
GENERAL DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Reach Higher Award Winner: It was announced this month that Horticulturist Mary Weber was nominated by her peers and won the summer “Reach Higher” award. Weber has gone above and beyond all summer overseeing the installation of over 3,000 annual plants, taking on a large part in the Bird Friendly program, hosting the Little Sprouts program, and coordinating volunteers for the Adopt-a-Flowerbed program. Her positive attitude and willingness to *Reach Higher* is one of the many reasons she won. Congrats Mary!



Budget: Staff spent all of November focusing on the FY2024-25 budget. Parks and Recreation manages four operating budgets along with new equipment and staffing requests, equipment replacement, special revenues, and capital improvement projects. Department budgets are due December 1 for Finance to review.

Staff Development: Weber attended the Iowa Nature Summit as a representative of Bird Friendly Iowa November 15 to 17. The first-year event was created to bring together a broad range of organizations sharing a passion for preserving and protecting Iowa’s natural resources, and to provide a platform for networking. Speakers presented everything from nature’s positive impact on public health, how to integrate nature in education, its impacts on the state’s economy and more.



All forestry staff attended a national conference and trade show in St. Louis hosted by the Tree Care Industry. On the way to the conference staff stopped at Shimek State Forest in southern Iowa which is one of the largest remaining single pieces of contiguous forest in Iowa, totaling 9,148 acres. Staff were able to view various species that are less common in our area and experience what a large-scale woodland management setting looks like.

Forestry and operations staff completed their renewal course for pesticide applicators through the Iowa State Extension office.

Faulkes Heritage Woods: Arborist Cimprich and an Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) representative walked Faulkes Heritage Woods for the annual monitoring visit. Following the inspection, engineering and forestry staff revisited the property to update the trail mapping following the tree harvest activity.

PROJECTS

Prairie Hill Park: The parking lot at Prairie Hill was prepped for asphalt paving. Through a coordinated effort with Public Service, the parking lot was paved, and backfilling was completed around the perimeter. Punch list items will be addressed in the spring with a ribbon cutting to follow.



Reforestation Plan: The Urban Reforestation Master Plan is nearing the end of the analysis phase. A framework draft is expected to be reviewed in early 2024 following completion of public engagement sessions and the online survey, which closed on November 30.

PARKS

Holiday Lights: All hands were on deck to install over 100,000 LED lights in City Square Park, the North Plaza, the Uptown Artway, and along the 7th Avenue streetscape and roundabouts. Staff installed the 30-foot, 2,000 LED panel tree in the park. The tree plays five songs which feature animated lighting. The Artway was decorated in a colored theme including colored light tunnels, floating orbs, light curtains, waterfall lights, and colored holiday trees.



Snow Equipment Preparation: Staff have been preparing, repairing, and installing snow equipment. A sanding unit was installed on a newly acquired truck; retrofitting a sanding unit takes more time for the initial install.

Bench Pads: The grounds team completed concrete installation for the fall round of memorial benches. Benches will be installed throughout the winter as they arrive from the manufacturer.



Summer Equipment Storage & Repair: After snow equipment is ready to go, summer mowing equipment is inspected, cleaned, and repaired before being put in storage.

Horticulture: November started with horticulture and grounds staff working to finish emptying, removing, and storing planters and hanging baskets that would not be decorated for the holidays. Annual plants were removed from the remaining planters and soil was lowered to allow for winter greenery to be installed.



Horticulturist Weber worked the rest of November to create handmade oversized holiday sweets to complement the new light features in the Uptown Artway. The centerpieces include cotton candy, gingerbread people, cupcakes, ice cream cones, chocolate kisses, donuts, hard candies, and hot chocolate.



Additionally, candy cane themed decorations were purchased, and dogwood centerpieces were touched up and reused from last season for the North Plaza and 7th Avenue planters. During the last week of November, volunteers from Uptown and the Friends of Marion Parks helped create greenery pieces which were installed in each of the planters; six volunteers spent a total of twelve hours cutting and creating 24 of the 34 greenery pieces needed for the planters! Thank you to the wonderful volunteers for making this happen! (photo right) All planters in the Artway and North Plaza were fully decorated in time for the Holiday Tree Lighting event on December 1.



URBAN FORESTRY

Forestry Operations: Staff continue developing maps to support the environmental survey process for approval of the CDBG-DR grant funding for tree planting. Advance preparation and communication for prescribed burning in natural prairie areas was completed with plans for the activity to be scheduled before the year end.

Budget request proposals have been submitted to department heads for review for FY2024-25. Urban forestry has requested to add an additional full-time staff position and equipment to increase work efficiency.

Staff rented a remote-control heavy brush mower to address overgrowth concerns in rural rights-of-way, waterway/detention basins and natural areas. They partnered with Public Services to operate the unit for a week, focusing on areas both departments have had previous reports on. The unit can mow up to a 60-degree slope, and mulches trees up to 6 inches in diameter.



REQUESTS FOR SERVICE

CODE COMPLIANCE	SEP 2023	OCT 2023	NOV 2023
New Complaints	17	10	1
Resolved Complaints	20	10	18
Active Complaints	45	48	32

COMPLAINT TYPE	SEP 2023	OCT 2023	NOV 2023
Tree – Right of Way	4	4	1
Tree – Private Property	5	1	0
Sidewalk Obstruction	0	2	0
Sidewalk Not Cleared (Snow or Ice)	0	0	0
Tall Grass and Weeds	8	3	0
Parks Misc	0	0	0
TOTAL	17	10	1

CEMETERY

OAK SHADE CEMETERY	SEP 2023	OCT 2023	NOV 2023
Spaces sold	4	1	3
Burials	4	2	4

RECREATION

Little Sports Camp: The Little Sports Camp for youth ages 3 to 5 was held on Mondays and Wednesdays in November at the Marion YMCA. The 41 participants were introduced to the fundamental skills of sports with each day focused on a different sport, including football, soccer, basketball, and softball/baseball.

Bingo Night: The November Bingo Night at Lowe Park had 100 participants, with \$567 paid out to winners.

Holiday Events: Recreation staff were gearing up for the upcoming holiday events. Youth programs include Grinchmas, Candy Cane Hunt, and Santa’s Little Workshop. Community events include the Great Candy Cane Hunt (in the parks), Light the night Holiday Lights Tour, and Holiday Lights BINGO.

ARTS COUNCIL

Coffee House Night: The November Coffee House Night concert featured Barb Francesco with 67 people in attendance.

The Gallery: The art exhibit in The Gallery titled “Four Midwest Friends” features works from Denise Murphy, Eli Ehlinger, Chris Childers, and Robert Murphy. The display will run from December 2 to January 25.



