

## Parks Operations Report

April 2024 – August 2024

Spring and summer in Parks are the busiest seasons for staff. This year above normal rainfall and frequent storms kept park staff citywide busy with constant vegetation growth and storm clean up. The usual routine maintenance was increased with the activity in parks but adding athletic field prep, beach maintenance, shelter cleaning, large projects and garbage collection are all part of our summer routine. Operations also supported community and neighborhood events citywide; these events are part of what makes Madison a great place to live and visit.

### Conservation

The spring 2024 prescribed burn season was very successful, thanks to cooperation within Parks and with the Wisconsin DNR, and support from UW students enrolled in the Prescribed Fire Ecology course at UW Madison. In March and April, a total of 380 acres were burned across 36 units. This included 304 acres burned by staff, 71 acres burned by contractors, and 5 acres burned by volunteers. The most significant of these was perhaps the registered State Natural Area at Cherokee Marsh, which includes 215 acres of City-owned conservation park that were a portion of a larger burn coordinated by DNR and supported by Parks staff. Conditions this spring allowed for very effective burns, that greatly reduced woody species encroachment and leaf litter, resulting in robust native herbaceous growth this summer.



Vigorous native plant communities in areas cleared last winter, then burned this spring at Meadow Ridge.

Parks also provided indirect support to increase the safe and effective use of fire to restore and maintain Midwest natural areas. Staff hosted a prescribed burn workshop for volunteers at Elver Park in April, and the Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council met at the Goodman Maintenance Facility in May for their annual post-season After Action Review.



Prescribed fire workshop at Elver Park.



Much time has been devoted to responding to the severe storm in May, and subsequent storms through the summer. Staff has cleared some 80 downed trees from trails alone in conservation parks and worked to repair damage to trails. In the coming year, several trees will be planted to replace some of the canopy that was lost. Trees will also be planted as part of ongoing restoration efforts, to augment existing tree canopy in areas where it is lacking for various reasons. At Kettle Pond, planting will advance the establishment of a more mature and stable plant community as this property has transitioned from active agriculture to natural area during the last century. At portions of Turville Point and Owen, disease and storm damage have threatened the integrity of the woodlands, and planting additional oaks is warranted.



Extensive canopy disturbance at Knollwood and trail damage from uprooted tree at Owen.



Gully and erosion repair at Owen.

Staff made progress this year in reducing some invasive species that require dedicated, long-term management to control within the context of the surrounding diverse native plant community. Notable achievements include crown vetch and black locust at Owen, reed canary grass at Cherokee Marsh and Edna Taylor, and Himalayan Pokeweed at Turville Point. Areas sprayed this summer will be burned, then seeded this fall to establish native species in place of invasive ones. The parks continue to benefit from past efforts on other difficult to control species, with minimal or greatly reduced populations of Japanese knotweed, hedge parsley and Himalayan pokeweed in specific management units at Cherokee Marsh, Elvehjem, and Owen.

Prescribed grazing continues to be an effective tool for managing our woodlands. Each year, the herbaceous plant community grows more robust as competition from woody invasive species is reduced. Areas grazed for the first time often have a nearly complete lack of any foliage when goats are removed, but units that have been grazed for several seasons now have an abundance of native plants remaining when the herd rotates. Combined with prescribed fire, this tool is helping to achieve and sustain greater diversity and better-quality habitat with greatly reduced use of herbicides per acre.





Typical progression of unit grazed in conjunction with seeding and prescribed fire, various sites.

## **CONSTRUCTION**

This construction season has been a challenge with the frequent heavy rain and thunderstorms. Wet weather work is a reality with Construction however and staff kept busy with numerous tasks. Annual beach maintenance was performed before the season which included the addition of new sand as well as grooming and raking the beaches. Another task performed during wet weather is replenishing wood mulch surfacing at our playgrounds, this was completed at Olive Jones, West Port Meadows, Everglade, Mayfair and Doncaster Parks. As things dried out, Construction staff quickly got to work removing the entire Eastern tennis court at Rennebohm park. Crew assisted in the cleanup of the storm damage that occurred in May by pushing streets open and collecting brush. Richmond Hills Park received a new playground installed by Construction staff.



Richmond Hills Playground



Quann Dog Park bike racks

Staff installed a sandbox at Zook Park near the playground after receiving a request from neighbors. A larger project at Elver park disc golf involved re-positioning holes 2,3 and 4. This required new concrete tee pads and a large retaining wall for a basket location on the hillside. Other concrete installations include pads for 2 new bike racks at Quann Dog Park and donated/memorial bench pads at Wingra, Hoyt, James Madison, Reindahl and Orton Parks. Current work in progress is being done to build out the new nature play area at Olbrich park near the SW shoreline. This includes a new T-swing, play area, two embankment slides and 2 swinging benches. The playground crew continues to keep our 180 playgrounds safe for operation and staff installed a new climber at Oak Park Heights Park. Construction staff continually support other Parks operations with material deliveries such as bunker sand to Golf, Quartzite stone to Olbrich gardens and machine shredded and screened topsoil to the Cemetery as well as the Streets Division.





Zook Park sandbox

## **Facilities**

Facility Maintenance staff performed the necessary tasks for getting the Goodman Pool filled and ready for the season, this requires approximately 800 hours of staff time to complete. Some of these tasks include installing or replacing pool signs, fixing any issues with plumbing in the restrooms, inspecting all pool filters, filling the pool with water, balancing pH and Chlorine levels, and inspecting pumps and pipes for leaks, among others. Along with the pool, the three splash pads at Reindahl Park, Elver Park, and Cypress Spray Park were also inspected and made operational beginning Memorial Day weekend.

Drinking Fountains were de-winterized for the season to provide drinking water for residents and dogs at 201 different locations throughout the City. Two brand new fountains were installed at Quann and Walnut Grove Dog Parks. These fountains have three different features including a drinking fountain, bottle filling station, and a dog drinking fountain all on the same pedestal and are a great improvement for these two dog parks.



Quann Drinking fountain



Olbrich bridge rebuild



An annual task for staff to complete this quarter is the service or replacement of fire extinguishers throughout the park system's buildings. There are 176 fire extinguishers to check to ensure we are in compliance with annual inspections.

There are a few projects to highlight that Facilities staff worked on besides regular work orders. In spring, the employees removed the wooden bleachers that were built on the Duck Blind in the Mallards Baseball Stadium. This removal project was quite extensive and took weeks to complete. The City has acquired the building at 305 S. Bedford Street, the exterior of the building was in poor condition and needed to be painted. An employee used a spider lift to power wash and paint the outside of the building which gave it a nice, fresh appearance. Another building that was repainted was the bathroom building at Bernie's Beach. It was previously very faded and the new paint on the exterior made the building look almost new again. The last project to highlight is one of the carpenters took a few weeks to completely remove and build a new bridge at Olbrich gardens. The bridge was also widened to make two-way traffic easier across the bridge and includes two trap doors to access pumps for the waterfall nearby.



305 Bedford before



305 Bedford after

### General Parks

West Parks spent much of the early summer cleaning up from the May windstorm. Both maintenance staff and arborists spent hundreds of hours cleaning up trees throughout parks on Madison's west side. More than 150 trees in 47 parks were lost and many more severely damaged from the winds and rain. Brush staging areas were created in a number of parking lots for the Parks and Forestry crews in different locations around the city to eliminate travel to the City reduction plant. The Streets division spent weeks chipping the accumulated brush at Warner, Demetral, Garner and Elver Parks.

The early summer storms coincided with extremely rapid grass growth, which made work planning very challenging. Operations staff citywide helped Forest Hill Cemetery prepare for Memorial Day. Mowing, string trimming, pruning and mulching are part of the preparation. It is the busiest day of the year for the cemetery with hundreds of people visiting for graveside services at veteran burial sites.





May storm damage



Forest Hill Memorial Day preparations

Preparing parks and delivering supplies for neighborhood and community events has become a regular part of operations. Parks Alive, Picnic in the Park, Ride the Drive, Opera in the Park, La Fete de Marquette, Great Taste of the Midwest, Juneteenth at Penn Park, Bird and Nature Festival and the Disability Pride Festival are just a handful of events that we supported this summer.



Big Blue Stem meadow



Bear Mound Park

All the rain this year has helped all vegetation grow including native and invasive species. The Ecology Team has kept busy in tier one and two meadows and planting beds controlling invasive species by mechanical, cultural and chemical methods. Volunteer groups have helped with invasive control also including Edgewood students, Clean Lakes Alliance and Wild Warner. Spring tree planting was performed and planting plans for fall tree planting have begun. Numerous beautification projects will be completed this summer and fall, planning and preparation has begun on many including the Lakeside gravel gardens, and an edible landscape at Britta Park.



General Parks has been busy with daily prep on the athletic fields but have also incorporated some longer-term maintenance and improvements to the playing surfaces. A few fields have been top-dressed with sand for a better soil profile and eliminate some of the wash boarding that develops on the playing surface over time. Aeration is happening more often and seem to be on a good track for fertilization and overseeding. The growing conditions have been great with all the rain, so the challenge has been preparation of the fields in wet conditions.

Construction began on a new park shelter and restroom at Country Grove Park. A new Futsal and new basketball court are also being added to the park. The surrounding neighborhood is happy to have the new amenities close by. New shelters are also being constructed at Door Creek and Tenney Beach and are on schedule to be completed this fall. The Warner Beach shelter had some sitting stones placed and arranged in a way to reduce the drift of sand across the asphalt path leading to the shelter. The sand was being deposited into a newly planted pollinator garden which looks amazing and provides a resource for the birds, butterflies, and bees.



Warner Beach pollinator garden



Door Creek Park shelter

Parks is also continuing its commitment to move to more electrical equipment with the purchase of 2 Stihl EV Zero-Turn riding mower. Staff spent the last 2 seasons testing and analyzing different brands before choosing the Stihl brand that we believe will best suit our needs. Parks also converted additional handheld equipment and fleet vehicles to electric versions that have proven to meet operational requirements. This spring we tested a robotic electric mower at the Goodman Pool, after favorable results we decided to purchase a unit that mows the entire inside turf area of the pool.





New electric riding mower



Robotic mower

## Mall Maintenance

Olbrich Gardens assisted Mall staff with the summer annual plants installation, the plants are still looking great at the end of the summer. Mowing, watering, and weeding the downtown landscape areas were performed daily, beautifying the cityscape while using electric landscape equipment to assist the Mall with the maintenance.



Olbrich and Mall staff installing plants



Mall employee painting light post

Hardscape maintenance continued, including power washing, cold-patching sidewalk defects, and daily sidewalk sweeping. The power washing sidewalks program is nearly 80% complete, with most of the Capitol Square and side streets completed. Light pole painting continued throughout the summer months, giving a fresh coat of paint to the lower section of the pedestrian poles. Damaged and old bike racks and benches were also replaced to improve the downtown appearance.

Daily recycling and garbage collection was busy for Mall Maintenance, including prep work and cleanups from numerous downtown events. Events included Maxwell Street Days, Concerts on the Square, Madison Night Market, Art Fair On The Square and the Mad Lit Concert series.