



COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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News release

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Parks Director Matthew Collins appointed Public Works Director for Village of Whitefish Bay

Kenosha County Parks Director Matthew Collins will depart his position effective Jan. 14 as he pursues a new opportunity as Public Works Director for the Village of Whitefish Bay, County Executive Samantha Kerkman announced today.

In his new role, Collins will lead the Public Works operation in the suburban Milwaukee village where he and his family have lived throughout his tenure with Kenosha County, Kerkman noted.

“Matt and his talents have been a tremendous asset to Kenosha County Parks, and we wish him well in his new role with Whitefish Bay,” Kerkman said. “Matt has taken our parks to the next level with outreach, programming and public-private partnerships and collaborations. Going forward, we will seek a director with the skills to continue this momentum.”

County Public Works Director Shelly Billingsley will serve as the Interim Parks Director until a successor to Collins is identified, Kerkman said.

A former Park Unit Coordinator with the Milwaukee County Parks system, Collins joined Kenosha County in 2015 as Assistant Director of Parks. He was promoted to Parks Director following the retirement of then-Director Jon Rudie in 2016.

“The first task when I was hired in 2015 was to wear out the grass,” Collins said. “I can say with certainty that I have accomplished that goal. This past year, we welcomed over 3 million park visitors and offered 280 events and programs within the Kenosha County Parks system.”

Collins said the growth mindset of the county’s parks has enhanced the quality of life for Kenosha County residents and visitors, increasing opportunities for families to get outdoors through creative programming, partnership opportunities, and an ongoing drive to provide high-quality park operations.

Among the highlights of his time with Kenosha County Parks, Collins cited the transformation of a former gravel pit into the Kenosha County Veterans Memorial Park, the restoration of the Pike River within Petrifying Springs Park, an expanded trail network, and the construction of a band shelter at Old Settlers Park.

Collins also oversaw the development of public-private partnerships such as the Petrifying Springs Biergarten, the Boundless Adventures aerial adventure park at Bristol Woods Park, and the Flip Flops concession stand at the Silver Lake Park Beach.

Kenosha County twice won the Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association's Silver Star Award during Collins' tenure — in 2016 in recognition of the parks system's work with the county's Summer Youth Employment Program, and in 2019 for creative service delivery and marketing related to the partnership with Boundless Adventures.

Last month, the county received a Beautification Award from the Kenosha Area Chamber of Commerce in recognition of the Old Settlers Park band shelter project. The most recent new Parks event was held Dec. 2, when Collins joined Kerkman at the first-ever county Christmas tree-lighting in Petrifying Springs Park.

"I am proud to have had the opportunity to work alongside my dedicated park staff that emphasize high-quality public service, focused on a positive guest experience," Collins said. "I am also appreciative to have worked with two supportive county executives, Jim Kreuser and Samantha Kerkman. Both leaders have prioritized the County Parks, and their respective visions have enhanced the system greatly."

Billingsley said she is thankful she had the opportunity to work with Collins since she began serving as the county's Public Works Director in August 2022. She commended Collins for his contributions to the county.

"Matt certainly had a dream for the Parks Division, and I think he accomplished his dream plus some," Billingsley said. "Matt will be missed by the Department of Public Works and Development Services, but I wish him well in his future endeavors."

About Kenosha County Parks:

Established in 1927, the Kenosha County Parks system offers more than 1,500 acres of managed recreational land at eight parks dotted across the county, plus 14 miles of paved cycling trails. More details about park locations and amenities are available at <https://parks.kenoshacounty.org> or on the Kenosha County parks mobile-optimized app, accessible at <https://kenoshacounty.org/ParksApp>.

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