

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT - MAY 2026

COMMUNICATIONS TO BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

Park Superintendent's Monthly Report Summary

As always, our team is working incredibly hard to provide the best possible services to the community. The first week of May is Public Service Appreciation Week. We want to take a moment to express our gratitude to the amazing Madison Parks Team for the incredible efforts they put forth every day to make the park system what it is today. It takes every single one of our employees working in a variety of disciplines, regardless of if they have been here 35 years or it's their first day, to create the ideal park system for all. We celebrated the week with cake, individual notes of kindness to each member of the team and a TeamCity Awards ceremony in which many from our team were recognized for their service. The story of the team's work is highlighted so beautifully in the [Parks Division's 2025 Annual Report](#).

As part of Public Service Appreciation Week, Mayor Rhodes-Conway recognized a number of Parks staff at a ceremony held on May 5. Ranger John Ringwood was recognized for performing life saving measures on an individual in need of attention. Aaron Wilkie, Garden Facilitator at Olbrich Botanical Gardens, was recognized for his constant support, creativity, commitment and hard work that go to making each of the programs at Olbrich successful. Ten additional employees were recognized for their more than 30 years of service (that's more than 300 years of service combined!), as follows:

35 or more years of service:

Tony Young, Central Parks
Shelley Johnson, East Parks
Steve Ranum, Facilities Maintenance
Gregg Gotzion, Central Parks
Spencer Rowe, Mall Maintenance

30 or more years of service

Terry Cork, East Parks
Charlotte Blotz, West Parks
Doug Keene, Central Parks
Laura Bauer, Central Parks
Darren Helgeson, East Parks



Aaron Wilkie with Mayor Rhodes-Conway



Ranger Ringwood with Mayor Rhodes-Conway. Also pictured, Steve Dray and Terrence Thompson

Personnel Updates

Promotions/Hires:

- Joan Nelson was provisionally appointed to Program Assistant 1 at Olbrich Botanical Gardens.

Departures:

- Connor Warren resigned from his position as Parks Maintenance Worker on April 9, 2026.

Section Updates

Community Services Section (Terrence Thompson)

Community Events (Kelly Post)

- We are excited to announce that Lauren Travis has joined the Community Services team as our new Youth Engagement Coordinator. Her first day was April 27, and we are pleased to welcome her experience, enthusiasm, and skills to the team as she begins supporting youth programming and community partnerships at the Goodman Pool and southside communities.
- May is our busiest permitting month for incoming applications and customer inquiries. Staff are communicating daily with event organizers, coordinating logistics across divisions, and processing a high volume of park event permits to ensure activities move forward smoothly.
- As summer events begin to ramp up, staff are working closely with internal divisions and partner agencies to ensure permit details, safety expectations, and operational needs are well understood in advance.

Parks Alive (Debra Alleyne)

2026 Preparations

Refreshments

- For the 2nd year in a row, we have secured 100% donations from the Chocolate Shoppe. They will provide ice cream to all 33 events as our partner.
- Along with securing food trucks for each scheduled date, we will be partnering with Mentoring Positives for pizza for our July Sports & Games month. They are not only a fantastic neighborhood partner but are also dedicated to working with youth in the community and teaching both life and business skills.

Volunteer Software

- Despite some change management challenges, NRT participants can now sign up for shifts through the Get Connected Volunteer Software, which the Parks Volunteer Coordinator manages. This year, we have also opened the program to the public, allowing dedicated, interested volunteers to sign up for shifts. The software provides many features such as confirmation emails, reminders, and simple cancellations. It also offers better security, shielding participant information exclusively from event coordination personnel, and provides liability waivers that protect the city.

Parks Alive Partner Meetings

- Four information sessions were held for existing and new partners and for interested parties to learn more about the genesis of Parks Alive and the concepts behind its programming.

Customer Service (Kevin Goke)

Athletics

- There have been 31 applications for the Qualifying Discounts Program (QDP) so far in 2026. 58% of applicants received the maximum 60% discount; notably, 14 of those 18 applicants are benefiting from the youth discount program phase-out.
- We have seen a surge in youth baseball over the past couple of years; we now have over 50 Little League coaches making reservations for practices, mainly at Elver Park.

Watercraft Storage

- We are continuing to offer spaces to customers on our waitlists; we currently have 381 of our 441 spaces filled for 2026. For the 60 spaces left to fill this year, we have 323 people waiting, with 45 total people waitlisted for a space at Vilas.

Language Access

- Recently, office staff assisted a customer who needed ASL translation, and our staff used the Language Line Insight app to assist! Staff had some technological issues to resolve on the fly, but steps are being taken to smooth out the bumps.

Call Volume

- In 2026, office staff handled 3,887 calls, with 32% of those calls in April.

Recreation Services & Aquatics (Tracey Hartley)

Events

- A total of 28 movies are scheduled for this year.
- There are 14 Learning Series planned for the year.
- Preparations and planning are underway for the signature event, Ride The Drive.

Aquatics

- Preparation for the beaches will begin on Monday, May 18, in anticipation of the opening on Saturday, May 23.
- Splash pads will also open on Saturday, May 23.
- Goodman Pool is fully staffed, featuring 43 lifeguards, 19 aquatic attendants, and a complete Aquatic Management Team.
- A new Pool Scholarship Program will launch in early May, with opportunities for the public to sign up at the Parks office, and dates for registration at Goodman Pool in early June. Please watch the Goodman Pool website and the Parks' social media for updates.
- All patrons visiting Goodman Pool must sign the Behavior Waiver Pool Pass before entry.
- There are still many pre-season training sessions that need to be completed before the pool opens, including Head Lifeguard Trainings, All-Staff Trainings, Waterpark Certifications, Lifeguard Recertifications, and De-escalation training for the Aquatic Management Team.
- Goodman Pool will open on Thursday, June 11, at noon.
- Mr. John Hayes of Goodman Jewelers will sponsor the first 500 youth admissions, allowing them to enter free of charge.

Rangers & Volunteers

Rangers (Steve Dray)

Enforcement Contacts

- Rangers had 39 enforcement contacts in April, resulting in 26 warnings and 13 citations. 18 parking citations were also issued.

Disc Golf

- The Elver disc golf course opened with all-new disc golf baskets. We are one of the first courses in the country to have INNOVA's new basket design. Hiestand disc golf course is scheduled to open within the next week. It is still closed to give the park's ecology team time to complete a project.

Recruitment/Hiring/Training

- Our three new hourly Park Rangers, along with one full-time Ranger, started in early April. All four completed the classroom portion of Ranger Academy. They are all field training with our seasoned full-time Rangers. They are on track to be working solo by Memorial Day weekend.

Volunteers (John Weichelt)

Earth Day Week Volunteer Impact

- Completed a major Earth Day Week volunteer push, with events and service projects supporting parks across the city. Between Earth Day Challenge, weekday corporate groups, community cleanups, invasive removals, and related park projects, April volunteer activity during Earth Week reached a grand total of 925 volunteers. This included both large-scale Saturday (4/25) participation and additional Earth Week service opportunities.

Beach Volunteer Lead Recruitment

- Successfully recruited and began working with beach cleanup leads for Spring Harbor Park, B.B. Clarke Beach Park, Olbrich Park, and Tenney Park Beach. These roles help create a more consistent volunteer presence at high-use beach and shoreline areas during the warmer months.

Volunteer Program Growth and Citywide Momentum

- April was a big month for the volunteer program, with the new volunteer website passing 1,800 registered volunteers in its first year of usage. We are also starting to see more volunteer events happening across the city at the same time, especially on weekends. These included Park Friend projects, shoreline trash cleanups, invasive plant removal, garden support, disc golf course work, beach cleanup leads, and other community-led efforts.

Warner Park Community Recreation Center (Zach Watson)

- Pickleball will launch in the Green Gym with three courts opening on June 1. The hours of operation will be Monday to Friday, from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM. A fitness center membership will be required to participate. We are also working to update RecTrac to offer online pickleball reservations.
- We will be offering Basketball Camps in June, July, and August, with specific dates to be determined. These camps will be conducted with the Warner Park Basketball League, which we anticipate introducing this fall.
- The WPCRC hosted the Bird in Nature Festival on April 26–27, 2026, welcoming over 1,000 community members to this year's event.

Olbrich Botanical Gardens

- *Comprehensive Master Plan*: staff and consultant team refined plan, which will be discussed by the Commission at the May meeting. Staff continued engagement with interested stakeholders.
- *National Travel and Tourism Week*: The Mayor's Office along with Staff from the Gardens, Travel Wisconsin and Destination Madison hosted Governor Evers, his wife and team on Monday, May 4 for a tour of the gardens and facilities in recognition of the role that the Gardens play in local tourism.



- **Garden Highlights:** (By Samantha Peckham) Check out the gardens if you are looking for blooms. The Outdoor gardens are in full bloom, including:
 - Crabapples (*Malus* spp.) are blooming throughout the gardens in many colors
 - Late daffodils (*Narcissus* spp.) are blooming along Butterfly Lane, the Meadow, The Moonlight Meadow, and the Long Walk, along with a few other spots in the Gardens.
 - Tulips (*Tulipa* spp.) are blooming in the Herb Garden Courtyard, Moonlight Meadow, Sunken Garden, and other areas.
 - Spring ephemerals like Trillium (*Trillium* spp.), Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*), Mayapples (*Podophyllum peltatum*), and Hepatica (*Hepatica* spp.) are blooming throughout the Woodland Garden and along the path into the Thai Garden.
 - Shooting Stars (*Dodecatheon meadia*) are blooming in the Prairie Dropseed Meadow in the Perennial Garden
 - Lilacs (*Syringa* spp.) are blooming along Sugar Ave.

Planning and Development (Adam Kaniewski)

Parks Capital Projects - Design

- A public meeting was held on April 30 for the [Odana Hills Golf Course and Park renovation project](#). The plan is included as an information item on this BPC agenda and is anticipated to be brought forward for potential adoption by BPC in June.
- The Sasaki design team continues to advance construction documents for the SkyLine – the initial phase of shoreline improvements for the [Madison LakeWay](#). The project is nearing the 65% design milestone, with public works bidding anticipated to occur this fall. P&D staff are working closely with the consultant team and various City agencies to finalize the construction details.
 - To support public art selection, City Planning organized an ad hoc committee that has reviewed over 60 art qualification submissions. The committee will identify 4-5 applicants to visit the site and discuss their proposals specific to the project. P&D staff have participated in the art selection committee meetings to answer questions as needed. Staff have also attended fundraising events held by the LakeWay Partners to provide project updates and information.
- Staff and the consultant team have begun narrowing down design options for the reimagined [Cypress Spray Park](#). A public input meeting was held on April 20. The goal for start of construction is fall of 2026.
- P&D staff is coordinating with Parks-Facilities staff and Engineering-Facilities staff on roof replacements for the Vilas Shelter and Olin Park Pavillion in 2026.
- Design and community engagement for the next round of playground replacements continues for [Orton Park](#), [James Madison Park](#), [Marshall Park](#), [Heifetz Park](#), and [Newbery Park](#). Construction is anticipated to begin in either fall of 2026 or spring of 2027.
- Work is underway on the design of Madison Parks fifth inclusive playground, to be located at Reindahl Park. A public input meeting on the design will be held in May. Construction is anticipated to begin in either fall of 2026 or spring of 2027, after the new Imagination Center at Reindahl Park is completed.
- Progress is being made on numerous aspects of the Olbrich Park – North Parcel project. Staff are currently moving forward with numerous design and planning components for the project including a land division and re-zoning application, easement and access agreements, WEDC Brownfields Grant application, adjustment to the City landmarks and National Register of Historic Places boundary, and an RFP for consultant design services.

- Responses to an RFP for the design of the [Warner Park Southeast Recreation Area](#) were reviewed by a panel of staff who selected KL Engineering. The contract for design services is expected to be executed in May, with design work beginning thereafter.
- Construction documents are being prepared by staff for 2026 sport court crack filling and resurfacings.
- Preliminary design and coordination is underway for the following projects: Haen Family Park Sun Shelter Replacement, Paunack Park Sun Shelter Replacement, Garner Park Parking Lot Reconstruction, Garner Park Pickleball Courts, Rennebohm Park Accessible Parking, Owen Park Driveway Reconstruction, Manchester Park Path Connection, Marshall Park Boat Launch Reconstruction and Dredging, Carpenter-Ridgeway Singletrack, Edgewood Pleasure Drive Fencing,

Parks Capital Projects - Construction

- Demolition of the single-family house located at 354 E Lakeside St. is complete. Staff are working on contract close-out procedures.
- Replacement of the [artificial turf at Breese Stevens Field](#) is complete. Staff are working on contract close-out procedures.
- Replacement of the [Olin Park Pedestrian Bridge](#) was completed on May 4. Staff are working on contract close-out procedures.
- The [Kennedy](#) Park playground replacement construction is nearing completion and construction has begun on the [Sandburg](#) Park playground replacement. The replacement of playgrounds at [Ontario](#) Park and [Skyview](#) Park will follow. Construction of all four playgrounds is expected to be complete by August 14.
- The new pump station at Yahara Hills Golf Course is now functional. Staff are working through punch list items with the contractor prior to contract close out.
- Construction of the [Warner Park Pickleball](#) Courts and [Worthington Park Futsal](#) Court is expected to begin in May.
- The Yahara Hills Golf Course Well Transfer Pipe project is expected to begin construction in May.
- The [Hoyt Park Parking Lot Reconstruction](#) project is expected to begin construction in mid-May.
- Installation of [Beach Accessibility Improvements](#) at Esther Beach, Warner Beach, and Tenney Beach are expected to begin during May. This project was made possible by the Madison Parks Foundation.
- Bids for the [Country Grove Park Singletrack](#) project are expected to be received on May 21. Construction is not anticipated to occur until 2027.
- Bids for the Yahara Hills Golf Course Cart Paths project are expected to be received on May 21.
- The park improvement project at [Kenneth Newville Park](#) has been approved for bidding. Bids are expected to be received in June.

- The [James Madison Park – Lincoln School retaining wall replacement](#) project is expected to receive approvals for bidding in May, and to receive bids in June. The schedule of this project has been accelerated due to the deteriorating condition of the existing retaining wall.

Park Planning

- Staff have been holding a series of Public Input Meetings to receive input for Park Development Plans for the 50 neighborhood and mini parks in the [southeast](#) and [southwest](#) areas. Meetings are being held by Alder District. Meetings have been held five out of six Alder Districts so far. Staff are working to develop draft plans for the parks that have received input so far.
- The first public input meeting for the [Park Development Plan for Hartmeyer-Roth Park](#) was held on April 14. A community survey is currently available to provide additional input. A second public input meeting is expected to be held in late-May.
- Staff have continued work to engage with a Geomorphologist consultant to perform work in accordance with the Vilas Park Cultural Resources Report.

Development Review / Park Impact Fees

- A consultant has been selected to provide services to update the Needs Assessment, which was last updated in 2016. This work is expected to take place throughout the remainder of 2026 and into early 2027.
- In the month of April staff completed reviews of 10 development projects and coordinated and processed 23 separate Park Impact Fee payments totaling about \$975,000. Staff also coordinated a Bond executed for deferred impact fees of about \$950,000.
- Staff have been coordinating with the developer of the Starkweather Plat regarding potential grading activities on park land.

Park Operations (Chad Hughes)

Central

- Performed picnic table repairs and placed tables in parks.
- Cleaned shelters in preparation of parks opening to reservations on April 25th.
- Completed brush clearing projects along Wingra Creek, Vilas Shoreline and Thut Park.

Ecology Team

- Finished a great spring burn season with multiple sites burned and seeded
- Ordered trees and plants for spring planting season

Conservation

- Conducted prescribed burns
- Oiled eggs to control local breeding population of Canada Geese.
- Hosted volunteer workday with Clean Lakes Alliance at Cherokee Marsh – South

Construction

- Finished cleaning out all the materials and equipment stored at Wild Waters.
- Started the construction projects at Yahara Golf Course.
- Cleaned up storm damaged playground at Ocean Park.
- Performed playground inspections, maintenance and repairs.

East

- Finished painting garbage cans and placing them back in parks.
- Deep cleaning of shelters including pressure washing before reopening on April 25th.
- Finished pruning the remainder of oaks and elms planned before the cutoff date.

Facilities

- Started the process of de-winterizing shelters and water amenities.
- Installed boat and fishing piers at numerous locations.
- Performed Brittingham Row House Door repairs.

Mall

- Spring flowers planted (pansies and kale) in the service area.
- Downtown Visitor Center booth installed for the season—W. Main Street location.
- Turf maintenance (aerating, overseeding, purple cow compost, fertilizing), including a large overseeding project on W. Washington Ave.

West

- Marked athletic fields and attended training by the athletic lead worker.
- Pulled and put away snow stakes, hockey boards, shelter sides until next season.
- Blew leaves and debris out tennis courts, inspected nets and basketball hoops.
- Performed turf and parking lot edge clean up and repair from winter plow damage.