Accomplishments Since 2018

The 2018 to 2023 Park and Open Space Plan provided twelve strategies for the Parks Division to pursue. The strategies reflected the values, opportunities and concerns identified in the previous planning process. They have provided an excellent guide for staff, Board of Park Commissioners and various subcommittees as day-to-day decisions are made to improve the park system. This section provides an overview of accomplishments related to each of the twelve strategies.

Strategy: Improve public access to lakes

Since 2018, the City of Madison Parks Division has implemented several measures to enhance public access to the city's lakes. These efforts include:

- Acquisition of multiple separate lake shore properties, including the parcel and the new Parks Administration building at 330 East Lakeside, 346 and 354 Lakeside Street, and 16 Lakeshore Court.
- Installation of two beach mats, one at Bernie's Beach and another at Vilas Park Beach, to improve accessibility, in partnership with Madison Parks Foundation.
- Installation of two ADA-compliant fishing piers, one at Vilas and another at the Warner lagoon near the main shelter, in partnership with the Madison Parks Foundation.
- Construction of new beach shelters with restrooms and sheltered picnic table area at Tenney Park and Warner Park.

Strategy: Design park facilities to accommodate diverse activities and populations

Since the Parks Division set this strategy in 2018 many projects have led to improvements that can serve very diverse uses and populations. Some examples are as follows:

- Collaboration with the cricket community to add a full-size cricket field at Elver Park and to improve the practice field used by the women’s league at Haen Family Park.
- Installation of gaga ball pits to three locations, Penn Park and Olbrich Park and Olive Jones Park in partnership with Randall School.
- Incorporation of dual striping on sport courts to allow both tennis and pickleball when courts are resurfaced.
- Construction of recreational biking facilities and features at Aldo Leopold, Sycamore and Sandburg Parks.
- Renovation of The Glen Golf Park and subsequent creation of The Glen Golf Park Programming Plan to accommodate mixed use recreation at the golf course.
- Construction of the first futsal court in the system at Penn Park, with more planned in the future.
- Collaboration with organizers from Disability Pride, Madtown Mommas and Disability Advocates to review sprayground and inclusive playground proposals, as well as on-street handicapped parking layouts.

Strategy: Protect and enhance natural and cultural resources

Over the past decade, Madison Parks has continued ongoing preservation and maintenance of parkland and has shifted more resources towards the management of natural areas within parks. Examples of this work include:

- Creation of the Conservation Technician Trainee position in the 2022 Operating Budget.
- Reallocation of Parks resources to create the Parks Ecology Team in 2022, consisting of five staff dedicated working in community, neighborhood, and mini parks with a focus on improving and maintaining natural areas in the system to create a more sustainable and climate-resilient landscape.
- Investment of $1 Million of capital improvement funds into Madison's Conservation Parks over the past five years to restore and maintain sensitive habitats.
- Historic Preservation efforts at facilities such as Breese Stevens Field, Gates of Heaven, Brittingham Boat House, Hoover Boat House, Normal Hall.
- Historic Preservation of landscapes such as Tenney Park, Hoyt Park, and Forest Hill Cemetery.
- Adoption of the Burial Mound Policy by the Board of Parks Commissioners in 2019, which was updated under the guidance of representatives of the Ho-Chunk nation and provides procedures and guidelines to assure that the mounds are treated with the utmost respect and responsibly managed in a manner that protects the integrity of the mounds.

Strategy: Acquire parkland to reduce parkland deficiencies and address increasing population density

Since 2018, the Parks Division has acquired a total of 245 acres of land to address parkland deficiencies and address increasing population density city-wide.

- Acquisition of east side parkland, including expansion of OB Sherry and Zeier Park.
- Acquisition of north side parkland, including Hartmeyer Roth Park, Tilton Park, and Whitetail Ridge Expansion.
- Acquisition of south side parkland, including a portion of 1802 and 1804 South Park Street for a new park, and 330 East Lakeside Street, along with three residential properties, for the expansion of Olin Park.
- Acquisition of west side parkland, including Moraine Woods and 7250 Mid Town Road for the expansion of Elver Park.
- Acquisition of downtown parkland located at 305 S. Bedford Street for the expansion of Brittingham Park.
- Reclassification and redevelopment of two downtown City owned properties to parks to address parkland deficiencies in the downtown. Properties include the Madison Senior Center Courtyard located at 333 W. Dayton Street, completed in 2024. The Crowley Station Water Utility Surface located at East Wilson Street and South Hancock Street became Lakefront Porch Park in 2023.
- Dedication of multiple parks city-wide to address increasing populations with new developments, including Kestrel, Eagle Trace, and Canter Parks.

- Attachment of three former Town of Madison Parks, including Fraust Park, Heifetz Park, and Harvey Schmidt Park.
- Disposal of 231.55 acres of parkland to address broader public needs, including a portion of Yahara Hills Golf Course to Dane County for purposes of Landfill expansion (231.28 acres) and Hughes Park for redevelopment of Centro Hispano (.27 acres).

Strategy: Ensure that new park development occurs in a fiscally sustainable way

The Madison Parks system continues to grow and develop. As this happens, the Parks Division has worked to adapt to changing recreational trends while utilizing existing park infrastructure and leveraging strategic partnerships.

- Reconstruction of The Glen Golf Park through a Donation and Development agreement, utilizing private funding and resources to create a high-quality golfing experience and expansion of types of uses of the Golf Park.
- Utilization of plastic tiles as a surfacing solution for courts with damaged pavement to extend the life of individual courts at lower cost options.
- Volunteer-led construction of "All-Wheel Spots" on underutilized paved areas to address needs of the skateboarding community and beyond.
- Reinvestment of land sale proceeds at Yahara Hills Golf Course to support the capital needs of the Golf Enterprise Program.
- Redevelopment of the Crowley Water Utility Surface to Lakefront Porch Park through a Donation and Development agreement, utilizing private funding to enhance the decking, community garden planters, furniture, and overall welcoming feel of the space.
- Development and establishment of a Cooperative Agreement with the Madison LakeWay Partners who will be the primary philanthropic partner for the Madison LakeWay.

Strategy: Ensure that existing levels of service are maintained and supported through the park system and are increased as new parks and facilities are developed.

- Adherence to the benchmark of 95% of Madison residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, and through careful planning, Parks is maintaining that standard as new neighborhoods are built.
- Madison Parks has continued to stay on-track with a playground renewal program. The program sets out to ensure that Madison Parks playgrounds are no more than 25 years old.

Strategy: Create equitable access and funding for parks.

Implementation of the Parks Division's Equity Action Plan has been and will continue to be a priority for Madison Parks. The Parks Division has created work groups that focus on four key areas: Health and Safety; Public Participation; Strategic Plansand Budgets; Employment; and Training and Learning . Key accomplishments in this area since 2018 include:

- Implementation and growth of the Parks Alive program that focuses on community building and connection in the city's most underrepresented communities.
- Sustained growth of the Kids Need Opportunities at Warner (KNOW) Program in partnership with Madison Parks Foundation to create positive experiences for the community's north-side youth.

- Continuation of the Goodman Pool Scholarship program in partnership with the Goodman Foundation and Madison Parks Foundation to reduce barriers to entry.
- Growth and evolution of the Parks Worker Program and other green career pathways to reduce barriers for entry into the workforce.
- Utilization of the Equitable Hiring Tool in many recruitments in efforts to diversify the workforce.
- Utilization of the City's Equity Analysis tool on major programs, projects, and policies.

Strategy: Improve the park system's capacity to withstand future environmental changes

The planning and maintenance approach of the Parks Division has evolved over the last decade to significantly improve the climate resiliency of the current and future park system. Key examples of this work are as follows:

- Adoption of the updated Land Management Plan in 2023, which specifically addresses strategies to adapt operations to climate change, proactively manage the urban forest, and increase resilience of natural areas.
- Creation of the Parks Ecology Team, which leads the effort to diversify park natural areas, landscape beds, and urban forest canopy.
- Increased use of existing alternative land management practices, including prescribed burning, prescribed grazing, and the flea beetle predator pilot program.
- Collaboration with City Forestry and residents on spongy moth control during the latest population peak during 2023.
- Modification of winter recreation facilities such as the use of "Nice Rink" style ice skating rinks. This technology is intended to reduce water consumption and lessen the impacts of temperature fluctuations on the skating program.
- Increased use of green infrastructure in construction to reduce carbon footprint and mitigate watershed impacts. This includes following the LEED design principles, such as energy-conscious mechanical controls, use of solar panels, and conversion to LED lights.
- Focused conversion of fossil-fuel equipment to electric where possible. Park has added over 100 pieces of electric handheld equipment since 2018. Parks also has 21 EV Fleet vehicles including trucks, cars, riding lawn mowers, forklifts and UTVs.

Strategy: Increase connectivity between parks to enhance access

Connection between parks is critical to healthy neighborhoods. Since 2018, the Parks Division has increased the connectivity between parks across the city in the following ways:

- Madison Bicycle Adventure Trail plan was completed to provide a feasible way to connect parks across the city using existing bicycle infrastructure and park and open spaces. Recent accomplishments include new biking facilities in Aldo Leopold Park, Cannonball bike path, and Sycamore Park.
- Starkweather Creek Bike path connects OB Sherry Park with Olbrich Park, and will serve to connect Starkweather Park in the future.
- Construction of the Autumn Ridge Bike path for connectivity on the east side, including Heistand Park.

Strategy: Develop a healthy and diverse urban tree canopy within parks

Madison Parks has worked to improve urban tree canopy within parks through a variety of strategies as follows:

- Investment in Treekeeper tree inventory software in partnership with City Forestry, which now provides records of the species and number of trees in the park system. Work continues to inventory trees on all park properties.
- Acquisition of properties with healthy, mature canopies, including more than 50 acres of mature forest land. This includes the addition of 20 acres of woods to Whitetail Ridge and another 20 acres at Moraine Woods.
- Implementation of the woodland tier system and initial broadscale restoration efforts based on the adopted 2023 Land Management Plan.

Strategy: Increase engagement with groups and organizations and develop new ones

In recent years, the Parks Division has grown its partnership base considerably.

- The Parks Alive program is possible due to the collaboration and participation of a variety of City agencies, including the Department of Civil Rights, the Neighborhood Resource Teams, Community Development Division, Public Health Madison Dane County, and more. Parks Alive is building relationships and capacity of neighborhood residents to take leadership in developing Parks Alive events.

- The Madison LakeWay Partners, formerly the Friends of Nolen Waterfront, were established and grew to support the Design Competition and development of the Lake Monona Waterfront Master Plan. The Madison LakeWay Partners is a new affiliate organization of the City with the mission of supporting the Madison LakeWay redevelopment of the Lake Monona shoreline.
- Ride the Drive returned in 2024. This event was reimagined and planned with a Community Steering Committee that was comprised of various City agencies and community partners, such as the Madison Parks Foundation, Madison Bikes, Madison Boats, MSCR, Public Health Madison Dane County, Community Development Division, and the Madison Sports Commission.
- Worked collaboratively with the Madison Public Library and Engineering Division to design the Imagination Center at Reindahl Park.
- Worked with community organizations and small businesses to expand programming at the Glen Golf Park.
- Established a new partnership with the Black Men Coalition of Dane County to bring baseball to Elver Park.
- Renegotiated the agreement with Madison Mallards to bring the Madison Night Mares, a women's collegiate softball team, to Warner Ball Park in 2024. The agreement included the installation a new turf infield at the Warner Ball Park, with no initial capital investment from the City.
- Renegotiated the Cooperative Agreement with the Madison Parks Foundation, building on the strong partnership and establishing stronger communication and collaboration between the Parks Division, the Madison Parks Foundation, and the Board of Park Commissioners.

Strategy: Pursue regional solutions to regional issues

- Communication and collaboration with Dane County and State of WI officials during several emergency response situations, including 2018 Floods and COVID-19 Pandemic response.

- Collaboration with Dane County, Town of Verona, City of Verona and Ice Age Trail Alliance to purchase Moraine Woods expansion and explore additional acquisitions for Ice Age Trail Connection.
- Collaboration with Dane County to sell a portion of Yahara Hills Golf Course for use as landfill expansion and proposed sustainability campus that will serve the future waste management needs of the entire Dane County area.
- Acquisition of Marty Farm in collaboration with multiple City Agencies to expand Elver Park and address stormwater and transportation infrastructure needs of the far west side.