Appendix K: Trust for Public Land ParkScore Overview

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) issues a ParkScore that compares park systems across the 100 most populated cities in the United States.

Published annually, the index measures park systems according to five categories reflective of an excellent city park system:

- Investment
- Acreage
- Access
- Equity
- Amenities

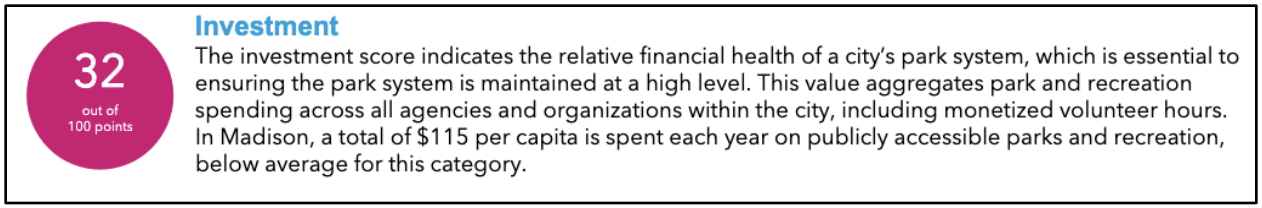
Year	Madison Rank
2016	10
2017	9
2018	12
2019	12
2020	12
2021	13
2022	13
2023	13
2024	18
2025	19

Madison's TPL ParkScore Trends

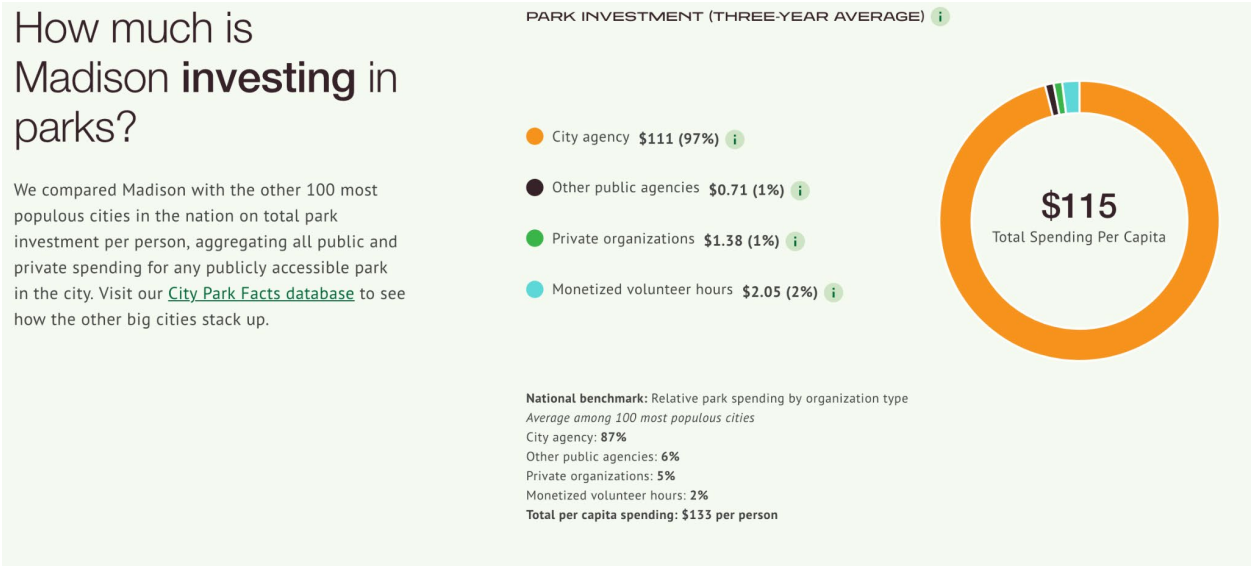
Over the past decade, Madison's TPL ParkScore rank dropped from 10 in 2016 to 19 in 2025.
While TPL has adjusted its methodology during this period, Madison's public and private investment per capita seems the primary driver in Madison's ParkScore changes.
Of the 23 cities listed as TPL's Top 20 park system between 2023-2025 with a population below 1M, Madison has the lowest per capita investment at $119, compared to $259 per capita average of the 23 cities during the same time period.

Despite constrained investment, Madison Parks consistently ranked above average in terms of access and amenities, indicating an efficient and prioritized approach to allocating limited resources.

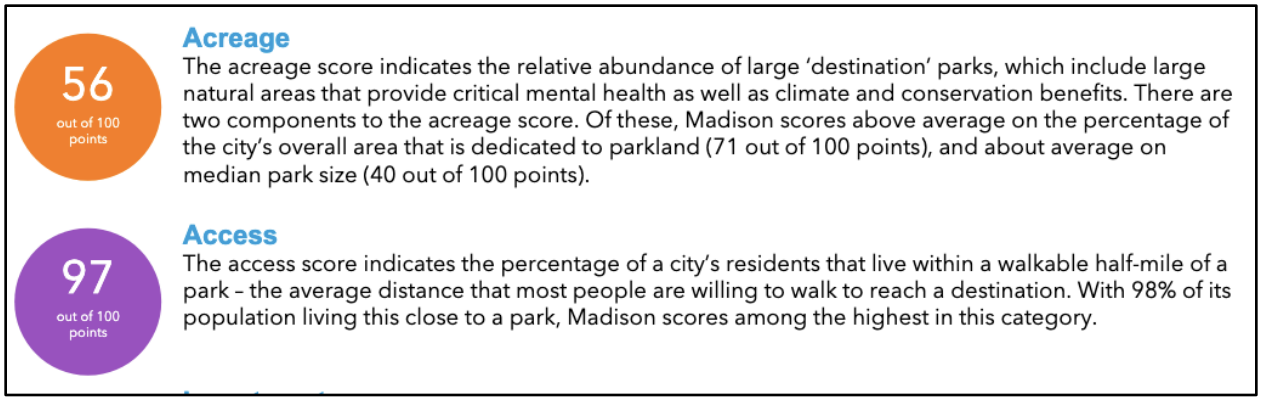
Madison 2025 ParkScore[1]



An analysis of Madison TPL ParkScores indicates that investment drives Madison's falling ParkScore. The 2025 TPL gave Madison a ranking of 32 out of 100 for investment. For context, between 2016 and 2023, Madison invested between $122-155/capita; while Madison's per capita investment dropped to $112 in 2024 and $115 in 2025. To receive a 100, investment would need to increase to $266/capita. Madison's $155 investment per capita is the lowest of all top 20 cities. It is $61 less than the next lowest city (Pittsburgh, PA at $176 per capital) and $146 less than the average at $260 per capita of the top 20 cities.

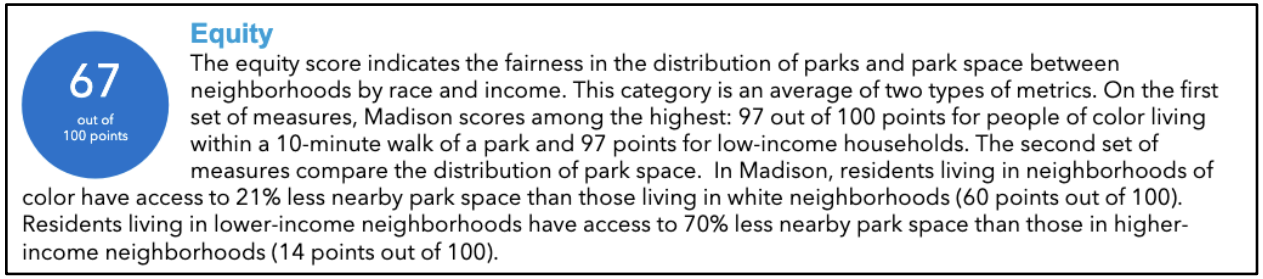


[1] Trust for Public Land, ParkScore Ranking (2025) (available at https://www.tpl.org/city/madison-wisconsin)

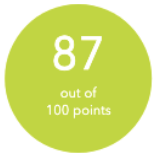


Although Madison scores well on access (97/100) with 98% of residents within a 10 minute walk to a park, Madison's acreage metric scored much lower (56/100). Madison scores well on average on the percentage of the city's overall area dedicated to parkland (71/100), Madison is only average on median park size (40/100 points). This may be a function of Madison's increasing population and density and the lag in Madison's ability to build parks to serve its fast growing population. Madison's isthmus geography may also create constraints on its ability to add downtown parks.

Note: TPL excludes large water bodies from any acreage calculations to better compare across the 100 cities.



The acreage deficiency affects Madison's equity-ranking (67/100). Neighborhoods of color and low-income neighborhoods have strong access to parks measured by % within a ten minute walk. However, those same groups have less access to park space acreage. Residents in neighborhoods of color have 21% less park space as those in white neighborhoods (60/100). Low-income neighborhoods have 70% less park space as those in high-income neighborhoods (14/100).



Amenities

The amenities score indicates the relative abundance of park activities popular among a diverse selection of user groups (kids, teenagers, adults, seniors). Overall for this category, Madison scores among the highest, though it varies by amenity: basketball hoops (100 points out of 100), sport fields and diamonds (100 points), dog parks (100 points), playgrounds (100 points), senior and rec centers (9 points), permanent restrooms (84 points), and splashpads (39 points).

While Madison scores well in amenities generally (87/100), the lack of senior rec centers and splash pads may be lowering Madison's ranking. With respect to senior rec centers (9/100), the low score might be a function of structure with senior rec centers not being within Park structure, however TPL removes the lowest scoring amenity. The second lowest scoring amenity is splash pads (14/100), which may be geographically influenced. Finally, TPL does not include any culturally-based and other amenities that Madison Parks have significantly invested in, e.g., pump parks, bike trails, skate parks, golf courses, pickleball courts, cross-country skiing, cricket. Importantly, none of Madison's most heavily reserved park amenities -- soccer, tennis, ultimate frisbee, pickleball, and softball -- are among the TPL amenities (See Fig. 4.5).

Conclusion

While Madison Parks currently delivers a top 20 park system at less than half the cost of comparable park systems, Madison Parks is unlikely to be able to continue meet its mission of being an exceptional (Top 20) park system with its existing level of per capita investment and Madison's ongoing population growth rate.