Madison Parks Division

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MADISON PARKS

DATE: May 9, 2025
TO: Mayor, All Alders, and Board of Park Commissioners
FROM: Lisa Laschinger, Interim Parks Superintendent
SUBJECT: Steve Stricker American Family Insurance Foundation Agreement for the Use of Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, North Unit Parking Lots and Driveway

Dear Mayor, Alders, and Commissioners,

The Parks Division has submitted an agreement with the Steve Stricker American Family Insurance Foundation that was introduced at the April 15 Common Council Meeting (Leg File #87830).

Cherokee Country Club, which is privately owned and adjacent to the Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, recently reopened following a major course renovation as TPC Wisconsin. The American Family Insurance Championship, which has been held at University Ridge Golf Course is scheduled to move to TPC Wisconsin in 2025. The event not only provides a playing venue for PGA Tour Champions who are 50 and older, but it provides entertainment for the community, economic benefit through tourism and support to numerous local charities each year.

The annual PGA Tour will bring thousands of people to the north side of Madison, including players, staff, and spectators, during the event from June 2 – 8, 2025. During the weekend events, Friday to Sunday, between ten and twenty thousand public spectators are expected to attend each day. With this influx of people to the space, ensuring a safe event for residents, event attendees, and park users is top priority. The Parks Division recognizes that this area of the city is not accustomed to or designed for an event of this size. There will undoubtedly be a significant impact on the neighborhood, in both positive and negative ways.

The event organizers have met with the City's Street Use staff team for overall neighborhood and traffic impacts and have met with the Parks Division separately to discuss the use of the parking lots at Cherokee Marsh – North for the event. The event organizers met with the Street Use staff team on March 21, 2025, to review transportation impacts, emergency and safety plans, impacts to the bus system, and other logistical impacts. The Foundation has submitted their request for a Street Use permit, which is currently under review and will be taken up again by the Street Use staff team on May 12.

Recognizing the magnitude of impact the event will have on the area the Foundation has separately requested the use of the Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park – North Unit parking lots for the event support vehicles. Regardless of the Foundation's use of the parking lots, North Sherman Avenue, north of Wheeler, will be closed to traffic except for residents and event vehicles, effectively closing all vehicular access to the park. Therefore, the Parks Division is proposing allowing the event organizers to utilize the parking lots off North Sherman Road, requiring that pedestrian and bicycle access be maintained throughout the event in a coordinated fashion, and that the organizer pay a fee that will bring revenue to the park system to support the conservation park. The agreement terms are summarized as follows:

- The Foundation will be granted access to the two parking lots and driveway in Cherokee Marsh North Park. The first lot is located at 5850 N. Sherman Avenue which is directly adjacent to the northern boundary of TPC Wisconsin, and the second lot is located at 6006 N. Sherman Avenue.

- Vehicles will not be allowed in the park from June 2 through June 8, unless permitted by the event organizers or by the Madison Police Department. Emergency personnel and Park Rangers will still have vehicular access to the park.

- The park will be open at its normal hours, and pedestrians and cyclists will be allowed to enter the park via Sherman Avenue. The pedestrian entry on Burning Wood Way will remain open, allowing park access from the west to the park.

- Due to the sensitive nature of the park, no parking or equipment will be allowed off the gravel areas of the parking lots or driveway, with the exception of signage only if it does not damage the vegetation.

- Parking will not be allowed on the driveway without prior permission from Madison Fire Department to ensure emergency vehicle access clearance while not parking on the vegetation.

- The Foundation is responsible for any damages to the park, and for cleaning up and removing all visible debris associated with the Event.

- The Foundation is responsible to pay the City $14,000 for the seven days of use. The revenue from the event will be allocated to the Park Division Operating Budget in the Conservation section, which is responsible for the management of Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park, North Unit.

The Parks Division has met with the Friends of Cherokee Marsh about the impacts to the park and received feedback on concerns about public access and concerns about impacts to the flora and fauna of the park. Alder Glenn will be hosting a virtual community meeting on Tuesday, May 13 with the event organizers to review the logistics, impacts, and get feedback from the community regarding the plan. Parks Division staff will be present at this event to assist with answering questions and supporting the community with this complex event.

The Parks Division, in coordination with other City Agencies, will ensure that the event organizers communicate what the impacts to the public will be as the event date nears. The City will release a news release from Traffic Engineering regarding traffic issues. This includes sharing that the Foundation has agreed to allow park users to park in the event parking at Madison College and take a shuttle bus to and from the shuttle stop, located near the corner of N. Sherman and Wheeler Roads.

Madison Parks will post information about how to access the park during the event. The information will be shared on our website, via the Madison Parks E-News with 43,000 subscribers, and forwarded to the media and neighborhood organizations starting in mid-May. The information will be amplified with social media posts as the event nears. The Parks Division will be adding additional bike racks to the Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park to accommodate additional bike traffic during this time.

We recognize that with the number of people expected in the neighborhood during this week and with the road closures and checkpoints, it will be more difficult than normal to visit Cherokee Marsh North. The first week in June will be a good opportunity for park users to visit one of the other 18 conservation parks in the system. Cherokee Marsh Conservation Park – South is located at 5002 School Road and provides over 240 acres of ecology similar to the North Unit. Warner Park, though not designated as a conservation park, is another nearby park that offers areas of passive recreation for residents looking to connect with nature.

Overall, the Parks Division proposes this agreement because it provides a mechanism to keep the park open to users and would only prohibit vehicle access temporarily, while simultaneously bringing revenue back to the park. The American Family Insurance Championship is an event that has many benefits to the community, and we look forward to working with the Steve Stricker American Family Insurance Foundation collaboratively to minimize the impacts to neighboring residents, park users, and the park itself.