

Appleton Police Department

222 South Walnut Street - Appleton, WI 54911-5899
(920) 832-5500 – www.appleton.org/police



To: Alderperson Joe Martin – Chairperson Park and Recreation
Alderperson Kyle Lobner – Chairperson Safety and Licensing
From: Chief Todd Thomas
Date: July 8, 2015
Subject: Park Security and Alcohol Issues

Chairpersons Martin and Lobner;

We have experienced a noticeable increase in disruptive, disorderly and nuisance activity in some downtown parks recently. The activity has festered to the point it is not only affecting the parks but has seeped out into the neighborhoods and the downtown business district. From my 30 years of law enforcement experience I know that the majority of this activity is caused by alcohol abuse, generally in downtown parks. Because of this it is unusual for a city the size of Appleton to allow alcohol in parks without a permit. I know from prior experiences that this is an issue that we cannot be indifferent to. It will continue to grow and it will impact people's perceptions of our city and our downtown.

The Parks and Recreation Department has now had to move programs to different parks because of participants feeling uncomfortable in some parks, people not signing up for programs, and the facilities management staff feeling unsafe at times when doing maintenance in certain parks.

I met with our Community Liaison Officers (CLO's) and District Captains to get a better understanding of the history behind this issue. I also assigned an officer to research park activity for the downtown area parks. A similar study was done in 1998-2004 and some of that information is attached to this memo. The issue of alcohol abuse in the parks has been discussed several times going back at least 15 years and it is important to understand how we got to where we are now. This is a lengthy report but I believe that understanding the background of this issue will help you understand why the Police and the Park and Recreation Departments are recommending a change in the park ordinance.

I have included a letter from the directors of our two local homeless shelters supporting a more restrictive ordinance. They believe the current park ordinance creates a "refuge" for transients and substance abusers that is causing harm to the community and undermining their ability to help these clients. This is a unique partnership, not seen elsewhere, that speaks to the seriousness of this problem. We are grateful for their willingness to work with us to address this problem.

Thank you for taking the time to review this and we look forward to working with you to make the parks a safe place that can be used by all, while also helping those who are homeless or battling substance abuse succeed.

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Historical Background

1998 - 2001 Park Rescue Project – CLO Pat Dewall and Steve Elliot

Returning Appleton's Parks to the People Program

This was a project completed by the CLO's in 1998 to address this problem. The program received a national award for problem solving policing. The following park problems were identified by analyzing data and receiving input from officers and community members that were being affected;

- Transient alcoholics were responsible for majority of criminal/nuisance behavior in the parks.
- Citizens and city employees using the parks frequently complained about being harassed.
- Public use of the parks decreased due to the perception of the parks being unsafe.
- Officers spent a disproportionate amount of time handling disturbance calls in the affected parks when compared to parks in other areas of the city.
- Schools, daycare centers, and the YMCA stopped using certain parks.
- An increase in homeless shelters created an influx of transients to the community.
- The majority of alcohol related complaints came from the parks in the downtown area.
- The shelters, food pantries, and drop in centers were located in the downtown area.
- There were no regulations on alcohol use in parks.
- Parks became frequent gathering spot for drinkers who started drinking early in the morning.
- The park regulars were regularly drunk by noon.
- Their presence and intoxicated state gave them a sense of ownership of the parks.
- Interviews of residents and people who used the parks revealed the majority of harassment and criminal behavior was not reported and the citizens felt the park was unsafe so they quit using the parks.

The following goals were pursued:

1. Eliminate criminal activity from the parks
2. Restore sense of safety to those legally using the parks
3. Reduce calls for service
4. Facilitate intervention for alcoholics

City Response: Community members and the police worked together to change the ordinance to restrict alcohol before noon (Ord 13.74). A process was also put in place to evict those involved in illegal activity in the parks. Community shelters started using street workers to intervene and connect with those needing services assist them and monitor their behavior.

Results:

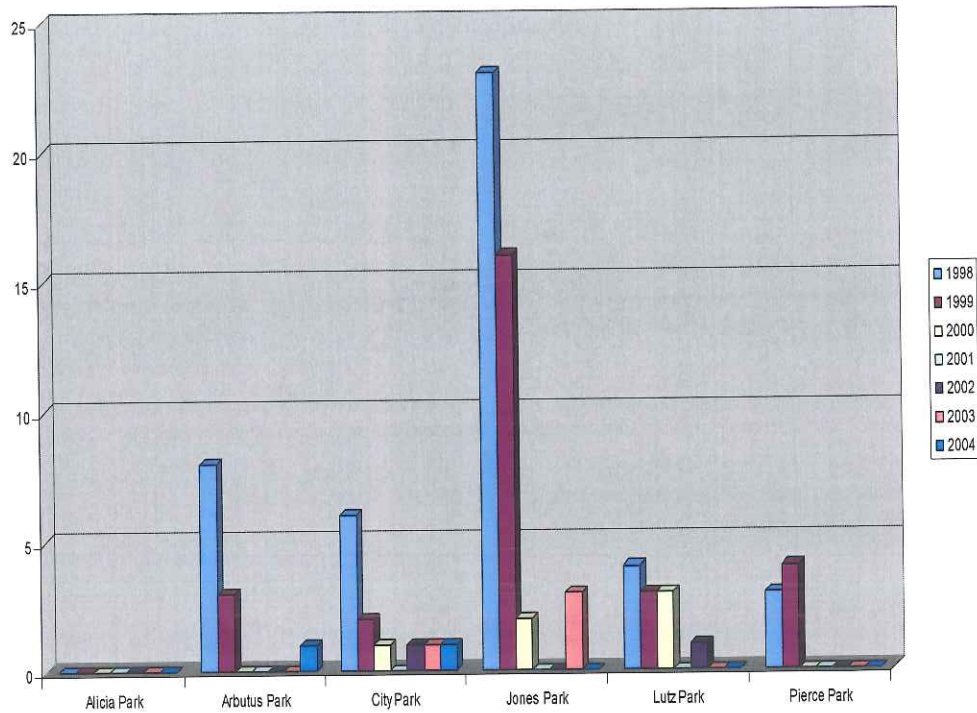
Over three year period, in six targeted parks (Alicia/Arbutus/City/Jones/Lutz/Pierce) there was an 89% decrease in alcohol related incidents. Calls for service over those three years also decreased by 38%.

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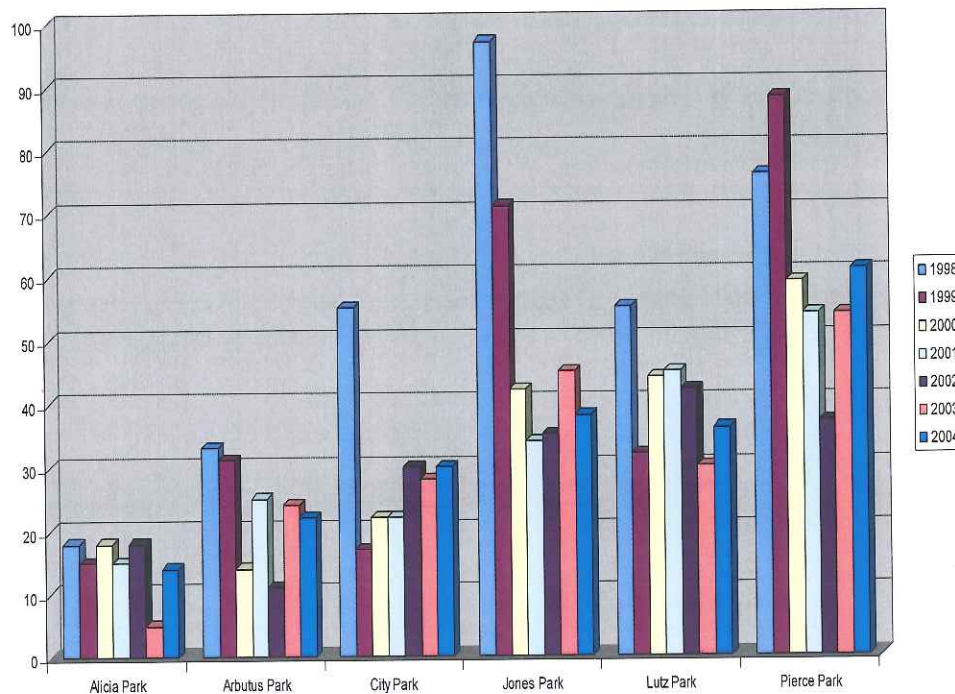
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Alcohol Related Calls for Service



Annual Calls for Police Services



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2008 – Jones Park and Arbutus Park complaints

In May of 2008 the issue of alcohol in the parks was again brought before the Park and Recreation Committee as an informational item. A request was made by the Police Department to modify the park ordinance to limit the possession and consumption of alcohol in *Jones Park* and *Arbutus Park* because of complaints similar to those from 1998. The same issues were re-emerging;

- There was a noticeable increase in disturbances, drug dealing, panhandling and harassment, public urination and defecation, littering and criminal damage to city property.
- It was very difficult to proactively address issues because the offenders could see officers approach.
- A CLO told the committee he was in Arbutus Park almost daily for the above issues.
- The parks became a safe haven for all kinds of criminal activity.
- City resources were being wasted trying to monitor and regulate behavior. These were resources not being used to deal with other community and neighborhood issues.
- Community Service Officers (CSO's) were intimidated going into parks and calls for service were much higher in the downtown parks

In July of 2008 the Park and Recreation Committee discussed the issues and asked for more data to be compiled before moving ahead. The committee eventually decided it was too late in the summer to address the issue and wanted to wait until 2009.

2013 – Animals/Alcohol in the Park changes

The Park and Recreation Committee was addressing park rules related to animals in the parks. The Health and Police Departments were involved in the discussion only related to animals in the parks. At a committee meeting a motion was made to move the time alcohol was allowed in the parks back to 9:00am. The Park and Recreation Department was against it and explained that legitimate park users already had the opportunity to get an extension to the hours by getting a permit signed by the Director or their designee. The Police Department was not involved in the discussion of changing the hour's alcohol was allowed in the parks.

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December 11, 2013

- The Park and Recreation Committee addressed the park rules as an informational item on December 11, 2013, and as an action item on January 8, 2014. A motion was made to change the time alcohol was allowed from 9:00pm to 10:00pm.
- Another motion was made to move the starting time you could have alcohol in the parks back 10:00am. There was discussion about shelters being rented for bridal showers and similar events that usually started earlier in the day and were done by 2:00pm. The committee felt the renters should be able to enjoy a drink.
- Almost all the discussion was about the issue of allowing dogs in the parks and how it would affect the safety of the parks and impact the public's use of the parks in a negative way.

2015 Park Safety Issues

Our mission as a city is to meet the community's needs and enhance the quality of life in our neighborhoods. The Police Departments mission is to provide excellent police service to the community and all we serve. To adhere to our mission we are bringing this information forward for council to review and potentially update our ordinance.

We have seen a noticeable increase in activity in some of the downtown parks in the past year. The issues are the same issues that have been addressed over the years. Modifications to hours temporarily mitigated the issues but did not solve them;

- Transient alcoholic's criminal and nuisance behavior in the parks is growing.
- Citizens and city employees using the parks are being harassed.
- Officers are spending a disproportionate amount of time handling disturbance calls in the affected parks as compared to parks in other areas of the city (see chart).
- The majority of alcohol related complaints came from the parks in the downtown area.
- Some parks have become frequent gathering spots for drinkers who start drinking early in the morning. The park regulars are frequently drunk by noon.
- Their presence and intoxication have given them a sense of ownership of the parks.

On May 12, 2015, Captain Freeman requested more patrols in Jones Park and Arbutus Park because of complaints about the above behavior from the community and Officers working in the area. Officers were told to patrol the parks and aggressively enforce park rules related to alcohol.

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Clearly the majority of the unwanted behavior was related to alcohol use. The ability to start drinking in the parks at 10:00am frequently means that by noon there are several drunken people sleeping, causing disturbances, and harassing citizens in the park.

We have received complaints of intoxicated people having sex during the day in the middle of the park, open air drug dealing, heroin arrests, people defecating in the park and leaving the used toilet paper lying around, vomit by the pavilion from intoxicated people, aggressive panhandling and harassment, and similar types of behavior.

These behaviors have spread into our downtown area and we are getting more complaints from downtown businesses about the drunken activity of some of these people including panhandling in their businesses, thefts, using their bathrooms to "shower" in, stealing their toilet paper and other supplies, and presenting a poor image for our downtown business and community.

I met with Scott Peeples and Jerome Martin from the two main homeless shelters and talked about the city's concerns. They submitted the attached letter that explains their concerns about the current ordinance. They believe the current ordinance is effectively undermining the street workers and their shelters ability to deal with their clients issues. A "refuge" has been created for them that inhibits any intervention and makes the problem worse. We agree with their assessment.

We felt it appropriate to review the ordinances of the surrounding communities because of the patchwork of boundaries in the Fox Cities and what we feel is a need to be consistent with others.

Comparable Ordinances

Ordinances in the Fox River Valley:

Appleton	Allowed in all parks - No permit needed
Town Menasha	Allowed in all parks – No permit needed
Kimberly	Allowed with a permit only
Menasha	Allowed with a permit only
Little Chute	Allowed with a permit only
Grand Chute	Allowed with a permit only
Neenah	Not allowed at all

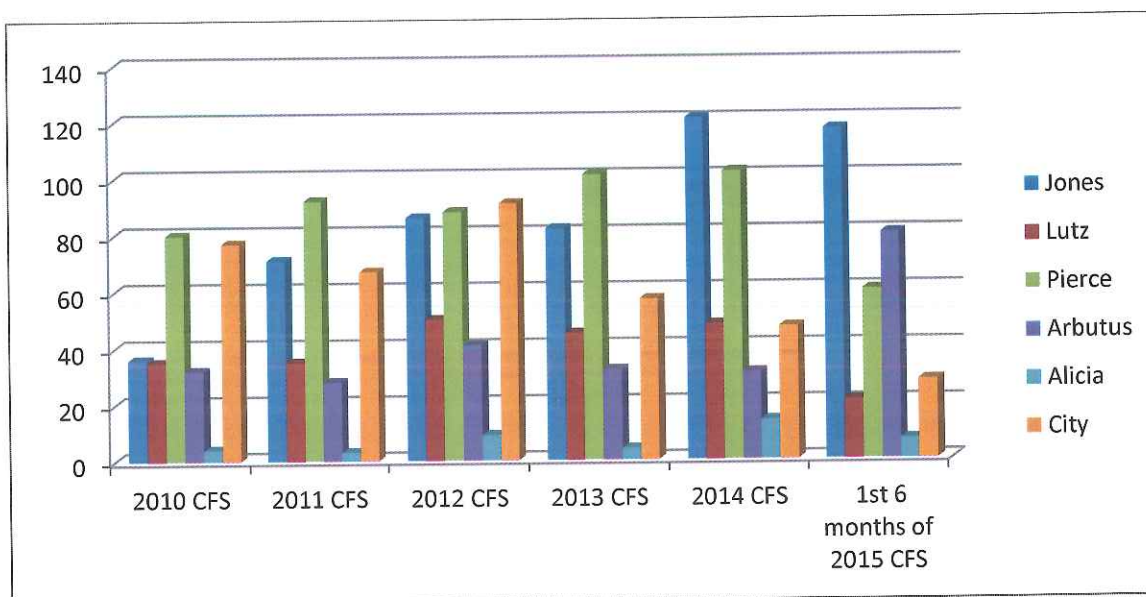
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I've attached several graphs as informational items. This is the total calls for police service for the six parks in the downtown area. The numbers for 2015 are for only the first six months of the year. The trend lines for Jones, Arbutus, and Pierce Parks are disturbing. Many of these calls were created by proactive activities of our officers to walk the parks and address the complaints.

2010 – 2015 Total Calls for Service



Park	2010 CFS	2011 CFS	2012 CFS	2013 CFS	2014 CFS	Jan – June ONLY 2015 CFS
Jones	36	71	86	82	121	117
Lutz	35	35	50	45	48	21
Pierce	80	92	88	101	102	60
Arbutus	32	28	41	32	31	80
Alicia	4	3	9	4	14	7
City	77	67	91	57	47	28

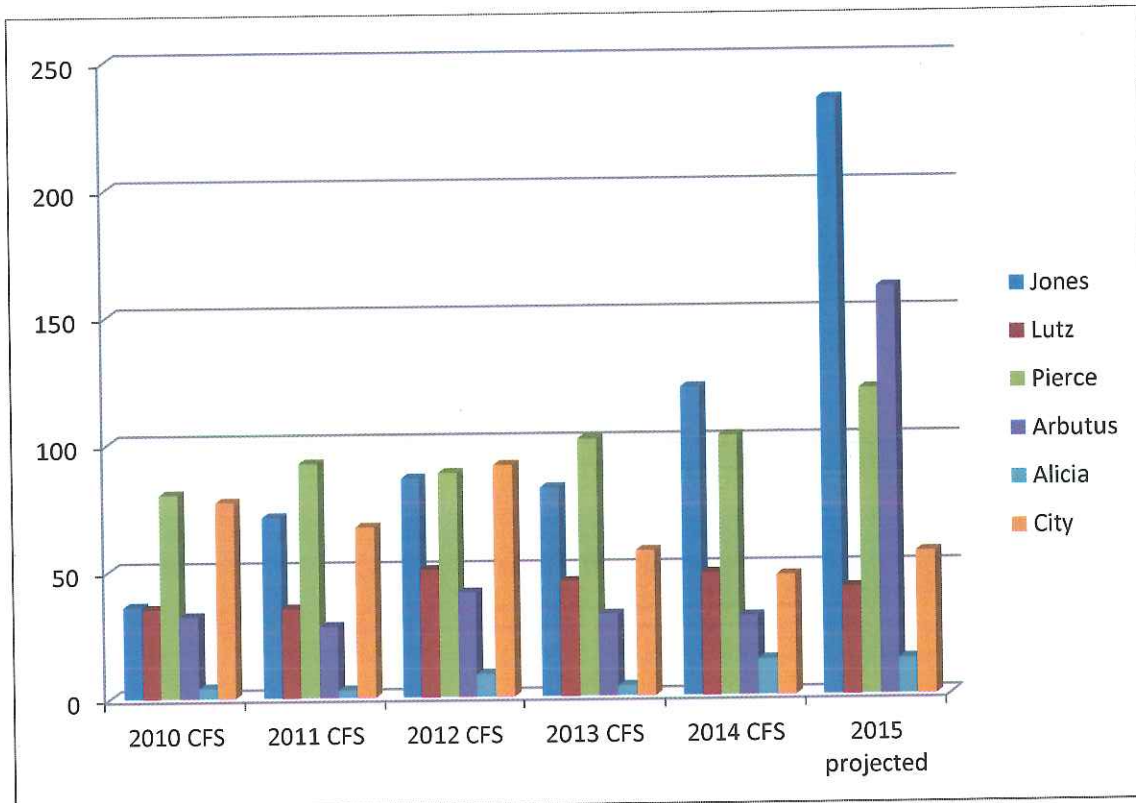
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The below graphs are if the trend lines continue for the rest of the year for all the parks.

2015 Projections if trend line continues



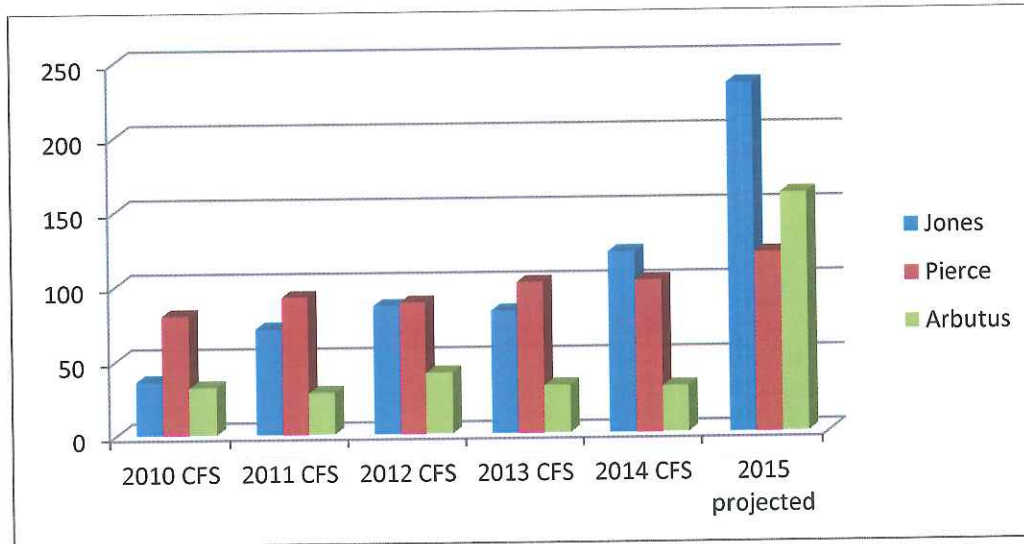
Park	2010 CFS	2011 CFS	2012 CFS	2013 CFS	2014 CFS	2015 projected
Jones	36	71	86	82	121	234
Lutz	35	35	50	45	48	42
Pierce	80	92	88	101	102	120
Arbutus	32	28	41	32	31	160
Alicia	4	3	9	4	14	14
City	77	67	91	57	47	56

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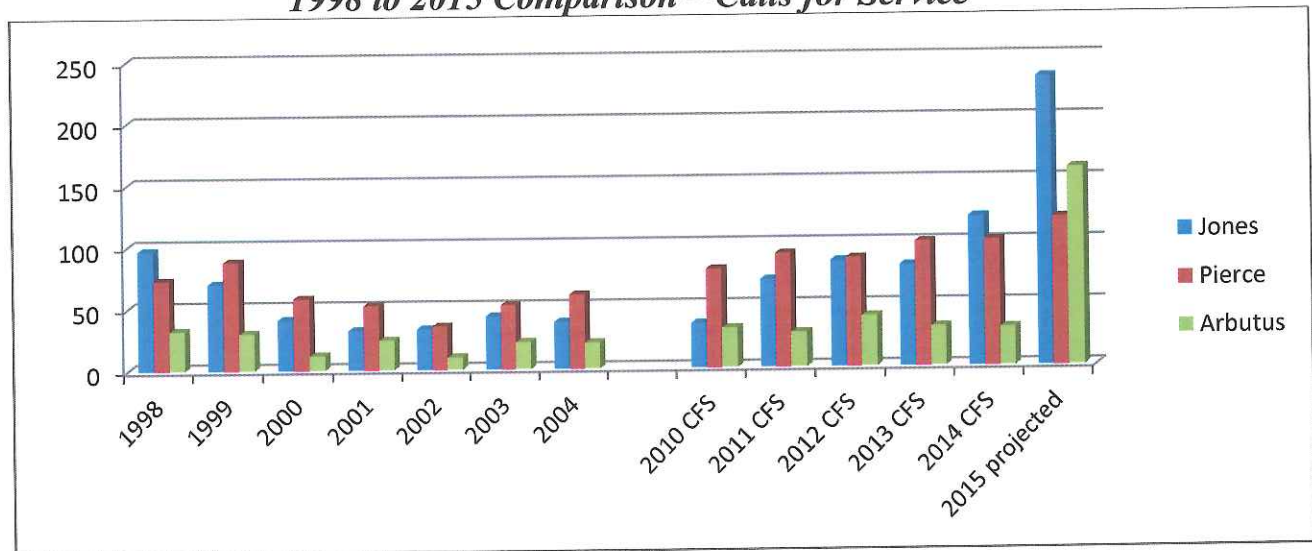


Three Parks with the highest number of Calls for Service 2010 to 2015



The below is a comparison of calls for service from the first Park Rescue Project from 1998.

1998 to 2015 Comparison – Calls for Service



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We used information entered into the dispatched calls to determine if the calls were related to alcohol use. This meant reading the notes of the calls and the reports, when written, to determine if alcohol was involved in the disturbance or incident as a contributing factor. Clearly the incidents of alcohol related calls have increased in Jones Park for several years and in Arbutus Park the last couple years.

Alcohol Related Calls – Six Parks

Park	2010 CFS	2010 Alcohol	2011 CFS	2011 Alcohol	2012 CFS	2012 Alcohol	2013 CFS	2013 Alcohol	2014 CFS	2014 Alcohol	2015 CFS	2015 Alcohol
Jones	36	7	71	9	86	9	82	14	121	25	234	52
Lutz	35	0	35	1	50	0	45	0	48	0	42	0
Pierce	80	1	92	0	88	3	101	2	102	1	120	2
Arbutus	32	4	28	1	41	3	32	3	31	4	160	26
Alicia	4	0	3	0	9	0	4	0	14	0	14	0
City	77	0	67	1	91	3	57	3	47	1	56	0

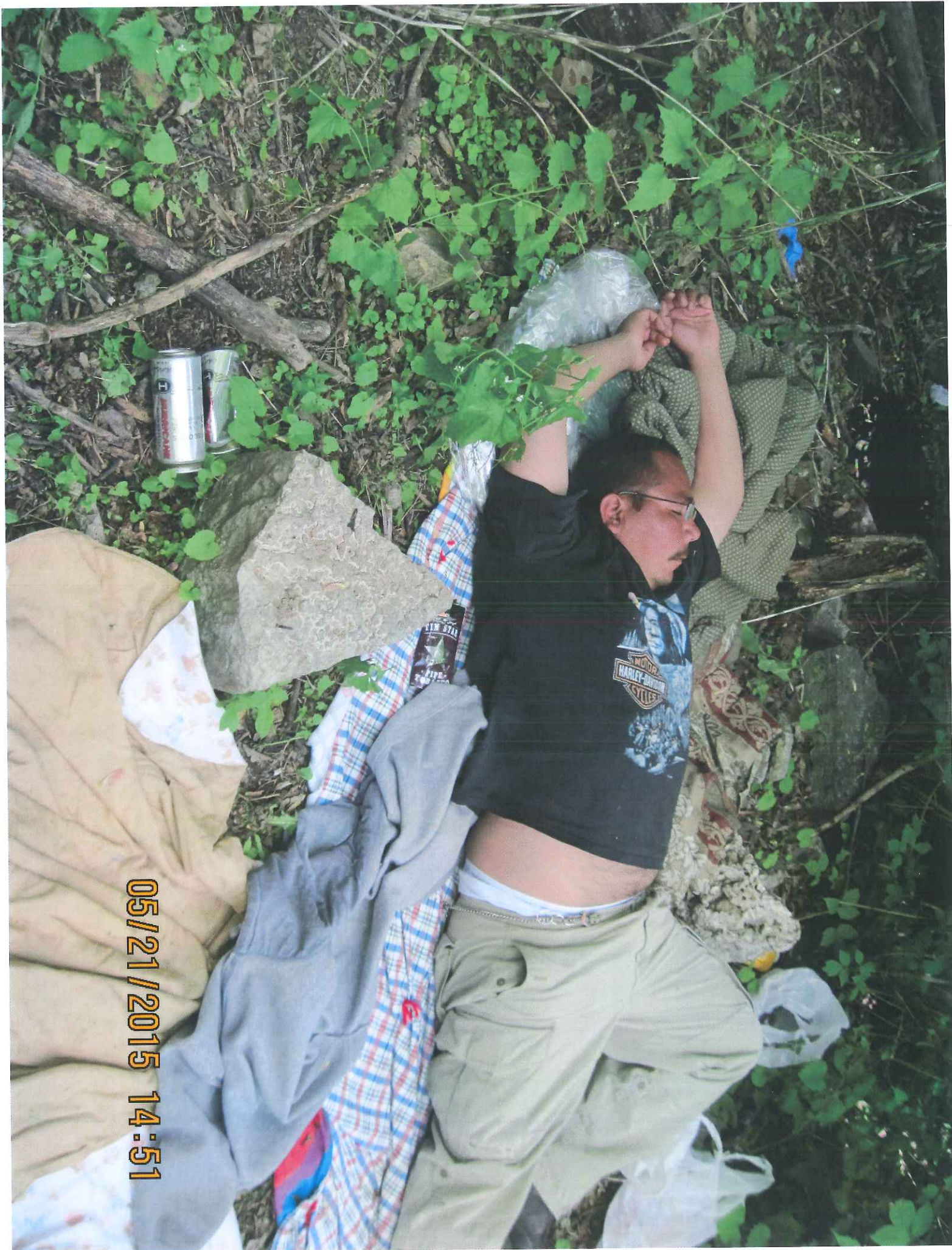
Three Parks with highest Alcohol related Calls – 2010 - 2015

Park	2010 CFS	2010 Alcohol	2011 CFS	2011 Alcohol	2012 CFS	2012 Alcohol	2013 CFS	2013 Alcohol	2014 CFS	2014 Alcohol	2015 CFS	2015 Alcohol
Jones	36	7	71	9	86	9	82	14	121	25	234	52
Pierce	80	1	92	0	88	3	101	2	102	1	120	2
Arbutus	32	4	28	1	41	3	32	3	31	4	160	26

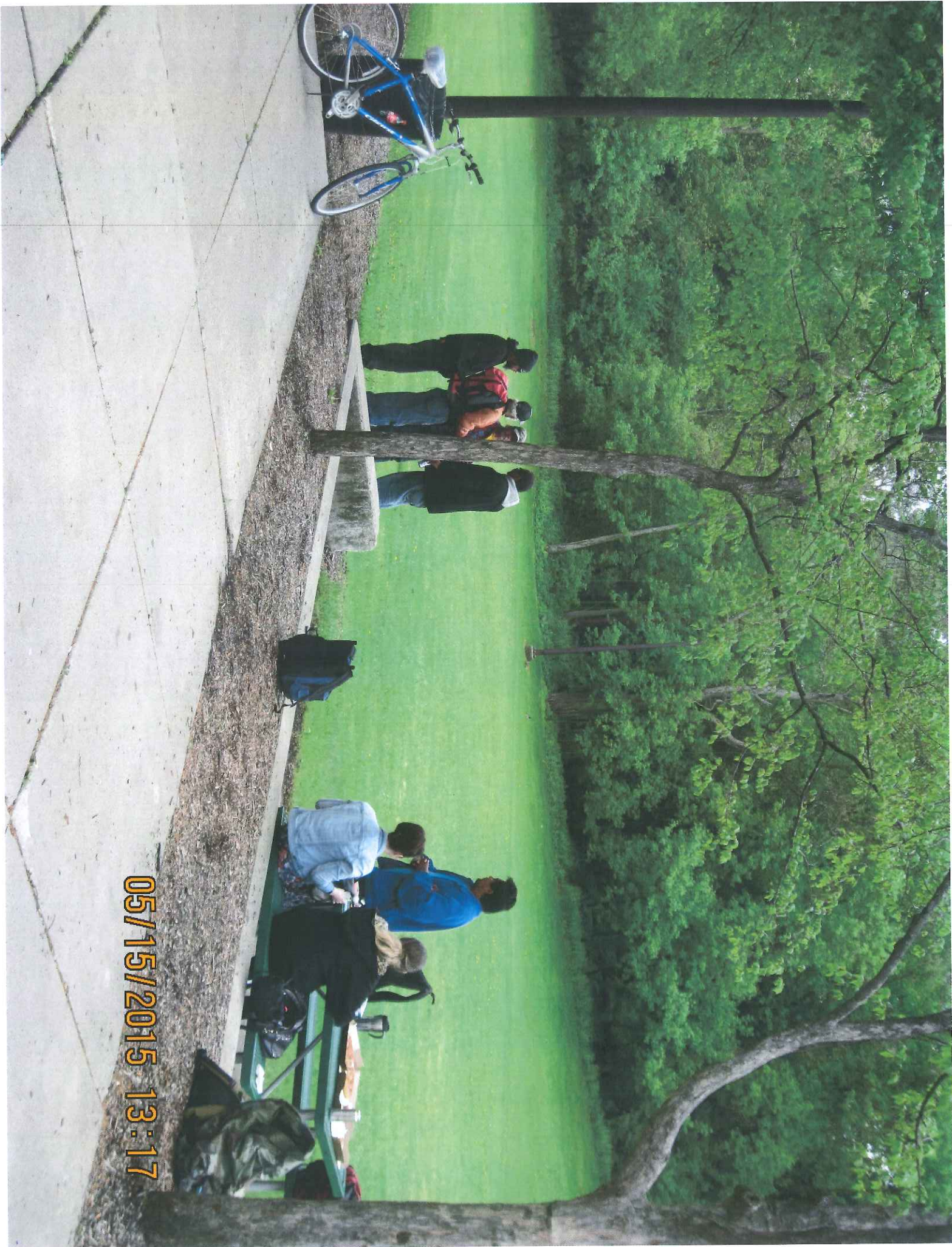
There are several community members, city employees, and business members who have spoken in support of action to deal with the issue of alcohol in our parks, specifically the downtown parks. There are photos attached to this of some of the things we frequently see in Jones Park. This is very similar to what was seen in 1998.

Thank you for your time reviewing this and we will provide you any other information you need to help you determine what the best course of action is.

Chief Todd Thomas



05/21/2015 14:51



05/15/2015 13:17

05/21/2015 15:04



05/15/2015 13:17



05/15/2015 13:15





05/15/2015 13:14

05/28/2015

Chief Todd Thomas
Appleton Police Department
222. S. Walnut Street
Appleton, WI 54911

Dear Chief Thomas,

Recently it has come to our attention that several people experiencing chronic homelessness have been loitering in small groups in parks throughout the city. We've been told that they have been consuming alcohol, becoming intoxicated and engaging in disorderly behavior. As soon as we received this information we stepped up our street outreach efforts to identify who these individuals are and connect them to services.

While engaging these individuals, one of the things we learned from speaking to them is that they prefer to congregate in parks because parks are the only public spaces they can gather and legally consume alcohol. This presents two significant challenges for our street outreach work. One of the challenges is that the parks provide a "refuge" area for people to freely consume alcohol. Having such an area tends to promote their drinking instead of deterring this group from drinking. Unfortunately, the more they drink, the less likely they are to commit to services.

Secondly, because the parks are the only public locations that offer these small groups of people the ability to consume alcohol without fear of repercussions, they tend to concentrate in groups making it hard for outreach workers to work individually with each person. Not only is it more difficult to have in-depth individualized conversations with each person, but it becomes harder for a person to ask for help or services in a group setting because it may be interpreted as a sign of weakness.

We feel that it is important to create an ordinance prohibiting the possession and consumption of alcohol in city parks without a permit. Such an ordinance will serve to deter and hopefully reduce the amount of alcohol being consumed by the people experiencing chronic homelessness and struggling with addiction issues. An ordinance will also eliminate use of the parks as a "refuge" and may result in the groups dispersing and helping to make our street outreach efforts more effective.

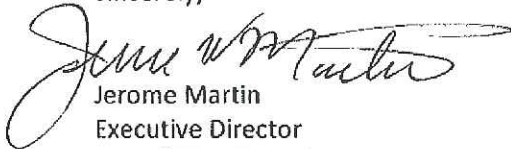
While we do not want to criminalize homelessness, we know that excessive use of alcohol and addiction challenges can directly pose barriers to housing stability or create additional issues that can potentially create barriers to stability. Therefore, any intervention strategy that will help deter and limit a person's opportunity to excessively consume alcohol helps to reduce the potential for individual harm.

As members of the community and park users ourselves, we feel that it is important that we work together with other community entities to ensure that parks are safe, family oriented venues that can be shared by everyone in the community.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions or would like to discuss this further. Our contact information is listed below.

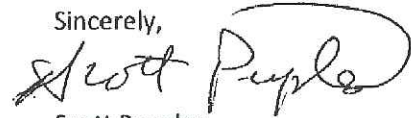
Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Jerome Martin
Executive Director
Homeless Connections
920.734.9192
jerome@homelessconnections.net

Sincerely,



Scott Peebles
Executive Director
Fox Valley Warming Shelter
920.832.1479
peeplesscottj@gmail.com