



**MADISON
PARKS**

Alcohol Policies in City of Madison Parks

Project Outline – Review of Policies regarding Alcohol in City of Madison Parks

- BPC requested a review of MGO 8.24 regarding alcohol in parks
- Current ordinance has been continually amended over the years
- New parks have been added to the prohibited parks list since 1993 (32 years)
- There is currently no clear path for parks to be removed from the list

Goals

Focus on a system that promotes public safety and can be effectively regulated

Ensure the policy can be easily understood by park users

Emphasize equity

Uphold the enjoyment of all park users

Plan of Action

Research: History, Current Policy, Enforcement

Review: Health-related data

Ensure: Use RESJI Lens – Equity Analysis

Review: Policies of other municipalities

Current Alcohol Ordinances

Consumption of alcohol in Madison parks is allowed, except for designated alcohol-free parks.

No possession of alcohol in parks after 10 p.m.

Open containers of alcohol prohibited in parking lots

Glass containers prohibited

Consumption and sale of alcohol is permitted in Madison parks, including alcohol-free parks, with the proper permit.

Alcohol Prohibited Parks

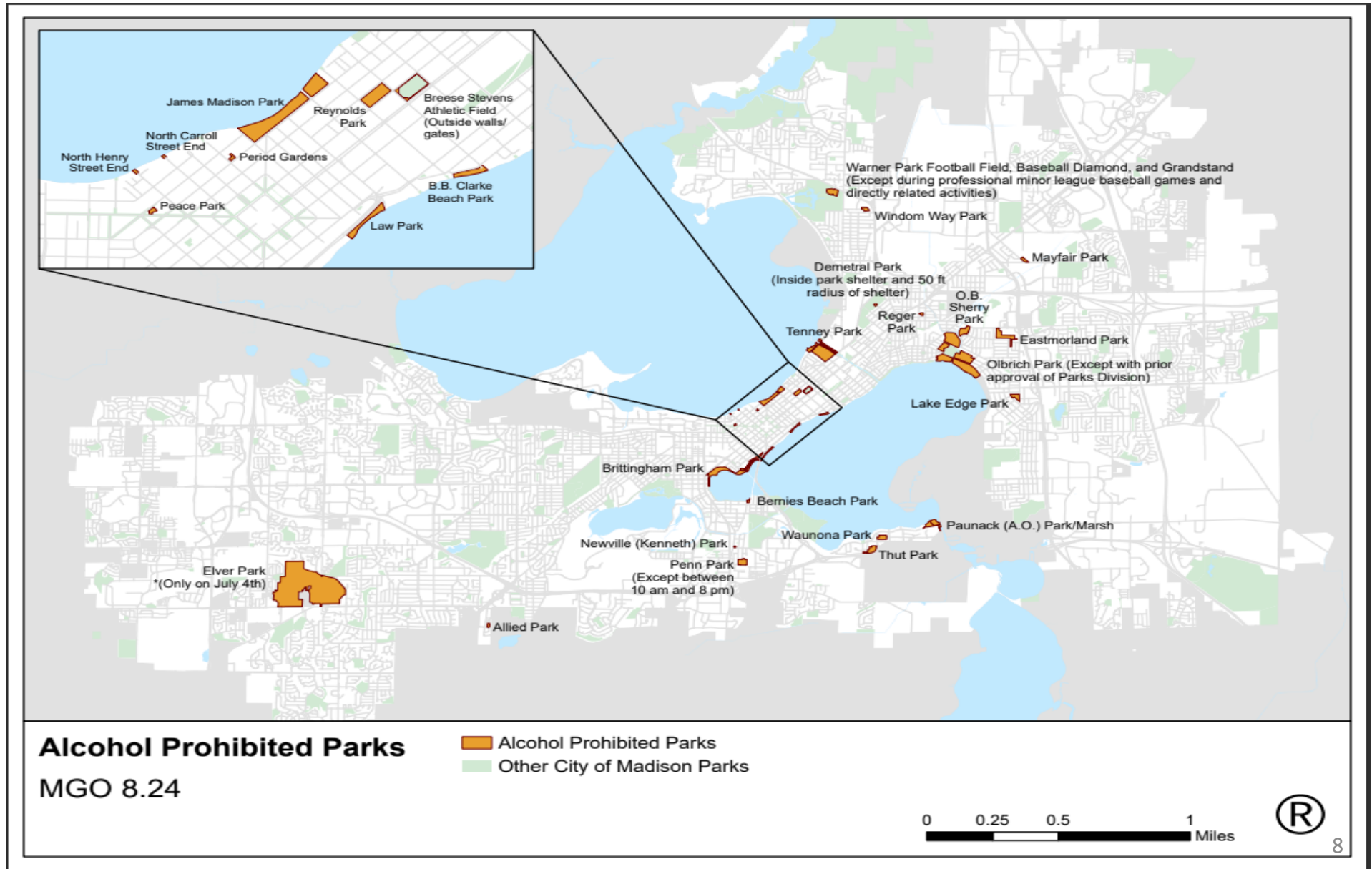
30 parks have alcohol prohibitions

Exceptions at some alcohol-free parks include:

- "Duly designated and cordoned off areas specifically set aside for the consumption of alcohol beverages"
- Authorized by lease (e.g., Warner Ball Park, Olbrich Biergarten)
- Authorized by permit (e.g., shelter reservation, community event)

Alcohol Prohibited Parks

- Allied Park
- B.B. Clarke Beach
- Bernie's Beach
- Breese Stevens Field (except w/in the walled and gated portions)
- Brittingham Park
- Demetral Park shelter and a fifty (50) foot radius
- Eastmorland Park
- Elizabeth Link Peace Park
- Elver Park on July 4
- James Madison Park
- Lake Edge Park
- Law Park
- Mayfair Park
- Newville Park
- Olbrich Park during the Atwood Community Center's Summerfest Celebration
- Olbrich Park, except for the Olbrich Botanical Gardens
- Olin/Turville Park when the Park Commission approves any special event which includes areas specifically set aside for the consumption of alcohol beverages, except in those areas.
- Paunack Park and Paunack Marsh
- Penn Park
- Period Garden Park
- Reger Park
- Reynolds Park and the Well 24 property
- Sherry (O.B.) Park
- Tenney Park
- The public right away that extends from North Carroll Street to Lake Mendota.
- Thut Park
- Warner Park football field, the baseball diamond and the grandstand
- Warner Park on the day of the Rhythm and Booms celebration
- Waunona Park
- Windom Way Park



Permitting – Private Events

Alcohol Prohibited Parks

- Cannot sell alcohol; serve alcohol only
- with shelter reservation: \$55 beer/wine permit
- without shelter reservation need an Open Space Permit: \$150 total fees
 - \$60 app fee
 - \$35 reservation fee
 - \$55 beer/wine permit

Alcohol Allowed Parks

- Cannot sell alcohol; serve alcohol only
- with shelter reservation: no permit needed
- without shelter reservation: no permit needed

Permitting – Public Events

Alcohol Prohibited Parks

- Park Event permit-required:
 - serving only: \$55 beer/wine permit
 - selling alcohol: \$55 beer/wine permit + \$700 beer selling permit
 - Temp B Picnic License required for serving or selling
 - MPD staffing required for serving or selling

Alcohol Allowed Parks

- Park Event permit-required:
 - Serving only: no additional permit fees
 - Selling alcohol: \$700 beer/wine permit only
 - Temp B Picnic License required for serving or selling
 - MPD staffing required for serving or selling

Enforcement of Alcohol Violations in Parks

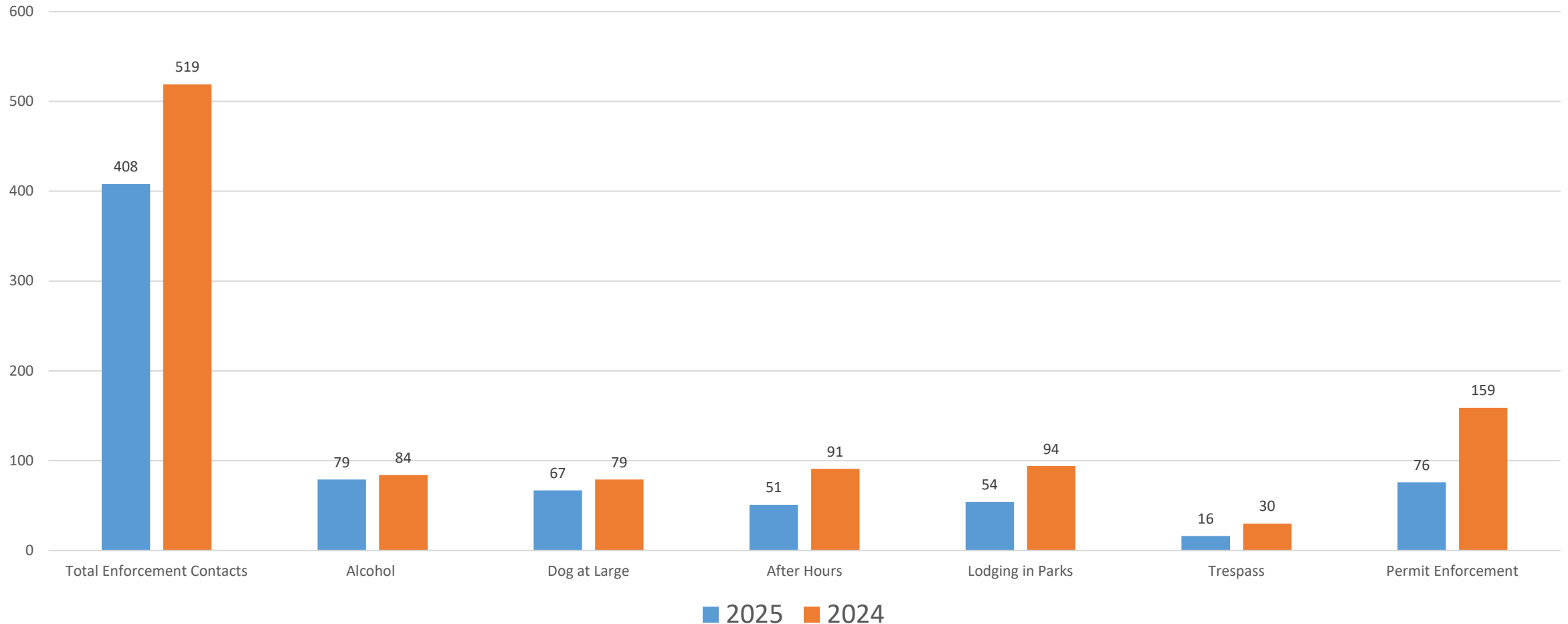
- Park Rangers responsible for addressing alcohol violations in parks with warning, citation, or ban
- Madison Police may also enforce in parks



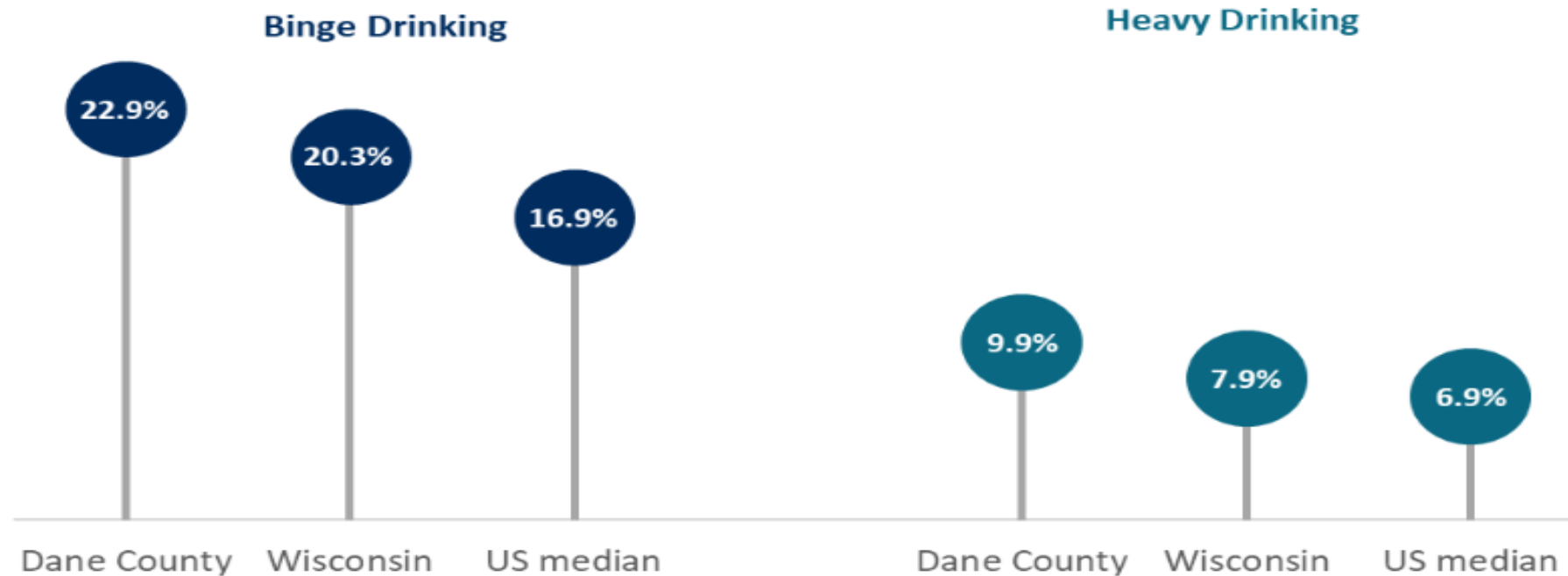
Enforcement Contacts by Park Rangers

Type of Enforcement	YTD 2025	2024		YTD 2025	2024
Total Enforcement Contacts	408	519		408	519
Alcohol	79	84		19%	16%
Dog at Large	67	79		16%	15%
After Hours	51	91		13%	18%
Lodging in Parks	54	94		13%	18%
Trespass	16	30		4%	6%
Permit Enforcement	76	159		19%	31%

Enforcement Contacts by Park Rangers

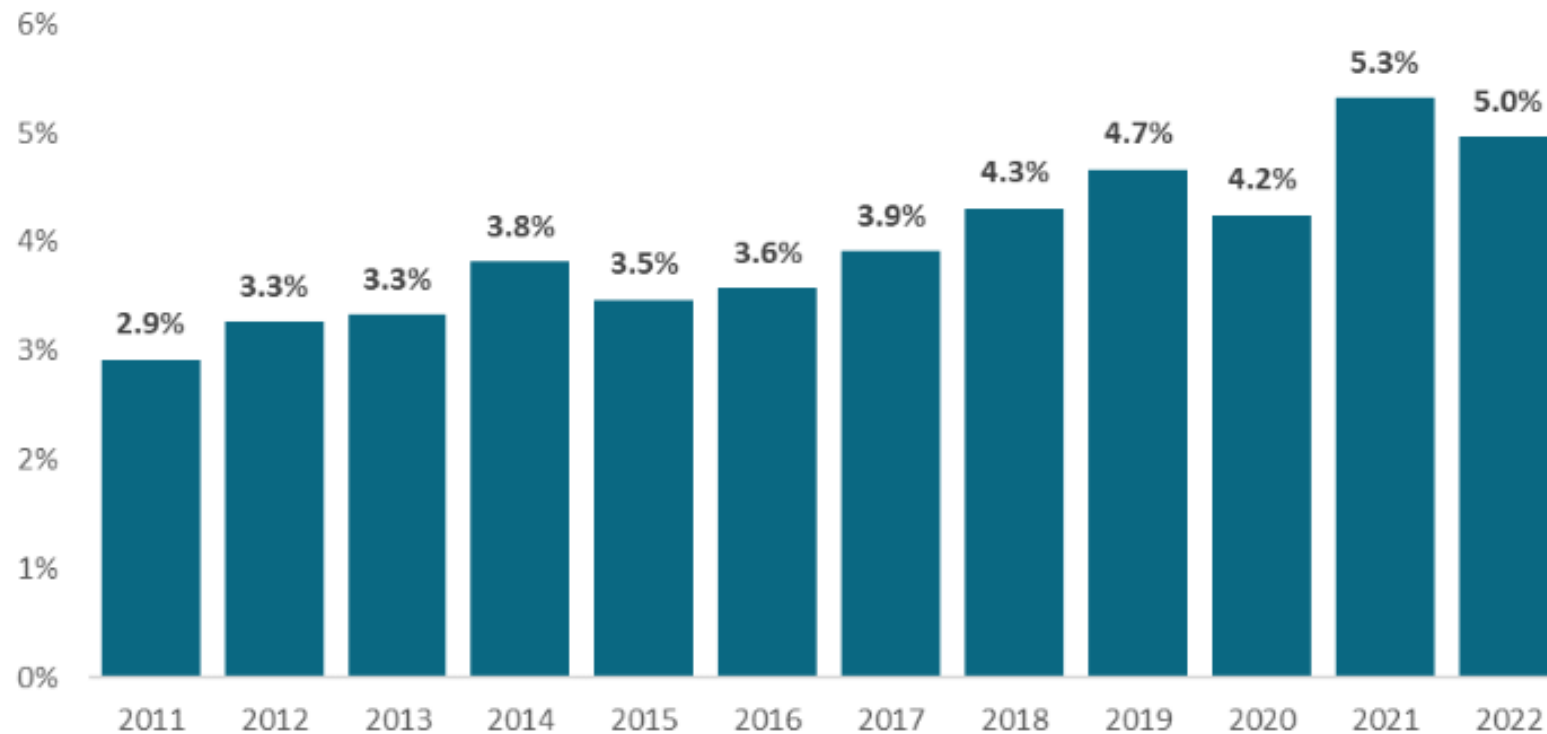


Health-Related Data



Data sources: Binge Drinking :Wisconsin Department of Health Services, DHS Interactive Dashboards, Alcohol Adult Consumption Module [web query]. Heavy Drinking: Wisconsin Interactive Statistics on Health, BRFSS Module (Dane County and Wisconsin); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (US).

In Dane County, the percentage of all deaths with alcohol as a contributing factor rose from 2.9% in 2011 to 5% in 2022.



Data source: Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Office of Vital Records

Equity Analysis

Finding	Finding	Finding	Finding
Potential impacts on unhoused folks if alcohol is not allowed in parks	Potential impacts on individuals uncomfortable around alcohol if alcohol is allowed in all parks	Potential financial barriers for low income if requiring permit/reservation for alcohol	Potential for increase in negative behavior due to overconsumption of alcohol

What Are Other Larger WI Municipalities Doing?

Milwaukee, WI

- Alcohol not allowed in parks. Shelter reservations include an alcohol permit. Consumption also allowed at licensed vendors throughout the park system.

Dane County, WI

- Alcohol allowed in parks. Groups of 25 or more require a “beverage permit”. No glass on beaches.

WI State Parks

- Alcohol is allowed in most state parks with the exception of a few parks and amenities.

Green Bay, WI

- Alcohol is not allowed in parks. Shelter reservations at *some* parks allow purchase of an alcohol permit.

Smaller, Local Municipalities

Fitchburg, WI

- Alcohol is allowed in approximately half of the city parks. Any sales require permitting.

Middleton, WI

- Alcohol is allowed in parks with the exception of Fireman's Park. Events require permits. No glass allowed.

Monona, WI

- Alcohol is allowed in most parks. Events require permits. No glass containers

Sun Prairie, WI

- Alcohol is allowed in parks. No glass containers

Similar Size Municipalities Across the Country

Charlotte, NC

- Alcohol prohibited in parks unless allowed by permit or specific program

Austin, TX

- Special permit required for alcohol sales/consumption at events; without a permit, alcohol in parks is not allowed

Pittsburgh, PA

- Alcohol is not allowed except by permit.

Cincinnati, OH

- Sales/consumption of alcohol in parks is prohibited unless authorized by the Park Board via permit

More Similar Size Municipalities Across the Country...

Louisville, KY

- Louisville Metro parks prohibit alcohol; alcohol at parks requires approval from Parks & Recreation Director or specific licensing.

Buffalo, NY

- City code broadly prohibits drinking in public places (including parks) except for licensed/permitted events

Fort Wayne, IN

- City ordinance prohibits bringing/consuming alcohol in parks unless specifically exempted; Fort Wayne lists specific parks/facilities where alcohol is allowed by policy/permit

Similar Sized Municipalities Continued...

Cleveland, OH

- Cleveland's municipal code prohibits open containers in public places including parks; liquor-law enforcement policy explicitly cites park prohibitions

Minneapolis, MN

- Alcohol not allowed in parks unless it is served at a Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board eatery licensed to serve alcohol, or you have a special use permit.

Three Potential Recommendations

Prohibit

Prohibit Alcohol
in all City Parks -
with certain
exceptions

Allow

Allow Alcohol in
all City Parks

Allow w/
Dry Parks

Allow Alcohol in
most City Parks
with certain “dry
parks”

Prohibit alcohol in all city parks

Amend City ordinance to prohibit alcohol with certain exceptions

Examples:

- Alcohol permit may be purchased with shelter reservation or event permit
- Disc golf permit include alcohol permit
- Contracted partners may be allowed to sell alcohol per terms of their agreement (Mallards, Biergarten, Breese Stevens, etc.)
- Golf courses allowed to sell alcohol

Prohibit alcohol in all city parks - Pros & Cons

- Pros

- Clear & Consistent policy throughout parks system
- Maintains parks as welcoming spaces for children/families
- Promotes wellness/public health goals via more controlled or monitored consumption
- Provides safe environment for all users, especially those in recovery, uncomfortable around alcohol, etc.
- Reduces risk of negative alcohol-related behavior

- Cons

- Limits available locations for unhoused individuals to consume alcohol
- Potential impact on resources (enforcement ability)
- Lower income park users potentially impacted
- May restrict casual gatherings that include social drinking
- Potential financial impacts with increased fees

Allow alcohol in all city parks

Amend City ordinance to allow alcohol in city parks with certain exceptions

Examples

- Require permit for alcohol at large events
- No alcohol sales w/o permit
- No glass containers
- No alcohol in parking lots
- Update city ordinances to allow Park Rangers to address unwanted behavior

Allow alcohol in all city parks - Pros & Cons

- Pros

- Consistent policy throughout parks system
- Clear, easily understood policy
- Consistent with culture of social consumption of alcohol
- Little to no impact on low-income park users

- Cons

- Potential for overconsumption leading to unwanted behavior
- Potentially impacts those in recovery, uncomfortable around alcohol, etc.
- May conflict with public health goals of promoting wellness

Allow alcohol in most city parks with certain “dry” parks

Amend city ordinance to prohibit alcohol in certain parks

Examples:

- The parks system sets aside certain parks where alcohol is prohibited
- Park users may purchase an alcohol permit with a shelter reservation in an alcohol prohibited park
- Certain parks or types of parks and locations within parks will be set as alcohol prohibited (conservation parks, forest hill cemetery, Vilas Zoo, etc.)
- Parks are added or removed from the list through a process.
- No glass containers, No alcohol in parking lots

Allow alcohol in most city parks with certain “dry” parks

Pros & Cons

- Pros

- Provides “safe space” for those who do not want to or cannot be around alcohol
- Allows flexibility when there are alcohol-related problems in parks
- Consistent with culture of social consumption of alcohol
- Little to no impact on low-income park users

- Cons

- Potential for overconsumption leading to unwanted behavior
- Can be unclear/confusing for park users
- Can appear inequitable for neighbors surrounding alcohol prohibited parks
- Problems may re-appear at next park down the road



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