

City of Madison

Park & Open Space Plan 2025-2030

**MADISON
PARKS**

Door Creek Park by Andrea Guget

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Executive Summary



McPike Park by Nataliya Akulenko

Madison residents have recognized the importance of park and open spaces for over 130 years. Parks serve an important role in the community’s ecosystem and provide opportunities for residents to connect with the area’s natural resources. Parks also improve the physical, mental and social well-being of the city’s residents and are an important part of the cultural fabric of the community. Well-planned and programmed parks create gathering spaces and recreational opportunities with fewer barriers for residents. Today, the City of Madison Parks Division has over 290 parks and manages 5,700 acres of park land, and over 95% of residents live within a 10-minute walk from a park.

The 2025-2030 Park and Open Space Plan (POSP) serves as the Parks Division’s five-year strategic plan. The POSP was developed under the guidance and oversight of the Parks Long Range Planning Subcommittee and approved by the Board of Park Commissioners. The POSP is adopted as a supplement to the City of Madison Comprehensive Plan and is required for participation in state and federal grant programs. An analysis of park land inventory was completed, and the POSP incorporates public feedback received, analyzes park use and trends in recreation, and takes into account overall City, County and State planning efforts to determine park and recreation needs for the community.

Madison is the second largest city in Wisconsin. Since 2010, both Madison and Dane County’s population growth has outpaced all other municipalities in the state. Madison is expected to grow from a population of just over 291,000 in 2024 to over 309,200 with an increase of 15,000 residential housing units by the year 2030. The population of individuals ages 65 and older is the fastest growing age demographic and is expected to increase by about 50% by 2040. There continues to be disparities in terms of race, income, and housing. Clearly these demographic changes will require Parks to respond and adapt. For example, the number of parks and different types of amenities will likely need to increase to meet Madison’s growing needs. As the population grows, housing developments are expected to become more dense with less personal yard space, further increasing the importance of well-planned park spaces that are walkable from the surrounding neighborhood. Understanding future development needs and these trends helps Madison Parks plan for how to best meet the current and future recreational needs of the entire community.

Multiple public engagement strategies were utilized throughout 2024 to understand how parks are meeting the needs of residents. The top five reasons people visit park spaces include:

- general physical activities such as walking, hiking or running;
- leisure activities, such as picnicking or nature viewing;
- attending events and festivals;
- activities involving the lakes such as boating, fishing, and swimming; and
- biking.

Overall, residents place a high value on Madison’s parks and open spaces and find them to be welcoming and accessible. Residents emphasized the importance of balancing the protection of natural resources with the need for park development. Public engagement efforts did indicate a desire for increased connectivity; more focus on partnerships; improved maintenance of existing facilities; enhanced spaces and programming to meet the needs of adolescents; and strong preference that existing resources be utilized for addressing deferred maintenance of existing facilities. Likewise, engagement efforts and analysis of athletic field users demonstrate the need for the Parks Division to provide sufficient flexible playing fields throughout the city, including facilities that can accommodate larger scale events and tournaments.



Worthington Park



Allied Park



Allied Park

As the largest public landowner within the city, the Parks Division plays a major role in helping to protect natural resources. Climate change not only impacts how the Parks Division manages the land, but is also noticeably impacting year-round recreation within the community. Fluctuations in temperatures and extended seasons are resulting in different year-round recreation needs than traditionally offered. The POSP discusses the Parks Division’s approach to confronting these challenges.

Despite the high value placed on parks and open spaces, Wisconsin and Madison continue to lag behind the rest of the country in terms of funding outdoor recreation according to the Trust for Public Land ParkScore report. As the park system grows, additional resources are needed to fund and maintain park facilities and spaces. Aging infrastructure and increased usage are resulting in an even greater need for resources. Madison’s taxpayer funding is not sufficient to resource all the needs of the park system, and both diverse revenue streams and strategic partnerships must be pursued.

The 2025-2030 POSP provides a roadmap for addressing the many challenges faced by the park system. The recommended strategies and actions build on those from the 2018-2023 POSP and incorporate feedback, trends, and data gathered throughout this planning process. The recommended strategies of the plan are aligned with the 7 elements of a great city as identified in the Comprehensive Plan. 2025-2030 POSP recommended strategies call for Madison Parks to:

- Increase connectivity between parks to enhance access.
- Reduce parkland deficiencies and respond to increasing residential density.
- Create welcoming and inclusive park spaces and programming.
- Foster meaningful connections with groups and organizations that advance the vision of the Parks Division.
- Improve public access to lakes and waterways.
- Protect and celebrate the community’s cultural richness.

- Protect and enhance natural resources.
- Improve the park system’s capacity to adapt to environmental challenges.
- Develop new parks and amenities in a fiscally sustainable manner.
- Secure sufficient resources to sustain service levels across the growing and changing park system.
- Pursue regional solutions to regional issues.
- Promote the physical and social health of the diverse community.

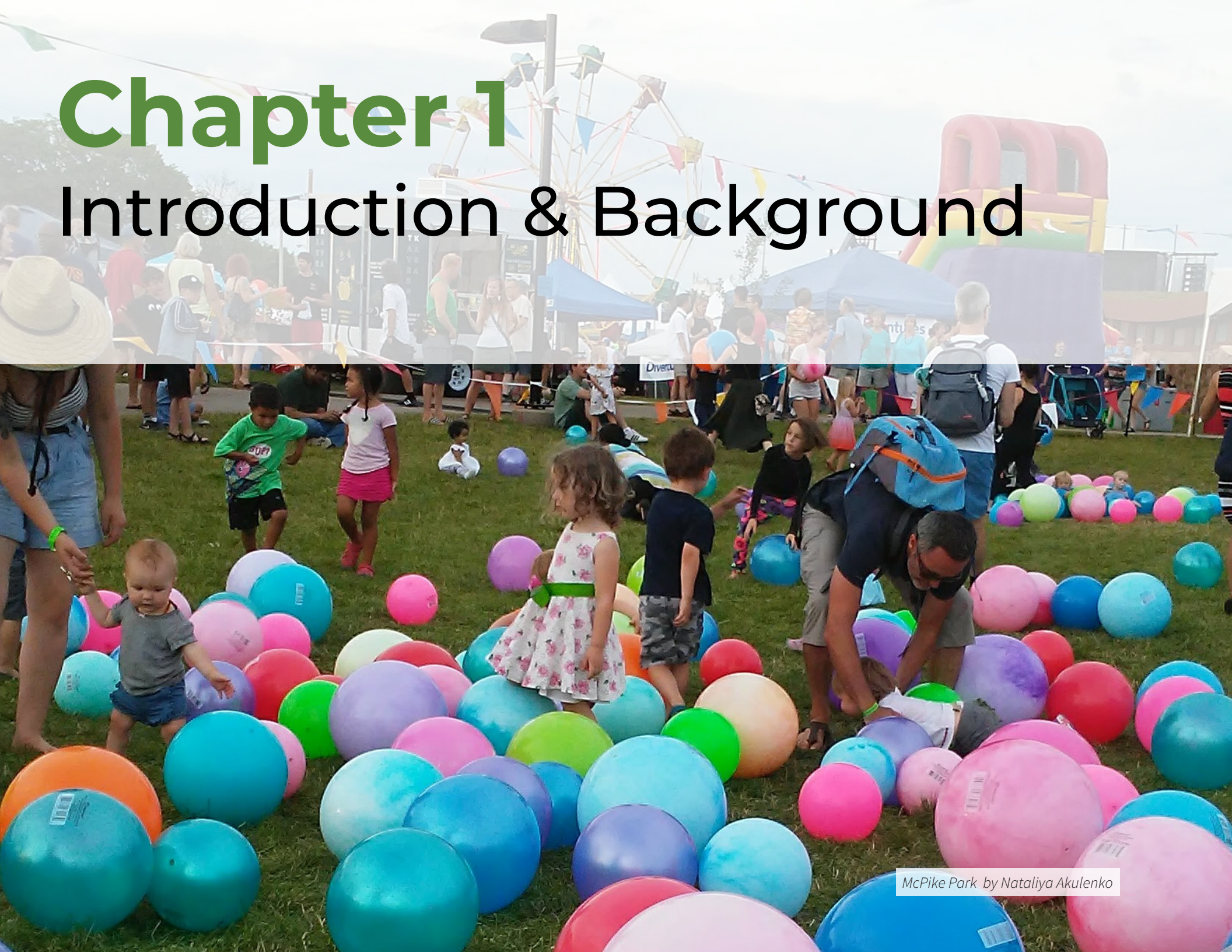
Madison Parks has a long legacy of striving for and achieving excellence. Existing resources and practices are not sufficient to maintain existing service levels and continue to build the park system of tomorrow. In order to accomplish the strategies and corresponding actions set forth in this plan, Parks Division staff, policymakers, and stakeholders must take action, think creatively, and leverage the power of partnerships.



Brittingham Park

Chapter 1

Introduction & Background



McPike Park by Nataliya Akulenko

Chapter 1: Introduction & Background

The Park and Open Space Plan (POSP) serves as the five-year strategic plan for the Parks Division, providing analysis and recommendations regarding the overall system of parks in Madison. The POSP reviews city-wide parkland distribution, funding mechanisms, and relationships to changing demographics, land development, and future growth across the city.

This chapter discusses the purpose of the Plan, provides a summary of the history of Madison Parks, and highlights accomplishment since the previous plan was last adopted in 2018. In addition, this chapter outlines the benefit that park and open spaces provide the community and the process for updating and adopting this plan.

1.1 Purpose of the POSP

City of Madison parks play a vital role in creating a thriving community. Parks improve the health and wellness of residents of all ages, and in turn contribute to the well-being of the entire community. The POSP informs public policy and system-wide decisions regarding how parks are planned, developed and programmed. This POSP aids City Boards, Commissions, City agencies and staff, and other government agencies in decision-making processes and serves as a communication tool for interested residents and volunteers. It helps inform decisions related to park policies, acquisitions, development of parkland and facilities, as well as influences City of Madison resource allocation and operations. The analysis and recommendations discussed in this plan relate to park development, management of core facilities, and broad concepts in park system planning.

The POSP is evidence-based and therefore utilizes extensive public input, census data, park use records, geographic information systems mapping, and other informational databases. The plan has been subject to public review, hearings, and is adopted by the Board of Park Commissioners and the Common Council. The assumptions identified in the POSP are monitored on an ongoing basis resulting in adaptation where necessary. The POSP is updated every five years to stay current with changing recreational trends, demographics, and community needs. Maintaining a current Park and Open Space Plan is a prerequisite for participation in federal and state park and open space grant programs, which are critical to obtaining the resources required to accomplish many of the objectives laid out in this plan.

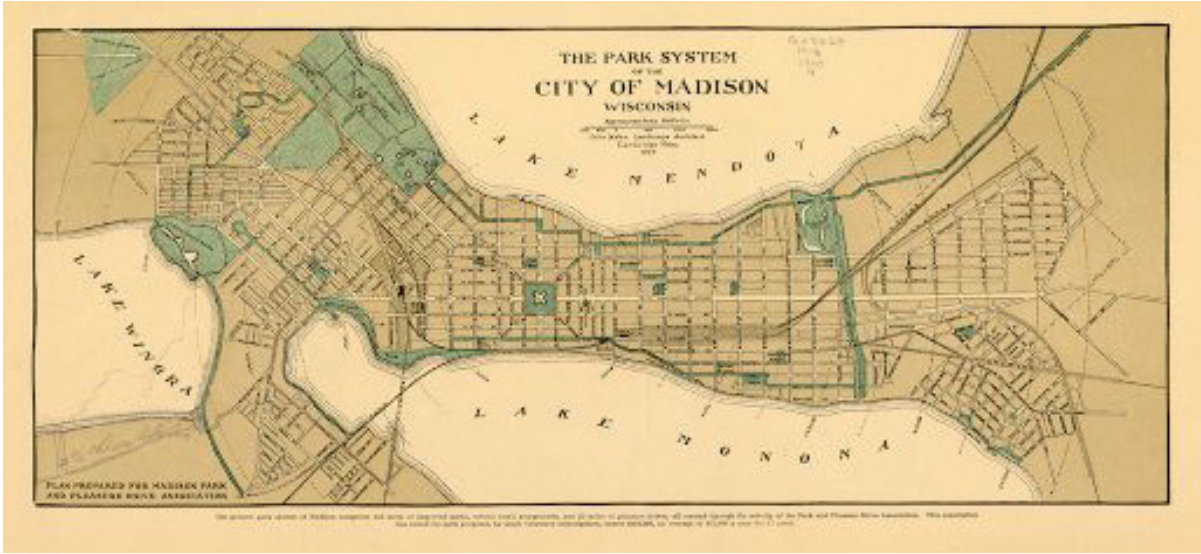


Warner Park by Kristin Mathews

1.2 History of the City of Madison Park System

The Teejop (Dejope), meaning “Four Lakes,” region in which Madison is situated today was formed by the retreat of glaciers approximately 13,000 years ago. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Four Lakes region became popular for settlement among native peoples somewhere between 8,000 to 2,000 years ago. Approximately 1,000 years ago ancestors of the Ho-Chunk tribe, known as the Woodland Tradition, began to settle permanently in the area, as evidenced by the construction of complex effigy mounds and artifacts of advanced tools, agriculture practices and pottery. Until European settlers began to arrive and displace the Ho-Chunk from their ancestral homeland of Teejop, the area served as the cultural center of the tribe’s society. A more detailed history of the impacts of the European settlement on the Ho-Chunk tribe is available in the Madison Historic Preservation Plan.¹

In 1836, Wisconsin became a Territory and James Doty persuaded the territorial legislature to designate the Four Lakes area as the new capital. Doty was hired by legislators to survey and plan the city, naming the city after James Madison.² Doty’s original plat of Madison included only one public space, a park around the capitol building, but otherwise had ignored opportunities for public access and parks around the lakes.³



In the 1860’s, a group of men were collaborating to create Madison’s first pleasure drive. This first pleasure drive expanded upon a network of farm roads at the University of Wisconsin which were opened to the public in the 1860s. For families and individuals with the means to do so, horse-drawn carriage rides were a popular leisure activity in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The success of the new network led to the formation of the Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association (MPPDA) in 1894. This was a group of local philanthropists who donated land and resources to create the foundation of today’s park system. The acres of parkland in the city expanded from just 3 in 1900 to 154 in 1905. Although the MPPDA effectively served as the city’s unofficial parks department by raising private donations to acquire and improve park land, construct additional pleasure drives, and plant trees and shrubs throughout the city, its founders and particularly its president John Olin recognized that long-term sustainability for a park system would require government involvement. To that end, the Common Council hired Emil Mische as its first park superintendent to oversee park operations in 1905. In 1909, the Common Council passed a tax of one-half mill (1/20th of a cent) for park purposes, which brought in nearly \$50,000 per year over the next ten years (approximately \$1.7 million in today’s dollars).⁴

The Board of Park Commissioners

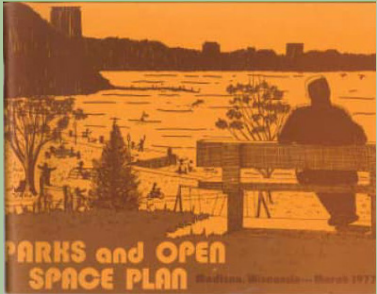
The Board of Park Commissioners is granted unique authority over the park system and is specifically empowered and directed to govern, manage, control, improve and care for all public parks, acquire park land and, with Council approval, to lease park spaces and sell or exchange park land. The Commission consists of seven members: five appointed residents and two Alder persons. Facilities Programs and Fees Subcommittee and Habitat Stewardship Subcommittee and Parks Long Range Planning Subcommittee assist the Commission in its decision-making and establishing level of service standards.

In 1909, the MPPDA engaged the services of the Landscape Architect John Nolen to prepare a comprehensive plan for the improvement and future growth of the city. Nolen published Madison: A Model City in 1911, in which he recommended that the existing 150 acres of parkland and many miles of pleasure drives be expanded into a coordinated system of parks under the responsibility of an official Park Commission. In 1931, the Madison Park Commission (now the Board of Park Commissioners) was created, and the MPPDA transferred full responsibility for the operation, maintenance, and acquisition of all parks and pleasure drives to the City of Madison, forming the basis of today’s parks system.⁵

In 1961, a Park and Open Space Plan was updated that recommended preservation of natural drainageways and significant natural areas. This plan and subsequent plans called for addressing parkland deficiencies and setting standards around recommended amounts of park land as the city continued to grow. Additional Park and Open Space Plans were completed in 1971, 1977, 1984, 1991, 1997, 2005, 2012, and 2018. The system and services provided continued to evolve over the decades, responding to the needs and priorities of the community along the way. In 2024, the Parks Division and Madison Parks Foundation Celebrated the 130th anniversary of the park system.⁶

Today, the City of Madison Parks Division manages over 290 parks, totaling more than 5,700 acres of land, and provides a variety of programming services. Additional land managed by the Parks Division includes street ends, right-of-ways and stormwater facilities that are used for park purposes. The Parks Division is also responsible for the operation, maintenance, and programming of special facilities such as Olbrich Botanical Gardens, the Warner Park Community Recreation Center, the Goodman Pool, four public golf courses, Forest Hill public cemetery, and the State Street/Mall Concourse. Madison Parks continues to use this plan as a tool to advance the growth of the park system. Madison’s historic commitment to public recreation and open space of all kinds provides the public today with a diverse system of parks and open spaces.

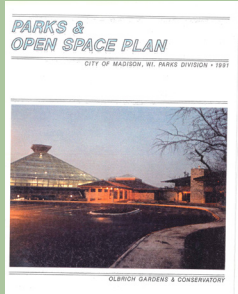
Parks and Open Space Plans through the years:



1961



1984



1991



1997



2018

1.3 Summary of Accomplishments Since the Previous POSP

The 2018-2023 Park and Open Space Plan included twelve strategies that reflect the values, opportunities, and concerns identified through a robust engagement and planning process. The 2018-2023 strategies served as excellent guidance for staff, Board of Park Commissioners, and various subcommittees when making decisions pertaining to day-to-day operations and long-term improvements to the park system. This section provides an overview of accomplishments related to each of these twelve strategies.

Table 1.1: Summary of Accomplishments Since the Previous POSP

2018-2023 POSP Strategy	Accomplishments
Improve public access to lakes	- Acquired multiple shoreline properties, including 346, 354, and 330-342 East Lakeside Street and 16 Lakeshore Court, for an increase of 627 linear feet of shoreline and 4.11 acres of waterfront property. - Installed two beach access mats in partnership with Madison Parks Foundation at Bernie’s Beach and Vilas Park. - Installed two ADA-compliant fishing piers in partnership with Madison Parks Foundation at Vilas Park and Warner Park lagoon. - Constructed new beach shelters with restrooms and sheltered picnic table areas at Tenney and Warner Parks. - Constructed a clean beach water filtration system at Warner Beach in collaboration with Dane County. - Continued seasonal beach maintenance and partnership with Public Health Madison Dane County to monitor water quality on beaches.
Ensure that existing levels of service are maintained and supported through the park system and are increased as new parks and facilities are developed	- Adhered to the benchmark of 95% of Madison residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park as new neighborhoods are built. - Installed 56 playgrounds through the playground replacement program, ensuring that Madison Parks’ current total of 179 playgrounds are no more than 25 years old. - Administered and enforced park land dedication and park impact fee ordinances for new residential development in the city.

Table 1.1 Continued: Summary of Accomplishments Since the Previous POSP

2018-2023 POSP Strategy	Accomplishments
Design park facilities to accommodate diverse activities and populations	- Collaborated with the cricket community to add a full-size cricket field at Elver Park and improve the practice field used by the women’s league at Haen Family Park. - Installed three gaga ball pits at Penn and Olbrich Parks and Olive Jones Park in partnership with Randall School. - Incorporated dual striping on sport courts to allow both tennis and pickleball when courts are resurfaced. - Renovated The Glen Golf Park and adopted The Glen Golf Park Programming Plan to accommodate mixed use recreation at the golf park. - Constructed the system’s first futsal court at Penn Park. - Collaborated with organizers from Disability Pride, Madtown Mommas and Disability Advocates to review designs for inclusive playgrounds, accessible parking improvements, and the Rennebohm Park sprayground. - Designed and installed inclusive playgrounds at Elver, Warner, and Rennebohm Parks.
Protect and enhance natural and cultural resources	- Adopted the Burial Mound Policy in 2019, which was updated under the guidance of representatives of the Ho-Chunk Nation. - Completed preservation projects at historic facilities such as Breese Stevens Field, Gates of Heaven, Brittingham Boat House, Hoover Boat House, and Normal Hall. - Maintained and preserved historic landscapes in Tenney Park, Hoyt Park, and Forest Hill Cemetery. - Invested \$1 million in capital improvements to conservation parks over the past five years to restore and maintain sensitive habitats. - Created a Conservation Technician Trainee position in the 2022 Operating Budget. - Reallocated existing Parks resources to create the Parks Ecology Team in 2022 to focus on improving and maintaining natural areas in community, neighborhood and mini parks.

Table 1.1 Continued: Summary of Accomplishments Since the Previous POSP	
2018-2023 POSP Strategy	Accomplishments
Acquire parkland to reduce parkland deficiencies and address increasing population density	- Acquired 245 acres of land to address parkland deficiencies and increasing population density city-wide: - East side: Zeier Park and expansion of O. B. Sherry Park. - North side: Hartmeyer Roth Park, Tilton Park, and Whitetail Ridge Park expansion. - South side: a portion of 1802 and 1804 South Park Street for a new park, and Olin Park expansion consisting of 16 Lakeshore Court, 354, 346 and 330-342 East Lakeside Street, including the Parks Division’s new administrative offices. - West side: Moraine Woods Park and Elver Park expansion. - Downtown: 305 S. Bedford Street for the expansion of Brittingham Park. - Reclassified two downtown City-owned properties as parks, including Madison Senior Center Courtyard and the Lakefront Porch Park. - Received dedication of multiple parks city-wide to address increasing populations with new developments, including Kestrel, Eagle Trace, and Canter Parks. - Added Fraust, Heifetz and Harvey Schmidt Parks through the Town of Madison attachment.
Create equitable access and funding for parks	- 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. - Continued the Goodman Pool Scholarship program in partnership with the Goodman Foundation and Madison Parks Foundation to reduce barriers to entry. - Developed and grew the Parks Worker Program and other green career pathways to reduce barriers for entry into the workforce. - Utilized the Equitable Hiring Tool in many recruitments as part of efforts to diversify the workforce. - Utilized the City’s Equity Analysis tool on major programs, projects, and policies.

Table 1.1 Continued: Summary of Accomplishments Since the Previous POSP	
2018-2023 POSP Strategy	Accomplishments
Ensure that new park development occurs in a fiscally sustainable way	- Constructed \$12 million in building improvements at Olbrich Botanical Gardens, which included the Frautschi Family Learning Center and replacement of production green-houses, funded equally through City support and Olbrich Botanical Society capital campaign. - Renovated The Glen Golf Park through a Donation and Development agreement with Michael and Jocelyn Keiser, Supreme Structures and the Madison Parks Foundation, utilizing private funding and resources to create a high-quality golfing experience and expand types of uses of the golf park. - Utilized plastic tiles as a surfacing solution for courts with damaged pavement to extend the life of individual courts as a lower cost option. - Created volunteer-led “All-Wheel Spots” on underutilized paved areas to address needs of the skateboarding community and beyond. - Reinvested a portion of land sale proceeds at Yahara Hills Golf Course to support the capital needs of the Golf Enterprise Program. - Developed and established a Cooperative Agreement with the Madison LakeWay Partners who will be the primary philanthropic partner for the Madison LakeWay. - Redeveloped 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 create an overall welcoming feel of the space. - Renovated the Royal Thai Pavilion at Olbrich Botanical Gardens in partnership with the University of Wisconsin, who provided \$1,650,000 in funding towards restoration efforts.
Improve the park system’s capacity to withstand future environmental changes	- Adopted the Parks Division’s Land Management Plan in 2023, which included updated strategies to adapt operations to climate change, proactively manage the urban forest, and increase resilience of natural areas. - Created the Parks Ecology Team, which leads the effort to diversify park natural areas, landscape beds, and urban forest canopy in general parks.

Table 1.1 Continued: Summary of Accomplishments Since the Previous POSP	
2018-2023 POSP Strategy	Accomplishments
Improve the park system’s capacity to withstand future environmental changes (Continued)	- Increased the use of existing alternative land management practices, including pre-scribed burning, prescribed grazing, and the flea beetle predator pilot program in both general parks and conservation parks. - Collaborated with City Forestry and residents on spongy moth control during the latest population peak in 2023. - Incorporated the use of “Nice Rink” style ice skating rinks 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. Examples include the Olbrich Botanical Gardens Expansion, Lakeside Offices, and Goodman Maintenance Facility. - Converted fossil-fuel equipment to electric where possible, including over 100 pieces of electric handheld equipment and 21 electric Fleet vehicles including trucks, cars, riding lawn mowers, forklifts, and UTVs since 2018.
Increase connectivity between parks to enhance access	- Adopted the Madison Bicycle Adventure Trail plan to provide a feasible way to connect parks across the city using existing bicycle infrastructure and park and open spaces. - Planned and constructed recreational biking facilities and features at Aldo Leopold, Sycamore, and Sandburg Parks. - Partnered with City Engineering to construct Starkweather Creek Bike Path extension to connect O. B. Sherry Park with Olbrich Park and future Starkweather Park. - Partnered with City Engineering to construct the Autumn Ridge Bike Path utilizing Heistand Park for connectivity on the east side. - Constructed bridge in Warner Park to better connect Brentwood neighborhood with the park and various services.

Table 1.1 Continued: Summary of Accomplishments Since the Previous POSP	
2018-2023 POSP Strategy	Accomplishments
Develop a healthy and diverse urban tree canopy within parks	- Invested in TreeKeeper tree inventory software in partnership with City Urban Forestry section. - Completed tree inventory to catalogue 45,000 trees on 215 park properties, including records of the species, diameter, and basic condition. - Acquired more than 50 acres of mature forest land with healthy, mature canopies, which include large acreages at Whitetail Ridge (20 acres) and Moraine Woods (20 acres). - Implemented the woodland tier system and initial broadscale restoration efforts based on the adopted 2023 Land Management Plan. Invested in TreeKeeper tree inventory software in partnership with City Urban Forestry section. - Completed tree inventory to catalogue 45,000 trees on 215 park properties, including records of the species, diameter, and basic condition. - Acquired more than 50 acres of mature forest land with healthy, mature canopies, which include large acreages at Whitetail Ridge (20 acres) and Moraine Woods (20 acres). - Implemented the woodland tier system and initial broadscale restoration efforts based on the adopted 2023 Land Management Plan.
Increase engagement with groups and organizations and develop new ones	- Implemented the Parks Alive program, which is dependent upon collaboration and participation of a variety of City agencies, including the Department of Civil Rights, Neighborhood Resource Teams, Community Development Division, Public Health Madison Dane County, and more. - Established and adopted a cooperative agreement with Madison LakeWay Partners (formerly the Friends of Nolen Waterfront) to support the Design Competition, fundraising efforts and development of the Lake Monona Waterfront Master Plan, now known as the Madison LakeWay. - Reestablished Ride the Drive in 2024 through a Community Steering Committee comprised of various City agencies and community partners, including Madison Parks Foundation, Madison Bikes, Madison Boats, MSCR, Public Health Madison Dane County, Community Development Division, and the Madison Sports Commission. - Collaborated with the Madison Public Library and Engineering Division to design the Imagination Center at Reindahl Park.

Table 1.1 Continued: Summary of Accomplishments Since the Previous POSP	
2018-2023 POSP Strategy	Accomplishments
Increase engagement with groups and organizations and develop new ones (Continued)	- Collaborated with various community organizations and small businesses to develop and implement The Glen Golf Park Programming Plan. - 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 fund the installation of a new artificial turf infield and bring the Madison Night Mares (a women’s collegiate softball team) to Warner Ball Park in 2024. - 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. - A dedicated Parks Volunteer Coordinator position was authorized in the 2023 Operating Budget, to systematically develop and support volunteer efforts in alignment with park priorities.
Pursue regional solutions to regional issues	- Collaborated with Dane County and State of WI officials during several emergency response situations, including the 2018 flooding event and COVID-19 Pandemic responses. - Collaborated 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 connections. - Collaborated with Dane County to sell a portion of Yahara Hills Golf Course (231.28 acres), as recommended by the Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks, for use as landfill expansion and proposed sustainability campus that will serve the future waste management needs of the entire Dane County area. - Acquired Marty Farm in collaboration with multiple City agencies to expand Elver Park and address stormwater and transportation infrastructure needs of the far west side. - Disposed of undeveloped Hughes Park (.27 acres) through City’s surplus process for re-development of Centro Hispano to meet broader community needs.

1.4 Madison Parks Vision and Mission Statements

Madison residents are fortunate to have inherited a park system built by the progressive vision and efforts of previous generations. Today, the Board of Park Commissioners, Madison Parks Foundation, and City of Madison Parks Division continue a mission of enhancing Madison’s legacy of diverse parklands; providing green space, safe environments, and recreational facilities; and meeting the changing needs of present and future generations.

The quality of life for Madison residents is influenced by its natural resources: parks, greenways, and public access to the numerous waterways which greatly define Madison culture. The vision and mission statements (adopted as part of the 2018-2023 POSP) and other goals in this plan serve to guide the development of policies and facilities in the City of Madison park system.

Vision Statement

Everyone shall have access to an ideal system of parks, natural resources, and recreational opportunities that enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors.

Mission Statement

- Provide an exceptional system of safe, accessible, well-planned and maintained parks, facilities, public cemetery, natural areas, and public shorelines.
- Provide affordable opportunities for recreational and educational experiences.
- Preserve and expand our urban forest resources through a well-planned and systematic approach to tree maintenance, planting, and natural area management.
- Preserve and promote City of Madison Parks’ historic legacy, as well as its future legacy.
- Provide opportunities for cultural interaction by facilitating community events and through the display of public art.

1.5 Role of Parks and Recreation

Madison is growing rapidly as new developments are occurring around the city and redevelopments are becoming more densely populated. Parks are some of the only free, multi-functional public spaces in the community. Ensuring that sufficient public open spaces remain available and accessible to residents is critical for a healthy, vibrant community. Parks contribute to the physical and mental health of residents in many ways, as well as provide economic benefits and serve a critical role in the environmental health of the community.

Public Health Benefits

It is well documented that parks enhance the physical health and mental, emotional, and social well-being of the community. Access to parks and open spaces, as well as free or low-cost programming and volunteer opportunities, creates healthier communities. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) reports that physical activity at any age can improve mental health and reduce the risk of chronic diseases, including obesity, osteoporosis, stroke, and Type 2 diabetes.⁷ Likewise, maintaining a healthy lifestyle can save more than \$1,800 per person in annual healthcare costs.⁸

Madison is a very health-conscious city. In 2023 Madison was ranked as the sixth fittest city in the United States according to the American College of Sports Medicine, with 64% of residents categorized as being in excellent or very good health.⁹



Brittingham Park

Move More, Spend Less

Did you know that staying active doesn't just boost your health—it also boosts your bank account?

According to research, maintaining a healthy lifestyle can save over **\$1,800 per person** each year in healthcare costs. That's money you could put toward travel, hobbies, or even a rainy-day fund—all while feeling better, sleeping better, and living longer.

Madison Parks provide accessible, affordable opportunities for individuals to stay active and prioritize their health.



Photo by Hansi Johnson



Allied Park

Community Well-being

Public parks are hubs for community interaction and neighborhood activity and foster a sense of belonging. They are places where residents gather for social events, recreational activities, and meetings about local issues, which increases social interaction, creates an overall sense of community, and helps to combat loneliness. The power of parks as a community gathering space was highlighted both nationally and locally during the COVID-19 pandemic, as people flocked outdoors for a safe way to connect with one another during a period of historic social isolation.

Parks are activated through events and programs that are permitted by or sponsored and organized by the Parks Division. The Carts in Parks program brings food carts and trucks into the parks and creates placemaking opportunities. Parks Alive programming activates parks in historically underserved communities (known as Neighborhood Resource Team (NRT) areas) with music, family-friendly activities, and free food with the primary goal of strengthening community ties within these areas. Various festivals, neighborhood block parties, and picnics that happen throughout the year are organized by individuals or organizations around the community and provide opportunities to strengthen community ties across the city.



Cherokee Mark Conservation Park - North by Wendy Murkve

Environmental Health

As the climate continues to warm, public health hazards linked to air pollution, heat waves, and flooding will become more common. The City of Madison is taking these threats seriously, and the parks system is integral to alleviating some of the adverse effects of climate change. For instance, park and open spaces help lessen the urban heat island effect and provide natural habitat to support native pollinators. The park system has approximately 1,775 acres of wooded areas and approximately 45,000 trees inventoried which help improve air quality and mitigate the impacts of extreme heat, by reducing air temperatures by up to 10 degrees.¹⁰ Madison has roughly 1,000 acres of parkland identified as managed meadows designed to protect and enhance pollinator habitat; this is in addition to our 1,700 acres of Conservation Parks. In addition, green infrastructure within parks can help mitigate flooding and protect water sources by slowing and absorbing stormwater runoff. These are a few of the many benefits the park system contributes to the environmental health of the community.



Elver Park

Economic Vitality

In some cities, the ability to find housing near parks or open space is a challenge. According to National Parks and Recreation Association (NRPA), 84% of adults in the U.S. sought high-quality parks and recreation when choosing a place to live.¹¹ Madison’s expansive parks system gets more people closer to parks and makes parks more accessible to the community. In 2024 the Trust for Public Land scored Madison at 93 out of 100 for park accessibility, meaning 93% of Madisonians live within a ten-minute walk from a park.¹²

According to a study completed by the NRPA and George Mason University, over 50% of 70 studied communities used parks and recreation images in their economic development materials.¹³ The study notes that parks and recreation contribute to economic development through business and talent attraction, retention, and expansion. Park specialty facilities, such as Olbrich Botanical Gardens, and the festivals and events permitted by the Parks Division are key driving factors for local tourism, which contributed towards the \$1.5 billion visitors spent in the Madison area in 2023 according to Destination Madison.¹⁴ Parks create economic opportunity for local businesses through programs such as Carts in Parks, and also equipment rental, catering, and entertainment opportunities that are facilitated through the permitting processes. In addition, the Parks Division utilizes various contractors for park maintenance and improvement projects.



Tenney Park

Accessibility

The Parks Division is dedicated to providing park access to everyone in the community. This is done through various means, including paved paths, accessible beach mats, playgrounds designed for users of all abilities, and providing sufficient parking and accessible parking in parks. Paved paths, compared to grass or gravel paths, provide a surface that is more accessible to people with various physical needs. Using paths to connect the general public to parks and recreation facilities, as well as other key community spaces, is critical to encouraging safe alternative modes of transportation. These paths provide important means of travel for those who prefer to bike or walk for health or environmental reasons and can be critical to those who lack other means of transportation due to age, income, or disability. In addition, providing and maintaining a certain level of paved parking lots in parks is essential for individuals who rely on vehicles to access these spaces.

To ensure access to parks for people with disabilities, the Parks Division worked with the Department of Civil Rights to complete an ADA Transition Plan. This plan identifies the facilities that need to be improved in order to provide adequate access under current standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act. See Appendix A: Parks ADA Transition Plan for additional details related to accessibility standards.

Equity and Inclusion

Madison Parks plays a vital role in the City of Madison’s Racial Equity & Social Justice Initiative (RESJI). The mission of RESJI is to establish racial equity and social justice as a core principle in all decisions, policies, and functions of the City of Madison. The City is committed to reducing racial disparities as it is well documented that racial inequities exist across all indicators for success, and that deep and pervasive racial inequities have been created and perpetuated into government at all levels.

African Americans, Latinos, and people living in low-income urban areas across the United States have disproportionately been denied the health, social, and environmental benefits of vital public spaces due to inequities born from historical and current-day policies, systems, and norms. These inequities are the product of policies and practices like residential segregation, redlining, racially biased planning decisions, and exclusionary zoning, as well as problematic narratives and ways of working in the green space field that have often excluded or tokenized Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

In 2018, the Parks Division launched the Parks Racial Equity Change Team (“Change Team”) to advance the City’s RESJI. The Change Team’s mission is to ensure that race will not limit access for BIPOC communities to our parks, natural resources, and recreation opportunities by design or service. The Change Team’s work centers on the Parks Racial Equity Action Plan.¹⁵ This document identifies racial equity priorities and serves as the roadmap of the racial equity work for the Parks Division by providing timelines, accountability, and performance measures. These goals ensure a continued high level of service to the evolving community and Parks Division staff.



Penn Park



Allied Park

Parks Racial Equity Action Plan Goals



Irwin A. & Robert D. Goodman Pool

- Improving health outcomes and connections to the Parks system
- Strengthening outreach and public participation from BIPOC communities
- Creating a racially diverse and inclusive workforce
- Ongoing training to improve understanding of racial equity concepts and tools

1.6 Planning Process

The planning process for the 2025-2030 Madison Park and Open Space Plan was conducted in three phases:



Allied Park

Phase 1: Data Gathering and Public Engagement

From fall 2023 to March 2025, the Parks Division evaluated current data and existing conditions in the park system, reviewed changes to the park system since the 2018-2023 POSP and identified key themes and issue areas to explore in the next iteration of the plan. The Parks Division hired a consultant team, MSA Professional Services with subconsultant All Together, to assist with the development and design of the plan and with community engagement. The Parks Division also worked with the UW Survey Center in early 2024 to develop and distribute a survey to randomly selected households throughout Madison. In April and May 2024, the Parks Division held four Public Input Meetings (PIMs) to solicit feedback from the general public on the planning process and priorities for the park system. Focused engagement with communities historically left out or marginalized during planning processes occurred over the summer of 2024.



Phase 2: Plan Development

Over the course of 2024 and into early 2025, the Parks Division and consultant team collaborated to develop the 2025-2030 POSP (Park and Open Space Plan). Each chapter of the plan, including text, figures, tables, and mapping exhibits, were developed and reviewed by the Parks Long Range Planning Subcommittee. In addition, the data was evaluated against current National Parks and Recreation Association and Trust for Public Lands metrics for communities of a similar size. The plan was also made available for review and comment by other City agencies that often collaborate with the Parks Division, such as the Planning Division and Engineering Division.

Phase 3: Plan Review and Adoption

The 2025-2030 City of Madison Parks and Open Space plan is adopted as a supplement to the City of Madison Comprehensive Plan. This plan and any future amendments become official City policy when the Common Council passes, by a majority vote, a resolution to adopt the Plan. See Appendix B: Authorizing Resolution (RES-2025-00XX) related to the 2025-2030 Park and Open Space Plan.

The procedure to adopt and amend the POSP is as follows:

Step 1: POSP Approval by the Board of Park Commissioners

1. The Parks Long Range Sub-Planning Committee (LRP) recommends the draft POSP for adoption by the Board of Park Commissioners (BPC) and refers the draft to the BPC.
2. The BPC reviews the draft POSP; depending on desired changes they may or may not refer to a future meeting.
3. The BPC passes a motion to approve the plan.

Step 2: Adopt the POSP as a Supplement to the City of Madison Comprehensive Plan

1. The Parks Division introduces a resolution to the Common Council to adopt the POSP (Park and Open Space Plan).
2. The Common Council refers the plan to the BPC.
3. The BPC passes separate motions to refer the plan to the Board of Public Works and Plan Commission.
4. The Board of Public Works provides feedback and recommends approval of the plan, returning it to the BPC.
5. The Plan Commission provides feedback and recommends approval of the plan, returning it to the BPC.
6. The BPC makes any revisions needed and recommends the plan for adoption by the Common Council.
7. The Common Council passes a resolution to adopt the POSP.

POSP Amendments and Updates

Amendments can be made at any time, but the City should generally not amend the plan more than once per year. A common recommended approach is to establish a consistent annual schedule for consideration of minor plan amendments. This plan should be updated every five years to maintain eligibility for Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Stewardship Funding. Unlike an amendment, a plan update would revisit the entirety of the plan content and include more robust opportunities for public participation.



Warner Park by Rita Cairms

Chapter 1: Endnotes

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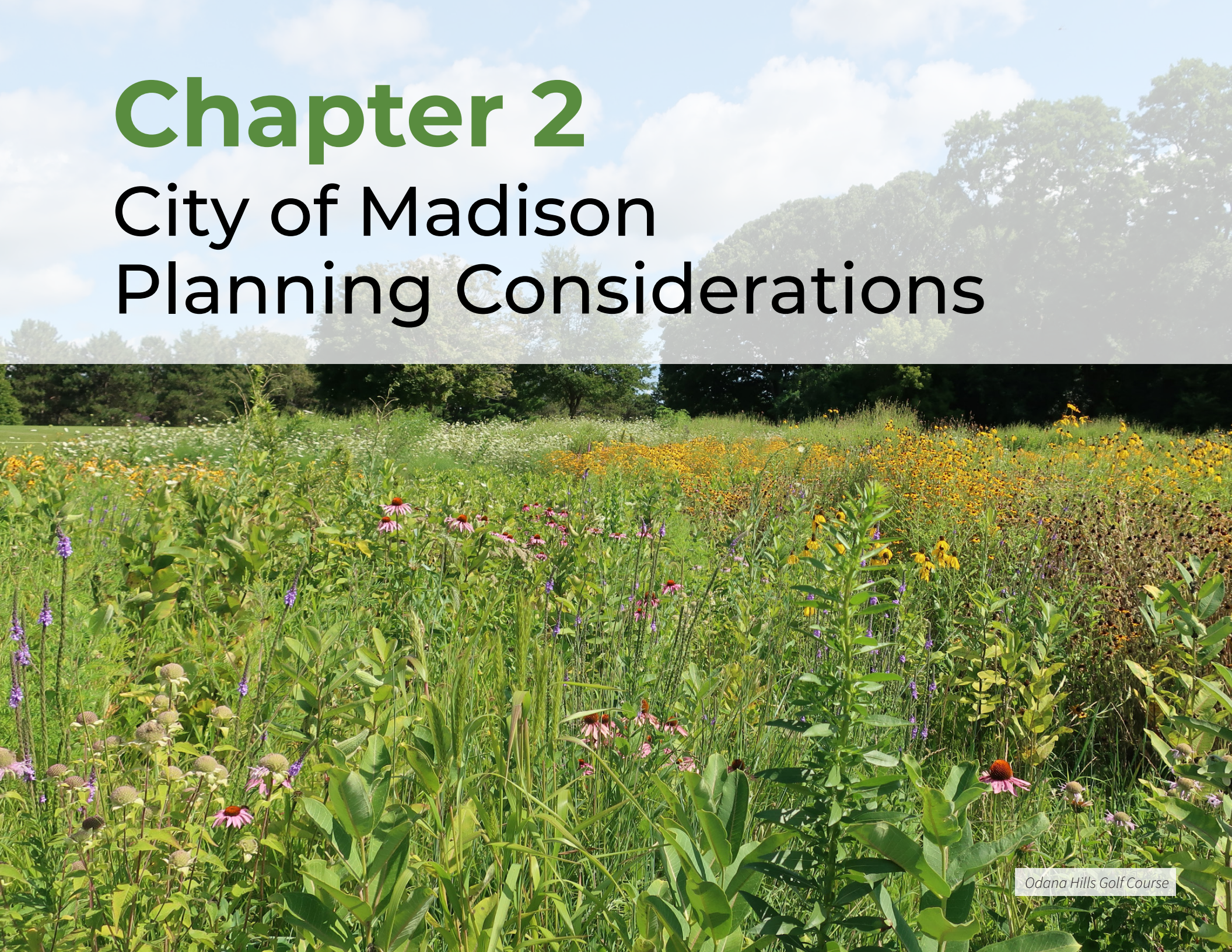
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Chapter 2

City of Madison Planning Considerations



Odana Hills Golf Course

Chapter 2: City of Madison Planning Considerations

Madison is the second largest city in Wisconsin. As the state capital and home to the largest University of Wisconsin campus, a significant portion of its economic vitality and development are linked to the University and Capitol. This chapter outlines various planning considerations related to the demographics related planning efforts, and environmental resources of the Madison community.

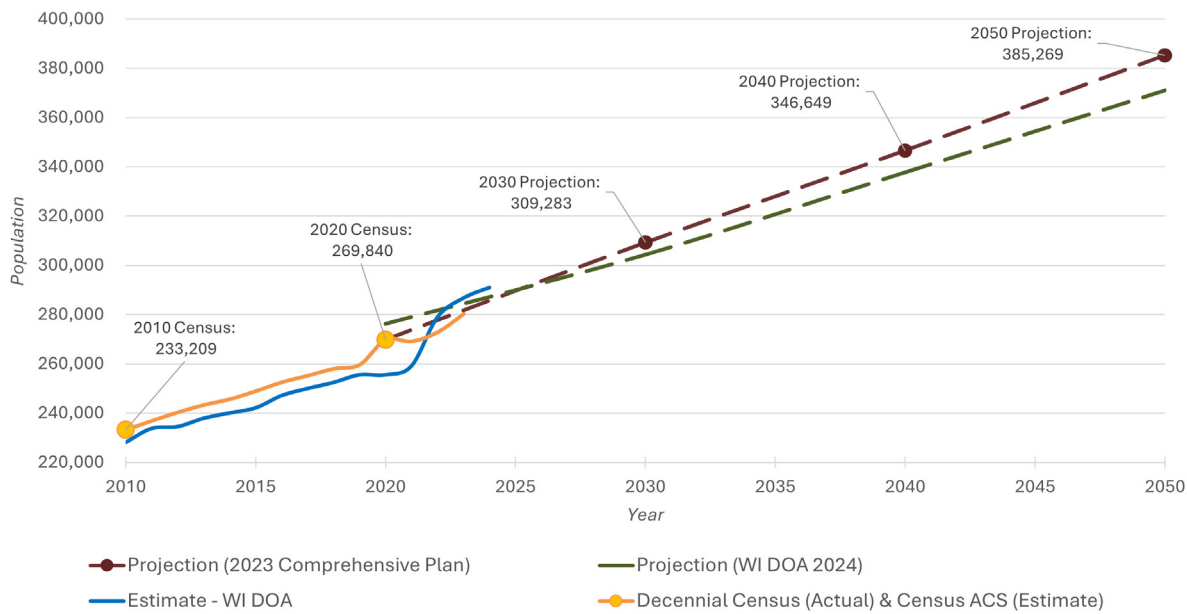
2.1 Demographic Overview

The Parks Division recognizes that thoroughly understanding the population it serves is the first step towards developing an inclusive parks system. A focus on equity is critical to the vision of providing an ideal park system to all Madison residents. This section reviews Madison’s existing and projected demographics, including population, age, race/ethnicity and income, and the implications of these changes to park planning.

Population

Madison is the second largest city in Wisconsin, having a population of 291,037 in 2024 according to the Wisconsin Department of Administration’s estimates.¹⁶ Madison’s population has increased by 30% since 2000 and is expected to continue to grow rapidly in the near future according to City Planning Division analysis utilizing data from the Capital Area Regional Planning Commission and U.S. Census Bureau, as shown in Figure 2.1. Dane County is anticipated to grow at a similar pace. Understanding the pace at which the population is growing is critical to ensuring that the outdoor recreation needs of the community are understood and that the park system continues to contribute to the natural ecosystem of the community.

Figure 2.1 City of Madison: Population Estimates and Projections



Source: City of Madison Department of Planning, Community & Economic Development

Age Composition

Due in part to the presence of the University of Wisconsin, Madison has a relatively young population compared to the rest of the state. In 2022, the median age in Madison was 32, approximately eight years younger than the statewide median of 40.¹⁷ Young adults aged 20-34 have historically been Madison’s largest age segment. In 2022, young adults accounted for over one-third of Madison’s total population, compared to the State of Wisconsin as a whole, where ages 20-34 account for only 19% of the total population.¹⁸

The Wisconsin Department of Administration Demographic Services Center provides county-level projections by age. Projections for Dane County show that the population of residents aged 65 and older will increase by 48%, or over 39,000 people, between 2020 and 2040.¹⁹ In 2010, the 65 and older age cohort comprised 10% of Dane County’s overall population; in 2040 it is projected to make up 17%. Residents aged 85 or older, who only made up 1.5% of the population in 2010, will account for 3.0% by 2040.²⁰ According to NRPA, the population of adults 65 and older is one of the fastest growing segments in the nation and is aging more actively than previous generations. It is critical to consider this when planning park spaces and programs.

Race and Ethnicity

According to the US Census Bureau, Madison’s population is predominately White. In 2020, 69% of the population identified as White alone (not Hispanic or Latino). Individuals identifying as Asian alone, Black or African American alone, or two or more races account for approximately 21% of Madison’s population (Figure 2.2). Nine percent of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino.

Understanding the race and ethnicity of the community is important to eliminating barriers and ensuring that all individuals within the community have access to recreational opportunities. In addition, parks create the backdrop for cultural enrichment and celebration in a variety of ways, as evidenced by the number and purpose of park reservations and special events held throughout the Madison. Chapter 4 provides additional details and analysis as it relates to recreation facility demand within the park system.

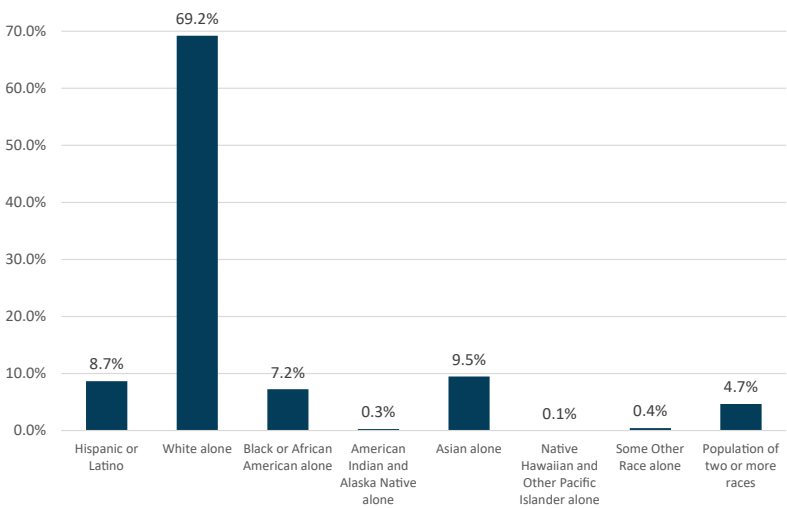
A Community That’s Growing Older—and More Active

Dane County is experiencing a significant demographic shift. Between 2020 and 2040, the number of residents aged 65 and older is projected to increase by 48%—that’s more than 39,000 additional older adults.

- In 2010, adults 65+ made up 10% of the population
- By 2040, they’ll represent 17%
- The 85+ age group will double, growing from 1.5% to 3.0%

This trend mirrors national patterns. According to the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), adults 65 and older are one of the fastest-growing age groups in the U.S.—and they’re staying more active than ever before.

Figure 2.2 Population by Race & Ethnicity

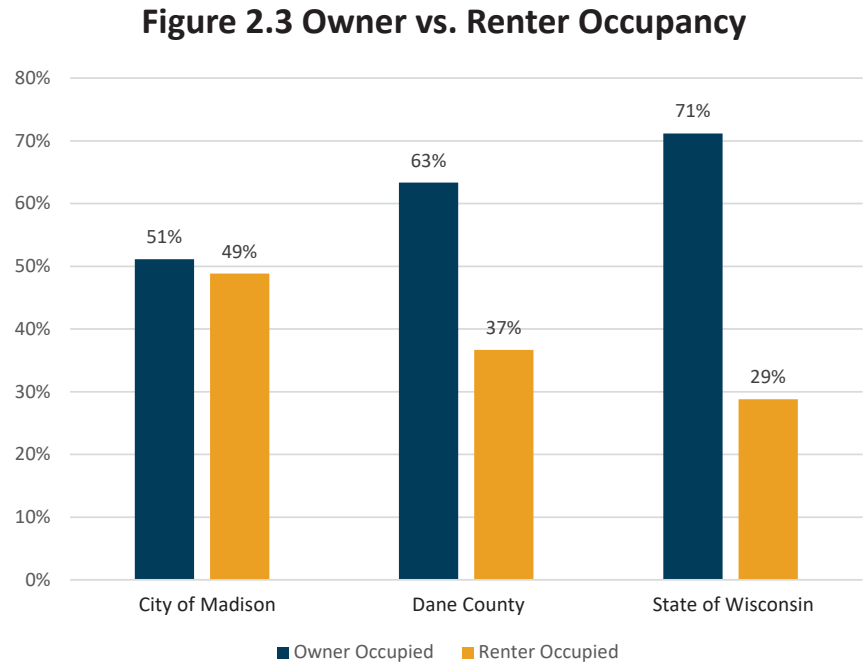


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census, P9 Hispanic or Latino, and Not Hispanic or Latino By Race

Housing

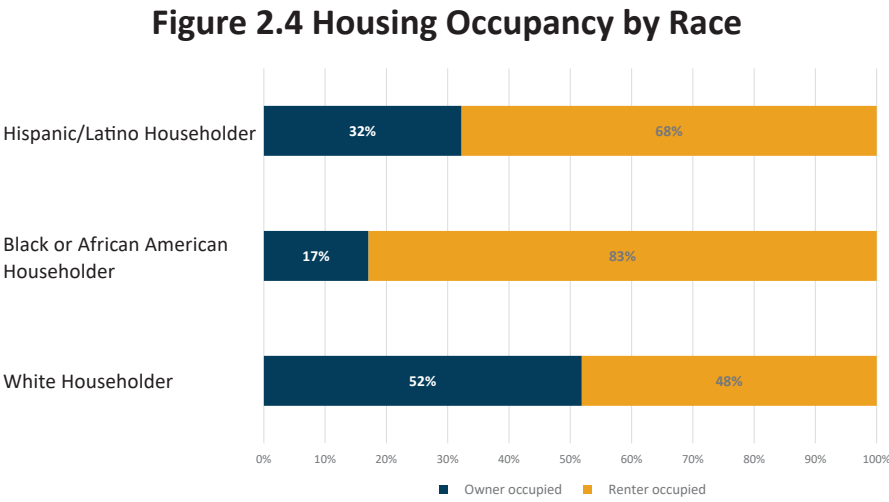
Housing is a basic human need, and neighborhoods are foundational to Madison. As shown in Figure 2.3, Madison has about equal numbers of owner-occupied housing units and renter-occupied housing units. Dane County as a whole has a higher proportion of owner-occupied units, at 63% owner-occupied housing units. Wisconsin consists of 71% owner-occupied units.²¹

The homeownership rate in Madison is lower for communities of color than for White households. Home ownership by White residents matches is split nearly 50/50 between owner-occupied and renter-occupied households. Black and Hispanic/Latino households are majority renter-occupied (Figure 2.4). The high number of renter-occupied units is attributable in part to the University of Wisconsin Madison and its younger population. However, according to the 2023 Comprehensive Plan, 9 out of 10 new residents are renters.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates B25008: Total Population in Occupied Housing Units By Tenure, City of Madison, Dane County, Wisconsin.

The City of Madison’s Housing Forward Plan, launched in 2021, sets goals and priorities to address the housing challenges in the Madison community.²² Notably, the City has set an ambitious goal of adding more than 15,000 new homes by 2030, which will be accomplished by a variety of housing types, many of which will be high density. Assuming many of the new units built will have little or no private yard space, the need for adequate park space to serve these residents is critical as neighborhoods are developed and redeveloped.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates B25003: Tenure

Workforce and Employment

Madison has a substantial professional population, which is largely attributable to its position as the state capital, the presence of the flagship campus of the University of Wisconsin, and headquarters for companies such as Exact Sciences. Health Care and Social Assistance represented the Madison’s largest employment sector in 2022, employing 19.4% of the workforce, followed by Educational Services at 13.7%, and Public Administration at 9.1%.²³ Table 2.1 shows the percentage of the workforce employed by each industry.



Table 2.1: Workforce in Madison by Industry

Jobs by NAICS Industry Sector (2022)	Jobs (Count)	Share
Health Care and Social Assistance	43,338	19.4%
Educational Services	30,603	13.7%
Public Administration	20,326	9.1%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	19,503	8.7%
Retail Trade	17,245	7.7%
Finance and Insurance	14,754	6.6%
Accommodation and Food Services	14,660	6.6%
Administration & Support, Waste Management and Remediation	11,109	5.0%
Manufacturing	10,130	4.5%
Other Services (excluding Public Administration)	7,532	3.4%

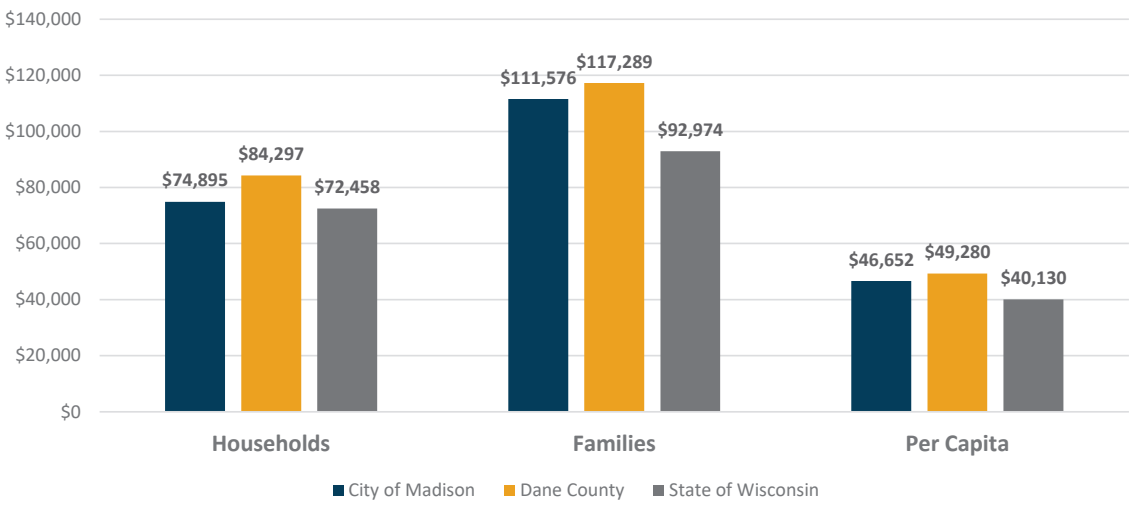
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022, OnTheMap. Note: Includes all private and public sector jobs within the City of Madison

Income

In 2022, Madison had a median household income of \$74,896—a 36% increase from 2015.²⁴ The median family household income was \$111,576, representing a 42% increase from 2015. Households are defined by the U.S. Census as all people occupying a housing unit; a family household consists of a householder and one or more other people living in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption. A family household may also contain people not related to the householder. Figure 2.5 illustrates that Madison’s median income tends to be higher than the state overall, but slightly less than the median for Dane County.

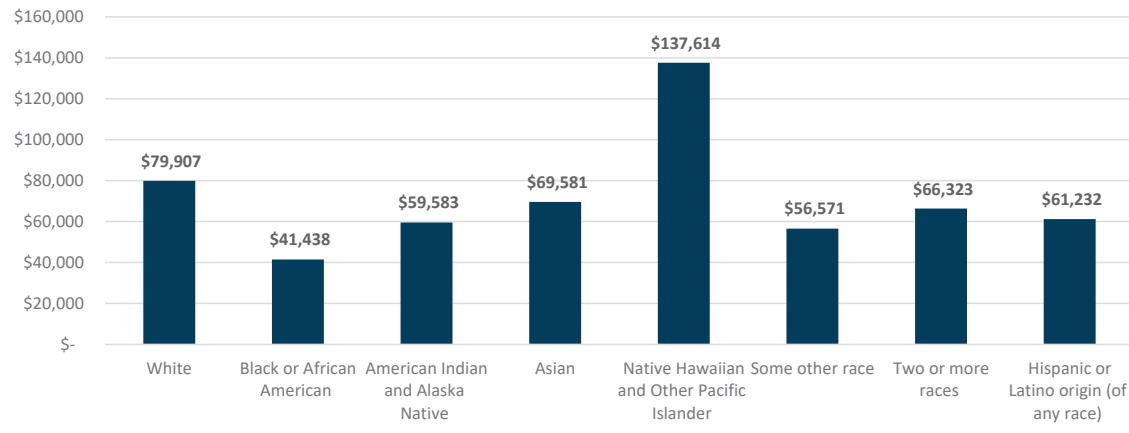
White households have a higher median income than all other races at just over \$79,900. Black or African American households have the lowest median income at just under \$41,500 (Figure 2.6). Despite the high median household and family income, nearly 17% of Madison residents are below the poverty level.²⁵ This rate is higher than the state and county, which both have poverty levels around 11%.²⁶ Minority populations in Madison also experience higher levels of poverty than White residents. While about 15% of the White population is below the poverty level, every other racial and ethnic group identified by the U.S. Census Bureau had higher levels of poverty (Figure 2.7).²⁷ The population of college students living off campus within Madison may increase the poverty rate within the community by approximately 5%.²⁸

Figure 2.5 Median & Per Capita Income Comparison



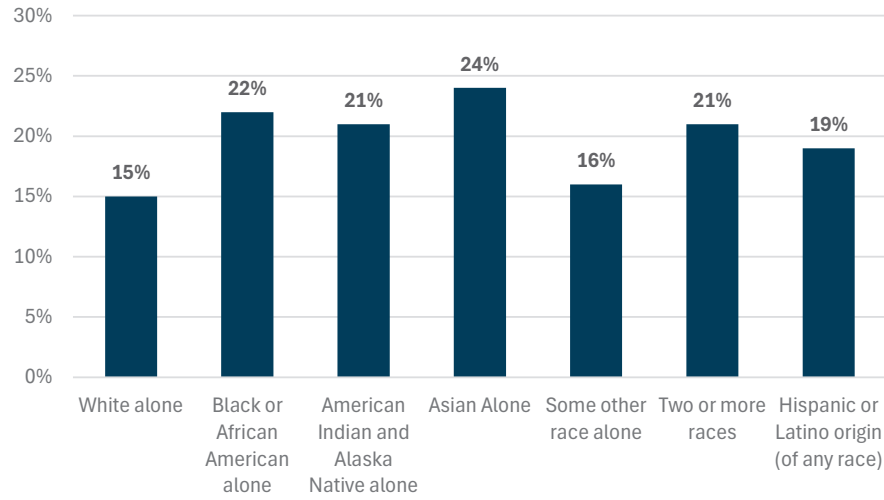
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates, S1901Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2022 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) & B19301Per Capita Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2022 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars), City of Madison, Dane County, Wisconsin

Figure 2.6 Median Income by Race/Ethnicity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates, S1901Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2022 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars). Note: Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander removed as small population size (<0% of total population) results in significant margin of error.

Figure 2.7 Percent of Population Below Poverty Level by Race/Ethnicity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates, S1701 Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months, City of Madison

Key Takeaways

While Madison may be considered relatively affluent overall, that affluence is unevenly distributed, with race and ethnicity being key differentiators. Parks have the potential to be equalizers by providing spaces, services, and programming that reduce barriers and provide opportunities for everyone within the community to thrive. Identifying the specific needs and desires of underrepresented community members is vital to ensuring equitable park access to all.

Madison’s population growth and increase in residential units will result in the need for greater or improved park access. The Parks Division must be able to sustain and adapt to cultural shifts, as Madison is becoming both older and more diverse. Residents of different ages and cultures have distinct values for parks and open space; therefore, these trends have significant implications for park planning. An adaptable, flexible parks system should evolve in conjunction with changes in its user base.



2.2 Related Planning Efforts

In addition to being a supplemental document to the City’s Comprehensive Plan, the Park and Open Space Plan works in conjunction with other planning documents, such as citywide, special area, neighborhood, neighborhood development, area, historic preservation, and cultural plans and watershed studies, to inform the growth, development, and management of the park system. While the citywide plans have broader implications to the entire parks system, the plans contained within the other categories tend to be specific to a geographic area. Table 2.2 illustrates the relationship of the POSP to other City planning documents that include recommendations or have implications for parkland. This section generally highlights key plans that have been implemented or adopted since the 2018-2023 POSP was adopted.

Table 2.2 Overview of City Planning Efforts

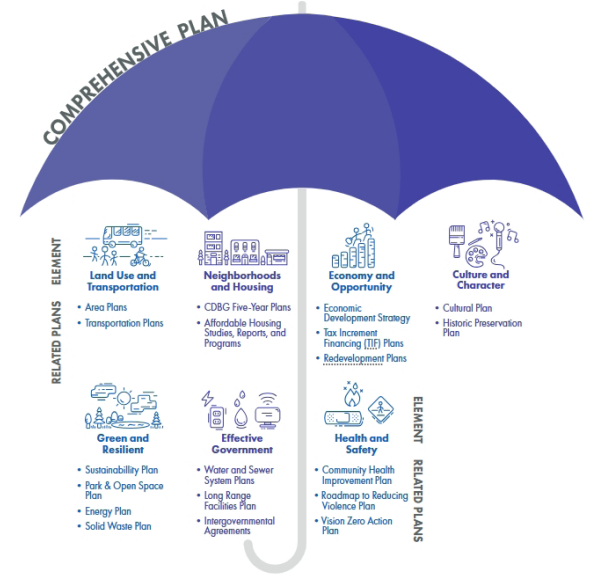
City of Madison Comprehensive Plan (2024)					
Parks and Open Space Plan (2025-2030)					
Citywide Plans	Special Area Plans*		Neighborhood Development Plans	Neighborhood Plans*	
Madison in Motion: Sustainable Transportation Master Plan (2017)	Central Park (2011)	Monroe Street Commercial District (2007)	Blackhawk (2006)	Allied-Dunn’s Marsh (1990)	Hoyt Park Area (2014)
	Cottage Grove Road (2017)	Oscar Mayer (2020)	Cherokee (2007)	Allied-Dunn's Marsh-Belmar (2005)	Marquette-Schenk-Atwood (1994)
Madison Vision Zero Action Plan (2020-2035)	Downtown Plan (2012)	Park Street Urban Design Guidelines (2004)	Cottage Grove (2006)	Arbor Hills-Leopold (2013)	Midvale Heights-Westmorland (2009)
Historic Preservation Plan (2020)	East Rail Corridor (2004)	Royster Clark (2009)	Cross Country (1998)	South Madison Plan (2005)	Mifflandia (2019)
Madison Sustainability Plan (2024)	East Washington Avenue Capitol Gateway Corridor (2008)	Schenk-Atwood Neighborhood Business District Master Plan (2001)	Elderberry (2018)	Brentwood Village-Packers-Sherman Village (1996)	Northport-Warner Park-Sherman (2009)
Madison Cultural Plan (2013)	East Washington Gateway Revitalization - BUILD (2003)	Stoughton Road Revitalization Project	Felland (2002)	Brittingham-Vilas (1989)	Regent Street-South Campus (2008)
Task Force on Equity in Music and Entertainment (2019)	East Washington Old East Side Master Plan - BUILD (2000)	University Avenue Corridor (2014)	High Point - Raymond (2017)	Broadway-Simpson (1986)	Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Worthington (2000)
Area Plans	First Settlement Neighborhood Master Plan (1995)	Williamson Street Design Guidelines (2004)	Junction (2018)	Darbo Worthington Starkweather (2017)	South Madison (2022)
	Northeast Area Plan (2024)	Lamp House Block (2014)	Marsh Road (1999)	Emerson-East-Eken Park-Yahara (2016)	Southwest (2008)
West Area Plan (2024)	Milwaukee Street (2018)	Wingra Creek BUILD (2006)		Greenbush (2008)	Tenney-Lapham (2008)
				Greenbush-Vilas Neighborhood (2010)	Triangle Monona Bay (2019)
		Marquette Neighborhood Center (2000)		Hiestand (2006)	

*= Some areas may have multiple adopted plans. In such cases, the most recently adopted plan is the one that remains valid.

City of Madison Comprehensive Plan

The State of Wisconsin requires that local governments create, maintain, and update a comprehensive plan no less than every 10 years. The City of Madison Comprehensive Plan was initially adopted in 2018, with interim updates in 2023 and 2024, and serves as a guiding document organized by seven elements: Land Use and Transportation, Neighborhoods and Housing, Economy and Opportunity, Culture and Character, Green and Resilient, Effective Government, and Health and Safety. The Comprehensive Plan was developed via a robust community engagement process, with over 15,000 people providing feedback, priorities, ideas, and directions on the type of community Madison strives to be. A key outcome of the planning and engagement process was a set of goals to help guide the City staff and policymakers over the next ten to twenty years, as well as the identification of specific strategies and actions geared toward implementing those goals. In addition to providing specific goals and recommendations, the Comprehensive Plan also includes a Generalized Future Land Use Map (GFLU) that guides the physical development of Madison by illustrating recommendations for land use and development intensity.^{29 30}

Several themes emerged from this plan which continue to inform development of park land, including changing demographics, changing preferences in housing and neighborhoods, continued desire for public transportation and trails, strong community value in culture and character of neighborhoods, and continued concerns regarding the environment. Overall, the Comprehensive Plan includes goals for addressing park land deficiencies, providing access to lakes, promoting biodiversity and a healthy urban canopy, providing a variety of programming responsive to the community’s needs, and collaborating with partners to enhance the recreational needs of the community.



Elver Park by Elliott Veith

Madison in Motion: Sustainable Transportation Master Plan

The City of Madison Department of Transportation, in close coordination with the Engineering Department, is responsible for developing and maintaining safe, efficient, economical, equitable and sustainable transportation. Madison’s comprehensive transportation network includes well-maintained streets, sidewalks, biking infrastructure, multi-use paths and public transit through Metro Transit services, including bus rapid transit (BRT). A strong multimodal transportation system is essential to provide residents and visitors access to park spaces.

The City of Madison’s Sustainable Transportation Plan, Madison in Motion, outlines a vision for a safer, more accessible, and sustainable transportation network.³¹ Key priorities include expanding transit, improving biking and walking infrastructure, and reducing reliance on single-occupancy vehicles. Additionally, Madison’s adopted Complete Streets guide, Complete Green Streets, provides a consistent process for planning, designing, building, and operating streets in a way that reflects our community values and increases safety and equity.³²

Enhancing multimodal connections to expand access to parks is considered in project design and selection, ensuring that residents can easily reach parks by walking, biking, or transit—ideally in a way that is well-integrated with the path network through parks. Recommendations for transit-oriented development and high-frequency transit routes may improve connectivity to parks, particularly for residents without personal vehicles. Efforts to increase pedestrian safety and multimodal access might include infrastructure enhancements such as improved crossings, multi-use paths, and better integration of transit stops near parks.



Madison Sustainability Plan

The Madison Sustainability Plan was adopted in the fall of 2024 as an update to the 2011 plan.³³ The Sustainability Plan is a roadmap for ensuring that Madison is a healthy and resilient place to live and work today and for future generations. The Sustainability Plan includes 24 goals organized into eight elements, which are designed to be ambitious yet attainable achievements that will make Madison a more resilient place today and into the future. Each goal is also accompanied by a set of actions—policies, programs, or projects that, together, help accomplish the goal. Parks plays a key role in achieving many of the Sustainability Plan’s goals, including those focused on providing equitable access to parkland, lakes, and natural areas; reducing greenhouse gas emissions; growing our resilience to the impacts of climate change; sustainability managing City owned properties by conserving water, minimizing pesticide use, and reducing waste; increasing access to urban agriculture; and growing Madison’s green workforce. The City also established the ambitious goal of reaching 100% renewable energy and net zero carbon emissions for City operations by 2030 and community-wide by 2050.



Historic Preservation Plan

The City of Madison Historic Preservation Plan was adopted in 2020 and aims to celebrate and preserve Madison’s rich heritage, including cultural resources, historic buildings, and established historic districts.³⁴ The Preservation Plan emphasizes the role of historic preservation in maintaining the Madison’s unique identity and enhancing quality of life for residents and provides context related to historically underrepresented communities, including African American, First Nations, Hmong, Latinx, LGBTQ, and Women. The Preservation Plan generally recognizes the various indigenous archaeological resources throughout Madison and highlights the importance of promoting opportunities for cultural enrichment and celebrations.

Relative to the POSP, Madison has 77 parks and open spaces that have features or the park itself is on the National Register of Historic Places and 33 parks or open spaces with facilities that are designated City Landmarks (see Appendix C – Historic Resources). The Parks Division recognizes the parks system is rich in archaeological resources and is committed to responsibly stewarding this sacred land. In addition to the recommendations of the Preservation Plan, in 2019, the Board of Park Commissioners adopted the Burial Mound Maintenance Plan, which was updated under the guidance of representatives of the Ho-Chunk Nation. The plan provides procedures and guidelines to assure that the mounds are treated with the utmost respect and managed in a manner that protects the integrity of the mounds. Throughout the lifespan of this plan, staff will continue to engage with representatives of the Ho-Chunk Nation and Wisconsin Historical Society for additional training related to cultural resource preservation.



Madison Cultural Plan

The 2013 Madison Cultural Plan explores the arts, history, and science.³⁵ It focuses on the work of individual artists, creative workers, and institutions in the commercial and non-profit sectors. The plan intentionally defines culture broadly. It includes individuals and organizations who are students, amateurs, and professionals. These fields include artisan food production, digital production, architecture, history and heritage, environmental programming, and more. Some recommendations address the need of optimizing the use of parks and streets for fairs, festivals and special events including outdoor concerts.



Task Force on Equity in Music & Entertainment Report

The Task Force on Equity in Music and Entertainment Report was accepted by the Common Council in 2019. It included 31 recommendations that aim to increase access to Hip Hop and all genres of music to public spaces such as parks, block parties, and festivals.³⁶ It also highlights the importance of building our music infrastructure, and support artists. Based on these recommendations, an Economic Impact Analysis was completed in 2022.



Special Area Plans

Special Area Plans focus on specific areas within Madison that are likely to see significant growth or have unique functional use. There are currently 22 active Special Area Plans on file, four of which contain recommendations for a total of about 35 acres of new parkland development. For example, the Oscar Mayer Special Area Plan, adopted in 2020 following the closure of the Oscar Mayer plant in 2017, proposes a significant increase in high density housing, incorporates bicycle trail connectivity between Sherman Ave and Ruskin St, maintains a balance of passive and active uses in the space, and provides a buffer for the adjacent wetland on the southern edge. The Oscar Mayer Plan proposed a 16-acre park to address the park needs of the increasing population within the area, which resulted in the acquisition of Hartmeyer-Roth Park in 2024.



Area Plans

The City’s Planning Division has implemented a new planning framework since the adoption of the 2018-2023 POSP, which recognizes 12 discrete areas to be utilized for planning boundaries moving forward. As Area Plans are developed for each of these 12 areas, previous plans are archived and no longer used for planning efforts. This new framework was developed to replace Neighborhood Plans and Neighborhood Development plans and avoid issues from the previous system in which some sub-areas had overlapping plan boundaries, while other neighborhoods were left out entirely. As of 2024, the City has adopted the Northeast and West Area plans and has a tentative schedule to develop the remaining 10 plans between 2024 and 2030. The Southeast and Southwest Area planning processes started in late 2024.

The Parks Division is working in tandem with City Planning’s efforts to create Park Development Plans for the mini and neighborhood parks within each of these areas. The Northeast and West Area plans include specific recommendations for addressing parkland deficiencies through acquisition or expansion in key areas, as well as reinforcing the importance of interconnectivity between parks and greenspaces with existing or future infrastructure. In addition, the plans identified strong community desire for strategic partnerships and specific amenities for a variety of year-round activities, such as dog parks, building facilities, shelters, playgrounds, and biking, among others.



Neighborhood & Neighborhood Development Plans

Even though the new planning approach has replaced and will replace Neighborhood Plans and Neighborhood Development Plans with Area Plans, many of the existing plans remain relevant. Neighborhood plans have provided a roadmap for building the community and anticipating growth within 23 well-established neighborhoods. As infill or redevelopment happens within these neighborhoods, the population density generally increases. Recent plans, such as Mifflandia, Triangle Monona Bay, and South Madison call for significant redevelopment and revitalization of these neighborhoods. Each of these plans examined the park access availability and recreational needs of the planned community. Within infill areas, there are fewer opportunities to acquire undeveloped land to meet the park needs of these residents, calling for creative means of addressing park land deficiency within these areas.

On the other hand, Neighborhood Development Plans (NDPs) have addressed the growth and development of urban expansion areas around Madison’s periphery where development is expected to occur in the foreseeable future. There are 19 NDPs that identify up to 44 new parks and expansion of 11 existing parks along the city’s periphery, totaling approximately 500 acres. Roughly 25% of the proposed new park parcels are proposed in the Northeast Neighborhood NDP (Table 2.2).

Table 2.3: Parks Projected in Neighborhood Development Plans

Neighborhood Development Plans	Estimated Population at Full Buildout	Existing City of Madison Mini, Neigh., Comm. & Open Space Parkland	Proposed City of Madison Parkland	Mini, Neigh., Comm. & Open Space Parkland at Full Build Out	Park Acreage per 1,000 Residents
Cross Country (1998)	9,000	96.8	0	96.8	10.8
Marsh Road (1999)	5,000	17.4	29.8	47.2	9.4
Felland (2002)	4,000	13.5	2.6	16.1	4
Blackhawk (2006)	3,300	32.2	1.2	33.4	10.1
Cottage Grove (2006)	3,700	10.3	3.8	14.1	3.8
Cherokee (2007)	5,000	65.9	0	65.9	13.2
Pumpkin Hollow (2008)	10,800	0	39	39	3.6
Northeast Neighborhoods (2009)	20,500	9.5	50.5	60	2.9
Midtown (2011)	6,700	35.2	7.9	43.1	6.4
Sprecher (2012)	9,800	204.6	4.4	209	21.3
High Point – Raymond (2017)	16,500	381.7	26.4	408.1	24.7
Elderberry (2018)	16,100	14	54.5	68.5	4.3

Table 2.3 (Continued): Parks Projected in Neighborhood Development Plans

Neighborhood Development Plans	Estimated Population at Full Buildout	Existing City of Madison Mini, Neigh., Comm. & Open Space Parkland	Proposed City of Madison Parkland	Mini, Neigh., Comm. & Open Space Parkland at Full Build Out	Park Acreage per 1,000 Residents
Junction (2018)	4,500	14.3	7.1	21.4	4.8
Pioneer (2018)	20,700	51	22.4	73.4	3.5
Nelson (2019)	9,000	11.1	6.8	17.9	2
Yahara Hills (2022)	8,900	86.5	65.4	151.9	17.1
Rattman (2023)	6,000	241	0	241	40.2
Reiner (2023)	26,500	0	76.3	76.3	2.9
Shady Wood (2023)	3,900	2.2	0	2.2	0.6
TOTAL	159,900	1287.2	398.1	1685.3	134.3



Intergovernmental Agreements

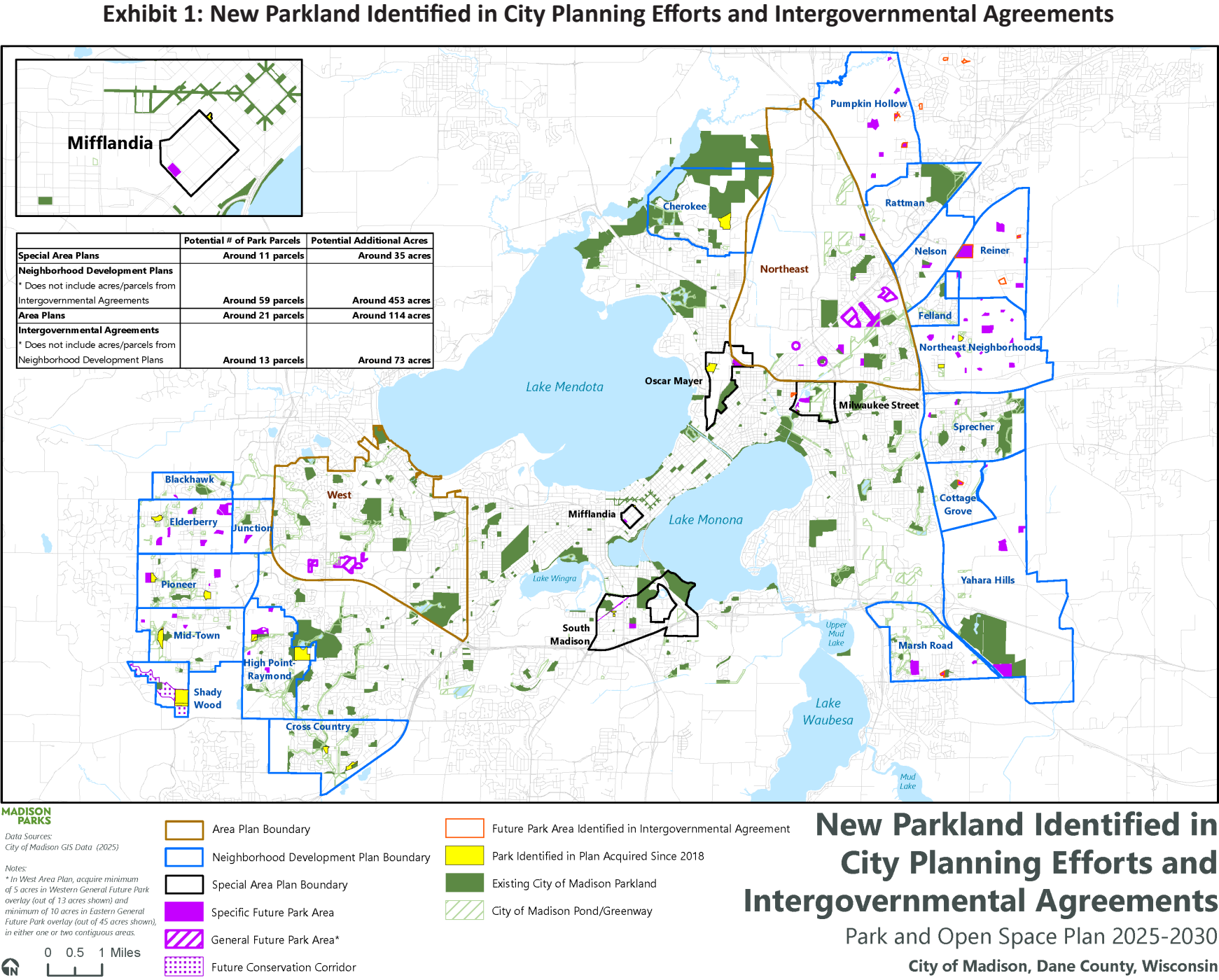
In addition to parkland dedicated in conjunction with new residential development, the City of Madison acquires existing parkland in neighboring communities as part of intergovernmental agreements. In 2022, the Parks Division acquired 3 new parks with the final attachment of the Town of Madison. Currently Madison has intergovernmental agreements with the Towns of Blooming Grove, Burke, and Middleton, which anticipates 11 additional parks by 2036, including three Town of Blooming Grove parks in 2027 and eight Town of Burke parks in 2036. Many of the parks contain amenities (e.g. playgrounds) that may or may not have been maintained to the same standard as similar Madison park amenities.

Exhibit 1 identifies the locations of new parks that will be added due to these neighborhood plans and intergovernmental agreements.

Key Takeaways

There are a significant number of active plans and reports pertaining to the work of City staff. In addition, the relevant plans and reports, which are built on significant public engagement and overseen by various public bodies, often set goals for what the community expects in terms of programming and operation of park spaces. Knowing how those plans interact with the work of the Parks Division provides for more cohesive and effective service delivery that aligns with the goals and expectations of the community.

These documents provide useful population projections and insights as to how the City is expected to grow, as well as potential means to address park access goals by assuming adherence to established park access standards. Parks leadership and Planning staff use this information to make decisions related to land acquisitions; inform park master/development plans and implementation of those plans; and also identify strategic partnerships that may help to advance the mission of the Parks Division. Parks Operations staff use this information to inform land management practices and equipment purchases, while Parks Community Services staff use the information to inform how the Parks Division goes about activating park spaces.



2.3 Environmental Factors

Madison is well known for its unique physical characteristics, waterways, and natural resources. Madison’s core downtown is situated on an isthmus that divides Lake Mendota and Lake Monona. A topographic map found in Appendix D illustrates Madison’s terrain and natural features. The natural geography of the region is composed of a variety of soil types (as shown in Appendix D) that provide the basis for the various habitats across the park system. This section discusses the implications of climate change, the Parks Division’s approach to land management, the urban forest and water quality issues as they pertain to the park system.

Climate Change

Wisconsin is already experiencing climate change impacts, including warmer temperatures, increased rainfall, milder winters, and air quality concerns. The past two decades have been the warmest in Wisconsin since recordkeeping began in the 1980’s. Dane County’s annual average temperature has increased by 3 degrees F since the 1950’s and is expected to increase another 5 degrees F by 2060.^{37 38} These rising temperatures won’t be felt the same across all seasons and times of day. Winters are warming faster than any other season, and nighttime is warming faster than daytime. Lake Mendota, which used to remain frozen for four months out of the year in the 18th century, could experience winters with no ice coverage at all in the coming years.³⁹ Wisconsin can also expect more heat waves. The number of extremely hot days (90°F or higher) in Dane County is likely to triple from 10 to 30 by 2050.⁴⁰

Wisconsin has also been getting more precipitation. In fact, 2019 was the wettest year on record. In 2018, over 11.6 inches of rain fell within the city in 24 hours, costing the City over \$1.6 million in emergency response and repairs. Since 1950, average annual precipitation in Dane County has increased 20%.⁴¹ This trend is expected to continue with annual precipitation increasing by 5% per year by 2060.⁴² Rainfall events are also expected to grow more intense, increasing the likelihood of local and regional flooding.

Climate Change in Wisconsin: What the Data Tells Us



Climate change isn’t a distant threat—it’s already reshaping life in Wisconsin.

- Dane County has warmed by 3°F since the 1950s and could warm another 5°F by 2060.
- Winters are warming faster than any other season.
- Nights are heating up more quickly than days.
- Lake Mendota, once frozen for 4 months a year, may soon see winters with no ice cover at all.

These changes affect everything from public health and infrastructure to agriculture and recreation. Planning for resilient parks, green infrastructure, and sustainable communities is more important than ever.

The City of Madison Engineering Division is working to develop 20 individual Watershed Studies across the city to model various storm events and identify solutions to mitigate flood damage. Many of the Watershed Studies identify improvements that may impact park land, in recognition that parks infrastructure can play a key role in helping address these issues.

- The 2010s were Wisconsin’s wettest decade on record by far, and 2019 was our state’s wettest year.
- During the past decade, there were more than 20 daily rainfalls extreme enough to be considered “100 year events”, meaning that they are expected to occur only once per century.

While climate change impacts the entire community, research is affirming that climate change is disproportionately impacting vulnerable communities. Climate change exacerbates racial and economic inequities.⁴³ Those with greater economic, social, and political resources are more likely to succeed in both managing and adapting to future climatic changes.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, those with fewer financial resources will become increasingly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, such as heat waves, poor air quality, and flooding. Climate change has the potential to further increase disparities in health outcomes. For example, lower-income neighborhoods that lack trees and green space are at a greater risk of heat-related illness. This necessitates that sustainability and adaptability initiatives recognize, and subsequently emphasize, an additional focus towards assisting these vulnerable and disadvantaged communities.

With the current and future changes to our climate, the way that park users interact with the system will change as well, which the Parks Division is anticipating and preparing for. As noted, with temperatures rising in the state, the winter season is beginning to shorten, which prompts residents to desire spring and fall outdoor activities for longer parts of the year. Therefore, installing dark-sky friendly lighted fields and courts to accommodate the extended playing season will be an important investment. The Parks Division has already noted a downward trend in the number of ice skating and skiing days and therefore will shift resources from ski trail and ice rink maintenance to natural area and trail maintenance to give park users a high-quality outdoor experience in the winter, even without ice rinks or ski trails. Recognizing that individual seasons vary each year, the Parks Division is adapting an opportunistic approach to winter recreation offerings as opposed to a traditional calendar-driven approach.

Rising Risks: How Climate Change Is Reshaping the City of Madison



In August 2018, Madison experienced historic flooding. More than 11.6 inches of rain fell in 24 hours, inundating watersheds and causing significant damage to public and private properties.

The Parks Division worked as part of the City’s emergency response operations by protecting city assets and providing sandbags for private property owners. Lake levels stayed well above ordinary levels until Summer 2019, resulting in substantial damage to shoreline park properties, requiring the City to apply for Federal Emergency Management Assistance (FEMA).



Elver Park



Turville Point Conservation Park

Land Management

The Parks Division’s Land Management Plan provides a foundation for stewarding the natural resources contained within the 5,700-acre park system in an era of climate change.⁴⁵ The Plan recognizes the unique habitats that exist within the system and provides actionable strategies for managing invasive species and creating and protecting pollinator habitat in both general parks and conservation parks.

As environmental conditions change there are increased opportunities for invasive species to take hold. Invasive plants, insects, and animals threaten the quality of native habitats, by creating potential for competition and disease pressures. Plants such as Japanese knotweed, buckthorn and garlic mustard compete and crowd out native vegetation. Invasive species are difficult to remove, often requiring multiple herbicide applications for full eradication. Invasive pests such as the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) and jumping worms have substantial environmental impacts with significant implications for public health.

Pollinators such as bees, moths, butterflies, bats, and hummingbirds provide vital services to our ecosystems. The state’s bumblebee and monarch butterfly populations have decreased in recent years.⁴⁶ Between 75 to 95% of all flowering plants rely on these organisms for pollination.⁴⁷ Roughly one out of every three bites of food a person eats is a result of pollinators, and pollinators are estimated to add \$217 billion annually to the global economy.^{48 49 50} Additionally, about 75% of the world’s food crops rely on pollinators.⁵¹ Over the last decade, the United States has experienced a dramatic decline in honeybee hives resulting from habitat loss, pesticides, parasites, and climate change.⁵² The Land Management Plan is rooted in principles of Integrated Pest Management (IPM), with an emphasis on the use of sustainable practices that promote biodiversity of flora and fauna in an era of climate change.

The Land Management Plan emphasizes the importance of species selection when restoring habitats to historic Wisconsin landscapes and recognizes that species traditionally suited for zones to the south will be able to tolerate and thrive in Madison’s new climate. Many objectives listed in the Land Management Plan are classified as “cultural” practices within IPM, which promote robust, resilient stands of vegetation that are more resistant to weed establishment. Where direct control of invasive species is required, the Plan outlines various methods of mechanical, biological, and chemical control of pests.

The Land Management Plan facilitates clear communication with stakeholders and is the framework to which staff, volunteers, and the community can refer regarding the management and maintenance of vegetation in parklands, whether turf, horticultural plantings, or natural areas. Each section contains a brief description of the types of vegetation that occur throughout the system, and documents goals, objectives, and best management practices for those landscapes. The Land Management Plan provides a baseline for managing the park system and creating more detailed plans, such as work plans for athletic fields and Habitat Management Plans for individual parks.

Urban Forest

Urban forests provide a variety of benefits to cities, making trees an especially useful tool for managing the effects of climate change. Urban trees help filter out many common air pollutants, including nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, ozone, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter. A well-designed urban tree canopy can substantially lower cooling and heating costs during the summer and winter months. Trees help to keep neighborhoods cool by providing shade for both outdoor spaces and buildings.

Urban trees also play a large role in reducing stormwater runoff. Tree canopies are effective at slowing run-off during rain events, while the roots both absorb water and provide stability within the ground to prevent erosion. According to the U.S. Forest Service, a medium-sized maple tree (16” sugar maple) intercepts 1,550 gallons of stormwater per year.⁵³

Urban forests are critically important for the public health of residents. For example, street trees in urban areas are associated with lower asthma rates among children.⁵⁴ The shade created by tree canopy also plays a vital role in protecting residents from harmful UV rays.⁵⁵ Studies have shown that living near urban forests can reduce physical and emotional stress among individuals.⁵⁶

There are approximately 11,000 acres of public and private tree canopy in the City of Madison, accounting for 22.4% of the Madison’s entire land area. A comprehensive tree inventory of trees on City-owned land was conducted in 2024 per a recommendation from the 2020 Urban Forestry Task Force’s Report.⁵⁷ Approximately 45,000 park trees, utilizing the Davey TreeKeeper software system, were inventoried. Not only does Madison’s tree canopy provide environmental benefits, but the aesthetic value of trees raises property values and can help reduce neighborhood crime.¹⁷

For additional details, see Appendix E: Ongoing Initiatives: Climate Resilience



Britta Park

Water Quality

Madison is positioned between the two largest bodies of water in Dane County, Lake Mendota and Lake Monona. The current city limits include shoreline frontage on four of the five interconnected lakes, Mendota, Monona, Wingra, and Waubesa. With five distinct lakes, monitoring and managing water quality is unquestionably a significant priority for the community. A map of Madison’s water resources can be found in Appendix D. The five Madison lakes themselves include 58 miles of shoreline and 22 public beaches. While Madison’s growth has posed problems for local water quality, recent decades have seen major improvements in pollution reduction and runoff management.

Threats to the health of Madison’s waterways stem mainly from the introduction of pollutants such as phosphorous and nitrogen, both of which often enter the watershed from far outside the city limits. Blue-green algae blooms, which can be caused by excess phosphorous levels and warm water temperatures, have plagued Madison’s urban waterways for years. These algal blooms decrease water quality and have the potential to cause serious illness. Additionally, harmful bacteria (e.g. E. Coli) and heavy metals drain into Madison’s lakes and rivers every year via stormwater runoff. As water quality science advances, additional hazards, such as PFAS (Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances), are identified. These pollutants impact not just environmental quality, but also recreational activities and the ability to consume fish safely, which impacts how parks are managed.

Long-term exposure to these pollutants may increase the risk of serious health conditions, including heart disease, kidney disease, and cancer.⁵⁸ Further improvements in reducing phosphorous and other harmful agricultural runoff will be vital towards stemming future algal blooms and dangerous bacteria, particularly as annual precipitation and temperature levels in Madison are projected to increase in upcoming decades.



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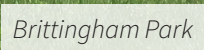
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Chapter 3

Parkland Inventory



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Chapter 3: Parkland Inventory

Madison’s park and open spaces play a significant role in providing the community with a variety of outdoor recreation assets. In addition to providing an overview of the park classifications, facilities, and amenities developed on lands owned by the Parks Division, this chapter outlines various other park and open spaces owned by other local and regional public entities. Exhibit 2 illustrates all City of Madison parks and greenways, as well as other public open spaces.

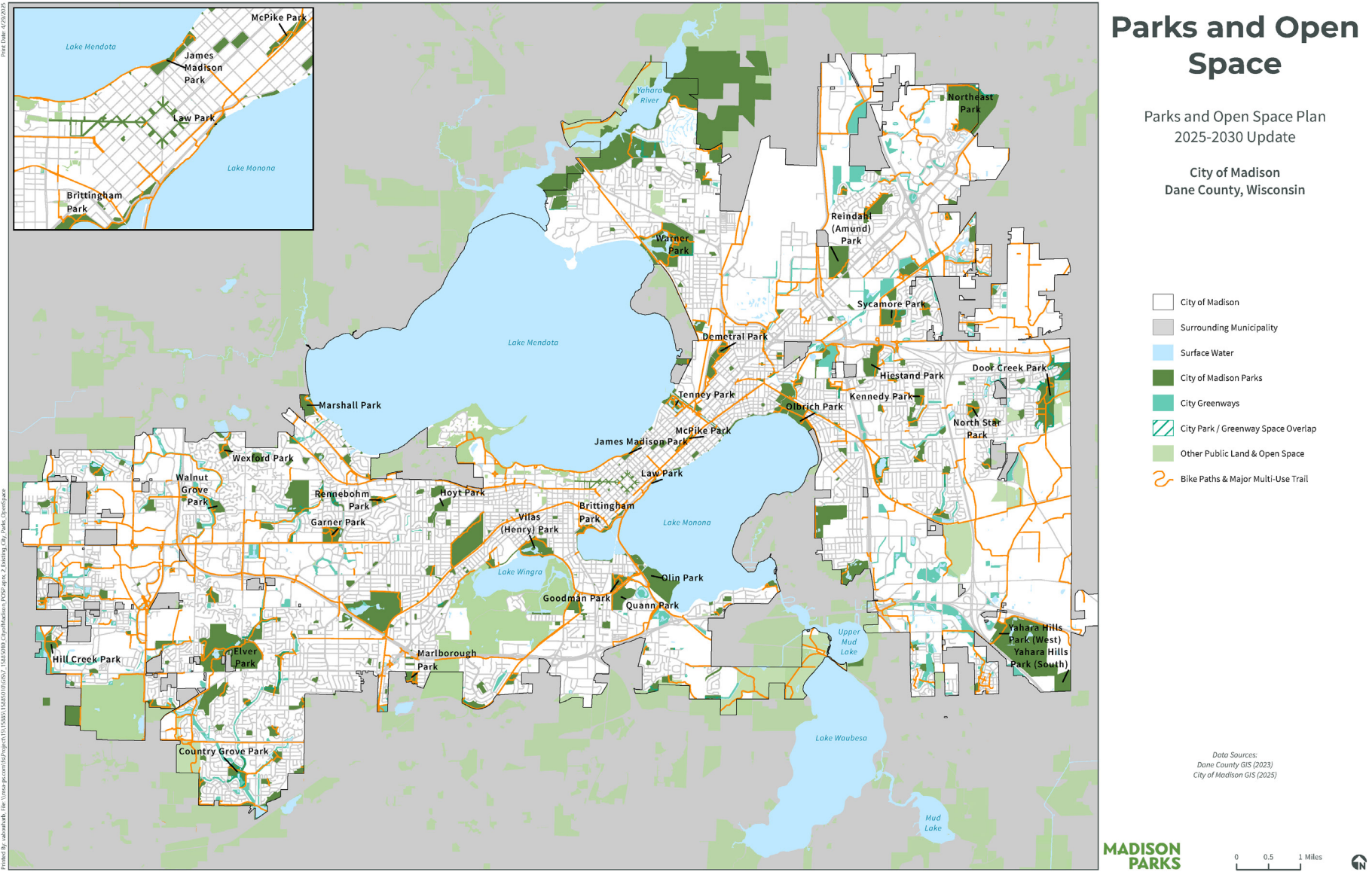
3.1 City of Madison Park Classifications

The Madison parks system offers a wide variety of spaces and recreational opportunities. As shown in Table 3.1, each park is classified according to property characteristics such as size, service area, amenities offered, programming, or special purpose. Exhibit 3 Illustrates the geographic distribution of City of Madison parks by their classification.

Table 3.1: City of Madison Park Type Classification Descriptions

Classification	General Description
Mini Park	Fewer than 5 acres and used to address limited, isolated, or unique recreational needs.
Neighborhood Park	Five acres or greater, neighborhood parks remain the basic unit of the park system. These parks serve as the recreational and social focus of the neighborhood.
Community Park	Typically greater than 20 acres, these parks serve a broader purpose than a neighborhood park. They focus on meeting community-based recreation needs, as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces.
Conservation Parks	Lands set aside for preservation of sensitive and/or high-quality natural resources.
Greenways	Public land owned or administered by City Engineering for stormwater purposes. Greenway acreage within parks is counted as parkland for purposes of inventory.
Open Space	Typically land that is not suited to develop as a conservation or active use park with facilities.
Other	Non-park facilities such as the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District Pump Station 8 which is located on land owned by the Parks Division.
Special Use	Parkland that serves unique recreation opportunities (e.g., Olbrich Botanical Gardens, golf courses, Forest Hill Cemetery).
Sports Complex	Heavily programmed athletic fields and associated facilities whose primary purpose is programmed active recreation.
Trafficway	Public right-of-way used as parkland. Development of this land is limited. Trafficway acreage is counted as parkland for the purposes of inventorying acreage and number of parks.

Exhibit 2: Park and Open Space Inventory



Parks and Open Space

Parks and Open Space Plan
2025-2030 Update

City of Madison
Dane County, Wisconsin

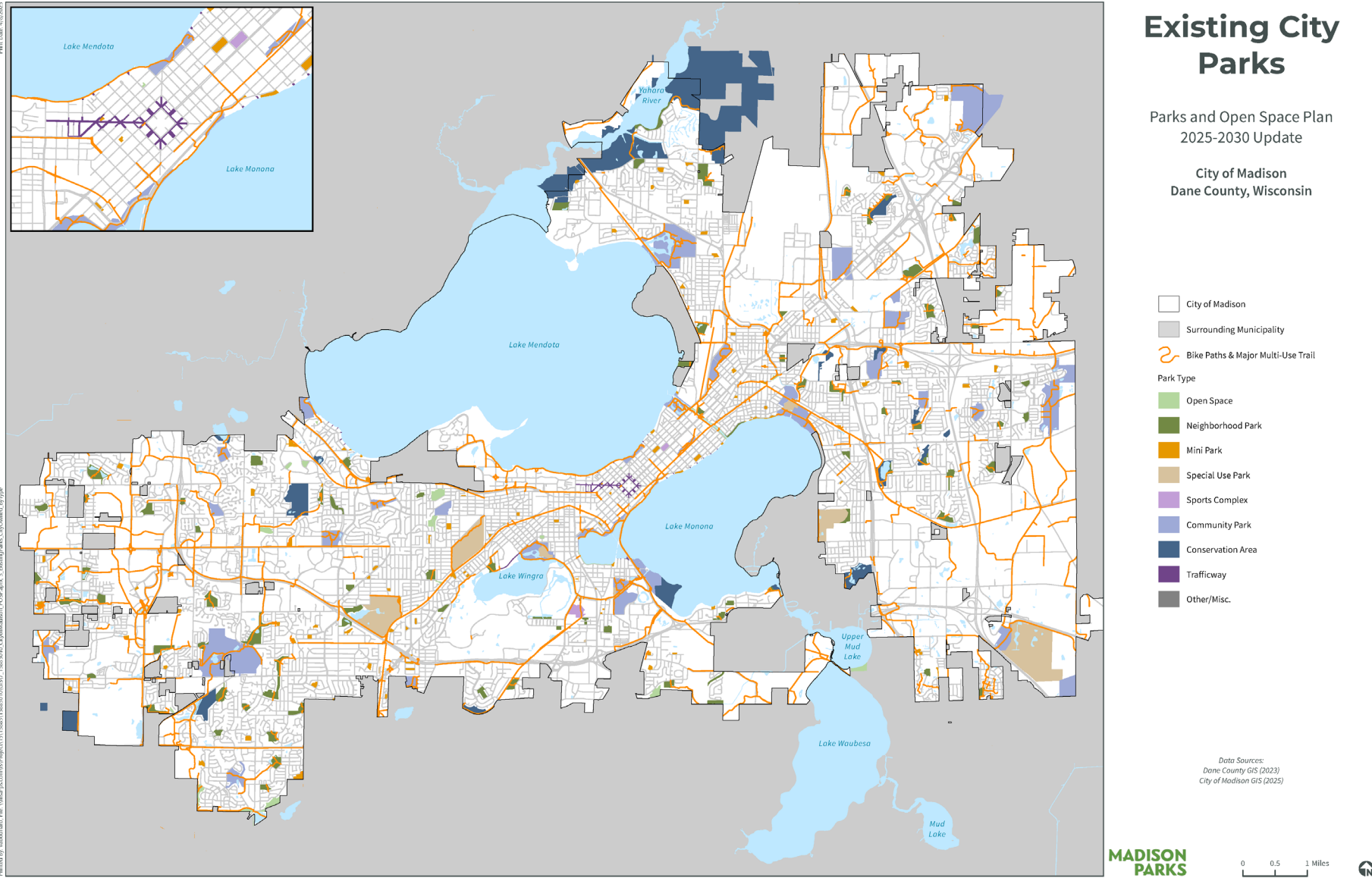
- City of Madison
- Surrounding Municipality
- Surface Water
- City of Madison Parks
- City Greenways
- City Park / Greenway Space Overlap
- Other Public Land & Open Space
- Bike Paths & Major Multi-Use Trail

Data Sources:
Dane County GIS (2023)
City of Madison GIS (2025)

MADISON
PARKS

0 0.5 1 Miles

Exhibit 3: Existing City Parks by Park Classification



Mini, Neighborhood and Community Parks

Mini, neighborhood, and community parks form the core parks of most communities throughout the United States and are commonly referred to in the Madison park system as general parks. The facilities in these parks usually provide some type of play equipment, athletic field or sport court, and open green space. Amenities within each park are developed based on the park development planning process, specific physical land constraints, and fiscal resources. Depending on the size and classification of the park, these parks can also include facilities such as community gardens, off-leash dog parks, and ski and hiking trails.

Increasingly, over the last decade, areas of native plantings are being incorporated into general park areas in a way that complements other recreational uses and improves biodiversity. A joint use agreement with Emerson School allows for the school grounds to be included as a mini park for inventory purposes and allows residents to use the space as public park when not in use by students. Table 3. 2 provides an overview of amenities potentially available for development by each park classification type. Appendix F provides an Inventory of all parks and open spaces by classification, including facilities at each one.

Table 3.2: Park Amenities Potentially Available by Park Classifications

Park Facility	Park Classification		
	Mini	Neighborhood	Community
Park sign	✓	✓	✓
Park kiosk/info board			✓
Benches	✓	✓	✓
Landscaping	✓	✓	✓
Picnic area(s)	✓	✓	✓
Open play area	✓	✓	✓
Open play area with space for reservable field(s).		✓	✓
Field Complex (soccer, football, softball, baseball, cricket, etc.)			✓

Table 3.2 Continued: Park Amenities Potentially Available by Park Classifications

Park Facility	Park Classification		
	Mini	Neighborhood	Community
Sport Court (basketball, tennis, pickleball, futsal, volleyball, etc.)		✓	✓
Sport Court Complex (basketball, tennis, pickleball, futsal, volleyball, etc.)		✓	✓
Playground	✓	✓	✓
Playground for both 2- to 5- and 5- to 12-year-olds			✓
Community gardens (based on space available and guidance from our partner Rooted)		✓	✓
Accessible path system		✓	✓
Recreational biking		✓	✓
Open air shelter		✓	✓
Reservable shelter with restrooms			✓
Drinking fountain			✓
Small parking area, if programmed		✓	✓
Large parking area			✓

Over time, individual parks may have been incrementally developed with amenities that may not align with current park development practices and services or community needs, based on the current park classification as outlined in Table 3.2. As Park Development Plans are created using the Area Planning Framework, efforts will be made to identify equitable distribution of sufficient amenities within mini and neighborhood parks within each of the planning areas around the Madison. The Park Development Plan process evaluates the unique natural characteristics of park land along with the needs of the surrounding community. Plans for some parks may include atypical amenities in order to provide for the unique needs of the community in a particular area.

Conservation Parks

The City of Madison has 21 conservation parks, consisting of approximately 1,830 acres of conservancy land. Conservation parks are managed to preserve native plant communities, wildlife, and significant natural resources. To preserve native plant and animal habitat, access is limited to foot traffic only (along with motorized wheelchair and mobility assistance devices) and dogs are not permitted. These facilities are acquired based on high quality environmental or unique geological characteristics of the land. Madison places high priority on the preservation of these areas and will continue to acquire conservation land to preserve and protect sensitive and high-quality natural areas in the future.

Greenways

Greenways are public land managed and administered by the City of Madison Engineering Division. They include lands such as detention ponds and drainage corridors. Greenways are sometimes considered part of the park (e.g., the drainage ponds at Owen Park), but can also be completely separate spaces (e.g., the retention pond on Mineral Point Drive). Recognizing the role these areas serve in the open space system, wherever possible, these stormwater natural areas should be adjacent or connected to parks in order to increase the overall community benefit of these spaces. The Parks Division occasionally shares mowing and plowing responsibilities with the Engineering Division for greenway properties.





Period Garden Park



Bolz Conservatory by Focal Flame Photography



Olbrich Thai Pavilion by Focal Flame Photography

Open Space

The classification of open space denotes land that does not have active recreation facilities but provides vital space for the community. This category includes 21 different parcels of lands that function as a park such as former landfill Mineral Point Park, land adjacent to waterways such as the Mud Lake Fishing Access, Period Gardens, and heavily wooded slopes such as Highlands East Open Space.

Other

Non-park facilities include the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District Pump Station 8 which is located on land owned by the Parks Division adjacent to Bowman Park.



The Glen Golf Park

Special Use Parks

Specialized facilities intended to serve a unique function are classified as Special Use Parks. These include golf courses, maintenance facilities, Forest Hill Cemetery, Olbrich Botanical Gardens, Warner Park Ball Park, and the Henry Vilas Zoo (operated by Dane County).

The City's four golf courses comprise the largest percentage of land utilized for a special use. The four courses managed by the Parks Division include Yahara Hills, Odana Hills, Monona Golf Courses and The Glen Golf Park. This open space is used for year-round recreation by golfers, walkers, joggers, and cross-country skiers.

The next largest special use facility is Olbrich Botanical Gardens, which operates as a public-private partnership between the Parks Division and the non-profit Olbrich Botanical Society (OBS). The facility features 16 acres of various outdoor gardens, the Bolz Conservatory, state-of-the-art production greenhouses and Frautschi Family Learning Center, along with the newly refurbished Royal Thai Pavilion (a gift to the University of Wisconsin-Madison from the Wisconsin Alumni Association-Thailand). The gardens showcase a variety of displays related to sustainable horticulture practices, including raingardens, gravel gardens and a variety of native plantings.



Duane F. Bowman Park by Brady Haferman

Sports Complex

This category primarily includes Duane F. Bowman Park and Breese Stevens Athletic Field, which function as venues for athletic games and practice. In addition to serving as the home field for the Madison Forward semi-professional soccer team, Breese Stevens Field also serves as a destination entertainment venue.



Breese Stevens Field by Noah Canlas

Trafficways

City of Madison trafficways are road right-of-ways that function as a public park. These include areas such as the Edgewood Pleasure Drive, certain street ends, and the State Street/Mall Concourse. The City of Madison has nearly 27 acres of parks classified as trafficways, but there are also areas that are road right-of-ways within larger classified parks (i.e., the non-vacated Esther Beach Road right-of-way within Esther Beach Park). The largest trafficway is the area known as State Street/Mall Concourse, which includes State Street and Lisa Link Peace Park and encircles the State Capitol grounds. It has five performance areas, walkways, fountains, biking routes, and numerous passive recreation facilities built into its design. With the shops and restaurants that line State Street, it is a primary destination for students, visitors, downtown employees, residents, and major community events.



Lisa Link Peace Park by Grant Frautschi

3.2 City of Madison Park Facilities

The City of Madison park system has over 290 public parks that generally provide typical park features such as basketball courts and playgrounds, as well as beaches, community gardens, ice skating rinks, pickleball and tennis courts, golf courses, and the nationally renowned botanical gardens. There are over 8,000 assets within the system; some examples include athletic fields, restroom buildings, and drinking fountains. For a breakdown of the park system’s different facilities, see Appendix F: Madison Park Facilities.

Madison parks system has traditionally ranked well when compared to other cities of similar size across the nation. Each year, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) gathers data from the 100 most populated cities in the nation. Among other categories, the TPL ParkScore compares the abundance of facilities that tend to be popular among diverse user groups. In 2024, Madison scored above average for overall park facilities but scored particularly high for basketball hoops (9.7 per 10,000 residents), dog parks (4.06 per 100,000 residents), and playgrounds (7.05 per 10,000 residents).⁵⁹



Worthington Park

3.3 Other Park and Open Space Facilities

In addition to the more than 290 parks offered by the City of Madison, Madison residents also have access to a number of other outdoor public recreation spaces. A variety of university, school, county, and state facilities add to the availability of park and open space within the City of Madison. These facilities are shown in Exhibit 4. This section outlines the various outdoor spaces available to within the Madison community.



Oak Park Heights Park

Exhibit 4: Other Parks and Open Space Inventory



University of Wisconsin

The University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW) contributes both athletic facilities and natural areas to the available open space in the City of Madison. The primary UW public facilities consist of the UW Arboretum and the UW Lakeshore Nature Preserve. These two areas provide over 1,500 acres of publicly accessible land for use.

The UW’s Arboretum totals 1,262 acres of conservation land. It includes gardens, prairies, savannas, deciduous forests, conifer forests, wetlands, and horticultural gardens. The UW Arboretum provides opportunities for hiking, biking, picnicking, jogging, skiing, snowshoeing, and nature viewing.

The Lakeshore Nature Preserve contains 300 acres of preserved land along four miles of the southern shore of Lake Mendota. The Lakeshore Nature Preserve provides opportunities for nature viewing, swimming, picnicking, hiking, jogging, biking, fishing, and has opportunities for launching kayaks, canoes, small boats and accessing the lakes for winter recreation.

The UW’s private recreational facilities (e.g. the Nicholas Recreation Center, Camp Randall Sports Center, and Bakke Recreation and Wellbeing Center) include indoor/outdoor tennis courts, an indoor racquetball court, swimming pool facilities, tracks, soft-ball diamonds, soccer fields, and basketball courts. These facilities are reserved for the over 60,000 students, faculty, and staff affiliated with the University. Additionally, the UW Library Mall and Memorial Union Terrace are popular outdoor spaces within the UW Madison campus complex enjoyed by students and the general public alike.



UW Arboretum by Jeff Miller, University of Wisconsin



UW Lakeshore Nature Preserve by Jeff Miller, University of Wisconsin

Dane County Parks

Dane County owns and manages over 12,000 acres of park and open space areas throughout the county. These areas are designed to offer recreational opportunities on a regional scale. Some of these parks lie within or partially within the City of Madison limits. These parks are typically conservation-oriented and have specific recreational facilities related to preservation or education regarding cultural and natural resources. Nearby county parks and facilities that serve Madison residents are described briefly below, with full details available on the Dane County website.⁶⁰

- **Badger Prairie County Park:** This Park serves as the center of the National Scenic Ice Age Trail Junction Area. The park has a shelter facility, mountain bike trails, a playground, a dog exercise area, and an aero-modeling field, and provides access to Military Ridge State Trail. The Madison Area Youth Soccer Association, which utilizes many of Madison soccer fields, also leases 60 acres of land on the north side of the park for use as a soccer complex.
- **Blooming Grove Drumlins Natural Resource Area:** This Area preserves glacial drumlin features that remain from the last glaciation, and provides opportunities for hiking, fishing, cross-country skiing, wildlife observation, foraging, nature study, as well as hunting and trapping.
- **Capital City State Trail:** The Trail is used for bicycling, walking, jogging, and in-line skating. Dane County Parks maintains the 9-mile segment of Capital Trail that traverses through the Capital Springs Recreation Area from Verona Road to Industrial Drive and provides multiple links around and through Madison between the Military Ridge State Trail and the Glacial Drumlin State Trail.
- **Jenni and Kyle Preserve:** The Preserve focuses on providing children and persons with disabilities a place to enjoy outdoor activities. Visitors can learn about natural environments through accessible trout and pan fishing, wildlife observation, wheelchair swings, and a picnic shelter building.
- **William G. Lunney Lake Farm County Park:** The Park is a unit of the Capital Springs Centennial State Park & Recreation Area, which also includes the Lewis Nine Springs E-Way, Capital City State Bike Trail, and Lower Yahara River Trail. The park offers three shelter facilities, play equipment, a barrier-free boat launch with fish cleaning facility, two accessible fishing piers, wildlife pond, overlook tower, hiking and cross-country ski trails, and a campground with group camping sites. The park also includes the Lussier Family Heritage Center, which serves as a hub for environmental education programs to participants of all ages and abilities.



Badger Prairie Park by Dane County Parks



Capital City State Trail by Dane County Parks



Nine Springs E-Way by Samantha Haas, Dane County Parks



Lower Yahara Trail by Phil Levin, Dane County Parks



Tenny Lock by Dane County Parks

- **Lake View Hill Park:** This heavily wooded park is the highest point on the north side of the City of Madison and contains restored savannas and prairie.
- **Lewis Nine Springs E-Way:** The E-Way creates an environmental corridor extending from Dunn’s Marsh to Lake Farm County Park to the south of Madison, which includes cultural and natural features of wetlands, prairies, sedge meadows, native forests, large springs, and Native American mound sites. It offers opportunities for jogging, hiking, biking, nature study, photography, and cross-country skiing.
- **Lower Yahara Trail:** The Trail provides an off-road trail connection between the Madison and McFarland, running along Lake Waubesa to connect the Capital City Trail at Lake Farm County Park with McDaniel Park in McFarland. The trail includes an accessible fishing pier, rest stops, and multiple observation areas with picturesque views, including along the shore of Lake Kegonsa and banks of Door Creek. Yahara Heights County Park and Cherokee Marsh Natural Resource Area: The Marsh is the largest remaining wetland, contains some of the best examples of burial mounds in Dane County, and is crucial to the water quality of Madison’s chain of lakes, including by preserving valuable wildlife habitat. The recreational park offers a 20-acre dog exercise area, hiking trails, and a canoe and kayak launch.
- **Tenney Lock:** The lock and dam has been operated and maintained by Dane County since 1981. The lock structure allows boats to pass between Lake Mendota and Lake Monona and accommodates approximately 10,000 boats annually. In addition to providing recreational benefits, the lock and dam are used to manage flood waters within the Madison chain of lakes.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) owns and manages a variety of natural resources. Governor Nelson State Park, located on the north shore of Lake Mendota, is in the closest proximity to Madison. The conveniently located park provides a sand beach, boat launch, picnic areas, prairie restorations, and approximately 8 miles of hiking/cross-country ski trails.

Other Parks/Conservancy Areas

There are several other public parks and conservancy areas under the jurisdiction of Madison’s neighboring communities that are used by Madison residents, including but not limited to Fitchburg, Middleton, and Monona. Fitchburg parks such as Huegel Jamestown, Western Hills, and Belmar Parks are adjacent to City of Madison parks. These parks can also provide unique opportunities for partnership in order to meet the needs of residents from both communities.

National Park Service Resources

The Ice Age National Scenic Trail spans 1,200 miles, traverses some of Wisconsin’s finest geologic and glacial features, and passes through the ancestral lands of 15 indigenous tribes. The Trail, located only in Wisconsin, was designated as an official unit of the U.S. National Park Service in 2023 and is one of only 11 National Scenic Trails in the country. The Dane County segment of the trail is 44.2 miles long, plus an optional 24.2 miles of connecting routes. The trail passes through the west side of the county, from Lodi Marsh to the Brooklyn State Wildlife Area. The Trail is built, managed and maintained by dedicated volunteers, Ice Age Trail Alliance, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, local partners, and the National Park Service. The Parks Division continues to work with Dane County Parks and the Ice Age Trail Alliance to acquire lands to expand Moraine Woods Park and provide a vital connection for the Ice Age Trail.



Governor Nelson Park by WisconsinExplorer.com



Ice Age Trail by Dane County Parks

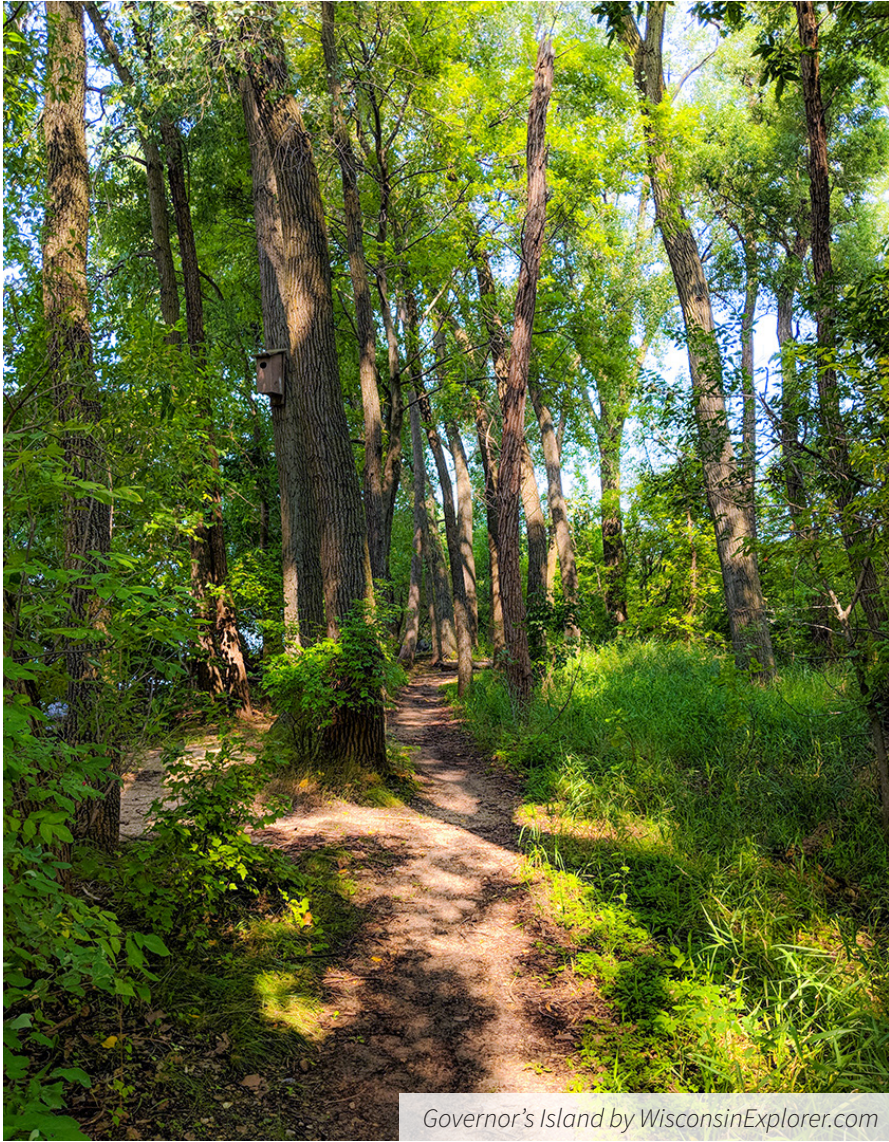
Private Recreational Facilities

Private recreational facilities provide recreational opportunities to Madison residents who can afford and desire to seek out specialized facilities such as private gyms, pools, and tennis/pickleball facilities. Additionally, there are several privately owned spaces within the Madison that are used as public amenities. These areas often provide local neighborhood open space and are owned by private organizations. These facilities have not been included in this plan.

Governor’s Island located along the north shore of Lake Mendota is another unique outdoor recreation space. Wisconsin’s first Governor, Leonard J. Farwell called the area home during his tenure, and the land was donated to the State of Wisconsin by the state’s second Governor to be used for the first State Hospital for the Insane, now the Mendota Mental Health Institute. The Institute now owns the property, but the public is welcome to traverse paved walking paths and take in scenic views near rocky bluffs.

Key Takeaways

Madison residents are fortunate to live in a place with outstanding natural resources and recreational amenities. Understanding resources provided by others and fostering partnerships around outdoor recreation needs will help ensure that unique natural resources are preserved, and a variety of opportunities are available for the enjoyment of area residents.



Governor’s Island by WisconsinExplorer.com

Chapter 3: Endnotes

59 Trust for Public Land. (2024). *2024 ParkScore Index: Madison, WI*. Retrieved from https://parkserve.tpl.org/downloads/pdfs/Madison_WI.pdf

60 Dane County Parks. (2025). *Dane County Park System*. Retrieved from <https://www.danecountyparks.com/ParkSystem/List>

Chapter 4

Engagement Strategies & Recreation Facility Demand



James Madison Park by Denise DeSerio

Chapter 4: Engagement Strategies & Recreation Facility Demand

This chapter examines recreational needs, demands, and concerns based on community engagement processes. The POSP planning process incorporated multiple engagement strategies to understand park use and concerns amongst Madison residents. Multiple methods were utilized to reach as many residents as possible; new engagement strategies helped to reach new voices during the planning process. The Parks Division strives to engage all residents to help ensure the concerns and input of all residents are represented. This chapter provides an overview of engagement efforts used in the planning process and analyzes facility use to inform the recommendations of the POSP.



4.1 Community Engagement

A multiple part engagement strategy was utilized for this planning process, including city-wide engagement activities and focused outreach with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and youth activities. Historically, in Madison and across the U.S., BIPOC and lower income communities are often marginalized or left out in planning processes due to the legacies of racism and poverty. Therefore, special focus and intentionality was given to engaging with Madison’s Black and brown communities, as well as young people considering they are a core demographic of park users. All Together, a creative agency based out of Chicago that specializes in equitable public engagement, was hired to design and implement engagement activities specifically intended to welcome BIPOC and youth voices into the planning process. A more complete summary of all the engagement activities and their results can be found in Appendix G.



Overall, the community engagement activities for this POSP update included:

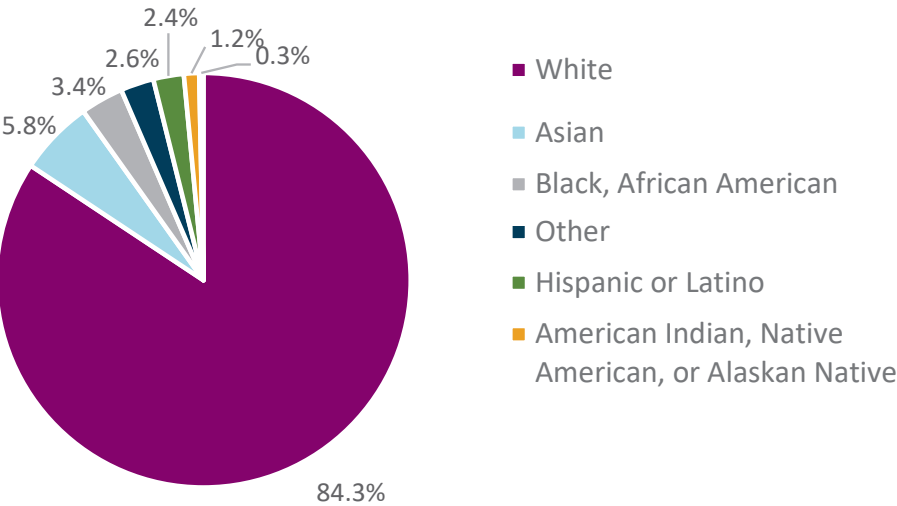
- A city-wide survey conducted through the University of Wisconsin Survey Center
- Four Public Input Meetings open to the general public
- Four Youth-focused “Pop-Ups” held at Parks Alive events
- Three Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) (held virtually) and Youth Focus Groups (held in-person)
- Fourteen ‘Wish Boxes’ distributed to libraries and community centers across Madison to gather comment cards
- A supplementary Youth and BIPOC-focused online survey, promoted via the wish boxes and pop-up events

City-Wide Survey

In the fall of 2023, the Parks Division hired the UW Survey Center to assist in the development and administration of a large-scale survey. The intent of the survey was to gauge satisfaction with Madison’s park and recreation amenities and learn more about how residents use those facilities. Surveys were mailed to 5,000 randomly selected Madison addresses; of those, 898 households completed the survey (18% response rate). Over 84% of respondents identified as white (Figure 4.1) and 71 percent identified as homeowners. The median age of respondents was 50, with the predominant age group of 65-74, which is a relatively normal age distribution but skewed slightly older. In addition, 57% of respondents identified as female, 41% as male, and 2% identified as nonbinary or other. The median household income range of the survey respondents was between \$75,001 and \$100,000, though income did not appear to be a major consideration in terms of accessibility to the park system.

Over half of survey respondents reported visiting Madison neighborhood parks within a 10-minute walk of their home on a weekly or daily basis. For City parks outside of one’s neighborhood requiring transportation, more than half of the respondents reported visiting monthly or yearly. More than half of the respondents also reported visiting larger natural or conservation areas such as Cherokee Marsh and Edna Taylor Park on a monthly or yearly basis, which was similar to frequency of visits to larger regional parks. Based on the survey, the majority of park visitors either walk or take private motorized vehicles to the parks that they visit most often.

Figure 4.1 Race/Ethnicity of Community Survey Respondents



Top 5 Activities in Madison Parks

Physical Activities

Demetral Park by Wendy Murkve

Leisure Activities

Vilas Park

Events & Festivals

Warner Park by Ken Lax

Lake Activities

Marshall Park

Biking

Aldo Leopold Park by Mike Repyak

The top activities respondents reported participating in, supervising, or watching activities were general physical activities such as walking, hiking or running and leisure activities such as picnicking, celebrations, reunions or nature viewing. Other top park uses included attending festivals or events, activities involving Madison lakes, and biking. This diversity suggests that parks cater to a broad spectrum of interests and activities, making them inclusive spaces for all visitors. Most respondents found the park system to be safe, accessible spaces where they felt welcome.

Most residents responding to the survey had not paid a fee for any park amenity, and those who did pay fees most commonly paid for off-leash dog park permits. According to the survey, the least common fee paid was reservations for athletic fields or courts.

When asked about availability of recreational facilities, most respondents felt Madison had just the right amount of facilities for general physical activities, leisure activities, biking, activities involving the lakes, and festivals or events. Some respondents indicated a desire for more water recreation programming activities using built facilities such as swimming pools or splash parks; more court-based sports facilities such as basketball, tennis or pickleball; and increased winter sports facilities for activities such as ice skating, hockey, sledding or skiing (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 Survey Results Regarding Amount of Recreational Offerings

Do you feel the City of Madison has too few, just the right amount, or too many facilities for each of the following types of activities?

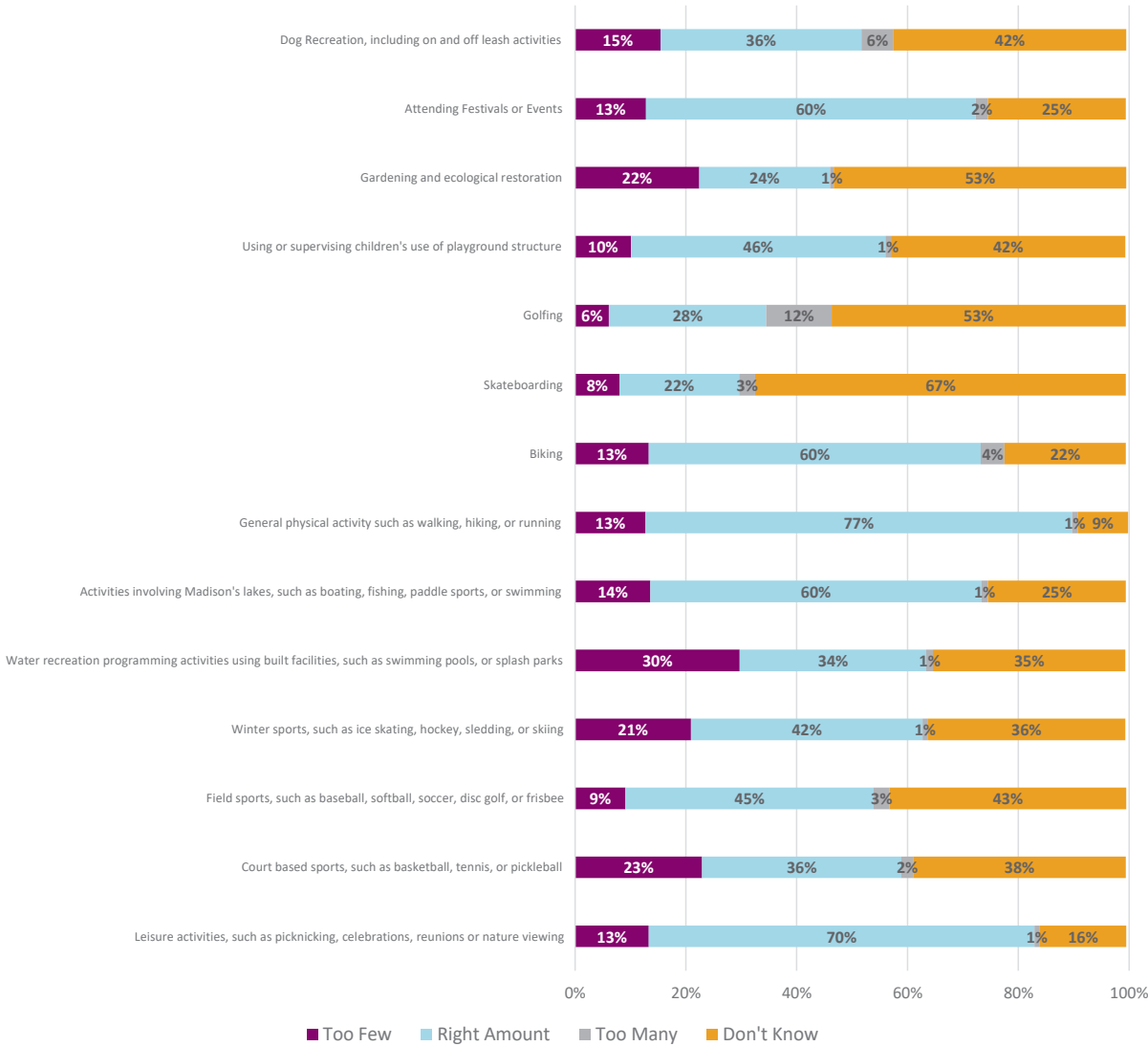
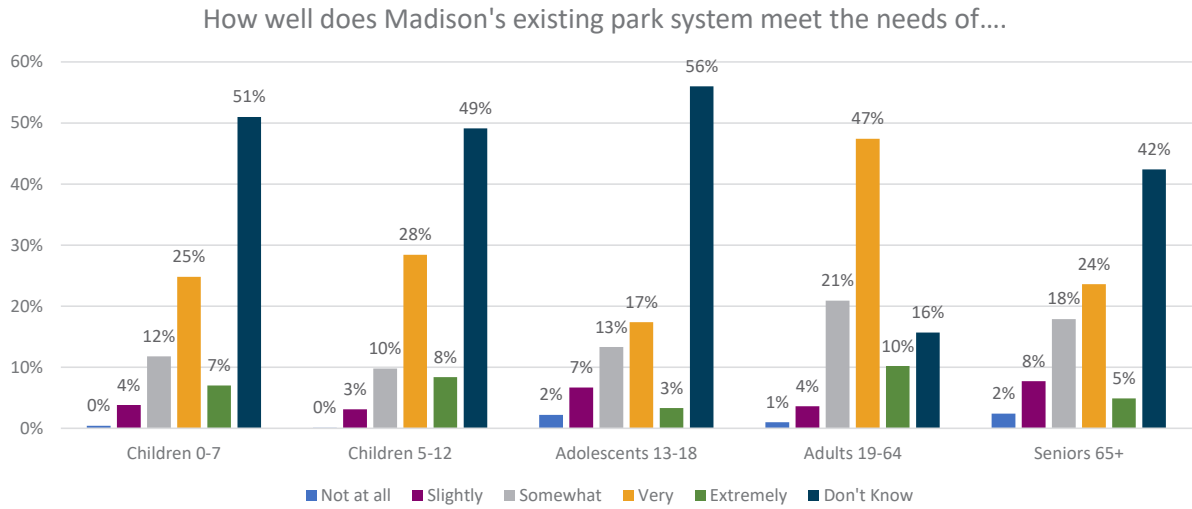


Figure 4.3 Survey Results Regarding Meeting Needs Based on Age



The survey results revealed that most respondents felt the parks met the needs of all age groups, particularly for adults and young children. Respondents indicated that the park system is not meeting the needs of adolescents (ages 13-18) quite as well compared to other age groups. Overall, the results suggest that while parks are largely successful in catering to various age groups, there may be room for improvement in addressing the specific needs of teenagers (Figure 4.3).

The majority of the respondents found all park features highlighted in the survey to be very important for a variety of reasons and recognized that parks and open spaces improve their quality of life. Land for recreation or preservation and natural open spaces and conservation areas were identified as some of the most important parts of the park system. Respondents were also asked to identify funding priorities for the various services throughout the park system. Maintenance, repairs and replacement of existing park amenities were ranked highest among funding priorities by respondents.

- Top priorities for parks funding, as identified through engagement efforts, are as follows:**
- Upkeep and Replacement of existing Facilities
 - Ecological management to address damage to environment, habitat loss and climate change

Public Input Meetings

Between April and May 2024, the Parks Division and MSA Professional Services, Inc. held a total of four Public Input Meetings (PIMs) around Madison to kick-off the POSP and begin gathering input for the update of the plan. These meetings were open-house sessions, with a short presentation given at the beginning of the meeting and stations placed throughout the room with activities designed to engage attendees on their priorities for, and opinions about, the park system. These meetings were held at locations across the city:

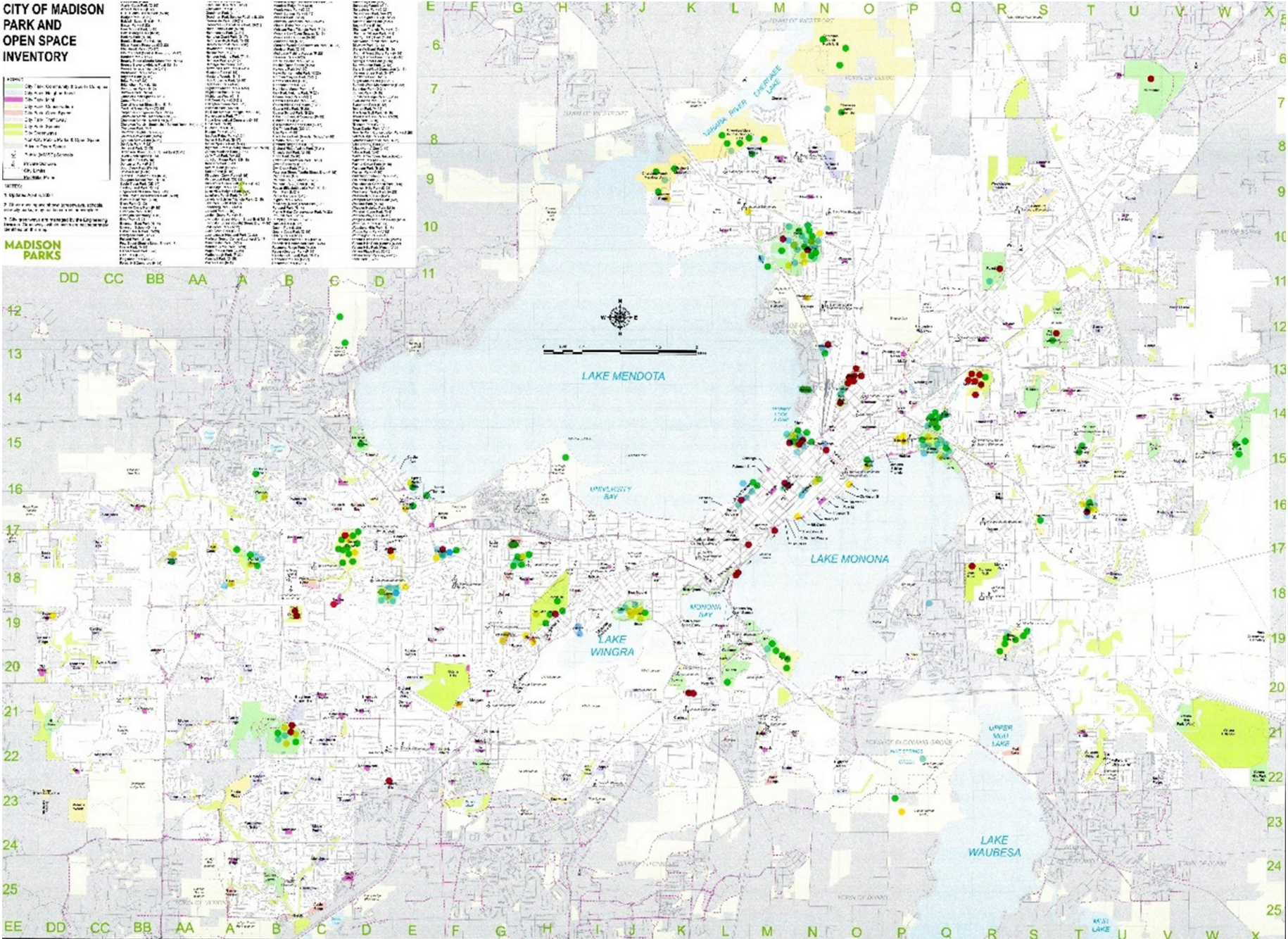
- Vel Phillips Memorial School (west side)
- Warner Park Community Recreation Center (north side)
- Olbrich Botanical Gardens Atrium (east side)
- Madison Parks Division Lakeside Office (south side)

During the event, QR codes placed on flyers located at the activity stations collected voluntary demographic information about the attendees. As is often the case for open invitation public meetings in Madison, attendees at the open houses were generally older (36% fell within the 41-55 age range, 21% were 56-70 and 34% were 70 or older), and 84% identified as “white” in Race/Ethnicity, with 8% Hispanic/Latinx, and 2% Asian/Asian American . Attendees also overwhelmingly reported regular park usage: 32% reported daily usage and 52% selected weekly usage. Meeting attendees participated in a number of activities designed to gauge residents’ priorities. These activities and their findings are described within this section .

A mapping exercise was used so attendees could share what parks they visit for certain activities (Exhibit 5). In total, 275 dots were place on the map by participants cumulatively across all four meetings. Through this exercise Warner Park and Olbrich Park were identified as favorite parks to enjoy nature and go to with children. Owen Conservation Park was identified as a favorite space for enjoying nature. Warner Park and Vilas Park were ranked as the best parks for group activities. Demetral Park and Starkweather Park were parks identified in need of most improvement. Participants were more likely to vote for parks that were closest to the public engagement session they were attending.



Exhibit 5: Public Input Meeting Mapping Exercise



Over 60 residents participated in the “Balance the Budget” exercise that was offered at the meetings. Each participant was allocated \$100 in funds that could be distributed in \$10 increments across five different spending categories. The highest percentage of funding was directed towards ecological management for existing parks, with maintenance/repairs/replacements receiving the second highest funding allocation. This suggests that attendees prioritized investment into existing facilities and land over new development. Equal amounts were designated for development of new parks and new amenities for existing parks. Additional programming for existing parks received the lowest funding allocation, through this exercise, which is similar to the results of the city-wide survey (Figure 4.4).

Meeting attendees provided 158 comments on boards related to six different Ongoing Initiatives of the Parks Division:

- Activating Parks
- Climate Resilience
- Golf
- Lake Monona Waterfront
- Recreational Biking
- Volunteers in Parks

See Appendix E: Ongoing Initiatives of the Parks Division to learn more about each of these topics.

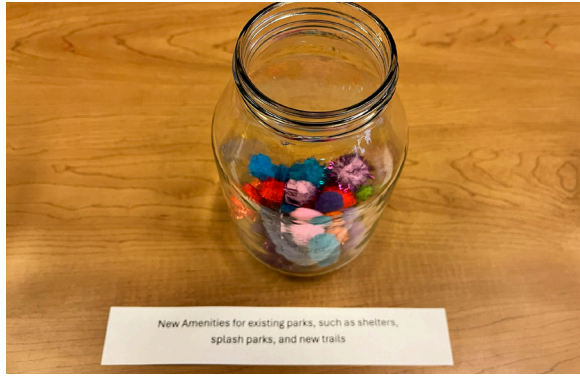
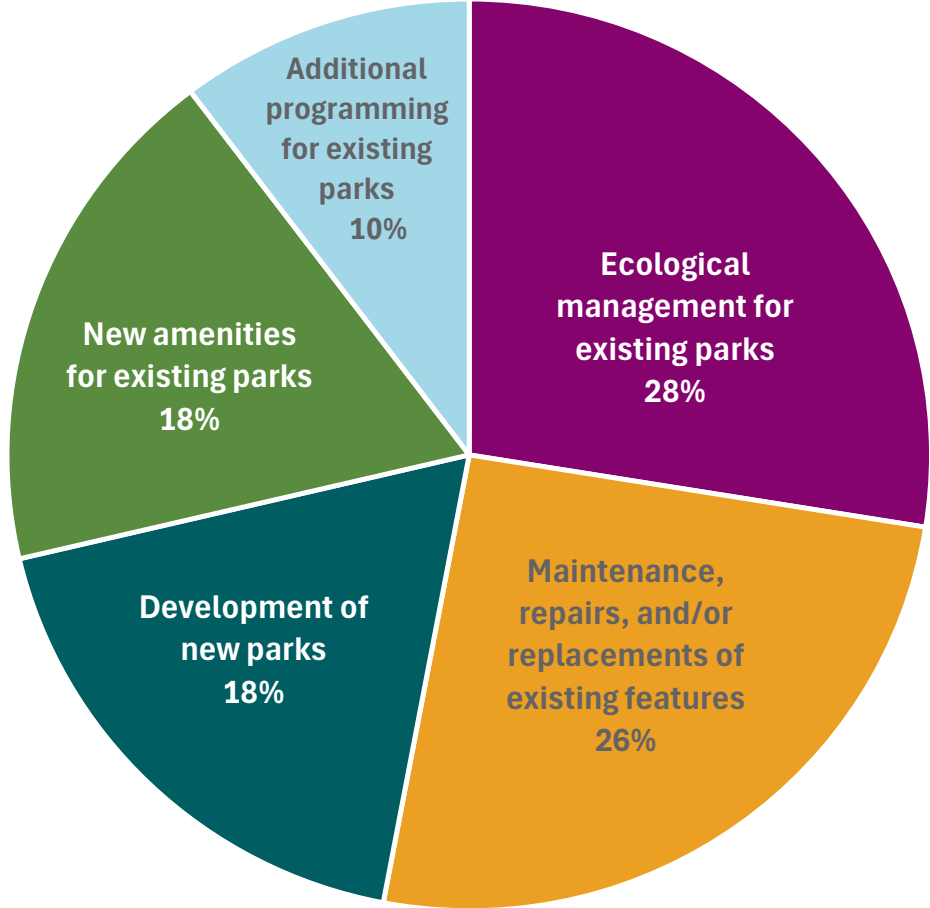


Figure 4.4 Balance the Budget Exercise Results



Many residents are passionate about park spaces, and those who attended the public engagement sessions tended to strongly favor specific uses or activities. Some individuals most interested in activating parks expressed a desire for more skateboarding, pickleball, and dog parks. Additionally, there was community interest for cultural events, to help ensure that Madison Parks are a hub for cultural celebrations for diverse residents, and cultural education for the public. With respect to Golf, participants expressed both excitement and concerns about the future of golf in Madison parks. While some respondents expressed concerns about limited usage and the financial costs and benefits of the courses, others noted the financial accessibility of an otherwise costly sport and the potential to bring in revenue for the Parks Division. Regarding Climate Resilience, overarching themes included support for maintaining natural areas, preservation of tree canopy, reduction of hard surfaces, and special attention to habitats for pollinators and birds. Participants showed interest in an interconnected system of bike paths throughout Madison and extending connections into surrounding municipalities but emphasized the importance of being environmentally sensitive to natural habitats. Participant comments on the Lake Monona Waterfront focused on protection of nature and ecological health. Meeting participants wanted to see improved access to information and stronger interorganizational collaboration pertaining the Parks Volunteer Program.

Staff asked participants to indicate on a presentation board which park facilities that they or a member of their household had utilized in the past 12 months. The majority of responses were for leisure activities, general physical activity like walking and running, and attending festivals and events. This feedback was consistent with the information received as part of the city-wide survey.



BIPOC and Youth Engagement Focus Groups

The Parks Division, MSA Professional Services, and All Together held a total of 3 focus groups (2 virtual and 1 in person in July 2024) to collect feedback from community members who are often are less likely to participate in typical community planning processes, and therefore whose voices are under-represented, including Hmong residents, BIPOC advocacy groups, and youth and were held during the summer. Participants provided valuable insights on their experiences, needs, and aspirations for Madison’s parks, helping to shape a more inclusive and responsive park system for the entire community.

Virtual focus group meetings were conducted via Zoom with service providers that have deep connections within the local community working with youth of color and members of the Hmong community. These connections are important to ensuring that youth feel safe and secure in participating in these events. Focus group participants indicated they regularly participate in park programming or visit parks. Suggestions for improvements included adding more restrooms and drinking fountains and seating to accommodate larger gatherings. These improvements would also improve access for families of young children who may have more frequent need for these facilities, allowing families to enjoy the parks longer. Some participants noted that crowding in popular areas can be a deterrent, including with playgrounds. Participants also noted the need for better communication and information with the Parks Division on how to rent park shelters, suggesting the information could be provided via posters or QR codes in the shelters themselves.

A youth focus group was held at Warner Park and included a kinesthetic cone activity and another facilitated group activity. Most youth participants indicated they spend a lot of time in parks, while some indicated they attend special events in the parks. The youth indicated a desire for more park facilities and events that are welcoming of teens. Some members of the youth focus group shared that lack of safe access across busy streets



and the presence of police that may deter youth from using the parks. Some youth participants noted a need for better lighting for evening use and the need for more facilities geared specifically for teenagers. The facilitated activity provided recommendations for incorporating art, promoting fitness, improving the environment, increasing the number of community events, and improving safety and connectivity to and within the parks.

Pop-Ups & Wish Boxes

The Parks Division, MSA Professional Services, and All Together held a total of four pop-up events at Parks Alive events in June and July. Parks Alive events are held at park locations within Neighborhood Resource Team (NRT) areas.⁶¹ Allied, Aldo Leopold, Worthington, and Warner Parks were the sites of these events. The Pop-Ups were an opportunity to attend events happening in neighborhood parks and connect with BIPOC families to hear their thoughts related to parks and open space in Madison. The Pop-Ups included activities designed to engage participants in describing both what they liked best and items they felt were missing from City of Madison parks. An estimated 144 kids engaged with the Parks Division’s pop-up booth over the summer of 2024. Kids were asked to write their favorite things to do in the parks as well as their “wishes” for making the parks a better place. The most popular activities amongst the kids were swings and slides.



Fourteen Wish Boxes were placed at libraries and community centers. These provided residents an opportunity to share ideas for changes or additions to parks, and the boxes provided a link to an online survey participants could use to give more feedback. Results were obtained from nine of the locations, while unfortunately five boxes were lost, and another box had no responses. People who engaged with the wish boxes expressed a desire for more accessible playground features for those with disabilities; additional sports courts and fields; more shade structures and trees; wildlife and habitat protection; open space preservation; more drinking fountains and restrooms; and additional pool and splash pad facilities.

Online Survey

A brief online survey (provided in both English and Spanish) was intended as a supplement to the survey produced through the UW Survey Center and was promoted via the four Parks Alive Pop-up events and the fourteen Wish Boxes. The supplemental survey was also sent directly to numerous community organizations within Madison. The survey was available from June through the beginning of September; sixty-four people took the supplemental online survey.

This survey was designed intentionally to be short, simple, and easier for teenagers to take. Though these questions were optional, over 50% of respondents indicated they were 18 yrs old or less. Respondents who took the online survey also identified in a higher percentage as Black/African American and two people took the Spanish language survey. Though not everyone completed this section of the survey, for those that did respond roughly two-thirds identified as female and the remainder identified as male, non-binary or something else. The majority of respondents visited parks on a daily, several times a week, or a few times a month basis. Hanging out/relaxing, walking, playing on the playground, and playing sports received the highest number of scores when asked what do you like to do when you visit a park. When asked if they ever felt unwelcome in a park, 85% answered ‘no.’ Of those who indicated they didn’t feel welcome, they could select as many multi-choice options as they wanted for the reason why; the majority responded they felt judged or stared at or didn’t feel safe. These survey takers also believed adding more shade and places to sit, fun events, and more bathrooms would help improve Madison’s parks.

A summary of this survey and other engagement efforts is available in Appendix G.

Key Takeaways

Madisonians place great value in their park system and the important role it plays in their lives. They are passionate about protecting parks and open spaces and see them as integral to the city’s character. Consistent themes across all engagement efforts indicate that residents want policymakers to prioritize maintenance and repair of existing facilities, invest in ecological restoration to combat climate concerns, and support the park and recreation needs of adolescents. At times, the desire for environmental protection is somewhat at odds with the need and desire to maintain recreation spaces and provide more facilities and amenities, such as additional playgrounds, bike paths, and sport courts. Across the different engagement activities, residents expressed a desire for more basic park facilities such as benches, picnic tables, shade and shelters, drinking fountains, and restrooms, and additional specialty facilities such as skate-parks, pickleball, pools, and splash pads.

It is notable from both the community-wide survey and the BIPOC and youth focused engagement efforts that there is still work to do to ensure all Madisonians feel comfortable, safe, and welcome within the parks. This can be addressed in part through improved communication regarding park policies, especially regarding sound/music and shelter reservations. There is a consistent message that there is a need for more facilities and events geared specifically towards the teenage co-hort (youth ages 13-18). The Parks Division must continue to make authentic connections with BIPOC, LGBTQ+, lower income and otherwise marginalized communities and non-park users to better engage them with planning efforts and fully understand their park and recreation needs.

These engagement results are a snapshot in time and based on the assumption that feedback received from individuals who participated is consistent with the needs of others within their demographics. These results take into account the participants’ preferred use of the parks and programs within the existing system, not future parks or needs of future residents or residents that did not participate in these efforts. All of the input received through these efforts is valuable and must be balanced with the overall needs of the park system, other planning considerations and available resources. These outcomes are not the only determining factor in how decisions will be made within the park system. As Madison continues to grow and expand, the Parks Division, other city planning staff and policymakers will need to ensure that new parks meet the recreational needs of the surrounding community.



4.2 Recreation Facility Demand

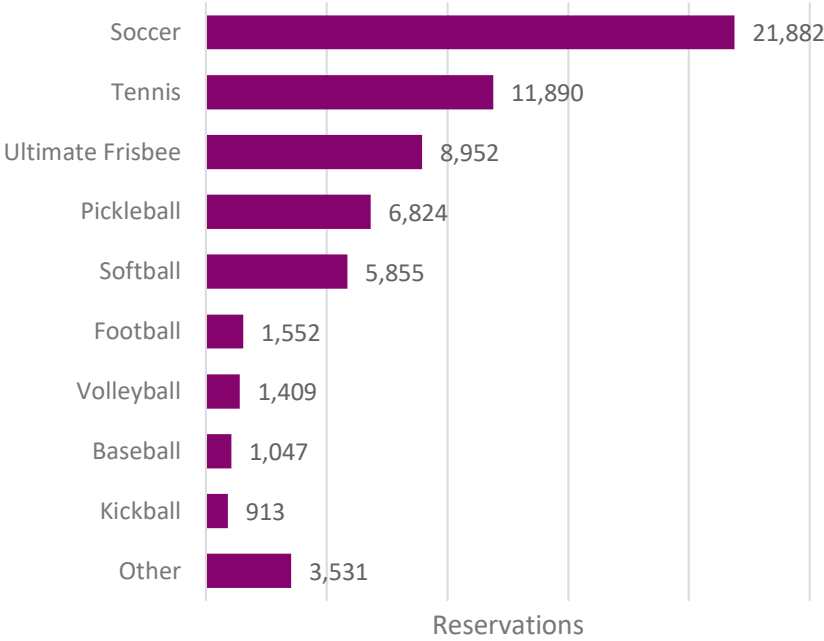
A recreation facility demand analysis is used to identify and prioritize future planning efforts and identify capital expenditures for natural areas and outdoor recreational resources. The assessment combines information obtained during public engagement processes, and examines past, present, and projected future needs in order to create informed recommendations. This section reviews data obtained from facility and athletic field reservations and permit sales, along with results of the survey conducted with local athletic organizations and information provided by various stakeholders to understand trends, use and preferences within the system related to recreational needs.⁶²

Athletic Field and Facility Usage and Needs

The City of Madison provides and maintains facilities for year-round athletic use within the park system but does not directly manage recreation league athletic programs. The City partners with Madison School & Community Recreation (MSCR) and other recreation organizations such as Madison Ultimate Frisbee Association (MUFA), Liga Latina y Latinos Soccer Association, Chavitas Soccer Club, Madison Area Youth Soccer Association (MAYSA), and Southside Raiders Youth Football to program the athletic fields.

The Parks Division’s reservation data from 2018-2024 were used to estimate demand, usage, and trends. The most popular activities included soccer, tennis, ultimate frisbee, and pickleball (appearing for the first time in the top four) (Figure 4.5). Sports with fewer than 900 reservations are grouped in “Other” and include activities such as cricket, lacrosse, basketball, and bike polo. Demand for athletic facilities continues to grow for ultimate frisbee, lacrosse, and cricket, which share facilities with other sports.

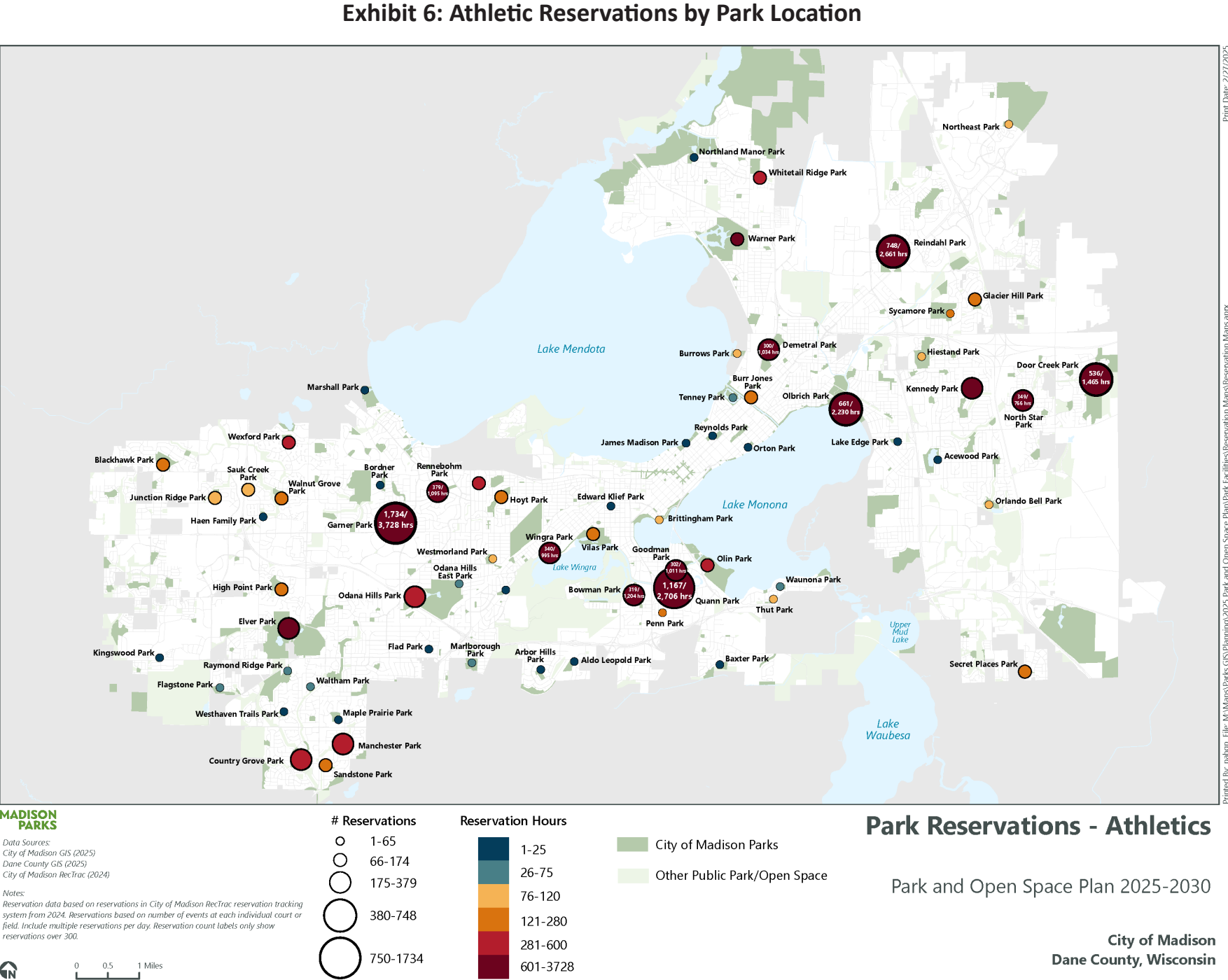
Figure 4.5: Athletic Reservations (2018-2024)



As was the case for the previous version of the POSP, athletic reservation data continues to indicate that the most frequently reserved parks are community parks with multi-field and/or multi-court complexes (Table 4.1). Facilities of this type allow users to host practices, games, and tournaments in a single location as opposed to multiple parks. Reservation Data is also shown by park location on Exhibit 6.

Sport	Park	Reservations
Soccer	Reindahl Park	3,380
	Wingra Park	1,548
	Rennebohm Park	1,337
Tennis	Quann Park	6,618
	Rennebohm Park	2,339
	Door Creek Park	737
Ultimate Frisbee	North Star Park	1,510
	Manchester Park	1,121
	Midtown Commons Park	899
Pickleball	Garner Park	5,391
	Door Creek Park	699
	Tenney Park	418
Softball	Olbrich Park	1,816
	Goodman Park	1,286
	Duane F. Bowman Park	1,103

Sport	Park	Reservations
Football	Warner Park	687
	Penn Park	346
	Thut Park	149
Volleyball	Olbrich Park	1,071
	Demetral Park	169
	Garner Park	50
Baseball	Duane F. Bowman Park	405
	Warner Park	283
	Elver Park	251
Kickball	Demetral Park	661
	Olbrich Park	131
	Duane F. Bowman Park	69



New sports that emerged since 2018:

Futsal

Penn Park by Noah Canlas

Camogie

Photo by Camogie Association

Rolfsball

Photo by Makenzi Johnson

Top Athletic Facility Needs

- Large multi-field spaces and appropriate facilities for tournaments/competitions
- Sport courts, especially pickleball
- Lighted athletic facilities for extended season use

Athletic fields are occasionally rested for renovation, which temporarily impacts their availability for reservations. When this happens, play is rotated to other fields. As facilities age and their conditions impact playability, reservations are either reduced or not allowed, as evidenced by the declining condition of Vilas and Warner tennis courts. Total reservations for these two parks decreased from 541 in 2018 to only 62 in 2021; both have since been closed and are awaiting replacement.

The Parks Division conducted two surveys of athletics organizations in 2023. A summary of this data can be found in Appendix H- Athletic Organization Engagement Summary. The first athletics survey asked park users the following questions: “What type of sports do your participants play?”; “What is the average cost per year to each participant?”; and “What is the age range of the majority of your participants?”. The second survey was intended to serve as an athletic facility assessment that sought to further understand specific facility needs from organizations that reserve athletic facilities. The athletics survey received 40 responses from the 240 groups asked to participate and the athletic facility assessment received 7 responses from 36 organizations asked to participate.

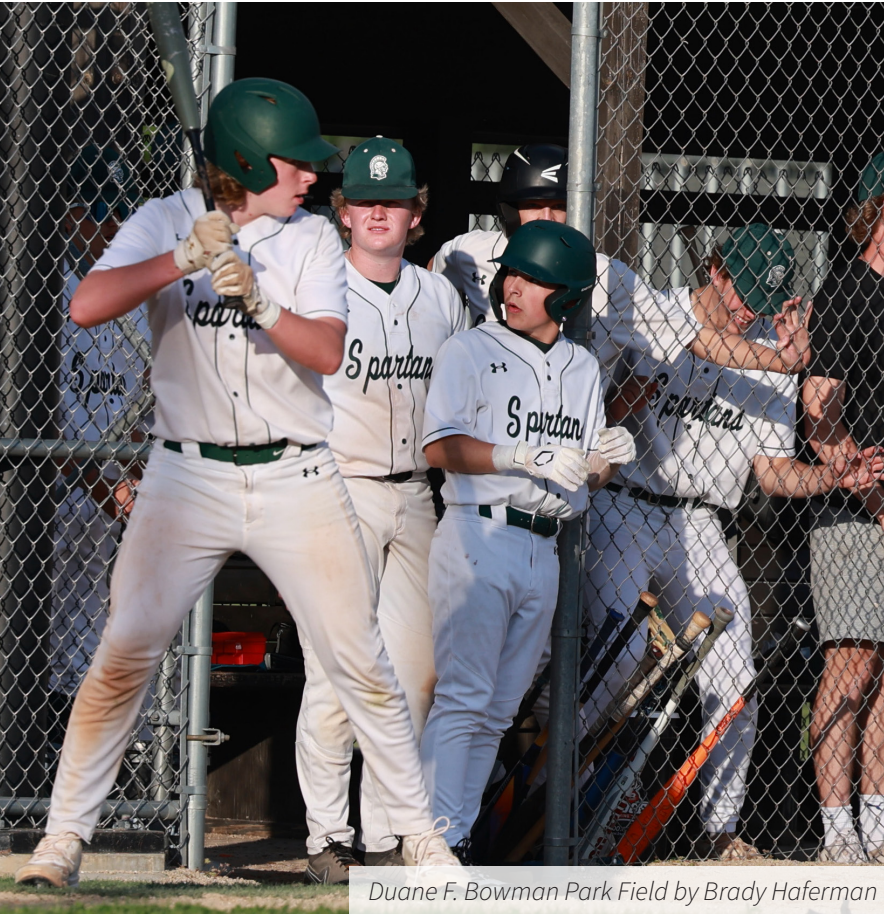
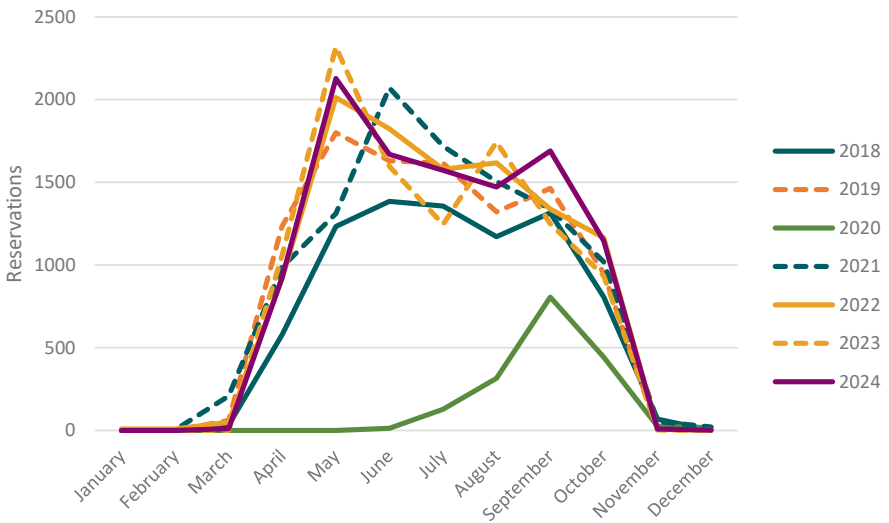
Several of the respondents to the 2023 athletic facility assessment, representing ultimate frisbee, adult women’s softball and soccer organizations, indicated that they had to turn away registrants from their respective leagues due to a lack of available space to schedule practices and games. The need for more full-size tennis, basketball, and volleyball courts was also mentioned. The Hmong community Focus Group sessions and comments placed in the Wish Box at Alicia Ashman Library mentioned support for more cricket and soccer fields as well as basketball courts. The value that Madison residents give to open field spaces for athletic use was also supported by the 2023 community-wide survey developed in partnership with the UW Survey Center: 37% of respondents answered “Very” to the question, “How valuable do you find open fields for games such as such as Ultimate Frisbee, soccer, and softball?”

The Parks Division’s athletic facility assessment and discussions with local leagues and event planning staff indicate that there is also demand for more lighted fields and facilities capable of hosting large scale events with restroom and concession buildings. There is also high demand for athletic field and sport court lighting for sports such as pickleball, soccer, ultimate frisbee, flag football, and volleyball. The Parks Division currently has facility lighting at a number of locations, including two dual-striped pickleball/tennis courts, two basketball courts, twenty softball diamonds, two baseball diamonds, one premium soccer field, one football field, one futsal mini pitch, and one sand volleyball court. Users currently take advantage of off-season softball outfields as

lit spaces for ultimate and flag football. Players have been observed at the system’s only dedicated pickleball facility at Garner Park stringing small LED lamps on the court fence to extend play into the darker spring and fall evenings. Reservations for athletic fields are starting earlier and ending later each year (Figure 4.6).

Respondents to the athletic facility assessment continue to place value on the ability to reserve multiple fields or courts at one park location to accommodate large leagues and host multi-game events such as tournaments, and these sentiments were echoed by staff at Destination Madison’s Sports Commission familiar with state- and national-level large athletic event requirements. The Madison Area Sports Commission hired Victus Advisors to conduct a study in 2022 of regional sports needs, and the study found there was an opportunity for an indoor/outdoor sports complex that would address the local athletic demand as well as attract regional tournaments, and events that could raise revenue to support the facility.

Figure 4.6: Athletic Reservations by Month (2018-2024)



Shelter Reservations

The Parks Division currently has 89 reservable shelters consisting of 34 shelters with restrooms, one combined concession/restroom building and 55 open-sided “picnic” shelters without restrooms. Shelters with restrooms are available mid-April through mid-October. Picnic shelters are available year-round. Shelters are reserved for wedding celebrations, family reunions, association/ business picnics, and community events. Shelters are typically booked for weekday evenings and weekends. The Parks Division has more than 2,000 shelter reservations each year. The most reserved shelters in the park system are at Garner Park, Highland Manor Park, and Brittingham Park. Highland Manor, Gates of Heaven, and John Wall Pavilion at Tenney Park are available for indoor rental space year-round (Figure 4.7). The geographic location of the shelter reservation data for 2024 is also shown in Exhibit 7.



Brittingham Park



Warner Park Beach



Elver Park

Figure 4.7: Top 20 Reserved Park Shelters (2018-2024)

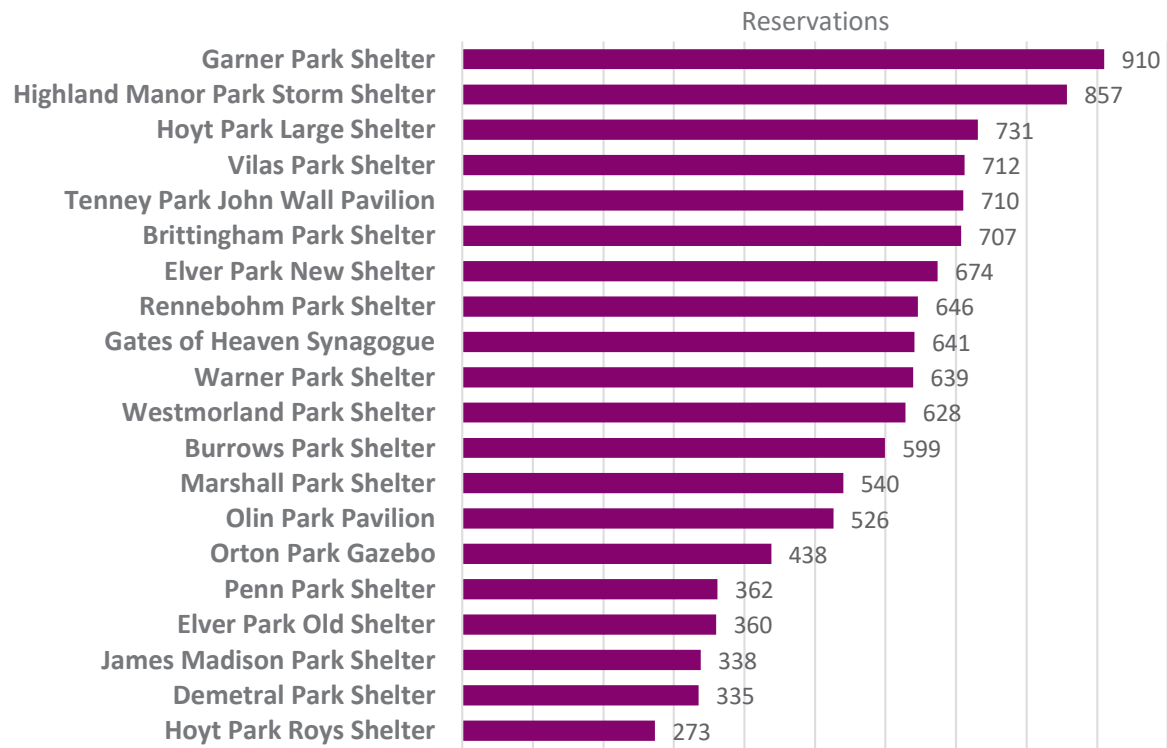
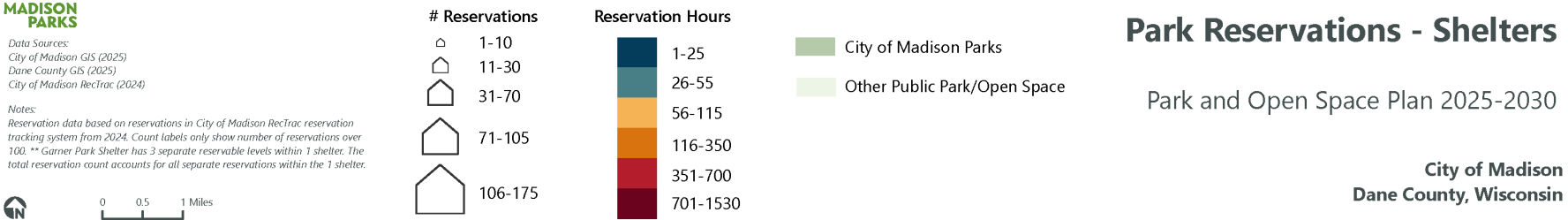
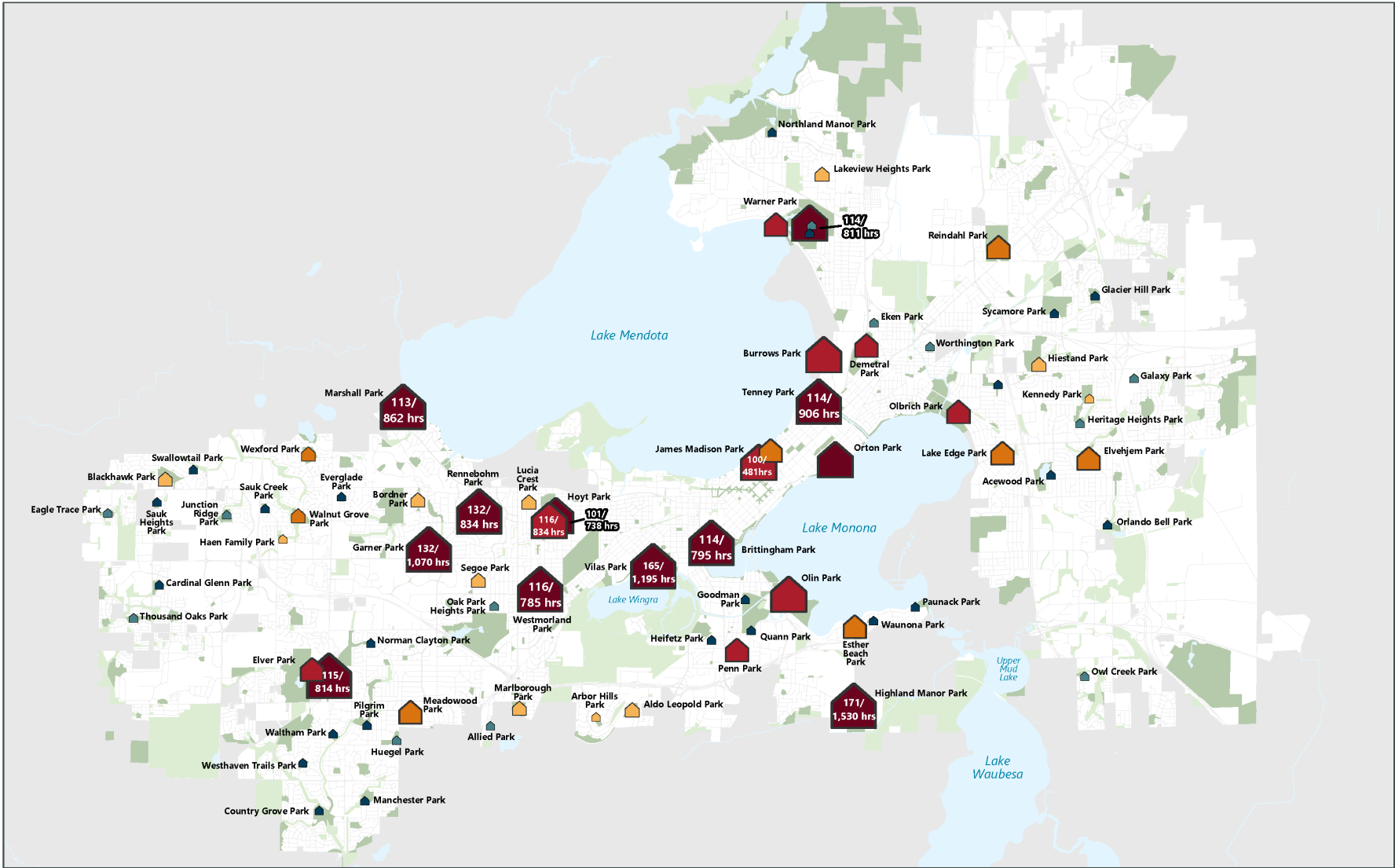


Exhibit 7: Shelter Reservations by Park Location



Park and Street Use Event Reservations

The Parks Division is responsible for permitting events that happen both within parks and on the street. Street Use and Park Event permits allow for event organizers to host many of the events that make Madison so unique. These events draw not only residents, but also visitors from around the region and country to visit Madison. Street Use permits are required for closing or rerouting traffic from any portion of a street or sidewalk to hold an event or activity. Park Event permits are required for events taking place in parks that anticipate large numbers of participants and require extensive set-up, include vending, or charge admission. The number of permitted park events has nearly doubled since 2018, while the number of street use and block parties has remained relatively constant (Figure 4.8).

Park Permit Sales

The City of Madison requires an annual or daily permit for cross-country skiing, disc golf, dog parks, and lake access for boating. Cross-country ski and lake access permits are joint permits for use on any designated site within Madison, Monona, and Dane County. Disc golf permits are required for each of the City of Madison courses: Elver, Hiestand, and Yahara Hills Golf Course. The dog park permit can be used at any City of Madison on-leash or off-leash dog park, Dane County Parks, Middleton, and Sun Prairie pet exercise areas.

The Parks Division continues to directly collect permits and track them in the resource management software program Ac-cela. Figure 4.9 identifies annual and daily permit sales from 2018-2024. As was the case for the time period covered during the last POSP, Park permit sales generally remained steady, with the major exception of the years 2020-2021, when permit sales across all four areas experienced major increases as residents were pursuing outdoor recreation during the COVID19 Pandemic. Permit sales have returned to at or below pre-pandemic levels.

Table 4.8: Permits for Community Events (2018-2024)

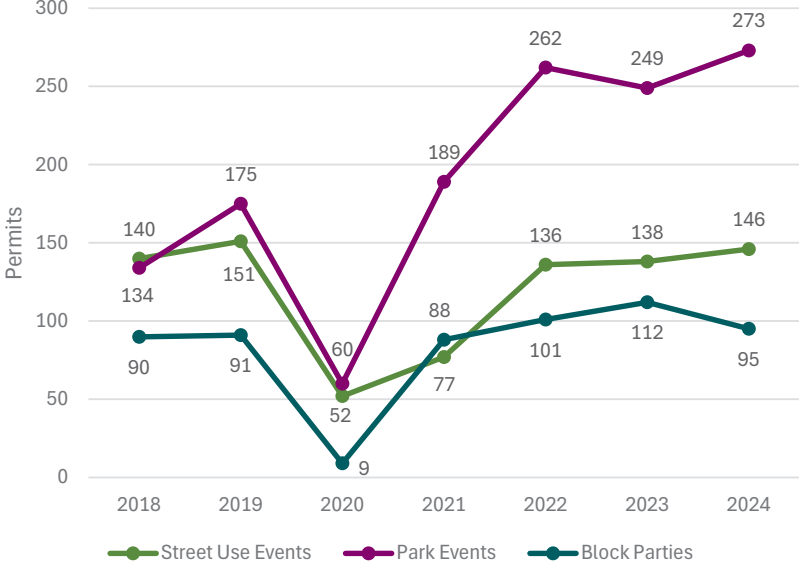
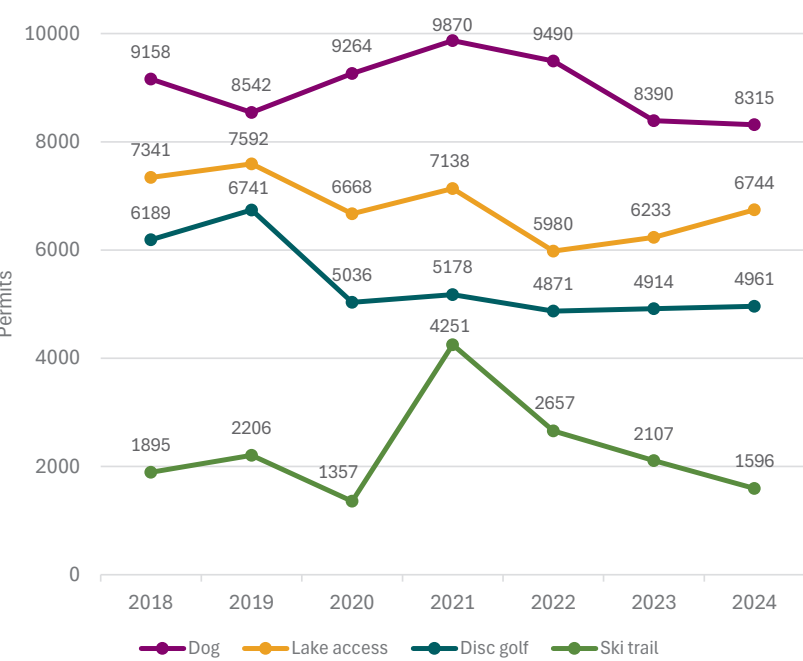


Table 4.9: Total Permit Sales by Permit-Year (Annual and Daily) (2018-2024)



Warner Park Community Recreation Center

The Warner Park Community Recreation Center (WPCRC) works to build community, foster fellowship, and create a safe place for youth to gather. The center is one of the most important assets of the Parks Division. Located on the northeast side of Madison, the center is a multi-purpose facility for community activities, including recreational, educational, and cultural programs and events. The facility includes a gymnasium, exercise room, game room, art room, meeting rooms, and a community room. In 2024, WPCRC reported nearly 160,500 visits, which does not include participation in New-Bridge programming for seniors. The “out of school time” program titled Kids Need Opportunities at Warner (KNOW) provides meaningful opportunities for Northside teens to engage in a variety of structured and unstructured recreational programs at the WPCRC. This program was developed in partnership with the Madison Parks Foundation and serves approximately 100-150 youth (duplicated) per week, and in 2024 provided 257 days of KNOW “out of school ” programming.



Olbrich Botanical Gardens

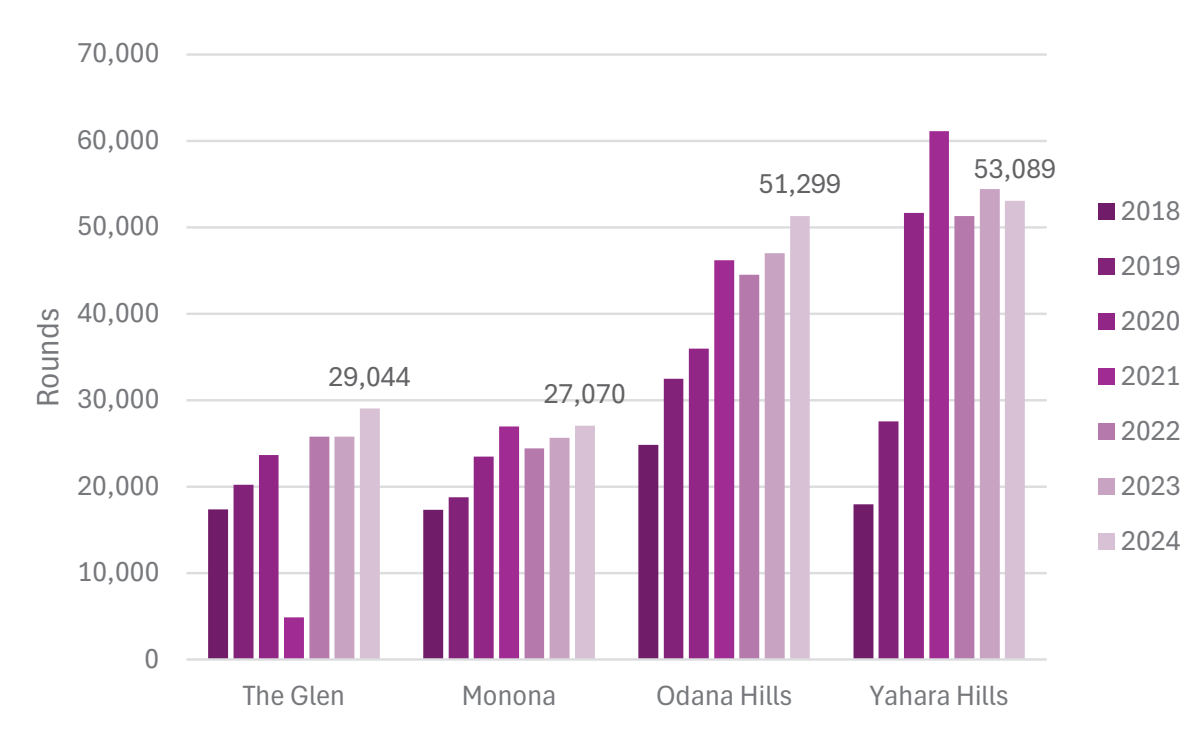
Olbrich Botanical Gardens, which is operated as a public-private partnership between the Parks Division and the non-profit Olbrich Botanical Society (OBS), has significantly increased the number of visitors each year. The number of visits increased from 340,000 in 2023 to over 370,000 in 2024. Olbrich Botanical Gardens offers the community a broad range of programs, activities and events, including an education program for all ages. Olbrich Botanical Gardens also offers a number of special events, including GLEAM: Art in a New Light; Blooming Butterflies; a year-round concert series; Crackle: Fire and Froth; and several annual indoor specialty flower shows. Throughout the year, various online plant sales are offered featuring bulbs, trees and shrubs, native plants, and pollinator mixes. The growth in visits at the Gardens has inspired OBS to fund a Comprehensive Master Plan Study in 2025 to determine how to sustainably grow and fund the garden footprint and programming.



Golf and Golf Park Programming

Recreational demand for golf shifted significantly during the pandemic and continues to grow. The Golf Program consists of four unique courses, offers a total of 72 holes (with a plan to reduce to 54 holes by 2026) and involves all aspects of golf course operations and programming in addition to providing space for events programmed by the Parks Division and others. The pandemic reinvigorated the game of golf nationally, and the Golf Program averaged 146,000 rounds of golf between 2020-2024, ending the 2024 season with the fifth consecutive year of record- breaking revenue with over 160,500 rounds of golf played (Figure 4.10). In addition, 25 unique golf park programming events ranging from family fun movie nights, live music fitness classes, and volunteer activities were held at The Glen Golf Park with over 1,500 participants for the year. The Glen Golf Park was closed for renovations during the majority of the 2021 season. See Appendix E: Ongoing Initiatives - Madison Parks Golf Program for more information.

Figure 4.10: Rounds by Golf Course (2018-2024)



Key Takeaways

The use of park spaces continues to increase, and the typical season for park usage continues to extend farther into the spring and fall seasons. The feedback received through these efforts affirms the Parks Division’s long-standing recognition of the need for additional larger scale athletic fields that can accommodate tournaments and multi-field play for a variety of sports. Resident use of park spaces has evolved over time, and it is important to anticipate and prepare for the ever-changing recreational needs of the community. As seasons lengthen and recreation offerings evolve as the climate changes, it is important to provide spaces that can accommodate outdoor recreation through improvements such as field lighting systems and potentially some artificial turf fields.

The Madison Park system is well-activated throughout the year. Parks-operated special use facilities continue to grow and programming has evolved in response to the community demands for these services.



To learn more about how park spaces are activated, see Appendix E: Ongoing Initiatives - Activating Parks.

Duane F. Bowman Park by Freddy Del Porte

Chapter 4: Endnotes

- 61 City of Madison. (2025). *Neighborhood Resource Team*. Retrieved from <https://www.cityofmadison.com/civil-rights/programs/neighborhood-resource-teams>
- 62 RecTrac is the reservation software currently used by the Parks Division. From 2018-2023, the Parks Division used Spotz for athletic field reservations, which was the successor to the start-up software called Gym dandy.

Chapter 5

Assessment of Outdoor Recreation Needs



Kennedy Park

Chapter 5: Assessment of Outdoor Recreation Needs

As outlined in previous chapters, Madison’s park system is part of an interconnected network of local, regional, state and national parks, open spaces and trails. Various methods were used in Chapter 4 to determine how well Madison’s existing park and recreation facilities satisfy current and future needs. This chapter provides an outdoor recreation needs assessment through both quantitative and geographic analysis to identify needs within the park system, and incorporates needs identified within regional and statewide outdoor recreation planning efforts. The qualitative analysis provides a comparison of existing parkland acreage and population projections in relation to park and recreation agencies across the US. The geographic analysis evaluates the geographic distribution of park facilities within Madison.

5.1 Quantitative Analysis – Park Acreage and Parkland Per Capita

Mini, neighborhood, and community parks are intended to meet the core recreational demands for playgrounds, fields, shelters, and sport courts. Madison’s 2012 and 2018 POSP established a desired service level of 10 or more acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. The City of Madison has approximately 5,755 acres of parkland or approximately 19.77 acres per 1,000 residents based on the 2024 Wisconsin Department of Administration population estimate of 291,037, compared to peer agencies across the country, where the median is 10.6 acres per 10,000 residents.⁶³ Table 5.1 includes the distribution of park types in the Madison park system.

Table 5.1: Parkland Acreage by Category

Park Type	Total # Parks	% Of Total Parks	Acres	% Total Park Acreage
Mini Park	103	35%	202.83	3.52%
Neighborhood Park	84	28%	834.28	14.50%
Community Park	31	10%	1,941.86	33.74%
Subtotal	218	74%	2,978.97	51.76%
Conservation	21	7%	1829.67	31.79%
Trafficway	22	7%	27.77	0.48%
Other	1	0%	0.62	0.01%
Open Space	21	7%	112.35	1.95%
Special	10	3%	777.82	13.52%
Sports Complex	2	1%	27.89	0.48%
Total	295.00		5,755.09	



Haen Family Park by Brian Shore



Rennebohm Park

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) developed a set of standards over two decades ago for the amount of parkland a community should try to achieve. NRPA recently has shifted away from the use of park standards because no single set of standards can take into account the uniqueness in each community across the country. NRPA now collects information from park and recreation departments across the country to provide an opportunity for those departments participating in the survey to compare themselves to other communities of similar population size.

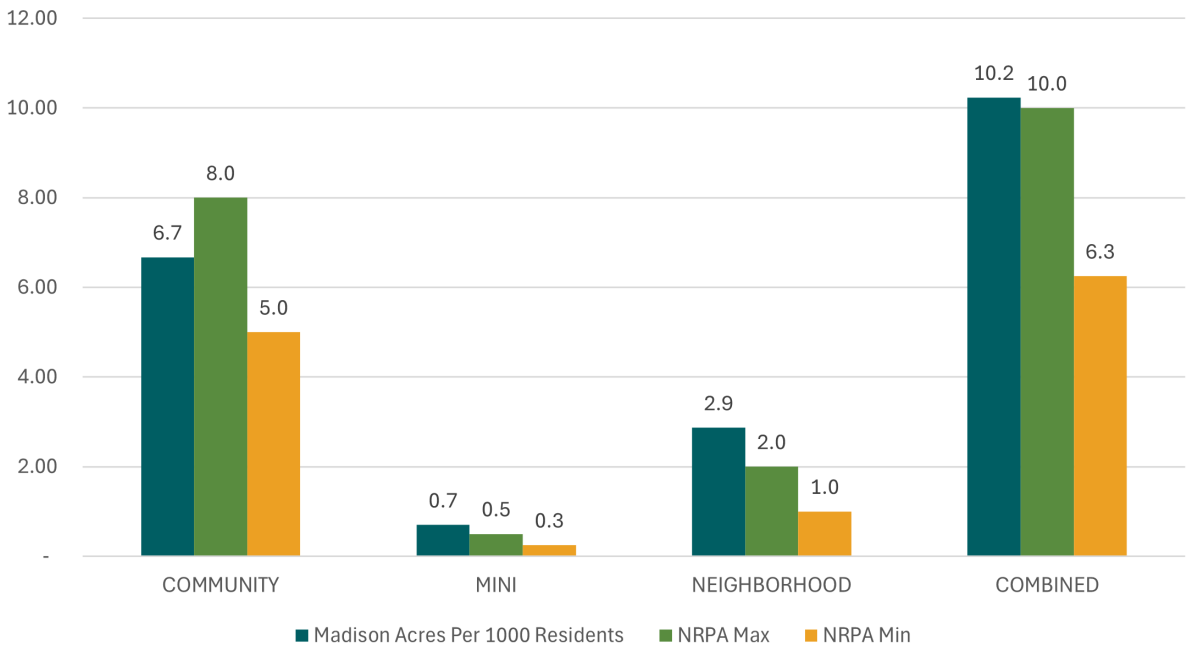
Table 5.3 includes the park classification, size, service areas, and historic NRPA standards, which were utilized by the City of Madison in its 2012 and 2018 POSP park analysis. The service area analysis is conducted to identify existing gaps in traditional core facilities. This analysis only evaluates service areas for parks classified as mini, neighborhood, or community. Special parks, conservation parks, trafficways, greenways, open space or other are not covered in this analysis.

Mini and neighborhood park deficiencies are present if a residential area is not within a quarter-mile radius of a mini park or a half-mile radius of a neighborhood park. The City of Madison provides most core facilities in neighborhood parks; mini parks are intended to fill voids between neighborhood park service areas, or in areas where land uses or geographical boundaries limit development of larger neighborhood parks. Nearly all residential parcels have mini and/or neighborhood park coverage. The residential areas that lack mini and neighborhood park coverage are shown in dark purple on Exhibit 9. These areas are predominantly located on the north side of Madison in the Sherman and Kennedy Heights neighborhoods, and on the west side within the Wingra Park and University Hill Farms neighborhoods and between Highway 14 and N Gammon Rd near the border with Middleton. In many cases, the recreational needs of these neighborhoods can be served by other municipalities that are not included in this analysis. As new residential units develop within infill areas, such as East and West Towne Mall Areas and Downtown, there will be challenges related to acquiring park land and providing safe access to these spaces.

Table 5.3: Park Service Areas by Type

Park Name	Service Area	Size (Acres)	City Adopted Standards Acres per 1,000 Residents	2024 Actual Acres per 1,000 residents
Mini	¼ Mile	<5	As appropriate	0.70
Neighborhood	½ Mile	5+	3.75	2.87
Community	2 Mile	20+	6.25	6.67
Total			10+	10.24

Figure 5.1: NRPA Guidelines Compared to City of Madison



Stricker's Pond by Brian Shore

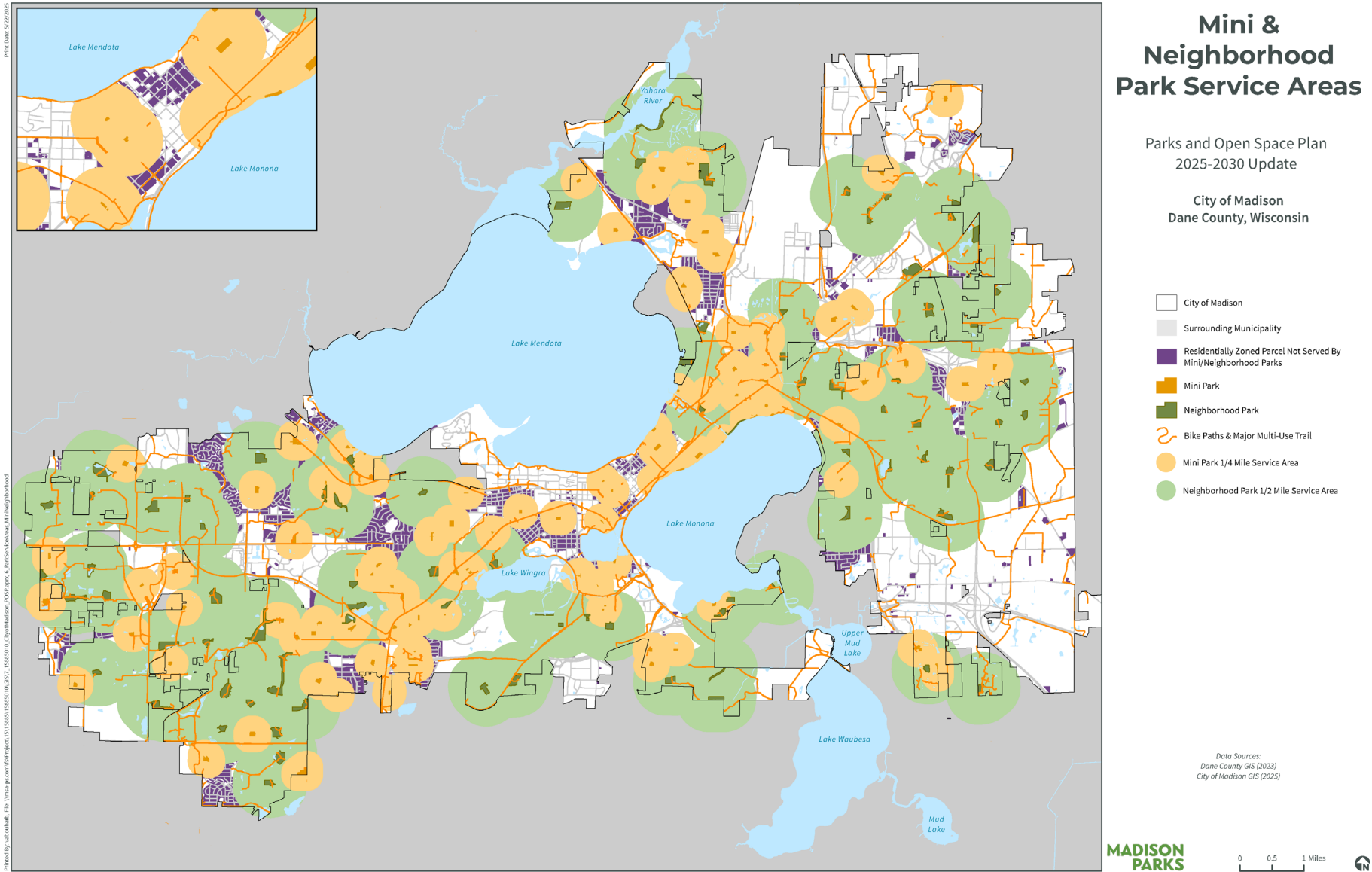


Tenney Park by Luna Collins



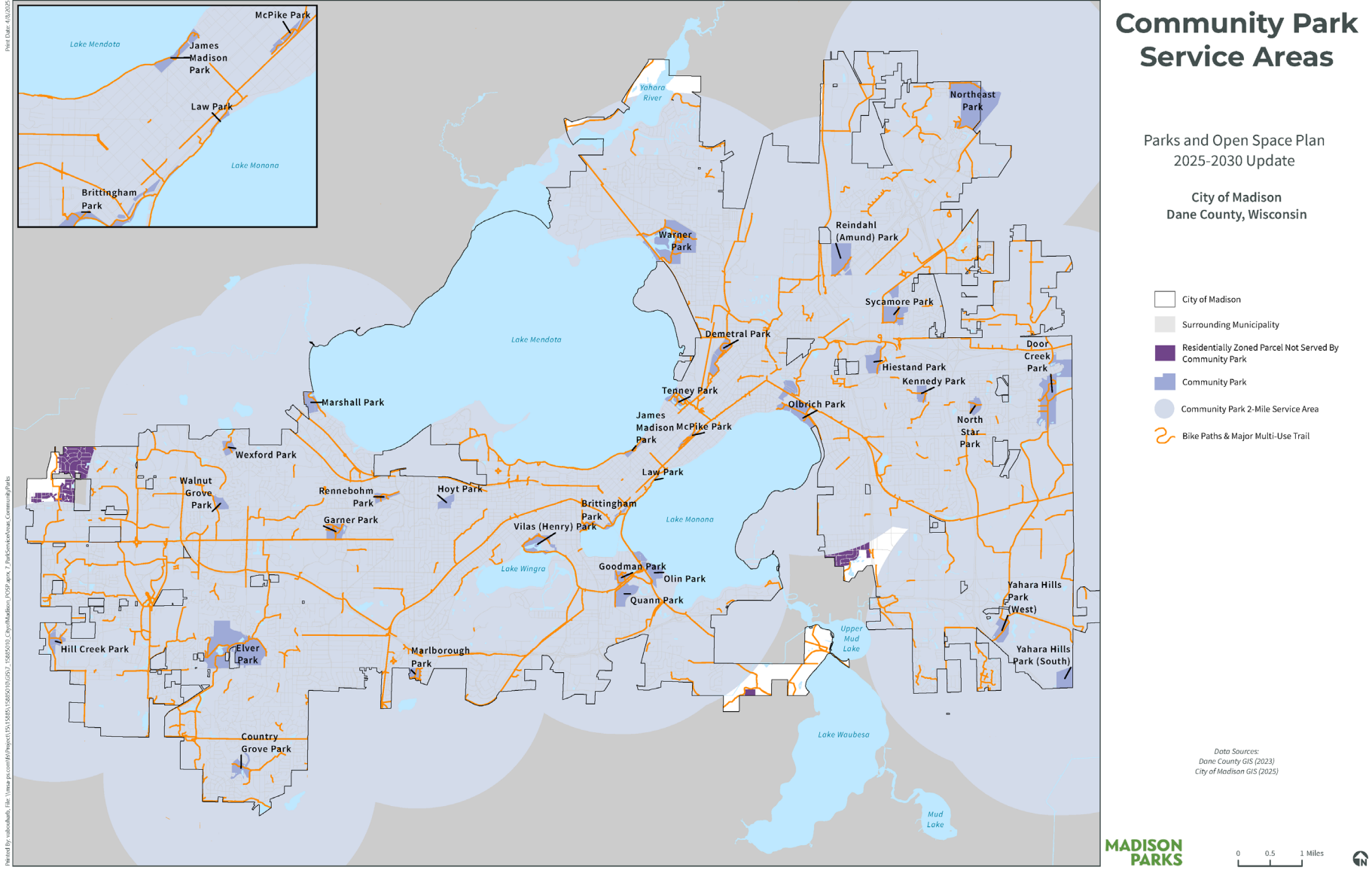
Kennedy Park by Heather McKittrick

Exhibit 9: Mini & Neighborhood Park Service Areas



The Madison park system provides community park service area coverage for approximately 97% of all areas of residential land use. Areas that are deficient in community park coverage are shown in dark purple on Exhibit 10. Residential parcels not served by community parks are concentrated in the northwest corner of the city and on the edge of Madison that is to the east of Monona. However, both of these areas are served by non-city parks.

Exhibit 10: Community Park Service Areas



A wide-angle photograph of McGinnis Park's playground. On the left, a large wooden swing set with three swings is positioned on a sandy area. To the right, a more complex play structure with multiple slides, climbing frames, and a tunnel is also on sand. Several children are visible playing on the equipment. The background is filled with large, leafy green trees under a bright sky. A grassy lawn occupies the foreground. In the bottom right corner, there is a white rectangular box containing the text 'McGinnis Park'.

This map illustrates the Yahara River watershed and its connection to the Lake Mendota and Lake Monona basins. The main map shows the river network (orange lines) flowing from the north and east into Lake Mendota and Lake Monona. The inset map in the top left corner provides a broader view of the region, showing the relative positions of Lake Mendota, Lake Monona, and the Yahara River. The map uses various colors to represent different land uses and water bodies: blue for water, green for forested areas, yellow for agricultural land, and grey for urban areas. The Yahara River is shown as a prominent feature, with its main stem and numerous tributaries. The map also shows the surrounding landscape, including the city of Madison and the surrounding hills.

5.3 Regional and Statewide Planning Efforts

In addition to City of Madison parks, Madison residents utilize park and open space facilities owned and managed by both Dane County as well as the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Major recreational uses of facilities under control of these organizations were outlined in Chapter 3 as part of the overall parkland inventory in the Madison area. This section provides an overview of the respective plans, including the broader recreational needs of the state and region, implications for the local system, and potential collaboration opportunities for the Parks Division.

State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2025-2030)

Every five years, states are required to develop a State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) for eligibility to participate in the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) State Assistance Program.⁶⁵ The 2025-2030 SCORP is a reference document describing recreation needs, trends, and opportunities to address gaps in outdoor recreation systems across the state. The SCORP is guided by three overarching goals:

- Ensure that all Wisconsinites have equitable opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation, regardless of where they live or their ethnicity, gender, income, abilities, or age.
- Maintain and expand the sustainability of recreational opportunities in our state, ensuring that existing opportunities are well funded and have the support to grow and expand where needed.
- Grow the collaborative partnership approach across federal, state, regional and local agencies, and private non-profit organizations and businesses to provide high-quality outdoor experiences for all Wisconsinites.

The SCORP provides a summary of engagement efforts used to gather feedback from Wisconsin residents to determine which factors affected participation in outdoor recreation and visiting parks. Respondents across major demographic groups were motivated to participate in outdoor recreation for the benefit of physical, mental and social health as well as connection with nature. The SCORP was informed by a robust public engagement process, including a survey sent to a random sample of 7,000 Wisconsin households, focus groups, and additional survey of county, city, and village park and recreation agencies.

SCORP (2025-2030) Strategies

1. Provide more opportunities for outdoor recreation close to home.
2. Provide needed recreation facilities.
3. Improve affordability of participation.
4. Support, develop, and enhance mentoring programs.
5. Create more welcoming outdoor spaces.
6. Improve the distribution of information on recreation opportunities.
7. Expand and diversify funding sources.
8. Adapt to new environmental conditions both in terms of participation in outdoor activities as well as the management of recreation opportunities and facilities.
9. Lead by example on climate change mitigation.
10. Create an implementation plan that identifies desired outcomes as well as the partners to coordinate and advocate for outdoor recreation throughout Wisconsin.

Despite an increase in outdoor recreation compared to a decade ago, the SCORP identifies systemic barriers to outdoor recreation that disproportionately impact specific demographic groups, such as inadequate transit options and personal safety concerns. Based on engagement efforts, barriers to park usage generally include:

- Individuals with no formal education or a high school diploma may not be able to afford the costs of outdoor recreation.
- BIPOC and Hispanic individuals are more likely to lack proper equipment and unawareness of or proximity to recreational options.
- Younger respondents in urban areas may be less likely to be aware of options that exist.
- Those with disabilities and those over 71 years old are more often faced with accessibility concerns related to outdoor recreation.
- Women and LGBTQ+ individuals reported concerns over personal safety and harassment and are less likely to visit a park alone.

Compared to other states, Wisconsin historically outperforms the national average for outdoor recreation participation. Highest statewide participation rates were for walking/hiking/running; swimming in lakes, ponds, or rivers; and wildlife watching/nature photography. The number of hunting and fishing licenses sold over the last decade has decreased, while the number of annual stickers and day passes sold at state parks has increased since 2020.

Much like within the City of Madison, State funding for parks and outdoor recreation has not kept pace with the demand for these resources. Annual bonding authority for the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, which funds park development around the state at the local and regional level, has decreased from \$86 million in 2010 to \$33.25 million in 2024. Wisconsin spends less per capita on state park operations than nearly every other

state, despite the park system being a major driver for outdoor recreation and tourism.⁶⁶ State parks are also experiencing issues related to deferred maintenance, which are intensified by increased demand for these facilities and may impact the ability to support tourism and best manage natural resources.

The Department of Natural Resources divides the state into eight discreet regions, with the SCORP develops regional insights. The City of Madison is located in the Southern Gateways Region, and the DNR has identified several future challenges for the region resulting from climate change, including ecosystem damages resulting from a longer growing season, and increased health risks with urban recreation as the temperatures rise. Survey respondents from the Southern Gateways Region reported an increase in nearly all activities identified in the survey, with the highest increases in participation in ATV or UTV riding, visiting dog parks and firearm ranges. The only decreases were modest declines in basketball, tennis, and ice skating. Target archery and firearm ranges, soccer, 4WD off-roading, and dual-sport motorcycle racing were identified as activities with lower availability within the region.



Tenney Park by Tara Camfield

The SCORP provides 10 strategies with actions that local, regional, and state agencies can act on. Examples of actions include selecting climate resilient species of vegetation, shifting recreation in response to climate change, improving accessibility to park facilities for individuals with disabilities, ensuring facilities are clean and welcoming, and improving communications through signage and creating awareness of recreational opportunities.

Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan (2025-2030)

Similar to the City of Madison, Dane County prepares a Parks and Open Space Plan (POSP) update every five years. The goal of the County’s 2025-2030 POSP is to identify significant cultural, historical, and natural resources to be considered for protection, preservation, or restoration. In addition, the plan seeks to analyze recreation needs and demands on a county-wide level.

Dane County is the fastest growing county in the state, and the population of adults ages 65 and up will continue to be the fastest growing demographic. Understanding the population helps plan for future regional park locations, park acquisitions and regional trail connections. The County POSP recognizes that with the aging population, there will be increased need for multi-generational spaces and enhanced access to recreation. The County POSP identified that over 70% of individuals participating in recreation on county lands are white and emphasized the need to reduce barriers and diversify recreational programming to encourage participation by BIPOC and Latinx individuals.

Top recreational activities within Dane County Parks include access for dogs, biking, hiking, boating, fishing, camping, outdoor education and disc golf. These are consistent with the top five national trends of running, walking, hiking, biking and fishing, which also increased dramatically during and post-pandemic.

Overall, recommended actions within the County POSP relevant to the Parks Division include work addressing winter recreation needs in the changing climate, effectively managing the increased use following the pandemic in order to protect and preserve park facilities and lands, improving outdoor education opportunities, implementing strategies to better serve underprivileged youth, and developing career pathways in environmental stewardship, among many others. The County POSP provides potential partnership projects with the city to enhance access to natural resources within the community (Table 5.4).



North Star Park by Autum Linsmeier



Cherokee Marsh - North by Elizabeth Olcikas



Door Creek Park

Table 5.4: Potential City County Partnership Opportunities (2025-2030)

Project Area	Opportunities for Collaboration
Blooming Grove Drumlins Natural Resource Area	- Planning with Madison Parks Division for new future recreation park in Northeast quadrant of county. - Partner with City & DNR to implement connection between Glacial Drumlin and Capital City Trails. - Partner with Madison Parks Division to expand hiking and cross-country ski trails at Door Creek Park.
Cherokee Marsh Natural Resource Area	- Collaborate with Madison Parks Division, DNR, and Friends of Cherokee Marsh to acquire lands within the Area. - Continue vegetative management practices within Area to control invasive species. - Consider future trail connections to Westport Drumlin Area.
Starkweather Creek Natural Resource Area	Planning with City Planning for trail connection to Token Creek County Park.
McPike Park	Continued consideration for Conservation Fund Grant Program dependent on Master Plan.
Madison LakeWay	- County is funding \$2 million of Phase 1 improvements. - Consider future partnership opportunities between County and City.
Rodefeld Landfill	Partner with Madison Parks and other surrounding communities on plans to convert landfill to recreational space, including planning for future recreational programming.
Ice Age Trail National Scenic Trail	Continue prioritizing County acquisition of lands for the Ice Age Trail, particularly where they overlap with other project boundaries, historic/cultural interpretative sites, and where partnership support is available.

Exhibit 12: Dane County POSP 2025-2030

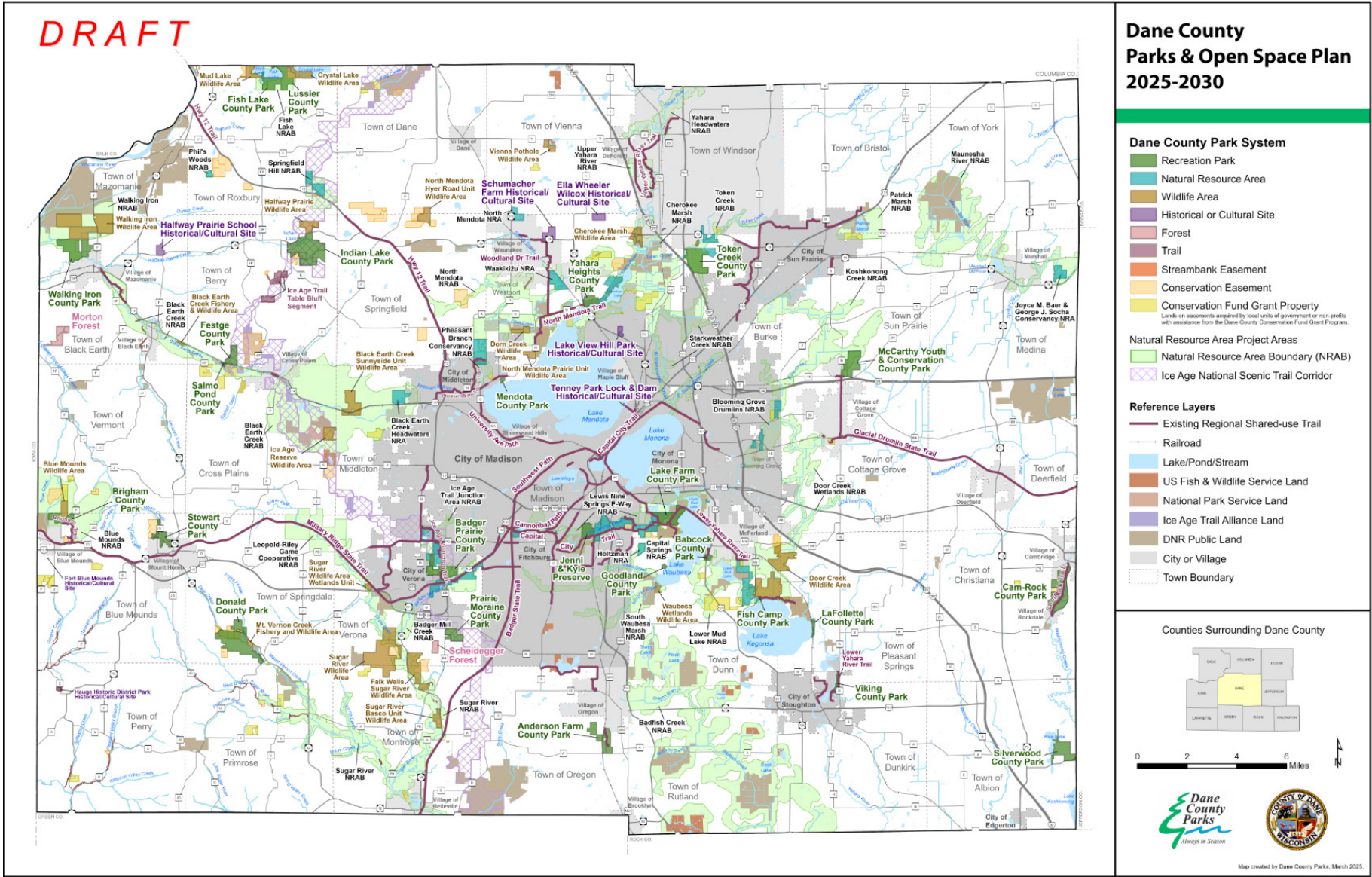
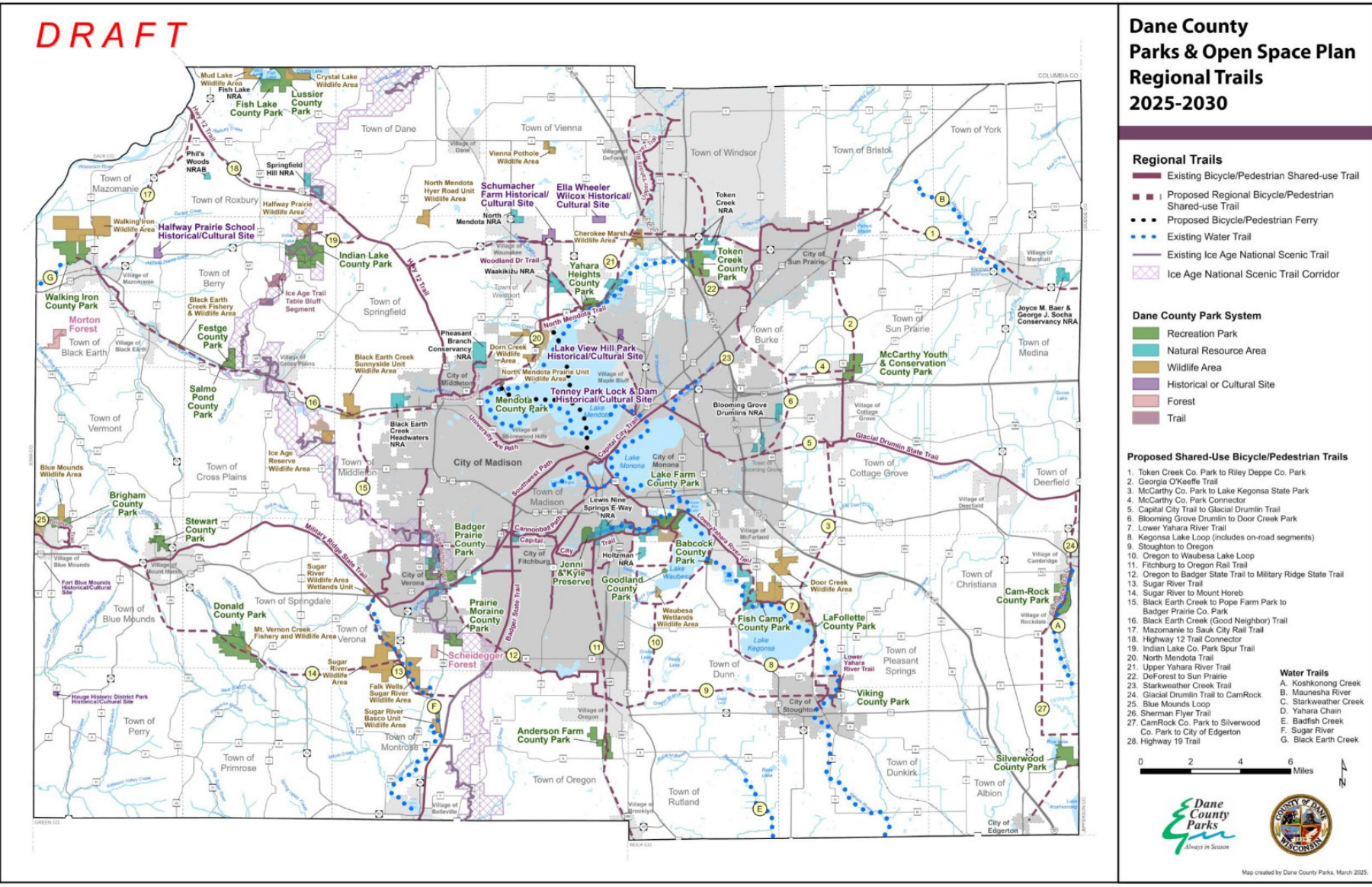


Exhibit 13: Dane County POSP Regional Trails 2025-2030



Key Takeaways

Madison residents have excellent access to the parks around the community. As the community continues to grow, it will be important to adhere to park access goals and provide adequate facilities to serve the growing population. Park leaders will need to continue actively pursue land acquisitions in areas of deficiencies as new construction and infill development occurs. Likewise, partnering with Dane County and the Wisconsin DNR may help alleviate some of the challenges that the region is facing when it comes to access to outdoor recreation. Key areas of collaboration include responding to the impact of climate change on winter recreation, investing in park facilities, and improving the natural environment.

Chapter 5: Endnotes

63 National Recreation and Parks Association. (2024). *2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review: Madison (City of) Parks Division*. Retrieved from <https://www.nrpa.org/siteassets/research/2024-agency-performance-review.pdf>

64 Trust for Public Land. (2024). *2024 Madison, WI ParkScore Ranking*. Retrieved from <https://www.tpl.org/city/madison-wisconsin>

65 Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. (2024). *State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2025–2030)*. Retrieved from https://widnr.widenet/s/jkhhvkb6sh/fl_mp_scorp_2025_2030_documentonly

66 Stein, J., & Byrnes, T. (2023). *This Land is Our Land: The Past and Future of Conservation Funding in Wisconsin*. Wisconsin Policy Forum. Retrieved from https://wispolicyforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ThisLandIsOur-Land_FullReport-1.pdf

Chapter 6

Parks Funding



Chapter 6: Parks Funding

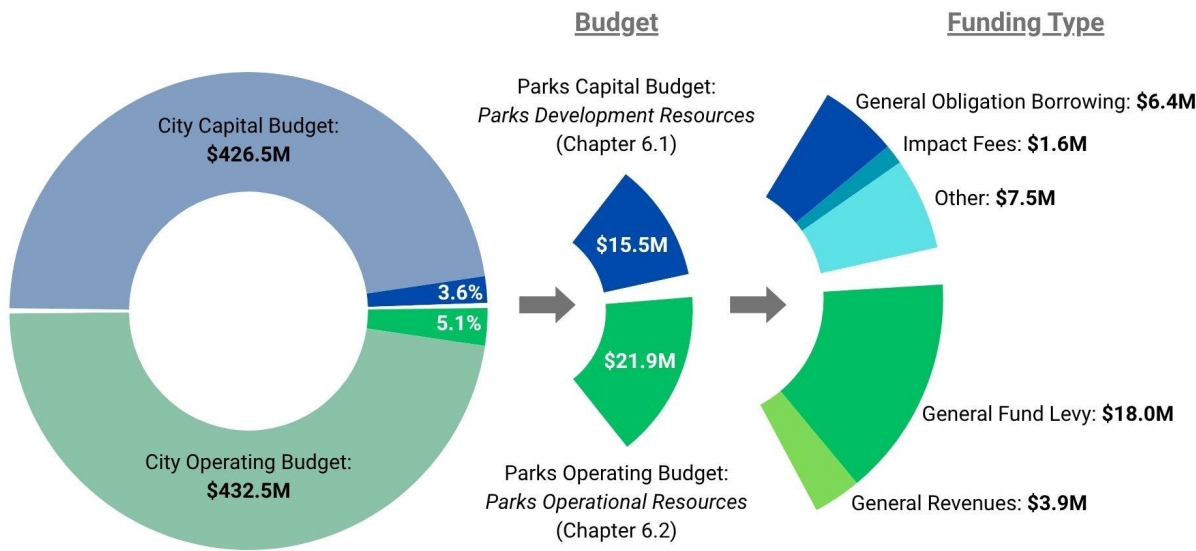
The City of Madison continues to grow in terms of population and geographic region. The Parks Division must be prepared to respond to the growing demands of the park system. Maintaining the existing system and building new spaces and facilities requires significant resources to meet the park access and outdoor recreation needs of the community.

Overall, there are five primary factors impacting development and operational funding resources:

- Long-standing, reliable funding sources are not increasing at corresponding levels of resource demand.
- Madison is experiencing rapid population growth and increased housing density, which requires the development of new parks to maintain service standards.
- Increased daily use and longer seasons require more resources.
- Historic facilities and aging infrastructure require increased maintenance.
- Facilities and programming have been added responsive to the needs of the community.

The City of Madison’s 2025 General Fund budget is \$432.5 million, of which \$21.9 million (5.1%) is allocated to the Parks

Figure 6.1 Parks Division Budget Within City’s Adopted 2025 Budget



Division through the annual Operating Budget. The City of Madison’s annual Capital Budget is \$426.5 million, of which \$15.5 million (3.6%) is allocated to the Parks Division (Figure 6.1). Based on this level of support per the Trust for Public Land ParkScore Index, the City of Madison is lagging behind peer systems across the country when it comes to investment in the park system. **According to these metrics based on a three-year average, Madison is investing approximately \$112 per resident annually for both parks operational and capital resources, when a system of this size and complexity should be closer to \$248 per resident annually.**⁶⁷

This chapter examines development and operational resources, along with alternative funding sources and considerations related to system growth. The analysis explains why current resources are struggling to align with trends in population growth. Staff and policymakers must pursue alternative funding sources in order to sustain and grow services across the system and create a system that is more resilient to external factors. Figure 6.2 provides an overview of the chapter.

Figure 6.2 Parks Funding Overview

Parks Division Capital Budget: Park Development Resources

What is Funded?

- Construction of new parks & facilities
- Replacement, maintenance, and improvements to existing facilities
- Acquisition of new parks

Types of Funding

- General Obligation Borrowing
- Impact Fees (Development)
- County, State, and Federal Funding
- Tax Incremental Financing
- Private and In-kind contributions

Concerns Regarding Funding

- Reliant on debt service, paid by property tax
- Directly dependent on residential development
- Dependent on specific projects and grantee programs available
- TIF District must be able to support the work financially and geographically
- Dependent on ability to fundraise

Parks Division Operating Budget: Park Operational Resources

What is Funded?

- 71% of Operating Budget funds salaries and benefits
- Day-to-day operations and maintenance of the park system
- Programming and permitting of the park spaces
- Fees for utilities serving park facilities

Types of Funding

- General Property Tax Levy
- Earned Revenue - generated through permits, fees, and agreements
- Private and in-kind contributions

Concerns Regarding Funding

- Property tax limits create a gap between allowable levy and needed growth
- Dependent on park uses, external weather events, and facility conditions
- Dependent on ability to fundraise

6.1 Park Development Resources

Park development resources are needed to build new parks, improve and maintain facilities, and update existing infrastructure within the system. The Capital Budget is the primary funding source that supports these projects. Each year, the Parks Division develops and updates its Capital Budget and corresponding five-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).⁶⁸ The CIP and Capital Budget are based on a review of existing and emerging infrastructure needs, planned development, and resident and alder input. This section discusses the Capital Budget funding sources, trends between 2018-2024, and outlook for 2025-2030.

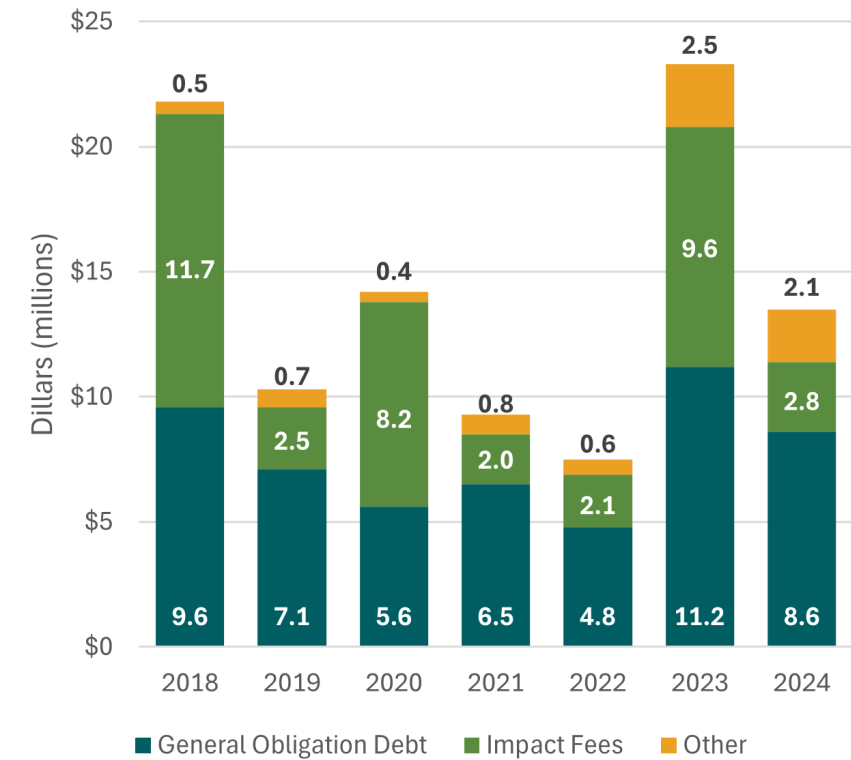
The Capital Budget is funded by multiple sources including general obligation bonds, impact fees, and other revenues such as county and federal funding sources, tax incremental financing (TIF) funds, special assessments, revenues from leases, and donations/contributions. The funding make-up varies from year-to-year depending on the types of projects within the Capital Budget and CIP. General obligation bonds and impact fees are consistently the largest funding sources. Each of these funding types are described in further detail within this section. The full 2025 Adopted Capital Budget and 2026-2030 Capital Improvement Plan is available in Appendix I.

General Obligation Borrowing

A major source of funding for capital improvement projects is general obligation (GO) borrowing, which is debt borrowed by the City through 10-year bonds and paid back using property tax levy shown as debt service as part of the overall City of Madison Budget. The amount of GO borrowing within the Parks Division’s budget can vary from year-to-year. In 2024, approximately 64% of the adopted Capital Budget was funded through GO borrowing.

Figure 6.3 shows the Parks Division’s adopted Capital Budgets from 2018 through 2024. Over this time period, two years were budgeted with higher resource inputs for unique circumstances. In 2018, \$9 million was budgeted for potential land acquisitions. In 2023 the Capital Budget included funding for expansions of Elver Park and Warner Park Community Recreation Center and new shelter construction projects at Door Creek and Country Grove Parks. Meanwhile, between 2022 and 2024, approximately 45% of the Parks Division’s Capital Budget was used to address deferred maintenance needs and replacement of existing infrastructure in the park system.

Figure 6.3: Adopted Capital Budget by Funding Source (2018-2024)



The adopted 2025 Capital Budget and 2026-2030 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) summary shown in Figure 6.4 and available in Appendix I is a plan of future expenditures for the Parks Division’s capital needs. The CIP is subject to annual appropriation as part of the City’s Capital Budget process. The 2026 CIP contains large projects, including replacing the Brittingham Park beach house, implementing the Madison LakeWay Improvements project, as well as golf improvements funded by the Golf Program. Several of these projects contain significant funding other than GO borrowing, including private donations, grants, or reserves applied. According to the 2025-2030 CIP, the Parks Division anticipates spending approximately 59% of capital resources on deferred maintenance and replacing existing facilities. In an effort to manage debt service and the overall Operating Budget within defined property tax levy limits, the Parks Division’s Capital Budget GO borrowing during the 2025-2030 period is expected to be an average of \$6.85 million per year compared to \$7.63 million during the 2018-2024 period, which is a reduction of 10 percent.

Parkland Dedication and Impact Fees Overview

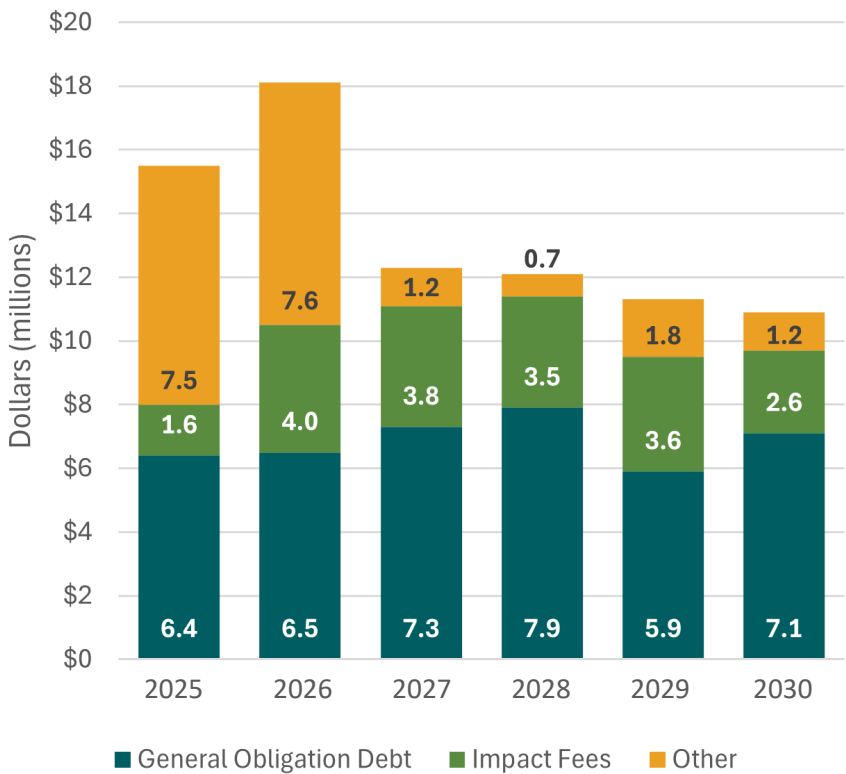
Impact fees have and will continue to account for the second-largest funding source in the Parks Division’s Capital Budget (Figure 6.3).⁶⁹ The Impact Fee funding is tied directly to the new residential development within Madison. Park Impact Fees are based on a 2016 Needs Assessment and include a requirement of either parkland dedication or a Park-Land Impact Fee (also called impact fee-in-lieu of dedication) along with Park Infrastructure Impact Fees to accompany new residential units.⁷⁰ Impact fee funding identified in the Capital Budget varies and is contingent upon fees received and anticipated projects. Impact fee funds accounted for 39 percent of the Capital Budget during the 2018-2024 timeframe. This section provides an overview of the Needs Assessment, as well as Park Impact Fees.

The City’s Community Development Division estimates that Madison added approximately 22,000 homes or housing units in the last decade. According to the City of Madison’s Housing Tracker, Madison has set a target of creating 15,000 new homes by 2030 to address the city’s challenges related to housing costs and supply.⁷¹

Quick Facts about Impact Fees

- Impact Fees are directly dependent on the housing market.
- 22,000 homes have been added in the last decade.
- Madison has set a target of adding 15,000 new homes by 2030.

Figure 6.4: Adopted Capital Budget and 2026-2030 Capital Improvement Plan



2016 Needs Assessment

The “Park Impact Fee and Land Dedication Policy and Public Facility Needs Assessment” completed in 2016 is the basis for the current parkland dedication, park impact fee in lieu of dedication, and park infrastructure impact fees requirements.⁷² These changes went into effect on January 1, 2017, were implemented over a three-year period (80% in 2017, 90% in 2018, and 100% in 2019 and beyond), and include a formula used to calculate Impact Fee adjustments annually. The new impact fee ordinance added a category for large multifamily units (four bedrooms or more) and updated the requirement for age-restricted units and group living quarters reflective of housing development trends. The current impact fee ordinance also provides exemptions for low-cost housing and updated requirements for accessory dwelling units, which became permissible with enactment of the new Zoning Code in 2013. One of the most significant changes as a result of the Needs Assessment was the move from 11 to 5 benefit districts. The current park infrastructure impact fee districts are North, East, Central, West, and city-wide (Exhibit 14).

An update to the Needs Assessment is anticipated to be completed by end of 2026. The level of service requirement for parkland dedication is among the items that are subject to change with an updated Needs Assessment. The Needs Assessment will be prepared using data gathered from around the nation and within Wisconsin, along with the information presented in the adopted 2025-2030 Park and Open Space Plan, and the City’s existing park inventory.

Parkland Dedication

Madison’s parkland dedication provisions mandate that developers of residential properties dedicate a specific amount of land for public parks as part of the plan approval process. The parkland dedication requirements ensure that new residential development provided parkland at the level of service of 10+ acres per 1,000 residents.

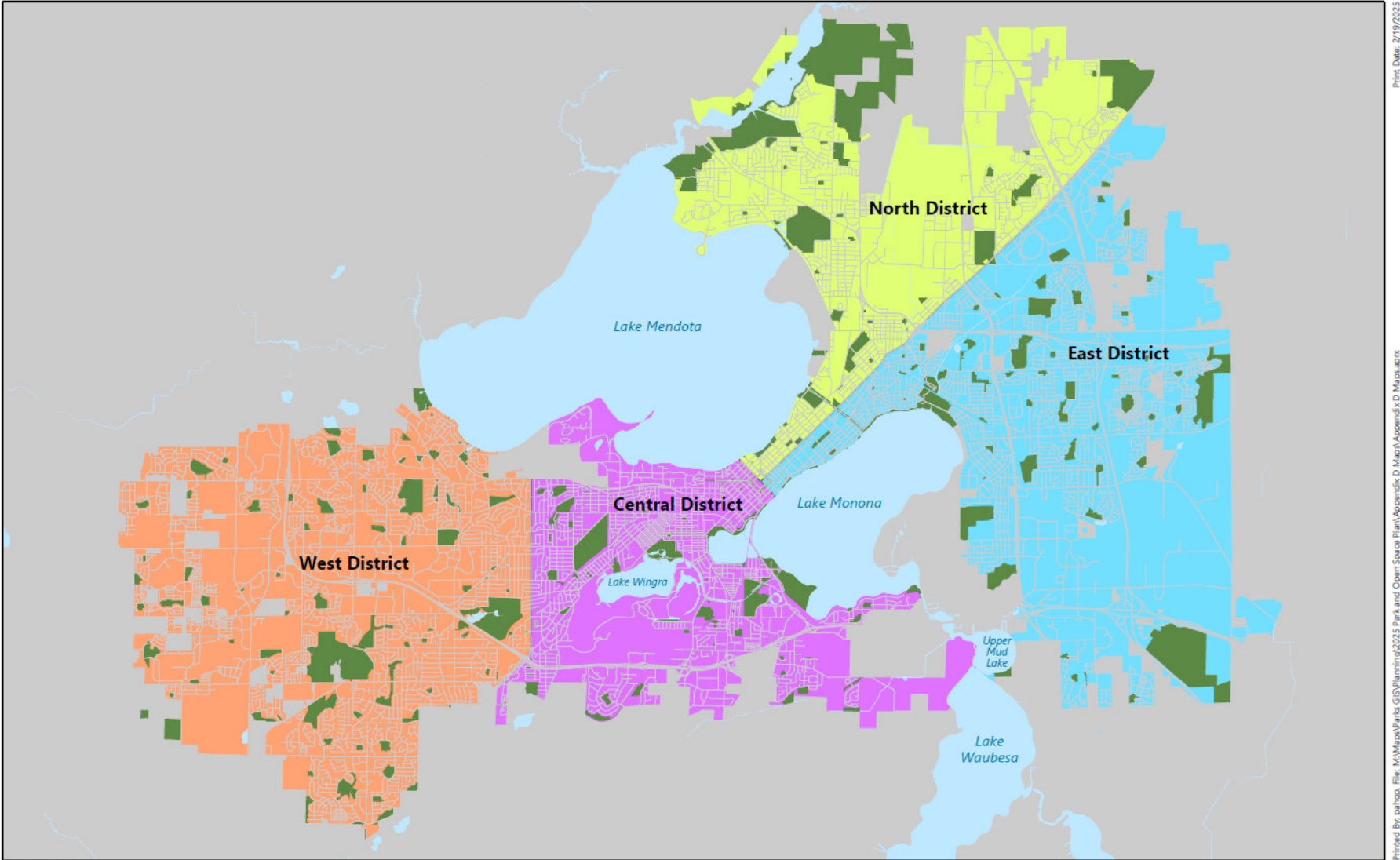
Investment in Historic Resources (Appendix C):

Park improvements within parks or facilities designated as National or Local Landmarks meet strict local and national permitting, design and construction guidelines. These facilities are more costly to maintain and restore compared to typical park facilities. Examples of historic restoration projects completed since 2018 include:

- 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
- Significant architectural preservation work at Breese Stevens Field

Developers of NEW residential units must provide land dedication or Park-Land Impact Fee to maintain standard of at least 10 acres per 1,000 residents.

Exhibit 14: Impact Fee Districts



MADISON PARKS

Data Sources:
City of Madison GIS Data (2025)

0 1 2 Miles

Impact Fee Districts

Park and Open Space Plan 2025-2030

City of Madison
Dane County, Wisconsin

Impact Fees Used for Park Acquisition

In situations where the City of Madison determines it is not feasible or desirable to acquire additional parkland through parkland dedication, developers are required to pay a fee in lieu of land dedication (the Park-Land Impact Fee). The Park-Land Impact Fee ensures that when a development does not dedicate parkland within its property, the developer provides funding to the City to independently purchase parkland. The fee in lieu of land dedication amount is determined using a formula based on the number of proposed dwelling units. This requirement provides funding for parkland acquisition outside of the property tax levy to meet park demand introduced by new dwelling units. Park-Land Impact Fees cannot be used for anything other than the acquisition of park land. The Capital Budget does account for parkland acquisition using these funds.

Park-Land Impact Fees have been a reliable source of park acquisition funding between 2018 and 2024. Figure 6.5 illustrates the annual Park-Land Impact Fees collected from 2018 through 2024.

Table 6.1 includes a list of parkland dedications and/or acquisitions utilizing Park-Land Impact Fees have resulted in the following park acquisitions or park expansion since 2018.

Impact Fees Used for Park Infrastructure

Park-Infrastructure Impact Fees provide a significant source of funding for construction of park facilities and amenities in the Capital Budget. This fee funds park development at a comparable level to existing park facilities and is assessed based on the number of units and type of housing developed. The Park-Infrastructure Impact fee schedule was updated based on the 2016 Needs Assessment and is adjusted annually based on the Construction Cost Index. Figure 6.6 identifies Park-Infrastructure Fees collected from 2018-2024.

Figure 6.5: Parkland Impact Fees Collected (2018-2024)

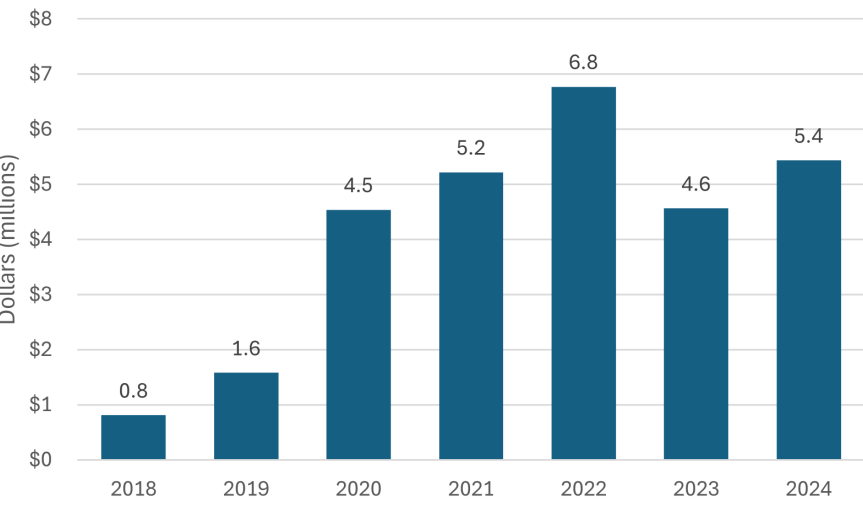
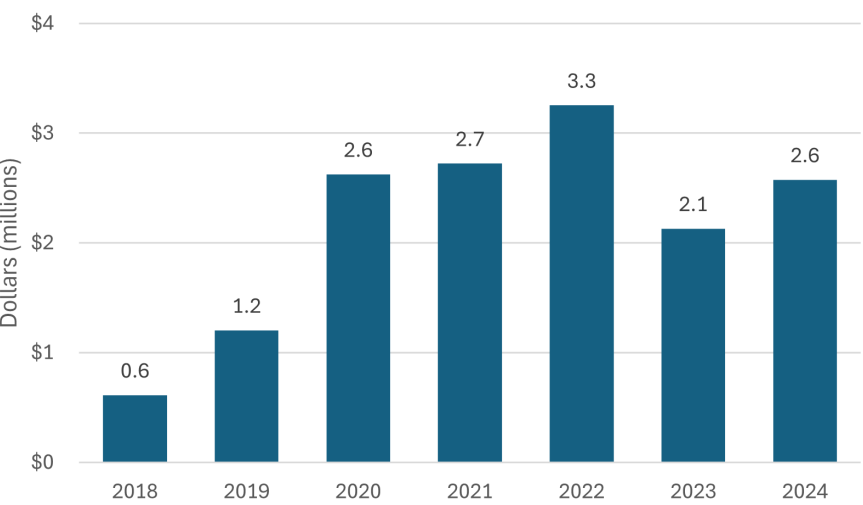


Figure 6.6: Park-Infrastructure Fees Collected (2018-2024)



The ordinance changes implemented in 2017 reduced the previous 11 benefit districts to 5 benefit districts. A city-wide benefit district was also created where 20% of all Park-Infrastructure impact fees are placed in a fund which can be used for park improvements anywhere throughout the city. Eighty percent of Park-Infrastructure impact fees must be spent in the district from which they are acquired. The end result of these changes to the benefit districts has created a more equitable distribution of impact fee utilization throughout the city. Notably, low-cost housing park infrastructure impact fee exemptions since 2017 are equivalent to nearly \$12 million in foregone revenue for park system improvements.

While Park Infrastructure impact fees help to offset park development costs, they typically only offset park development costs by an average of 30-50% of total costs, depending on the type of housing development. Impact fees provide a much smaller fraction of park development funding when considering improvements to community parks. Community parks often provide specialized amenities, that are more costly to construct compared to mini and neighborhood parks. Table 6.2 includes general costs associated with the development of various sizes of parks.

Table 6.1: Parkland Acquired and/or Expanded (2018-2024)

Acquired Through Dedication	Purchased Using Park-Land Impact Fees	Acquired Using Combination
Acacia Ridge Park Canter Park Country Grove Park Eagle Trace Park Midtown Commons Park Sunshine Ridge Park	Apple Ridge Park Brittingham Park Cherokee Marsh-North Unit Hill Creek Park Moraine Woods Conservation Park O. B. Sherry Park Olin Park Tilton Park Whitetail Ridge Park Zeier Park	Hartmeyer-Roth Park Elver Park



Table 6.2: Potential Park Development Costs

Mini Park <i>(smaller than 5 acres)</i>		Neighborhood Park <i>(larger than 5 acres)</i>		Community Park <i>(typically larger than 20 acres)</i>	
Master Plan	\$10,000-25,000	Master Plan	\$25,000-40,000	Master Plan	\$100,000-250,000
Site Engineering	\$12,000-20,000	Site Engineering	\$25,000-35,000	Site Engineering	\$300,000-400,000
Grading and Site Prep	\$25,000-100,000	Grading and Site Prep	\$60,000-150,000	Grading and Site Prep	\$120,000-200,000
Finish Grading & Restoration	\$12,000-15,000	Finish Grading & Resporation	\$120,000-150,000	Finish Grading & Re-sporation	\$200,000-350,000
Landscaping	\$12,000-25,000	Landscaping	\$50,000-75,000	Landscaping	\$80,000-150,000
Utility Services	\$6,000-10,000	Utility Services	\$12,000-25,000	Utility Services	\$25,000-75,000
Playground	\$100,000-150,000	Playground	\$120,000-175,000	Playground with play equipment for 2-5 and 5-12	\$120,000-175,000
Park Furnishings	\$25,000-40,000	Park Furnishings	\$45,000-70,000	Park Furnishings	\$75,000-100,000
(Approx 1/4 mi) Paved Trails	\$77,000-150,000	Backstop	\$6,000-8,500	Lighted Courts	\$2-5 million
		Picnic Shelter/ Open-Sided Shelter	\$100,000-150,500	Lighted Fields	\$1-2.5 million
		Soccer Fields	\$20,000-\$75,000	Shelter building with restroom	\$2-5 million
		Small Parking Lot	\$125,000-250,000	Picnic Shelter/ Open-Sided Shelter	\$100,000-150,000
		(Approx 1/2 mi) Paved Trails	\$155,000-250,000	Large Parking Lot	\$500,000-2 million
Representative Total				(Approx 1 mi) Paved Trails	\$350,000-500,000
\$250,000-535,000		\$860,000-1.5 million		\$7-17 million	

The Park Impact Fee ordinance has a provision that allows developers to construct a new park, built to City standards on parkland dedicated through a subdivision plat rather than pay Park-Infrastructure Impact Fees. This process allows developers to use funds that would have been paid as fees to construct the park along with the subdivi-sion development, rather than having the City develop the park. Since the 2018-2023 Park and Open Space Plan, the City has entered into development agreements for the construction of Thousand Oaks (2018) and Old Timber Parks (2024). As high-density housing is built at a rapid pace, developers and the City are interested in having parks that can serve those residents closer to move-in, likely resulting in more requests for park development agreements.

As Madison continues to grow, additional parkland will be required to meet commu-nity needs. Increasing density and infill development are identified in both the Down-town Plan and the Imagine Madison Comprehensive Plan as well as several other plan areas as referenced in Chapter 2.2: Related Planning Efforts. Parkland on the periphery will likely be acquired through parkland dedication. Within infill areas, converting an existing developed property to parkland (especially in the downtown area) will require significantly higher costs for acquisition, demolition, and potential site remediation as compared to new land dedicated from vacant lots or farm fields. Appendix D –DNR Inventory of Contaminated Properties, maps properties in developed areas may have contamination issues.

Other Capital Funding Sources

The use of other funding sources within the Capital Budget has increased over recent years, with 2% other funding sources used in 2018 compared to 16% in 2024 and 48% in 2025 as shown previously in Figure 6.4. Other funding is project specific and varies from year to year. Donation funding received through various partnerships is account-ed for within “Other Funding Sources” and is described in more detail in Alternative Funding Sources. This section outlines the various other methods for funding the de-velopment of the park system.

Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) is a governmental finance tool that the City of Madison uses to provide funds to construct public infrastructure, promote development oppor-tunities, and expand the future tax base.⁷³ TIF funding is captured as areas within Tax Improvement Districts (TIDs) are redeveloped in accordance with approved TID plans. As rapid redevelopment is happening in areas, the City has begun more actively estab-lishing TID districts and using some of the proceeds for park improvements. The adopt-

Parks Development Agreements



Through park development agreements, developers can construct parks using de-ferred Park-Infrastructure Impact Fees. Since 2018, development agreements were used to construct Thousand Oaks and Old Timber Parks.

Use of other funding sources within the Capital Budget has increased over recent years, with 2% other funding sourc-es used in 2018 compared to 16% in 2024 and 48% in 2025.

ed 2025-2030 CIP includes \$6,660,000 in TIF Funding for projects within multiple TID plan areas, including funding for improvements for parks in South Madison and Breese Stevens Stadium.

The 2024 Capital Budget and the adopted 2025-2030 CIP includes funding sources from Revenue Reserves, which is golf-specific funding from the sale of a portion of the Yahara Hills Golf Course in 2023 and surplus revenues from operations being used to fund capital course and facility improvements. The adopted 2025-2030 CIP also includes \$2.4 million of non-general fund GO borrowing, which is debt similar to GO borrowing, but instead of being repaid through the tax levy, it will need to be repaid by the Golf Program.

County, State and Federal funding sources vary from year to year. This funding is typically received through grants, which are dependent on funding availability from the grantor and whether or not the grant application is awarded. Table 6.3 illustrates sig-

nificant grant awards that the Parks Division received for capital improvements between 2018-2024. Funding acquisitions and projects through grant funding sources may result in long-term restrictions to which the City must adhere. See Appendix D for map of DNR Grant Stewardship Acquisitions.

The 2025 Capital Budget includes \$2 million of funding from Dane County to support the Madison LakeWay Improvements project. In addition, the Parks Division has an agreement in place for another Dane County Partners for Recreation and Conservation (PARC) and Ride Grant for up to \$187,500, to be used towards a recreational biking project at Country Grove Park. Staff continue to work with potential grantors and the City’s Grants Supervisor to evaluate and apply for potential funding sources suitable for individual projects. Appendix J summarizes key state grant programs available to municipalities to support major park and outdoor recreation capital investments.

Table 6.3: Summary of Grant Funding Received (2018-2024)

Year	Amount	Source
2018	\$26,895	State of Wisconsin for Central Park Skate Park
2020	\$13,000	US Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service for invasive species control and native seed-ing at Owen Conservation Park
2021	\$125,000	Dane County Parks’ PARC and Ride Grant for the Aldo Leopold Park Paved Pump Track Project
2022	\$1,500	Dane County Land & Water Resources Department for prescribed burn crew tools and PPE
2024	\$62,500	Dane County Parks’ PARC and Ride Grant for the Aldo Leopold Park Shred to School Project
	\$25,000	State of WI Vibrant Spaces Grant for Crowley Station

6.2 Park Operational Resources

The Parks Division is responsible for planning and maintaining the entire park system that covers over 5,700 acres of parkland and more than 290 parks. Additionally, the Parks Division programs park spaces through permitting special events, reserving facilities, and coordinating Parks Division-led events. As part of the City’s Department of Public Works, 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 street-ends and other City-owned greenspaces. The City of Madison’s Operating Budget is funded by property tax levy support, revenues generated by park operations, and other funding sources. The Operating Budget provides the resources needed for daily operations, including staff salaries, purchased supplies, and services. A full copy of the Parks Division’s 2025 Operating Budget is available Appendix I.⁷⁴

Since 2018, the Parks Division has undergone significant organizational change and extreme challenges that are reflected as major reductions in operating revenue between 2019 and 2020. As part of the 2020 Operating Budget, the entire Forestry section moved to the Streets Division to increase efficiencies and align with resource support offered by the Streets Division’s crews. Additionally, the Public Works Laborer program was created in 2023, which transferred maintenance of medians from the Parks Division to the Streets Division. The shift of this work (along with corresponding revenues and expenses) to the Streets Division allows Parks Division staff to better focus on mission-related work within the park system. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way people use parks, which impacted available resources and therefore the services that the Parks Division provides. On top of these changes and challenges, the system has continued to evolve and grow with regards to acreage, number of parks, and programming.

For budgetary purposes, beginning in 2025, the work of the Parks Division is split into four (4) major service areas which include Community Recreation Services, Olbrich Botanical Gardens, Park Maintenance and Planning & Development (Table 6.4). This chapter discusses the operational resources, including various revenues and expenses, partnerships, and volunteer resources, that are necessary to meet the needs of Madison’s growing park system.



Blackhawk Park



Olbrich Botanical Gardens



Mall Concourse

Table 6.4: Parks Division Operating Budget Service areas	
Service Area	Summary of Services Provided
Community Recreation Services	
	- Permits all special events and festivals in parks, on streets, and at Mall Concourse - Schedules athletic field, shelter, and open space reservations - Administers permits for lake access, dog park, disc golf, ski trails, vending, and public amplification - Provides front line customer service, education, and policy enforcement through the Park Ranger program - Administers park and facility use agreements with community partners - Coordinates and leads all parks-sponsored events, including coordinating and hosting Parks Alive events - Manages operations of aquatics program at the Goodman Pool and beaches Coordinates the volunteer program within park system - Provides facility rentals, a variety recreational services to youth, families, and senior citizens, and maintains and operates the Warner Park Community Recreation Center
Olbrich Botanical Gardens	
	- Maintains outdoor public gardens, tropical conservancy, and production greenhouses - Schedules facility rentals and events, as well as maintains rental facilities - Manages guest experiences - Facilitates a public-private partnership with Olbrich Botanical Society, which generally creates and manages events, education programs, exhibitions, and donor development - Coordinates the volunteer program to support all aspects of garden operations
Planning & Development	
	- Manages all aspects of park planning, design, and construction - Manages implementation of the Capital Improvement Plan - Coordinates with City Planning staff on area plans and long-range planning - Prepares park development and master plans - Manages review of private development and assessment of Park Impact Fees

Table 6.4 Continued: Parks Division Operating Budget Service areas	
Service Area	Summary of Services Provided
Park Maintenance	
Operations	- Oversees and performs all aspects of park maintenance, including mowing, shelter cleaning, and athletic field maintenance - Conducts preventative maintenance and repairs of building envelope and mechanical systems - Conducts beach and shoreline clean-up and maintenance of piers, docks, boathouses, and boat storage facilities - Operates and maintains Forest Hill Cemetery and Mall Concourse - Conducts ecological restoration and maintenance of conservation parks and natural areas within parks - Maintains winter recreation facilities, including skating rinks and cross country ski trails - Maintains and performs safety audits on playgrounds - Removes snow from paths, sidewalks, bus stops, and parking lots - Prunes, plants, and manages trees within parks
Finance & Operations	- Manages payroll, budgeting, purchasing, revenue billing, and administrative policy - Coordinates hiring procedures and human resource-related functions - Manages Geographic Information System (GIS) and performs land and asset management - Manages park system data
Public Information	- Manages Division’s communications, including website, blog posts, and social media platforms - Manages photo library, publications, and annual report - Coordinates responses to media inquiries and news releases

Parks Division Operating Revenues

The Parks Division’s annual Operating Budget between 2020-2024 averaged just over \$18.5 million (Figure 6.7). Note, 2018-2019 included the Forestry section and is therefore not representative of the Parks Division’s current operating budget. General Fund levy support accounted for approximately 85% of the Parks Division’s overall funding support over this period. The Parks Division’s Operating Budget also relies on multiple other revenue sources, referred to as General Revenues.

General Fund Levy Support

State legislative changes in 2013 enacted levy limits that define the maximum amount a town, village, city, or county may implement. Under these limits, a municipality may increase its levy over the amount it levied in the prior year only by the percentage increase in equalized values from net new construction. These levy limits created gaps in funding available through General Fund levy support compared to the resources required to maintain existing levels of City services. The transfer of the Forestry Section from the Parks Division to the Streets Division in 2020 accounted for a reduction in revenue and corresponding expenses of just under \$3.9 million. During this time, there were increases in levy support to cover cost of living adjustments, add several new positions, and provide limited additional resources for new facilities and programs. Following the extreme disruption caused by COVID-19, levy support was reduced by 1% in 2021. In 2024, the Parks Division, along with all other General Municipal City agencies, was directed to manage within 99% of their adopted budget. To continue current service levels, City of Madison voters passed a referendum to increase its tax levy limit by 7.4%; this increased the levy revenue by \$22 million for the 2025 Budget.

General Revenues

General Revenues are funds that the Parks Division generates from doing business and are a critical funding source for maintaining the park system. Table 6.5 describes each General Revenue Category and provides examples of sources for each of these revenues.

Average annual revenues generated from 2021 through 2023 by each Major Service area are shown in Figure 6.8; Figure 6.9 shows the average annual revenue by Major Revenue category between 2021 and 2023.

Figure 6.7: Parks Division Operating Revenues by Funding Source (2018-2024)

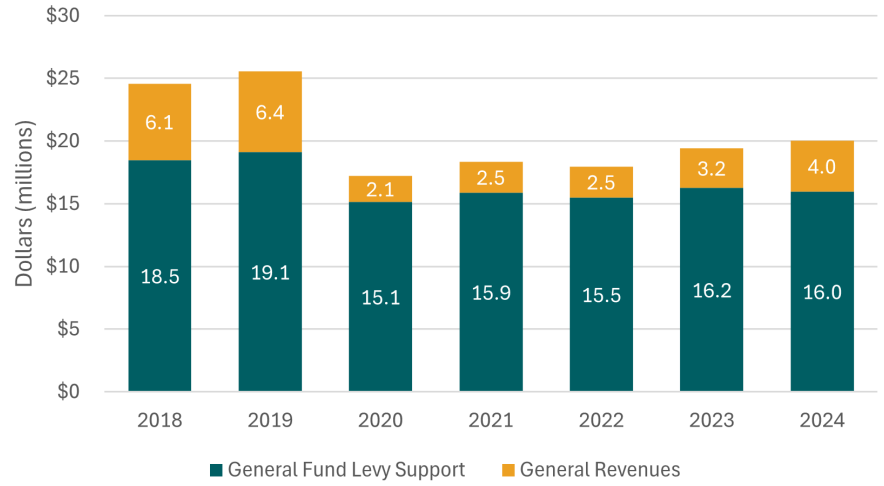


Table 6.5: General Revenue Categories	
General Revenue Category	Description of Revenue Sources
Inter-Governmental Revenues	Payments from the University of Wisconsin for Thai Pavilion annual expenses
Charges For Services	Park Use charges, Boat Launch charges, catering concessions, facility rental, admissions, lessons, program revenue, memberships, and reimbursement of expenses
Licenses and Permits	Cross Country Ski Permit sales
Fine Forfeiture Assessment	Assessments to Mall Concourse property owners for services provided
Investment Other Contribution	Private donations, generally through Madison Parks Foundation
Miscellaneous Revenue	Ordinance Violation fees
Other Finance Source	Trade-in revenue from equipment leased
Transfer In	Urban Forestry Special Charges, Dog Park funds, Disc Golf funds, Madison Ultimate Frisbee Association, Cemetery Perpetual Care Fund, and Room Tax

Figure 6.8: Average Annual Revenue by Service Area (in millions) (2021-2023)

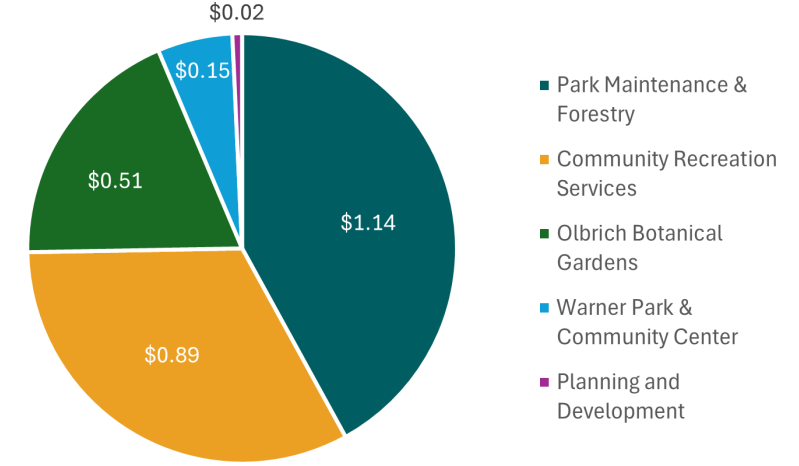
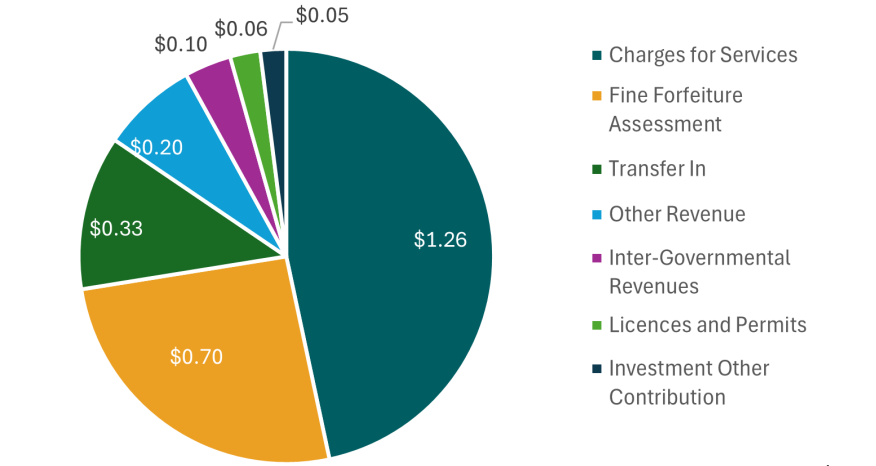


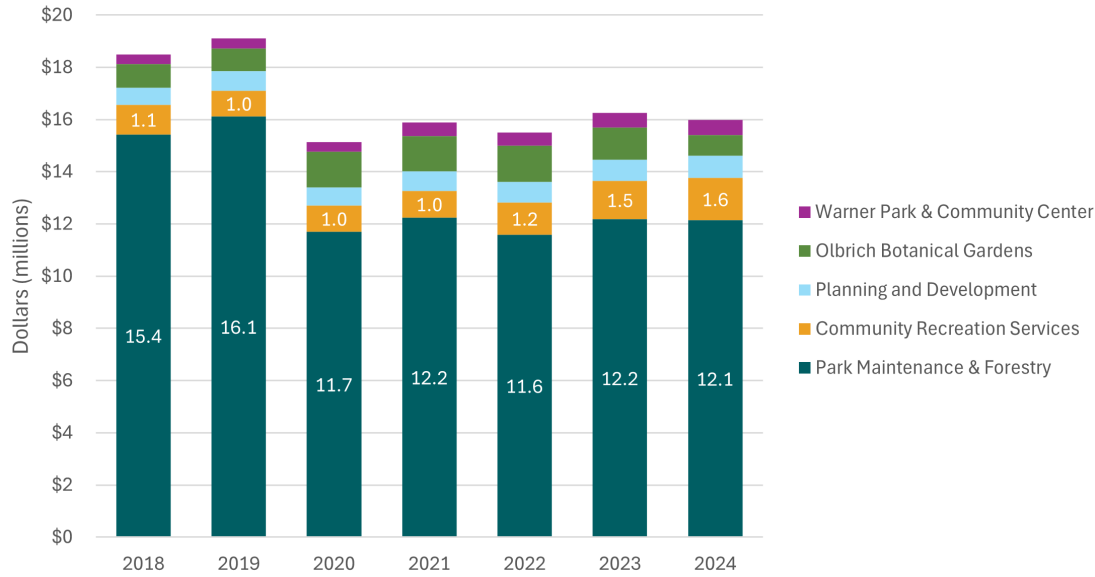
Figure 6.9: Average Annual Operating Budget by General Revenue Category (in millions) (2021-2023)



Operating Budget Expenses

The Parks Division’s Operating Budget expenses are broken down into five major categories within each of the Service Areas. These expenses account for the necessary staffing, benefits, supply, and service resources to efficiently operate the system. Parks Maintenance and Forestry is the largest of the five major service areas and has significantly more expenses, even without the inclusion of the Forestry section since 2020. Figure 6.10 shows the actual expenditures per Service Area and Figure 6.11 shows the breakdown of operating expenses by category within the Parks Division for 2018-2024. This section explains the various types of operating resources.

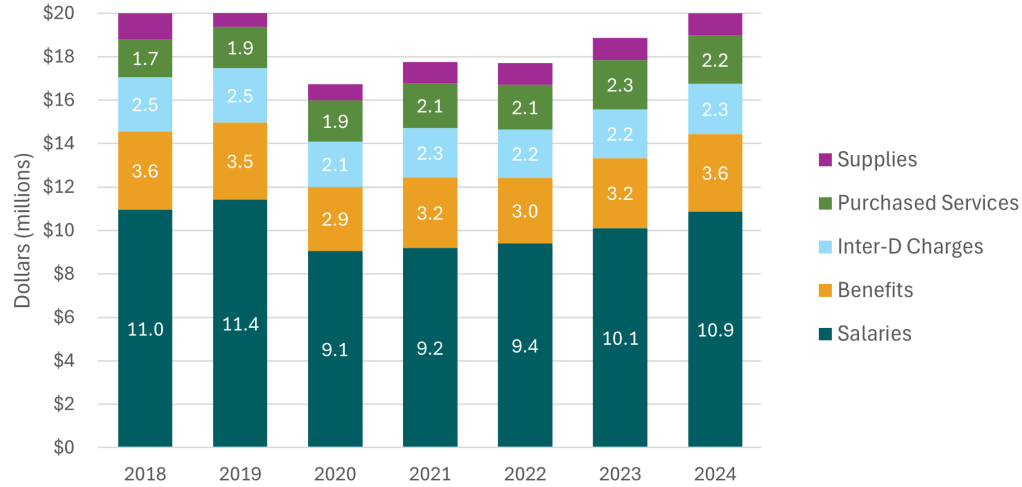
Figure 6.10: Parks Operating Expenses by Service Area (2018-2024)



Other Operating Expenses

Other annual operating expenses include purchased services and supplies as well as Inter-Departmental charges. Supplies include work and safety equipment and programming materials to support the various needs of the Division. Purchased Services have accounted for between \$1.7 million and \$2.4 million of the Parks Division’s annual Operating Budget and include utilities such as power, electrical, sewer, and stormwater charges and contracted services necessary to operate the park system, such as portable toilet rentals. Inter-Departmental Charges are expenses paid to other City agencies, with Fleet Services being the largest charge in the category. Fleet costs cover the cost of equipment repairs, fuel costs, and depreciation and have typically been between \$1.7 million and \$2 million per year for the entire Parks Division from 2018-2024.

Figure 6.11: Parks Operating Expenses by Expense Category (2018-2024)

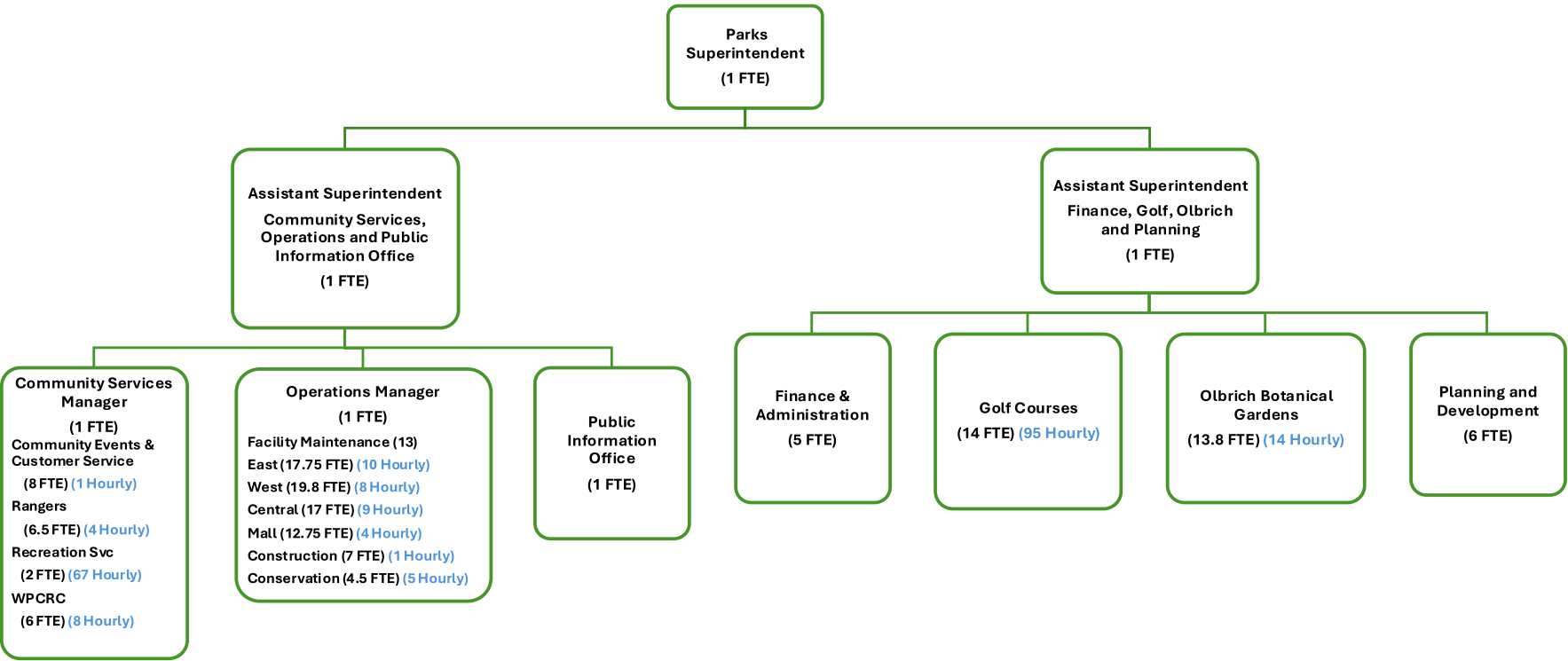


Parks Division Staffing Resources

Staffing resources, which include salaries and benefits, are the largest expense incurred by the Parks Division and accounted for approximately 70% of the Operating Budget’s annual expenses from 2018-2024. The biggest change in number of full-time employees between 2019 and 2020 was due to the transfer of the Forestry section, which included 34 employees, to the Streets Division. The Parks Division had a total of 144.85 authorized full-time employees in 2024 (Figure 6.12). These added positions reflect how priorities in services and programming have evolved during this time. While some of these positions were added through additional funding support, a number of them were funded by converting hourly wages to permanent positions. Each year, the Parks Division employs approximately 300 seasonal hourly employees with varying schedules and responsibilities.

- New positions added 2018-2024:**
- Conservation Technician Trainee
 - Recreation Services Program Coordinator
 - Parks Alive Coordinator
 - Volunteer Coordinator
 - GIS Specialist
 - Facilities Maintenance Worker

Figure 6.12: Parks Division Organizational Structure



FTE=Full Time Employee authorized in the Operating Budget
Hourly= Includes seasonal hourly employees

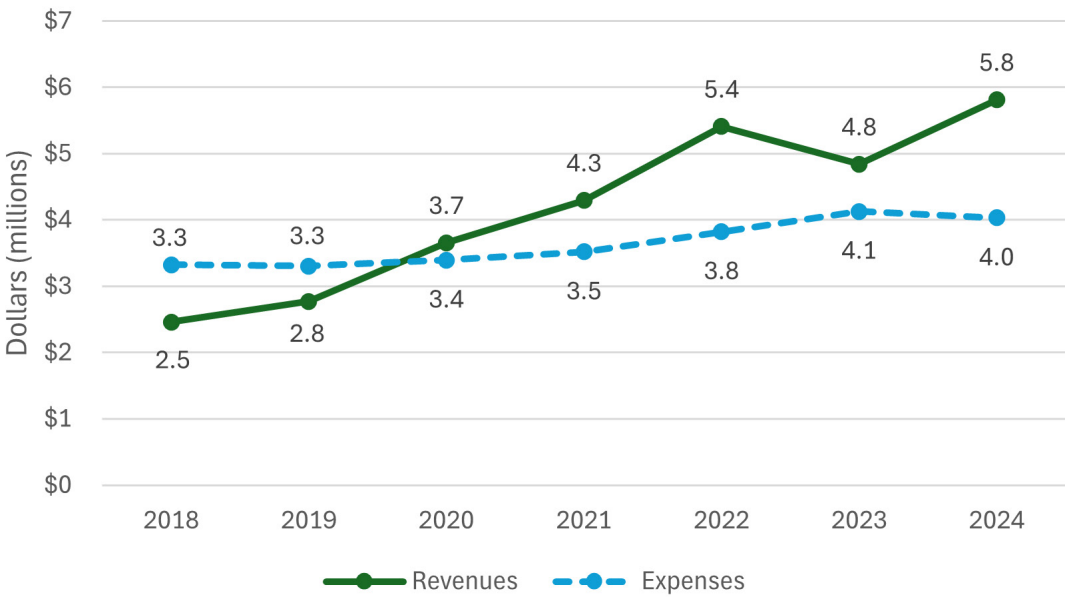
Golf Enterprise Program

The Madison Parks Division’s Golf Program (Golf) is operated as an enterprise, meaning it is expected to cover all of its expenditures with its own revenues, and it does not receive levy support. Golf is responsible for all aspects of golf course maintenance, clubhouse operations, and improvements. The Golf Enterprise Program sustained losses in most years between 2003 and 2019. Following historic financial losses in the 2018 and 2019 seasons due to extreme rain events, Golf received a loan of nearly \$900,000 from the General Fund. After which, the Mayor and Common Council created the Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks in June 2019 to evaluate the Golf Enterprise Program and make recommendations regarding its future. The Task Force’s Final Report contains 10 recommendations and continues to serve as a guiding force for the program.⁷⁵

Golf Program Revenues

Golf generates revenues through greens fees, food and beverage sales, cart rentals, events and outings. Over half of the revenue generated by Golf comes from greens fees, which are fees charged to customers using the courses. Food and beverage sales, along with cart rentals account for approximately 30% of the program’s revenues. Figure 6.13 details the 2018-2024 Golf Operating Budget for the four golf courses (The Glen Golf Park, Monona, Odana Hills, and Yahara Hills). In 2023, Golf sold approximately 231 acres of the Yahara Hills Golf Course to Dane County for use as a future landfill, compost site, and sustainable business park; the figure below excludes that substantial additional land sale revenue of \$5.5 million for that year. Net revenue is transferred to a Revenue Reserves account to be used for future investments within the Golf Program and to cover overages in expenses in years when expenses exceed revenues.

Figure 6.13: Golf Enterprise Operating Budget (2018-2024)



Golf Program Expenses

Golf operating expense categories are consistent with those of the Parks Division. Staffing expenses account for approximately 47% of expenses. Golf’s 2024 Operating Budget authorized a total of 14 full-time employees, 10 of which are permanent, and 4 of which are limited-term employees assigned to work on the golf improvement. Golf also hires over 100 seasonal hourly employees each year. Utilities, including water expenses account for approximately 20% of operating expenses, while supplies account for approximately 15% of total operating expenses. Golf pays Interdepartmental charges for Fleet Services similar to the Parks Division, but also pays charges for services provided by central City agencies and a Payment in Lieu of Taxes, which are not charged to other general fund agencies. Overall Interdepartmental charges and Transfers are approximately 13% of total operating expenses.

This is a pivotal moment within Golf, as it has continued to sustain financial success following the COVID-19 pandemic. To guarantee future success, Golf will need to invest revenue reserves wisely and sustain and generate net revenue. See Appendix E: Ongoing Initiatives - Madison Park Golf Program to learn more about the transformation happening within Golf.

Volunteer Resources

Volunteers play a crucial role in maintaining a vibrant park system in Madison by committing their time either on a one-time basis or with ongoing contributions. The Parks Division 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. While the role of volunteers is important to assisting with park maintenance and events, significant coordination is required by staff to manage these volunteer resources and ensure mutually beneficial outcomes. Volunteers at Olbrich Botanical Gardens contribute 20,000 hours of service annually, and in 2024, volunteers contributed nearly 29,670 hours in parks and the golf courses. The value of volunteer contributions in 2024 is approximately \$1.66 million.⁷⁶

The value of volunteer contributions in 2024 is approximately \$1.66 million.

- To learn more, see Appendix E: Ongoing Initiatives:**
- Madison Parks Golf Program
 - Volunteers in Madison Parks



6.3 Alternate Funding Sources

In addition to the annual Operating and Capital Budgets, the Parks Division relies on resources from a variety of partners to help create and program the park system. This section discusses key partnerships that help create some of Madison’s popular park facilities.

Madison Parks Foundation

The Madison Parks Foundation (“Parks Foundation”) plays a significant role in securing donations for the Parks Division. The Parks Foundation is a private non-profit 501(c)3 organization founded in 2003 as the non-profit partner of Madison Parks. The intended purpose of the Parks Foundation is to acquire financial resources via private donations, grants, and other contributions to make park improvements. The resources of the Parks Foundation are not intended to replace or substitute for tax revenues generated for the annual ongoing maintenance activities of the Parks Division. The Parks Foundation supported neighborhood fundraising for a number of projects since 2018 (Table 6.6).

Table 6.6: Capital Improvements Supported by Parks Foundation (2018-2024)

Inclusive Playgrounds	Playground Improvements	Accessibility Improvements	Other Key Improvements
Brittingham Park Elver Park Rennebohm Park Warner Park	Doncaster Park	Accessible Fishing Pier at Vilas Park	The Glen Park renovation
	Lake Edge Park		
	McGinnis Park	Beach Mat at Bernie’s Beach	Pickleball at Garner Park
	Sunset Park		
	Baxter Park	Beach Mat at Vilas Park Beach	Bike skills pump track at Aldo Leopold Park
	Westmorland Park		
	Olbrich Nature Play		Lakefront Porch improvements

Table 6.7: Donations/Contributions Collected from Parks Foundation (2018-2024)

Category	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Donations/Contributions	\$119,520	\$3,848,192	\$5,368	\$40,559	\$2,951,300	\$1,223,205	\$838,888

Table 6.7 identifies the total donations and contributions received from 2018 through 2024.

Olbrich Botanical Society

The Parks Division and Olbrich Botanical Society (“the Society”) work in tandem to support and operate the Olbrich Botanical Gardens. This longstanding partnership has played a key role in allowing the Gardens to grow and flourish over the years. The Society is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit and operates under its own \$4 million annual operating budget to lead fundraising, programming, education classes, events, and membership development at the Gardens. In 2018, the Society committed \$6 million in matching funds for the Frautschi Family Learning Center and production greenhouse project, which was completed and opened in 2021. The partnership has created world-renowned Gardens that continue to be a top tourist destination for visitors, attracting over 340,000 visitors annually. The Society is funding a Comprehensive Master Plan study in 2025 that will help inform the future development and operations of the Gardens.



Madison LakeWay Partners

Madison LakeWay Partners is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to fundraising and supporting the implementation of the Madison LakeWay master plan. The reimagined waterfront, spanning 1.7 miles of shoreline and 17 acres of land along Lake Monona, will become a welcoming destination for all Madison residents and visitors.

For additional information regarding this partnership, see Appendix E: Ongoing Initiatives - Madison LakeWay.

Other Public Private Partnerships

Over the past several years the Parks Division has been successful with creative place-making initiatives, and many of these place-making projects would not have been possible without public-private partnerships. These partnerships aid in repairs to aging infrastructure. Entities that enter into agreements/contracts with the Parks Division for these types of uses are held to high standards and specified goals, operations, and reporting procedures. Several of the Madison’s most popular destinations are enhanced by these partnerships including Mallards Stadium; boat rentals at Wingra, Olbrich, Marshall, and Brittingham Parks; the Biergarten at Olbrich Park; Garver Feed Mill; and athletics and events at Breese Stevens Field. Several of these groups are required to invest their own funding into improving existing park facilities specific including expediting upgrades to electrical and plumbing systems, bathroom fixtures, painting, and landscaping, which prolongs the life of these facilities with fewer investments from the City.

To learn more about these partnerships, see Appendix E: Ongoing Initiatives - Activating the Parks.

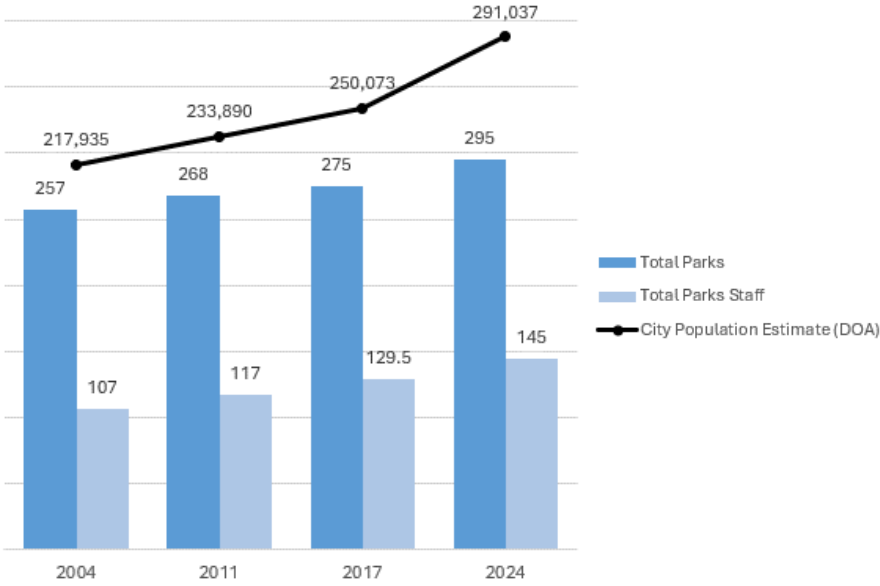
6.4. Park System Growth Considerations

Over the last four Parks and Open Space plan cycles, 38 parks were added to the park system (Figure 6.14). Despite this expansion of the park system, the population-adjusted number of parks declined from 1.2 parks per thousand residents in 2004 to 1.0 parks per thousand residents in 2024, largely due to a notable increase in Madison’s population since 2017. The City’s adopted Comprehensive Plan, numerous Neighborhood Development and Downtown Plans, and multiple Intergovernmental Agreements 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 saw rapid growth in both new and infill development that has outpaced the increase in operational funding. As these additional parks are designed and constructed, additional resources will be necessary to maintain, schedule, and coordinate activation of these spaces.

City-wide development also increases demand on operational resources to maintain 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 the Parks Division has increased, including an additional 216 bus stops and over 175,883 linear feet of sidewalk and bike paths. As these new facilities develop, they draw upon resources in the Parks Division’s Operating Budget.

Certain recreational facilities that have higher maintenance demands also require more operational resources. 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 more intensive maintenance for the turf to remain playable throughout the year.

Figure 6.14: Changes in Parks, Parks Staff, and City Population, 2004-2024

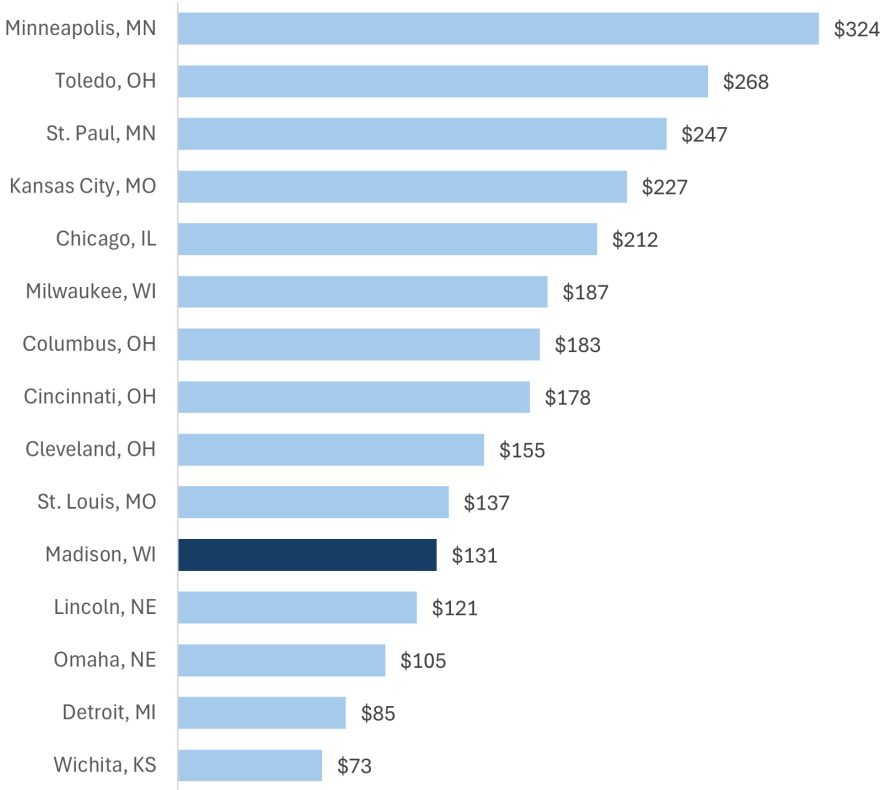


Compared to other large Midwestern cities, Madison’s investment in its park system is relatively low. According to the Trust for Public Land, Madison ranked 11 out of 15 among large Midwestern cities in terms of the amount of per capita public and private dollars invested in its parks in fiscal year 2023 (Figure 6.15). An overview of the TPL ParkScore can be found in Appendix K.

The Parks Division needs to continue to evaluate how future development and increasing numbers of facilities impacts operational resources. Operating facilities and staff needed to serve Madison’s growing park system must grow as development continues along the periphery of the city. For example, parks on the far west side, such as Thousand Oaks Park, are approximately seven miles from the Parks Division 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. The City’s Engineering Facilities staff is leading a long-term Facilities Needs 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.

Figure 6.15: Total Per Capita Dollars Invested in Large Midwestern City Parks, FY 2023⁷⁷



Key Takeaways

Historically, the primary funding sources of the Capital Budget have been General Obligation (GO) borrowing through property taxes and impact fees from residential development. These two sources are no longer adequate to address the deferred maintenance needs of a large and aging park system as well as development of new parks and facilities. Ongoing concerns with the tax levy limits have proven to create significant challenges to the availability of GO borrowing support for these improvements. Impact Fee funding from new residential development has continued to generate funding for infrastructure and land acquisitions; however, it is important to recognize that this revenue source is directly dependent on a healthy economy. In addition, the effectiveness of the Impact Fee funding and any pertinent adjustments must be evaluated through a new Needs Assessment to ensure the needs of both the growing and existing park system are met.

General Fund levy support within the Operating Budget is not sufficient to sustain the existing and growing park system along with the other City facilities the Parks Division is responsible for maintaining. Despite voters approving a \$22 million referendum in the fall of 2024 to increase General Fund levy support for the 2025 budget, alternative funding sources are critical to ensure that the Parks Division is able to continue to address the demands of an ever-growing population with diverse needs.

The City must actively pursue sufficient resources, both financial and in-kind, to cover additional development and operational resource needs necessary to design, construct, maintain and operate these parks and ensure park access standards are maintained now and into the future. The pursuit of these sufficient resources will likely require innovative and diverse strategies to ensure an excellent park system that can sustainably serve the community’s needs into the future. Strong partnerships are more important now than ever to the future of the park system.

Chapter 6: Endnotes

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Chapter 7

Recommended Strategies



Brittingham Park by Wendy Murkve

Chapter 7: Recommended Strategies

The 2025-2030 City of Madison Parks and Open Space Plan (POSP) is supplemental to the City of Madison Comprehensive Plan. The most recent Comprehensive Plan was initially adopted in 2018, with interim updates in 2023 and 2024. The Comprehensive Plan translates community input and ideas into policies and actions. The Plan is organized by seven elements which are major topic areas that influence the quality of life in the Madison:

- Land Use and Transportation: Compact Land Use | Efficient Transportation
- Neighborhoods and Housing: Complete Neighborhoods | Housing Access
- Health and Safety: Equitable Health Outcomes | Safe Community
- Economy and Opportunity: Growing Economy | Equitable Education and Advancement
- Culture and Character: Cultural Vibrancy | Unique Character
- Green and Resilient: Natural Resources | Parks and Recreation
- Effective Government: Efficient Services | Community Facilities |Regional Transportation

The Madison park system is integral in the quality of life for residents, as such the recommended strategies in the 2025-2030 POSP are organized within these seven elements. The 2018-2023 POSP was the initial basis for the strategies and corresponding actions, as this update process affirmed that they are still very relevant. The POSP incorporates information outlined throughout this document from the engagement process, recreation needs assessment, relevant planning documents, and various recognized park metrics into actionable data-informed strategies. As the city and park system continue to grow, develop, and evolve, these strategies will provide a roadmap towards achieving an ideal park system for everyone.



Table 7.1: Recommended Strategies by Plan ‘Elements’

Land Use and Transportation

Strategy: Increase connectivity between parks to enhance access.

- Create a comprehensive system of greenspace connections by means of pedestrian, biking, and water trails through parks.
- Increase connectivity with and through parks to key neighborhood facilities and public transportation methods.

Culture and Character

Strategy: Improve public access to lakes and waterways.

- Engage the community in the design process to increase water access on public lands.
- Provide opportunities for year-round water recreation.
- Support efforts of partners and stakeholders to improve water quality in Madison’s lakes and waterways.
- Encourage creative placemaking opportunities to connect the community to water.

Strategy: Protect and celebrate the community’s cultural richness.

- Respect and protect tribal sacred sites.
- Continue to recognize, preserve, and enhance historic parks.
- Pursue opportunities for cultural enrichment through community events and promotion of community building activities.
- Evaluate operational resources for park and street use events to promote balance between park uses and support the needs of the system.

Health and Safety

Strategy: Promote the physical and social health of the diverse community.

- Incorporate amenities that promote active recreation and social interaction for all skills and abilities, especially youth and seniors.
- Provide flexible multipurpose spaces that can respond to changing recreational trends.
- Provide sufficient fields, courts, and other facilities to accommodate larger competitions.

Table 7.1 Continued: Recommended Strategies by Plan ‘Elements’

Neighborhoods and Housing
Strategy: Reduce parkland deficiencies and respond to increasing residential density. • Make data-informed park planning decisions through evaluation of changing city residential population needs, market trends, and walkability standards. • Preserve, protect and advocate for sufficient undeveloped land for open space. • Acquire new parkland on existing developed properties where feasible in areas of high residential density. • Identify demand for additional parkland and sufficient improvement resources for Area Plans to address future residential density. • Pursue joint use agreements with owners of other public recreation spaces, such as school properties, to improve access in areas where there is no walkable access to mini, neighborhood, conservation, or community City-owned parkland.
Green & Resilient
Strategy: Protect and enhance natural resources. • Improve biodiversity by managing invasive species and promoting areas of native plant habitats and ecosystems. • Acquire conservation parkland to preserve unique habitats. • Preserve iconic and special landscape views. • Preserve, promote and expand the urban tree canopy.
Strategy: Improve the park system’s capacity to adapt to environmental challenges. • Incorporate of plant species that thrive and adapt to environmental changes with fewer resource inputs. • Integrate facilities, equipment and materials that reduce the carbon footprint of park operations. • Use best management practices for stormwater runoff and infiltration to address increased precipitation. • Support year-round outdoor recreation and extended season use through activities not impacted by climate change. • Develop an opportunistic approach to maintenance and programming that adapts to the unpredictable nature of climate change. • Create spaces and adapt programming to keep the community safe, healthy, and emotionally resilient in the face of stress and uncertainty.

Table 7.1 Continued: Recommended Strategies by Plan ‘Elements’

Economy and Opportunity
Strategy: Create welcoming and inclusive park spaces and programming. • Develop parkland and amenities that are reflective of the diverse recreational needs of the community. • Reduce barriers to use of park spaces, participate in programming, and support local business. • Pursue alternative funding sources that support programming needs of the Division and provide opportunities to business owners. • Incorporate public engagement methods and partnerships during the park planning process to ensure projects are representative of the diverse community. • Develop and implement a comprehensive communication plan to educate and inform the public about options and services available within the park system. • Create and promote awareness around relationship between good parks and a strong economy.
Strategy: Foster meaningful connections with groups and organizations that advance the vision of the Parks Division. • Nurture and create opportunities to strengthen the intrinsic value of parks within the community. • Develop a programming plan to grow and sustain relationships with existing partners, identify opportunities to address gaps in equitable distribution of services and programming across the city, and create frameworks to engage with future partners. • Encourage connection with parks and nature through Friends Groups and other volunteer groups while aligning efforts with identified land management strategies and master plans. • Support volunteers and recognize their contributions in planning, developing, programming, and maintaining park spaces and facilities. • Cultivate relationships and partnerships that boost the overall economy within the region by supporting placemaking and tourism.

Table 7.1 Continued: Recommended Strategies by Plan ‘Elements’

Effective Government
Strategy: Develop new parks and amenities in a fiscally sustainable manner. • Implement comprehensive data-based decision making in strategic planning and investment. • Secure adequate funding for infrastructure improvements within existing and future parks. • Revise parkland dedication and park impact fees every ten years to maintain adequate levels of parkland and funding. • Require parkland dedication of parks five-acres or more for new residential developments where feasible. • Expand existing park land where appropriate and feasible in accordance with adopted plans • Seek out and utilize innovative sources to expand and develop existing parkland and amenities. • Fund and construct necessary infrastructure improvements in parks acquired through annexations and cooperative plans.
Strategy: Secure sufficient resources to sustain service levels across the growing and changing park system. • Preserve public funding to maintain current levels of service in the Parks Division’s Operating and Capital budgets. • Allocate funding equitably to maintain and upgrade existing infrastructure and develop new facilities. • Pursue opportunities to diversify and increase revenue streams that support services. • Evaluate staffing and location of operational facilities to optimize resources for new City facilities. • Provide technical and administrative support to volunteers whose work supplements park maintenance, programming, and improvement. • Implement Results Madison and develop an asset management system to aid in data-informed decisions related to re-source allocation. • Encourage public interaction and participation with the Parks Division’s governing bodies. • Develop appropriate professional development and recruitment programs to attract and retain employees committed to advancing the vision of the Parks Division. • Pursue appropriate opportunities to repurpose and reallocate underutilized park assets in a manner that serves broader public purpose and is consistent with the Parks Division’s mission.

Table 7.1 Continued: Recommended Strategies by Plan ‘Elements’

Effective Government (Continued)
Strategy: Pursue regional solutions to regional issues. • Enhance or develop regional recreation facilities, where possible, as identified by the Wisconsin SCORP for the Southern Gateways Region to address supply shortages. • Continue joint planning efforts with Dane County Parks to implement recommendations of the Dane County Park and Open Space Plan within the City of Madison. • Collaborate with park advocacy organizations and surrounding municipalities to meet park and recreation demands. • Pursue strategic partnerships to provide tournament-scale venues.

Visit the Madison POSP 2025-2030 Plan Appendix for more information:

- Appendix A – ADA Accessibility
- Appendix B – Council Resolution Adopting the POSP
- Appendix C – Historic Resources
- Appendix D – Additional Maps
- Appendix E – Ongoing Initiatives
- Appendix F – Madison Park Facilities
- Appendix G – Community Engagement Summary Data
- Appendix H – Athletic Organization Engagement Summary
- Appendix I – Parks Division 2025 Adopted Budget
- Appendix J – State Grant Opportunities
- Appendix K – Trust For Public Land ParkScore Overview



MADISON PARKS

Tenney Park by Tara Camfield