

SUPERINTENDENT'S MARCH 2025 REPORT

COMMUNICATIONS TO BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

Park Superintendent's Monthly Report Summary

February gave us some real winter weather that allowed a continuation of our skating season until nearly the end of the month. The snow fall provided some opportunities for sledding and skiing as well. The lack of snowfall limited the duration of the snow season, but the quality of the snow did provide some opportunity. Overall, it was a significantly better than average skating season and a below average skiing season. I think this really points to the need to offer an array of winter recreation opportunities to position our offerings in a way that is resilient and inclusive of our community.

March has started with some warm temperatures and some windy days. This really helps get the ground thawing and drying out. We don't have a date for golf and athletic fields, but we know the pressure is on and staff are doing everything they can to provide these services as soon as we can. As we move into the shoulder season we will continue to monitor dog parks, disc golf courses, golf courses, and athletic fields for playability. We strive to keep and/or get these open as quickly as we can, but as the frost comes out of the ground and it is wet, there is a period where the turf just cannot handle the impact of use. I'm proud of the team for continuing to refine these processes to promote as many opportunities as possible, but without allowing significant long-term damage to occur.

The Parks Division was well represented at the Mayor's Team City Awards on March 4, 2024. Wilkie one of our Landscape Maintenance Worker's on our Ecology Team. They were recognized for their expertise, commitment, and positive attitude in their work. The Mayor specifically noted her appreciation of Wilkie's role in planting hundreds of trees annually. An inter-agency staff team who worked on the Rennebohm Park project was also recognized at this event. The team consisting of staff from Engineering and Parks, led by Kate Kane and Charlotte Blotz on the Parks side, were able to navigate a number of challenges to make improvements to the shelter and the tennis courts while balancing multiple challenging situations. This included providing a path to keeping the Cap City Band going for their summer season.

As a reminder to the Commission, Earth Day and Arbor Day are quickly approaching. The Parks Division's Annual Earth Day Challenge is April 26th. We are hopeful to get over 900 volunteers on this day to work at over 60 park locations.

Future Commission Items

- Pay to Park in Parks Pilot – The Council rescinded the pilot program for 2025. They included a requirement of a report regarding parking assets in parks to be submitted by April 2026. This item will be removed from this list after this month, with an expected return to the Commission in late summer of early fall this year.
- 2025 Division Workplan – The Management Team is finalizing our primary work plan items for the year and corresponding milestones. It is our hope to provide an update to the Commission in April. The work plan focuses on our significant change initiatives that have an array of impacts across our system and organization.
- Marshall Houses – Parks staff continues to work with Real Estate and the City Attorney's Office to engage with the property owners of the historic homes in Marshall Park. At this time there has been limited interaction with the current owners over the past few months, so the item has been lowered on the priority list.
- POSP Update – Parks staff is planning to provide an update on the POSP progress to the full BPC in April. LRP is working through strategies and recommendations, and a full draft plan will be available soon. The hope is to have an overview of the entire plan for BPC that has been reviewed by LRP.

- Olin Houses – Staff are working on a management plan for the Olin Houses as we acquire them. We own three of the houses at this point and would like to have a management strategy in place moving forward. The current plan on the three is working towards demolition on one home, extending the lease on a second, and evaluating options with Real Estate on the third. Over the past couple of months, we have focused energy on a potential acquisition and ensuring we are prepared for the demolition. Staff expects to be able to share a plan with the Commission over the summer.

Personnel Updates

Promotions/Hires:

Cooper Schira Mix was hired as Golf Course Superintendent 1, and will be working at The Glen Golf Park. Cooper began his new position February 3, 2025

Retirements:

Mike Aeberhard has retired from his position as Park Maintenance Worker from West Parks- Forest Hill Cemetery. Mike worked the City for 21 years.

Section Updates

P&D Superintendent Report Highlights

- Work on the POSP continues. In February the Long Range Planning Subcommittee reviewed the revised strategies. Staff continues to work on developing and refining other sections of the plan.
- Staff has been working with Veridian regarding new parkland dedication for the expansion of Midtown Commons Park and Newberry Park as a part of the Hill Valley Plat.
- Bids were received for the Rennebohm Sprayground project. Staff is recommending award of the contract to Parisi Construction for \$470,502.70. Construction is scheduled to be complete in the Summer of 2025.
- Bids were received for the installation of new Sun Shelters at Kestrel Park, Sycamore Park, and North Star Park. Staff is recommending award of the contract to Greener Valley Landscaping for \$202,195.00. Construction is scheduled to be complete in the Summer of 2025.
- Staff is working to prepare bidding documents for the Country Grove Park Singletrack project, Sport Court Resurfacing project, 2025 Playground Replacements project, and the Rennebohm East Tennis Courts reconstruction project.
- Schematic design for Phase 1 of the Madison LakeWay project is complete. Staff is coordinating improvements with City Engineering and City Forestry prior to starting the design development phase of the project. Construction is planned to begin in 2027.
- Staff has begun the process of preparing the Capital Improvement Plan for the 2026 budget process.

Community Services Report March 2025 – Terrence Thompson

Community Events (Kelly Post)

- The Community Event team has been actively enhancing applications, processes, and workflows to improve efficiency. We are prepared and excited for the 2025 Special Event season!
- We are excited to work with some new event organizers. We are committed to assisting event organizers navigate city regulations to host inclusive and well-coordinated public events. Some of the new events we will be permitting this year are:
 - Divine Mercy Festival – Sunday, April 27, 2025, at James Madison Park
 - USA Cycling Collegiate National Championships – Sunday, May 4, 2025, in the Tenney Lapham Neighborhood around Reynolds Park.
 - All City Swim – Tuesday, July 29 – Monday, August 4, 2025, at Hill Farms Pool and Rennebohm Park.

- We are gearing up for Carts in Parks 2025 – a program that supports small business owners by managing vendor permits, placements, and connections with Community/Neighborhood Park events. We are helping them thrive in public spaces.

Parks Alive (Debra Alleyne)

Parks Alive AASPIRE Intern

- The position description for the internship this summer has been updated better to reflect the dynamic nature of the Parks Alive program. Interview dates have been set, and panelists have been contacted to help select candidates for the summer.

Merchandise

- Ten Parks Alive merchandise items have been delivered to serve as community connectors and social facilitators for the events. These items include music, technology, sports, and games, all featuring the Parks Alive logo.

Partner Meetings

- We are planning meetings to update our partners about the changes in the program this year. Three presentation dates have been proposed for partners to attend in March. Additionally, we are scheduling more presentations specifically for food vendors and entertainment.

Customer Service (Joanne Austin)

- Watercraft storage renewal notifications were sent to current customers asking if they intend to renew their agreements. This proactive approach to reach out before agreements expire on March 31st continues to work well. Many customers have already renewed. We will contact those on our waitlist starting April 1st for any spaces that become available.
- Shelter reservations are well underway for 2025. 2025 shelter reservations started on November 1, 2024. Excluding large special events, Parks sponsored events, and election reservations, we have already processed 456 reservations. Of these, 284 have been placed online. The Highland Manor Storm Shelter, which is available the entire year, already has 73 reservations scheduled, most of which are on weekends. The Olin Pavilion has 31 reservations, many of which are for wedding celebrations. The New Door Creek shelter will be available for reservations this year and we already have 14 scheduled reservations. As usual, it will be an exciting shelter reservation year!
- Athletic reservations are in full swing and the QDP (Qualifying Discounts Program) is moving forward. Agreement holders and those with early priority reservation status have entered their reservations. Public reservations recently started requesting theirs too.
- A decent amount of snow finally arrived and cross-country ski permit holders were able to enjoy the trails this winter. As of Tuesday, February 25, we issued 329 daily ski permits this winter season and 434 annual permits, which are valid through 12/31/2025.

Recreation Services & Aquatics (Tracey Hartley & Shane Martin)

Winter Recreation

- The winter season concluded on Sunday, February 16. It was our best season since 2021-2022. The following facilities were open for skating: Elver for 48 days, Tenney for 45 days, and Vilas for 50 days. Additionally, ski trails around the city were open for 22 days. Looking ahead to 2025-2026, Door Creek will open with rentals for skiing, snowshoeing, and skating.

Aquatics

- Preparations for the summer season are underway. We anticipate needing to hire approximately 40 lifeguards. We are partnering with MSCR to host four hiring fairs—one at the end of March, two in April, and one in May. The beaches and splash parks will open on Saturday, May 24, and Goodman Pool will open on Thursday, June 12.

Rangers & Volunteers

Rangers (Steve Dray)

Recruitment

- Rangers will be opening recruitment for our Seasonal Park Rangers position soon. These part-time, seasonal positions play a vital role in keeping our parks safe and accessible to our summer park users. We will also be hiring a hybrid Park Ranger/Parking Enforcement Officer position in the near future. This is a newer position that works as a Park Ranger from Mid-April through Mid-October and as a Parking Enforcement Officer from Mid-October to Mid-April, helping each agency fill an area of need.

Enforcement Contacts

- Rangers have had 22 enforcement contacts that resulted in 8 warnings, 14 citations and zero bans. 18 parking tickets were also issued to date during the month of February.

Ranger Training

- Madison Park Rangers attended our annual consortium meetings with Rangers from the UW Arboretum, Dane County and the WI DNR, as well as WI DNR Conservation Wardens and Park Managers, Madison/Dane County Animal Services Officers, and members of the Dane County Sheriff's Office Marine and Trail Enforcement. It was a very informative time of networking and learning from each other.

Volunteers (John Weichelt)

Volunteer Management Software

- The development of the Get Connected platform is ongoing. The next steps include publishing more volunteer opportunities and testing features for tracking training and certifications. While engagement levels remain strong, we recognize that growing overall participation is an ongoing priority. We are focusing efforts on targeted recruitment for events such as Earth Day and dog park cleanup.

Volunteer Engagement & Outreach

- We have made significant progress on the volunteer website by refining features for easier navigation and simplifying the posting of volunteer opportunities. Additionally, we have addressed communication needs related to training requirements and role expectations in the volunteer program documents.

Warner Park Community Recreation Center (Zach Watson)

Expansion Project Update

- The exterior walls and steel framework have been established, and electrical work inside the old gym will begin on March 3.

Programming

- The KNOW Program partnership with the Madison Parks Foundation, hosted a Valentine's Themed Family Fun Night on February 14, 2025, welcoming over 100 community members. Due to the ongoing expansion project, we will offer a smaller Family Fun Night on March 14. Additionally, the WPCRC will be hosting a Community Dinner on March 30.

Olbrich Botanical Gardens
February 2025 Monthly Update

- **Comprehensive Master Plan Request for Qualifications** – Olbrich Gardens is seeking a team of planning professionals to design a comprehensive master plan. The request for qualifications is now open for interested firms. This plan will strategically outline the growth for Olbrich Gardens over the next 10-20 years. It closes on March 21st at 2pm.



- **Collards Kick-Off Event** – On February 1st, Olbrich Gardens in collaboration with REAP Food Group hosted the Collards Collaboration Kick-Off. Dr. Fabu kicked off the event with poetry readings from her latest book “We Eat to Remember: Soul Food Poetry”. Qwantese Winters lead an insightful discussion with four generations of farmers, that centered on the challenges Black farmers have experienced and the ways in which everyone can support their efforts moving more forward by sharing their stories on social media, volunteering at the farms, purchasing produce grown by local farmers (while respecting the pricing) and donating funds through supporting organizations. The kick-off wrapped up with a filming screening of Farming While Black, a documentary that spotlights a rising generation of Black farmers finding strength in the deep historical knowledge of African agrarianism — and its potential to save the planet. The film asked the question - Can Afro-Indigenous regenerative agricultural practices be the solution to climate change? This event was featured in the Cap-Times:



- **Annual Volunteer Appreciation** – Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway and Parks Superintendent Eric Knepp once again joined Olbrich Volunteers for an annual appreciation event. This year's event welcomed over 120 volunteers to celebrate their annual contribution of over 19,000 hours to the Gardens.
- **Bolz Conservatory Upcoming Closure Dates:**
 - **March 3-5:** Takedown of Orchid Escape
 - **March 24-April 4:** Annual pruning in the Bolz Conservatory

Park Operations Superintendent Report

Central/ Ecology Team

- Performed ice maintenance and snow removal.
- Completed 2nd and 5th year tree pruning.
- Worked with Parks Planning to make panting selection changes for Door Creek and Country Grove shelters.

Conservation

- Performed ski trail grooming.
- Brush removal and brush pile burning at Cherokee Marsh, Owen, Prairie Ridge, and Turville
- Sowed native seed at Cherokee Marsh, Edna Taylor, Owen and Turville.
- Supported deer management at Cherokee Marsh.

Construction

- Hauled and spread playground mulch assisting East, West and Central parks.
- Hauled recycled asphalt from Elver park to a future project location.
- Haul snow from the Capital square/State St. for Mall Maintenance.

East Parks

- Small brush clearing projects at Kingston Onyx and Whitetail Ridge Parks.
- Obtained occupancy for the new Door Creek Park shelter.
- Performed maintenance on picnic tables, benches, and garbage cans.

Facilities

- Started Wingra boat launch repair
- Repaired urinals at Mallards
- Installed a new furnace at Forrest Hill Cemetery Mausoleum

Mall Maintenance

- Removed snow for numerous large and small snow events.
- Pruned trees and bushes in the maintenance service area.
- Refurbished wood benches from the Capital Square.

West Parks

- Brush projects at Garner, Marlborough, Bordner, Everglade,
- Added mulch to a number of playgrounds in the West Parks section
- Removed snow from assigned routes and maintained ice at Elver. Also assisted volunteers at other ice rinks by removing heavier snowfalls.