Park Operational Resources

The Parks Division has responsibility for planning, designing, construction and maintenance for the City's park system, as well as programming and coordination of Parks-led special events and facilities reservations. Parks Operations staff are responsible for maintenance and care of over 280 parks as well as facilities: which include picnic and restroom shelters, athletic facilities such as the Goodman Pool, pickleball and tennis courts, ball diamonds and multi-use fields, as well as playgrounds, and other recreational amenities. Parks Conservation staff are responsible for managing conservation parks including groomed ski trails, structures such as boardwalks and overlooks and habitat restoration. The Parks Division also manages spaces non-traditional facilities such as the State Street/Mall Concourse, Olbrich Botanical Gardens, Forest Hill Cemetery, four municipal golf courses, and the Warner Park Community Recreation Center. The Parks Division also shares responsibility for snow removal on bike paths, sidewalks and bus stops as well as litter pick-up and mowing/trimming of street-ends and medians. This chapter examines and discusses the operational resources necessary to meet these obligations for a growing City of Madison park system.

Parks Division Operating Expenses

The annual City of Madison Operating Budgets provides resources for the staffing, supplies, services, utilities and other operational expenses. The Parks Division's Operating Budget is funded through multiple revenue sources including General Park Revenues, Other Restricted Funds, and Permanent Funds, with the General Fund (primarily through the property tax levy) providing the remaining amount needed to offset the annual expenses of -the Parks Division. Table X.X details the actual expenses from 2018-2023 for the Parks Division and the proportion of expenses that were supported by revenues or the General Fund. General Fund support for the Parks Division has not been consistent and has decreased during the six year period while revenues have experienced a precipitous drop – likely attributable to the Covid-19 pandemic - during the same six-year period.

2018-2023 Parks Division Operating Expenses by Funding Source

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
General Revenues	$6,082,214.70	$6,449,645.59	$2,081,906.69	$2,465,634.13	$2,471,536.63	$3,178,487.08
General Fund Levy Support	$18,491,693.00	$19,104,538.00	$15,136,018.00	$15,881,362.00	$15,496,292.00	$16,248,957.00
Total Expenditures	**$24,573,907.70**	**$25,554,183.59**	**$17,217,924.69**	**$18,346,996.13**	**$17,967,828.63**	**$19,427,444.08**

Revenues provide an important funding source for an expanding park system: General Park Revenues are generated through several mechanisms: lease/use agreements (ex. Olbrich Park Use Agreement with the Biergarten) require annual payments as well as reimbursement of expenses such as utilities. Other revenues in this category are generated from boat launch permits; catering and concessions; facility rental fees,

admission fees, program revenues and memberships at Olbrich Botanical Gardens, Goodman Pool and Warner Park Community Recreation Center (WPCRC); swim, skating and cross country ski lessons (and trail use passes); contributions and donations, ranger fees to support shelter reservations and other park uses, trade-in allowance for equipment; and State Street/Mall Concourse Special Charges levied to local businesses and property owners within the defined service area. The actual revenues received by section for the last six years are shown in Table X.X. Note that the Forestry Division moved from Parks to Streets in the 2020 Operating Budget - revenues shown in the table are limited to the two-year period that the division was supporting Parks.

Operating Budget Revenue Support by Section

Category	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Forestry	$3,445,205.29	$3,573,646.98				
Olbrich Botanical Gardens	$636,468.85	$651,913.33	$174,405.61	$347,518.64	$433,767.04	$752,400.53
WPCRC	$217,452.55	$199,006.66	$75,958.09	$83,481.18	$198,310.45	$176,921.27
Aquatics	$51,682.19	$49,692.84	$185.08	$953.66	$32,249.01	$34,744.05
Other Park Revenues	$1,731,405.82	$1,975,385.78	$1,831,357.91	$2,033,680.65	$1,807,210.13	$2,214,421.23
Total	**$6,082,214.70**	**$6,449,645.59**	**$2,081,906.69**	**$2,465,634.13**	**$2,471,536.63**	**$3,178,487.08**

Other Park Revenues support the Parks Division Operating Budget. These include revenues from off-leash dog park permits and disc golf permits. Revenues from use agreements with athletic groups such as the Madison Ultimate Frisbee Association (MUFA) and the Urban Forestry Special Charge are also included under Other Park Revenues.

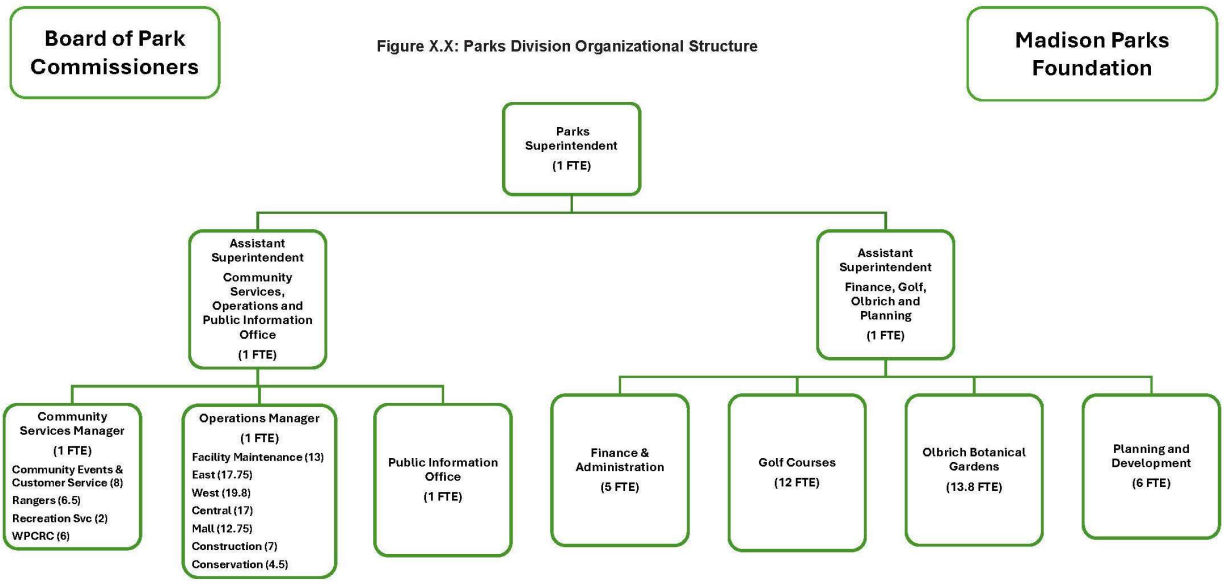
Parks Division Staff

In 2023, the Parks Division employed 148 full time employees (FTEs) and 302 seasonal employees. Parks staff are responsible for the development, maintenance and care of over 5,700 acres of parkland and over 280 parks. The Parks Division also manages non-traditional facilities, such as the State Street / Mall Concourse, Olbrich Botanical Gardens, Goodman Pool, Forest Hill Cemetery, four golf courses, and the Warner Park Community Recreation Center. Table X.X includes actual expenditures per section within the Parks Division for 2018-2023.

2018-2023 Parks Operating Expenses by Section

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Community Services	$2,705,719.57	$2,604,552.78	$1,999,530.15	$2,471,386.90	$2,694,163.24	$3,103,939.98
Operations	$14,817,738.15	$15,389,915.05	$12,216,926.74	$12,605,742.55	$12,138,251.17	$12,858,162.98
Olbrich Botanical Gardens	$1,547,423.30	$1,532,408.09	$1,536,165.03	$1,712,092.82	$1,833,595.37	$1,989,904.58
Planning and Development	$655,374.67	$751,196.41	$733,351.65	$752,683.71	$819,994.89	$844,577.18
Total	**$19,726,255.69**	**$20,278,072.33**	**$16,485,973.57**	**$17,541,905.98**	**$17,486,004.67**	**$18,796,584.72**

Figure X.X show the current Parks Division organizational structure. The two main areas are: Operations, Community Services and Facilities and Planning, Development and Finance. A general description of the main responsibilities of each section follows X.X



COMMUNITY SERVICES

Community Services coordinates all special events and festivals on public land including State Street/Capitol Mall Concourse, as well as reviewing and approving new community event initiatives, use agreements, and scheduling athletic field and shelter reservations. Community Services is also responsible for processing permit applications for vending, lake access, dog park, disc golf, and public amplification. Community Services also coordinates volunteer programs and manages the operations of aquatics, park rangers, the Warner Park Community Recreation Center and use agreements.

FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

Parks Finance and Administration manages payroll, purchasing, revenue billing, budgeting, and administrative policy. It also coordinates hiring procedures, human resource tasks, and employee onboarding.

OLBRICH BOTANICAL GARDENS

The Olbrich Botanical Gardens provides 16 acres of sustainable outdoor gardens and a 10,000-square foot tropical conservatory. The garden is operated as a public/private partnership between the Parks Division and the non-profit Olbrich Botanical Society. Olbrich Botanical Gardens serves more than 340,000 visitors throughout the year and provides education programming for adults and families as well as garden-related exhibitions and events.

OPERATIONS

Parks Operations oversees the operation and maintenance of all parks, as well as the State Street/Mall Concourse district. Responsibilities of Operations staff are vast and include facility construction, maintenance and repairs, shoreline cleanup and maintenance of beaches, boat ramps, docks, boathouses, and sailboat storage facilities; mowing and maintaining athletic facilities; and maintenance of buildings and parking lots. Parks Operations staff also maintain the City's cemetery, conservation lands, and several closed landfills used as parks. Parks Operations staff also remove snow from bike trails and bus stops throughout the City. The City's golf courses, previously maintained by Operations staff, moved to its own section and median mowing became a component of the City's laborer trainee program in 2024.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Planning and Development section is responsible for all aspects of park planning and development, including coordination with City Planning staff on Area Plans, long range planning and policies, park master planning, design and construction of parks and public works contracting and intergovernmental coordination of policies and ordinances. Planning and Development staff also assist with the development review process through site design approvals and assessment of fees and parkland dedication requirements related to new residential development.

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

The Public Information Office is responsible for managing the Division's communications, which includes overseeing the Parks website, blog posts, social media platforms, photo library, e-newsletters, news releases, and publications such as the annual calendar and report. Additionally the office coordinates responses to media inquiries.

Golf Enterprise Operating Expenses

The Madison Parks Golf Enterprise Program is operated as an enterprise, meaning it is expected to cover all expenditures with golf course revenues and does not receive levy support. The Golf Program is responsible for all aspects of golf course maintenance, clubhouse operations and improvements. Table X.X details the 2018-2023 Golf Enterprise Operating Budget for the four city golf courses (The Glen Golf Park, Monona, Odana Hills and Yahara Hills). Note that for 2023, the revenues total includes the sale of approximately 231 acres of the Yahara Hills Golf Course to Dane County for use as a future landfill, compost site and sustainable business park.

2018-2023 Golf Enterprise Operating Budget						
Year	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**
Revenues	$2,460,341.09	$2,769,145.61	$3,654,184.68	$4,294,298.93	$5,407,666.09	$10,383,223.07
Expenses	$3,323,660.69	$3,305,900.94	$3,393,669.44	$3,517,007.03	$3,821,211.13	$4,128,915.72
Profit (loss)	**($863,319.60)**	**($536,755.33)**	**$260,515.24**	**$777,291.90**	**$1,586,454.96**	**$6,254,307.35**

Mention (Year) Annual Report for the Golf Enterprise here?

Madison Parks and Partnerships ~~and Volunteers~~

City of Madison Parks is unique in that it is not a traditional park and recreation agency: in Madison the primary public recreation programming agency is the Madison School and Community Recreation (MSCR), a division of the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD), which has had a recreation program since 1926. Regardless of this organizational separation, the Parks Division and MSCR have worked closely together, as the missions of the two agencies are inherently intertwined. This long-term partnership has benefitted the community by having MSCR provide low-to no-cost activities at the Warner Park Community and Recreation Center ("the Center"), swimming lessons the Goodman Pool, and sports leagues and outdoor activities throughout the park system.
The primary Madison park facilities used by MSCR are softball, baseball, and kickball fields, tennis courts, and docks for pontoon rides. The partnership between Madison Parks and MSCR provides a large portion of the recreational programming in Madison Parks; however, even with MSCR providing a large amount of recreational programming, the Parks Division has identified populations that need additional opportunities and has created programming to address these gaps. Some areas that the Parks Division has expanded its programming include the Kids Need Opportunities at Warner (KNOW) program, the Learning Series, Movies in the Park, Parks Alive, and Carts in Parks. These efforts are further described in the Activating the Parks Issue Paper, which can be found in Appendix X.

In addition to MSCR, there are dozens of other organizations that program activities such as baseball, football, Ultimate Frisbee, and soccer that, combined with MSCR, add up to over 11,000 recreational programming reservations each year. Organizations such as the Southside Raiders, cricket clubs and Liga Latina De Futbol connect communities and expand recreational programming to a wider audience.

In addition to recreational programming, Madison Parks has had success with creative programing through public-private partnerships. Entities that enter into agreements/ contracts with Parks for these types of uses are held to high standards and specified goals, operations, and reporting procedures. Examples of these initiatives include the Wingra, Brittingham, Marshall, and Olbrich boat rentals and camps, the Mendota and Camp Randall Rowing Clubs, the Biergarten at Olbrich Park, the Mallards Baseball Stadium at Warner Park, and Breese Stevens Field.

Parks has continued to collaborate with the Madison Parks Foundation on successful programming initiatives such as the "Learn To" series, scholarships to the Goodman Pool and the Connecting Children to Nature program.

Madison Parks and Volunteers

Volunteers play a crucial role in maintaining a vibrant park system in Madison, contributing either on a one-time basis or with ongoing commitments. Madison Parks strives to involve individuals and organized groups such as neighborhood associations, corporations, Friends groups and other affiliated organizations to commit on an ongoing basis to a specific park or project. These sustained engagements encourage collaboration between Madison Parks' staff and volunteers to address large scale improvements and other initiatives. Conservation Parks have long been a recipient of extensive volunteer efforts; outreach by parks staff has helped continue to grow these programs. In 2023, Madison Parks had 3,379 volunteers who collectively provided 14,447 hours of service toward enhancing the park system. Highlights of the year included large-scale volunteer events, where hundreds participated in various initiatives, such as park cleanups, trash pickup, and invasive species removal.

Table X.X summarizes some of the notable volunteer programs and events from 2024. Note that in 2024, several volunteer-led programs did not happen, including Adopt Ice due to the inclement weather cancelling much of the ice skating season that year.

2024 Notable Volunteer Events

Name	Dates	Number of Parks	Number of Volunteers	Number of Volunteer Hours
Ride the Drive	August 11	6	300	1180
Earth Day Challenge	April 20	27	900	1800
Dog Park Clean-Up Day	April 6	7	72	144
Flower Gardens	May 15 - Oct 15	33	15	693
Goat Check Volunteers	April-October	20	2/date	420
Bird & Nature Walk	Jan-Dec	7	100	784

Olbrich Botanical Gardens has a long history of volunteer support dedicated to maintaining the gardens and supporting all aspects of programming and events at the Gardens. Over the past three decades, Olbrich has built a strong base of volunteers with an average of approximately 528 individual volunteers and 14 service groups comprising 150 people contributing approximately 20,000 hours of service per year for the 2019-2024 seasons.

System Growth Considerations

The City's adopted Neighborhood Development Plans, Intergovernmental Agreements, and the Downtown Plan project that the number of Madison parks will grow by 25% at full build out with a combined 67 new parks identified in these plans. While development of these parks is incremental, the past several years have seen rapid growth in both new and infill development that has outpaced the increase in operational funding. Development of these parks will require additional staff to plan and design these parks, and also to maintain, schedule, and coordinate their activities.

City-wide development also increases demand on operational resources to maintain the boulevards, bike paths, bus stops, medians, and sidewalks. In 2010, the City of Madison Streets Division, Engineering Division, and Parks Division divided maintenance of these transportation based city facilities. Since 2018, the number of transportation-based facilities maintained by Madison Parks has increased, including an additional 216 bus stops, 14 acres of medians, and 175,883 linear feet of sidewalk and bike paths. As these new facilities develop, they continue to draw upon the resources in the Parks Operating Budget.

The number of historic facilities owned and maintained by the Parks Division requires significant resources to manage and maintain. Additional levels of review are required before infrastructure needs can be addressed and improvements can occur. Costs to maintain historic facilities are significantly higher than regular park facilities. A list of historical resources including historic buildings maintained by Madison Parks is included in Appendix F. This list includes Gates of Heaven in James Madison Park, Breese Stevens Field, and Forest Hill Cemetery. Restoration projects the City has completed since 2018, include the interior and exterior preservation of Gates of Heaven, exterior preservation of Garver Cottage, interior and exterior preservation of the Catlin Chapel at Forest Hill Cemetery, and significant work at Breese Stevens Field.

An additional draw on operational resources is development of recreational facilities that have higher maintenance demands. Park facilities such as dog parks, ice rinks, shelters with restrooms, and splash parks require higher levels of maintenance. Additionally, athletic fields for popular sports such as flag football, ultimate frisbee, and soccer require higher maintenance so they remain playable throughout the year. While the role of volunteers is important in assisting with maintenance, significant coordination is required by staff to manage these volunteer resources.

Madison Parks needs to evaluate how future development, as well as the increasing number of facilities, affects operational resources. The location of operating facilities and staff to serve Madison's growing park system will become more of a concern as development continues along the periphery of the City. For example, parks on the far west

side periphery, such as Thousand Oaks Park, are approximately seven miles from the Madison Parks facility that houses the staff and equipment needed to maintain this park. In response to the ongoing growth of the City, planning for the South Point Public Works Maintenance Facility is currently underway by Engineering Facilities staff along with the development of a Parks Facilities Assessment which will set up a 5 year assessment cycle for every Park Division structure to inform replacement and maintenance budgets. Improvements in technology and efficiency will likely play a role in reducing staff hours, and metrics such as Results Madison and Performance Excellence should be used to inform a comprehensive analysis of operational needs and resources to maintain an expanding park system.

The Golf Enterprise Operating Budget sustained losses in most years between 2003 and 2019, which prevented the program from reinvesting in much needed capital improvements. Following historic financial losses in the 2018 and 2019 seasons, the Mayor and Common Council created the Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks in June 2019 for purposes of evaluating the current state and making recommendations regarding the future of the Golf Program. The Final Report, which contains 10 recommendations and continues to serve as a guiding force for the program, was adopted by Common Council in January 2021 (Legislative File ID #61936). This is a pivotal moment within the Golf Program, as it has continued to sustain financial success following the COVID-19 pandemic, closing out both the 2023 and 2024 seasons with over $5,000,000 in revenue. The Golf Program is in the process of significant transformation, as it works to reimagine and reinvest in the program while it implements a phased reduction plan that will take the program from its current 72 hole to a 54 hole operation by the beginning of the 2026 season.

Conclusion

Current funding levels are not sufficient to sustain the existing and growing park system and other City facilities the Parks Division is required to maintain. The City's system of parks and open spaces must continue to address the demands of an ever-growing population with diverse needs. Providing resources to meet these demands requires financial and in-kind support to cover additional operational expenses necessary to design, construct, maintain, and operate these facilities.

Overall, there are five primary factors increasing operational expenses:

- Development of new parks citywide,
- Citywide development due to population growth,
- Historic facilities with specific requirements for maintenance, and
- Addition of facilities in response to the community needs that require higher levels.