

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: April 17, 2024
To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
From: Guy Smith, Executive Director
Subject: Milwaukee County Parks 2023 Annual Report
File Type: Informational Report

This informational report provides a report on how the Milwaukee County Parks Department set and achieved its 2023 goals.

POLICY

This report aligns to Chapter 108: Achieving Racial Equity & Health.

Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	Chapter 108: Achieving Racial Equity & Health
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BACKGROUND

[File 22-104](#) amends Chapter 108 to require that “annually, by April 30 of each year or sooner, each Milwaukee County department leader and/or their designee(s) shall provide a written and oral report outlining their year-end results to a Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors committee. The reports shall, at a minimum:

- (a) Indicate the year-end goals the department set in the prior year
 - (b) Share the rationale and relevance of the department’s performance metrics (i.e. explaining why they are “SMART” goals (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely, and extending) and how they align to the county’s racial equity strategy, if applicable)
 - (c) Report the department’s year-end results relating to the goals it had set, and
 - (d) Provide a thorough analysis clearly articulating why goals were significantly exceeded, met, or not met.
 - (e) Explain the department’s progress in creating a departmental-level strategic plan that aligns to the countywide strategic plan and provide an update about future plans to revise and enhance the departmental-level plan in the year ahead.”
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ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

- 1A: Reflect the full diversity of the County at every level of County government
- 1B: Create and nurture an inclusive culture across County government
- 1C: Increase the number of County contracts awarded to minority and women-owned businesses
- 2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity
- 2B: Break down silos across County government to maximize access to and quality of services offered
- 2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions
- 3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities
- 3B: Enhance the County’s fiscal health and sustainability
- 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities

Alignment to the above strategic objectives is articulated in response to the questions below.

BODY

This report is responsive to the goals of Chapter 108 and is consistent with the reports provided in each of the last 2 years. Going forward, the Parks Department has developed a 3-year Strategic Plan and the goal is to present on progress made in the context of that plan.

1. What were the top 3 goals of your department/office 2023? Please explain why they are “SMARTIE” goals (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely, inclusive, and equitable) and how they align to the county’s racial equity strategy.
 - Goal 1: Earned Revenue: The Parks Department will reach its earned revenue goal of \$21,762,310 by the end of 2023. Each year the Parks Department sustains the operations of services that are not fully funded by tax levy support so that they are accessible to the public. Valuable services such as the community centers and pools require the support of revenue earned elsewhere in the department to sustain operations throughout the year. These non-revenue producing services align with the County’s vision as they advance health equity and are an upstream investment in addressing health disparities.
 - Goal 2: Environmental Sustainability: The Parks Department will reduce paved areas by 10,000 square feet (1/4 acre) by the end of 2023. The Milwaukee County Parks system has 611 acres (26 million square feet) of paved assets including roads, parking lots, trails, and athletic courts. Paved areas (asphalt and concrete) contribute to pollution by exposing waterways and Lake Michigan to surface pollutants and runoff. Paved areas also contribute to global warming by creating their own emissions and exacerbating urban heat island effects. The

reduction of paved areas directly supports the County's vision of addressing root causes of health disparities.

- Goal 3: Deferred Maintenance: The Parks Department will reduce its deferred maintenance backlog by \$1,000,000 by the end of 2023. The condition of parks buildings and facilities is translated to a dollar value by estimating the cost to restore these assets to a "like new" condition. The ability to maintain our assets ensures that services will continue to be provided to the public including those services that support the County's vision.

2. To what extent were these goals accomplished in 2023? Please explain.

- a. Goal 1: Earned Revenue: The Parks Department achieved its earned revenue goal of \$21,762,310 by generating \$24,677,245 in earned revenue by the end of 2023.
- b. Goal 2: Environmental Sustainability: The Parks Department achieved its goal of reducing 10,000 square feet of paved areas by the end of 2023. This was accomplished through 3 projects. In Walker Square Park, a 795 sf concrete pad was converted to turf grass. In St. Martins Park a dilapidated asphalt pad of 33,309 sf was converted to turf grass with a long-term goal of tree planting in this area. In Wedgewood Park a 14,337 sf asphalt area was converted to turf grass with a similar goal of tree planting in the longer term. In total, 48,441 sf (1.1 acres) of formerly paved parkland was converted to turf grass and most of that is planned to be reforested.
- c. Goal 3: Deferred Maintenance: The Parks Department achieved its goal of addressing \$1,000,000 worth of deferred maintenance by addressing at least \$14,673,196 worth of deferred maintenance by the end of 2023. This amount is calculated from the Parks' major maintenance budget and capital projects that were completed during the year.

3. What factors *enabled* progress toward accomplishing these goals?

Earned revenue goal: 2023 was another successful year for revenue generating areas within the department. One key factor in the performance of entirely outdoor revenue generating activities is weather which is impossible to predict when establishing the annual revenue target in the budget. Contributing to the successful attainment of this goal were areas that significantly exceeded their revenue goals including Food and Beverage sales (\$1,518,001 over budget in 2023), Golf course revenue (\$2,622,163 over budget), room rentals (\$226,518 over budget) and recreation sites such as the Mitchell Park Domes (\$391,836 over budget), McKinley Marina (\$187,714 over budget), and indoor recreation facilities (\$106,336 over budget).

Environmental sustainability goal: Parks did achieve its goal to reduce pavement by 10,000 sf, achieving 48,441 sf of asphalt or concrete to grass conversion in 3 projects. It

is possible that other capital projects completed in 2023 also helped to reduce the total paved area but these calculations were not available at the time this report was submitted.

Deferred maintenance goal: Parks spent \$1,325,113 of its major maintenance budget on addressing deferred maintenance in 2023. Other deferred maintenance was also addressed through completed capital projects. If we are defining a completed capital project as a new improvement replacing an asset that was past its useful life due to maintenance needs, then the total value of the new improvement is the value of investment made to address deferred maintenance. The following is the approximate total value of County investments in each capital project –

- Underwood Creek Parkway - \$1,129,878
- Rainbow playground - \$207,360
- Kletzsch dam - \$319,767
- Dretzka golf parking - \$2,000,949
- Cooper playground - \$210,022
- Tippecanoe playground - \$219,936
- McKinley parking lot phase 2 - \$5,998,872
- South Shore breakwater north section - \$2,956,130
- Old Loomis Rd - \$102,514
- Parks bridges - \$202,655

Total Capital = \$13,348,083

Total Capital + Major Maintenance = \$14,673,196

4. What factors *hindered* progress toward accomplishing these goals?

Earned revenue goal: Parks achieved its earned revenue goal in all business areas. Revenue and activity at parks is always weather dependent and the region had a warm and dry summer in 2023 that allowed for maximization of park usage.

Environmental sustainability goal: Parks did achieve its goal to reduce pavement by 10,000 sf in 2023 through three projects. There have been a few high-profile projects pertaining to the potential downsizing of roads to trails that, if accomplished, would have further helped the department achieve its pavement reduction goal. These projects were discussed throughout 2023 and Parks staff advocated for pavement reduction as an important goal in each case. More support for pavement reduction is needed as projects move from smaller efforts such as the removal of 795 sf of concrete in Clarke Square to the multiple acres of pavement that are needed to be removed in other areas of parkways and parking lots to move the needle on environmental sustainability.

Deferred maintenance goal: Parks has established a manageable goal for addressing deferred maintenance within the parameters of its annual budget, but this amount is approximately 1/500th (0.2%) of the total amount of deferred maintenance that exists in Parks' facilities. Real progress in addressing deferred maintenance requires more resources allocated to the building and construction trades in order to properly maintain assets, more capital projects to replace aged assets, demolition and removal of

certain assets that are no longer in service, and progress needs to be made on large scale initiatives for signature facilities that contribute to deferred maintenance such as the Mitchell Park Domes and Kosciuszko Community Center.

5. Aside from financial resources, what help does your department/office need in identifying and achieving your strategic goals?

Parks continues to exceed its revenue expectations because of the growth in activities that are fee-based like golfing and boating.

Pavement reduction will require difficult conversations in the future regarding the need for parkways and parking lots that may result in challenging community discussions around the value of green space as opposed to automobile parking needs.

One of the most impactful actions that could be taken to drive down the total deferred maintenance backlog of the Parks Department would be the demolition of vacant or underutilized assets. The removal of facilities within the Parks may encounter pushback from park users, at which time the education and support of County leaders to consistently highlight the need to support the County's fiscal health will be essential. While the County as a whole has reduced its building footprint by millions of square feet, and in turn reduced the cost to operate the building portfolio significantly, the same cannot be said of Parks buildings. A coordinated effort to better manage the Parks' portfolio of buildings to include the removal or redevelopment of some buildings that are the least efficient to operate should be considered.

6. What is the status of your department/office in developing its strategic plan?

Parks has completed its 3-year Strategic Plan which has been submitted to the County Board committees concurrent with this report.

FISCAL EFFECT

The report is informational only and there is no fiscal impact.

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