Staff supported both set up and cleanup of these and other events.



Marlborough Ride the Drive



Garner Park Opera



Rennebohm Jim Latimer sign