

Dane County: Mourns the loss of parks leader and conservation champion Bill Lunney

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MADISON, WI – Today, Dane County is mourning the loss of Bill Lunney, a towering figure in the county's parks and conservation community whose life was defined by public service.

For 30 years as Chair of the Dane County Park Commission, Bill transformed the Dane County park system into one of the most respected in the nation. His leadership enabled the system to quadruple in size, expanded accessibility for people with disabilities, and strengthened its long-term conservation mission. His passing is a profound loss for all who value the natural spaces that define Dane County.

"Bill believed deeply in leaving the world better than he found it and has been instrumental to the vitality of Dane County," said Dane County Executive Melissa Agard. "He was a great mentor and friend to me and so many others. We are undeniably stronger because of his leadership, vision, and unwavering commitment to conservation and community."

Bill often said, "A park is not just a piece of land, it is a vibrant part of the community." That belief guided decades of advocacy and action. In addition to his work on the Park Commission, he co-founded the Foundation for Dane County Parks with his wife, Judie Pfeifer, raising substantial private support to enhance and protect county parks beyond what public funding alone could provide.

His public service extended far beyond parks. Bill played a key role in preserving Dunn's Marsh and advancing the vision of a "green necklace" of protected lands

around Madison. He served multiple terms on the Dane County Board and was instrumental in establishing the elected County Executive form of government. Earlier this year, he was elected to the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame in recognition of his lifetime of environmental leadership.

Those who worked with him bore witness to his steady leadership style. When chairing a meeting, Bill paid close attention to parliamentary process, championed orderly debate, and ensured every voice in the room would be heard. Drawing on his deep knowledge of Dane County's history, he helped others understand how issues evolve over time and how thoughtful governance shapes lasting progress.

Dane County extends its heartfelt condolences to his widow Judie, his two sons, his three grandchildren, and all who loved him. Bill's legacy lives on in the parks, trails, wetlands, and protected landscapes that he worked tirelessly to preserve for future generations.