

SUPERINTENDENT'S MARCH 2024 REPORT COMMUNICATIONS TO BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

With golf courses open in February and temperatures regularly above 50 it appears that Spring is arriving early this year. The forecast through the remainder of the month indicates a likelihood of a more normal second half of the month, but given where we are starting, we anticipate the pressures of opening to come earlier and stronger this year. That is a challenge as it relates to our staffing model and the facilities we operate. Opening restrooms early is a challenge given the uncertainty of the weather. We try our best to not end up in situations where pipes bursting is a systematic issue due to opening non-conditioned restrooms too quickly. We will also struggle to keep up with maintenance of the system, particularly mowing and trimming, if the grass grows as early as it looks like it might. We are hopeful our ongoing recruitment efforts will be successful and we can be staffed to a reasonable level this summer. We are conducting job fairs and partnering with HR and others on strategies to raise awareness of the opportunities we have in Parks for seasonal employment. Staff will be evaluating start dates for seasonal staff that are available given the weather patterns as well.

Reservations, permits, and event scheduling is in full swing and the planning work for the summer indicates another busy and vibrant year in our parks system. The shelter reservations and permits are trending well. Event applications are also consistent with prior years. As is always the case, there will be some new events that are imagined that will take staff time to evaluate and assist organizers in making successful positive community events go smoothly. One of the more important focal points for event management this year is the work our team is doing to ensure collaboration between the City and events around the Square as it relates to bus route disruptions/detours.

Our partners are also busy prepping for an active year. The Mallards are moving forward on the turf project that will enable softball to come to Warner after receiving approval at the Common Council. Madison Boats is actively recruiting and training staff as well as preparing equipment and facilities for opening. The biergarten at Olbrich is excited to open this year with less construction along Atwood, but with a much improved ped/bike accessibility network for visitors.

Staff are also working together on plans and concepts to respond to the budget challenges the City is facing. We do not yet have plans in place, but we are evaluating many options given the potential need to reduce spending due to levy limits. We recommend anyone interested watch the presentations at the City Council meeting on March 5 by the Finance Director to get a better understanding of the budget situation.

Future Commission Items

- Golf Enterprise Update – The Golf Team is working to prepare a report to the 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. This will heavily involve our new Golf Operations Director.
- Marshall Houses – Parks staff continues to work with Real Estate and the City Attorney's Office to engage with the property owners of the historic homes in Marshall Park. The goal is to bring an update and potential options for moving forward to the Commission in the next few months.

- Olin Houses – We will be working on a management plan for the Olin Houses as we acquire them. We own three of the houses at this point and would like to have a management strategy in place moving forward. We anticipate buying more of these and it would be good to begin developing the plan for holding strategy. We are hopeful to have a plan in place in the first half of 2024.
- Parks Division Work Plan / Roadmap – Staff will present the Division’s roadmap to the Board, likely in May. The work plan provides an overview of significant change initiatives that the Division is undertaking and/or working on in 2024. The roadmap elements each have an assigned manager who are leading the work associated with that element.
- POSP Update – the Long Range Planning Subcommittee is working on the POSP and staff is looking into options for a good time over the next few months to provide an update to the Commission.

Section reports

Community Services Report March 2024 – Terrence Thompson

Community Events & Customer Service

Events (Kelly Post)

- The Community Events team has already issued 34 Park Event permits for 2024, with more in the queue and being submitted daily.
- We have a couple of new, larger-scale Park Event permit requests that we will send to the Facilities, Programs, and Fees Subcommittee for approval in March and May.
- The Community Events team held 3 Street Use Staff Commission meetings in 2024 and is meeting bi-weekly. We have reviewed and approved 31 Street Use permit applications in 2024.
- We are also working on several policy and process updates related to vending in parks, Metro detour guidelines for street use events, First Amendment events, and election year campaign events.

Parks Alive (Debra Alleyne)

NRT Engagement

- This year’s beginning has focused on contacting support networks regarding on-site support for the scheduled events. With the support of the Backbone Team, we have articulated to the NRTs the value they bring as support partners on the days of the events. Together, we plan to clarify each needed role and secure members to fulfill that role in the 2024 events.

Program definition document

- After finalizing the Parks Alive report, it became evident that the program parameters remained undefined. A document that outlines the essence, purpose, and parameters of the program has emerged through a process of distilling meeting notes, policy sources, and targeted conversations with the early adopters of the concept of Parks Alive. This included the program’s pillars and a program matrix that can help clarify the program’s function to departments, partners, supporters, and the community. The Backbone Team will review this document in March.

Organizational partnerships

- This year, we are considering introducing more activities into Parks Alive to help make each event unique. Over the past few months, we have had conversations with local organizations that can both provide co-created entertainment with the community. This was identified as an area of interest in the surveys conducted during the events in 2023. We have partnered with other city departments keen to support introducing arts and placemaking to Parks Alive.

Customer Service (Joanne Austin)

- Due to insufficient snow this winter, cross-country ski permit sales were lower than expected. However, the annual ski permits purchased for 2024 will still be valid until December 31.
- Watercraft storage renewal notifications have been sent out to our current customers, asking them if they intend to renew again. We have taken a proactive approach to reach out well before agreements expire on March 31, which is working well. Many customers have already renewed, and for those who have indicated that they will not return, we can reach out to those on our waitlist.
- Agreement holders for athletics have started making reservations using the RecTrac software by Vermont Systems. This software is the same one we use for our shelter reservations, activity registrations, and point of sale. Once all the agreement holders with priority scheduling have submitted their reservations, we will open the online system for public users to make reservations.

Recreation Services & Aquatics

Winter Recreation (Tracey Hartley)

- The winter season came to an end on February 4, 2024. All site equipment was stored away before spring voting began on February 18, 2024. We are working on the end of season report and conducting end of season evaluations for all staff. Our hope is that many of our staff will continue to work with Parks this spring and summer in various roles.

Aquatics (Shane Martin)

- We have posted job openings for Lifeguards and Aquatic Supervisors, and we are currently conducting interviews to fill these positions. We will continue to hire until our staffing needs are met.
- We have planned pool activities and programming for the entire summer season. Once winter is over, we will ramp up our planning efforts for the summer.
- Our Facility Maintenance & Operations team is currently installing the capital budget purchases that were made for the 2023 season, which include an ice machine, lockers, and guard stands at the Goodman Pool.

Rangers & Volunteers

Rangers (Jason Vroman)

- The Winter operations this year have been shorter than usual, and the Rangers have been actively patrolling the Parks and engaging with visitors who are enjoying the milder weather. However, the weather has also resulted in muddy conditions, leading to additional closures of Disc Golf Courses and Dog Parks, and an increase in park violations. In the first two months of 2024, the Rangers had to contact 118 individuals for enforcement reasons, which is significantly higher than the number of people contacted during a similar timeframe in 2023, which was 60.



- Rangers recently completed a Stop the Bleed training session, which was conducted by the Madison Fire Department in collaboration with UW Health. The objective of the training was to teach the staff how to use life-saving techniques in situations involving severe bleeding trauma. As Rangers have to deal with various situations daily, we aim to expand our training resources and topics each year. This was the first class in collaboration with other city agencies, and we hope to conduct more such training sessions in the future.

Volunteers (John Weichelt)

- With new volunteer support, we had a great Candlelit Hike on Feb 17 at Edna Taylor Conservation Park.



- We have 7 volunteer events planned with Clean Lakes Alliance from April to October, and 3 events with Shabazz High School from March to May.

- The Earth Day Challenge will be on April 20, 2024, and the Dog Park cleanup will be on April 27, 2024.
- The first park clean-up event of 2024 took place on February 26, 2024. A team of 12 people removed litter from Elver Park.



Warner Park Community Recreation Center (Zach Watson)

- The KNOW Program partnership with the Madison Parks Foundation hosted two Late Night Basketball Open Gym events. The first event was held on January 27 and welcomed 87 participants, while the second event was held on February 10 and had 43 participants. These events were organized in partnership with Officer Lu and the MPD CORE program. Apart from basketball, the events also included free food, age-appropriate resources, and free haircuts for the participants.
- The WPCRC hosted 4 MSCR Elementary afterschool basketball games with local schools; Lakeview, Shenk, Lowell, and Mendota. These games were held on Monday, February 19 and 26, and were attended by students and their families who came out to support their teams. The estimated number of attendees per game was between 60 to 70 people.
- On February 25, the WPCRC hosted a community dinner with 47 participants. The MPD North District provided assistance for the event.

Olbrich Botanical Gardens

The Climate Toolkit – Olbrich Botanical Gardens is now an official member of The Climate Toolkit. The Climate Toolkit is a collaborative opportunity for museums, gardens and zoos who want to learn how to **aggressively address climate change** within their own organizations and inspire the communities they serve to follow their lead. The Climate Toolkit's goals are designed to align with both the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals \(as compared here\)](#) and the [Project Drawdown Table of Solutions \(as compared here\)](#). View Olbrich Botanical Garden's profile here: <https://climatetoolkit.org/profile/olbrich-botanical-gardens/> Olbrich Botanical Gardens met the goals for the category of Landscapes and Horticulture. We did this by reducing lawns, utilizing electric garden tools and equipment, and reduction of pesticides and

fertilizers. Olbrich Botanical Gardens will continue to move forward with additional categories such as Water, Waste, and Internal and External Engagement.



Spring in February? – February was a month of orchids, crowds, and spring weather. The uncommon 60–70-degree temperatures and sun brought out the bees and spring blooms. Plants now blooming in the gardens include snowdrops, witchhazels, hellebores, and crocuses.



- **“Olbrich in Orbit”** – NASA isn’t the only group to land on the moon this year. Horticulturists from Olbrich Botanical Gardens are out of this world with this year’s Spring Show “Olbrich in Orbit”. Space travel visits are available from March 2-24, 2024. The cosmic journey includes an interactive space control center, alien mushroom forest, a hanging orbit of plants, and more!

Parks Operations

Conservation:

- Worked on black locust removal at Acewood, hazard tree removal at Knollwood and Owen, and oak woodland restoration at Meadow Ridge, and sowed native seed at Bitzer Family Preserve.
- Staff treated spongy moth egg masses at Glen Oak Hills Park and Garner Park as part of a targeted, multi-City agency coordinated response.
- The Operation Fresh Start crew cleaned up various sites after recent woody invasive species removal work. They completed burning brush piles at Acewood, Owen, Meadow Ridge, and Prairie Ridge.
- Contractors completed several projects this month, including forestry mowing, buckthorn removal, and woody debris removal at Cherokee Marsh Mendota Unit, Cherokee Marsh South Unit, Moraine Woods, Sandburg Woods, and Turville Point.

Construction:

- Hauled fill from Elver to Yahara.
- The Playground Technician has been developing and training new skills for welding plastic playground structures.
- Pruned trees along the perimeter road of Yahara Golf course.

Facilities:

- Performed seasonal closings for ice skating rinks for winter recreation.
- Made signature signs and worked on Park Foundation projects.
- Capital project work including pier rebuild for Law Park Pier, shutter rebuilding, water heater and water softener replacement at Brittingham rowing, and ice maker replacement at Goodman Pool.

General Parks:

- Performed seasonal oak and elm pruning.
- Restoration work at numerous parks including Hill Creek, Garner, Vilas and Marlborough.
- Closed ice rink locations for the season.
- Performed maintenance work on equipment and park amenities.

The Ecology Team:

- Finished clearing the ~7-acre portion of Warner woods that will be contracted out this spring for fire/follow up. This work was done with the help of the public workers, OFS and East Parks staff.
- LMWs finished their three-year-old tree pruning in all parks. They are now working on five-year-old tree prunes.
- Formulating and prioritizing areas to contract restoration work, along with composing contract letters with work schedules and maps for each area.

Mall Concourse:

- Swept and scrubbed sidewalks due to lack of snow.
- Removed holiday décor including BID's snowflake lights.
- Prepared for BRT station installation by removing planters, bike racks and benches.