

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: March 17, 2023
To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
From: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks
Subject: Feasibility for Creating a Milwaukee County Parks Youth Corps Program
File Type: Informational Report

REQUEST

In response to File 22-870, the Parks Department is providing a response to the request for a study of the feasibility for creating a Milwaukee County Parks Youth Corps Program.

POLICY

None

Wisconsin State Statutes:	
Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	
Specific Adopted Budget:	
Specific Adopted Budget Amendment:	
Specific Adopted Capital Project:	

BACKGROUND

Milwaukee County Parks has provided essentially the same level of service for parks and recreation in the community for 30 years with about one third of the workforce it had previously. Parks is always supportive of creative ideas to aid in recruitment and to support our budget to be able to rebuild a workforce that had 1,100 full time equivalent employees in 1989. There have been efforts over the years to organize employment programs that are specifically targeted to recruiting folks to work in parks, recreation and natural areas management. Some of these efforts have focused workforce development efforts on Milwaukee area youth who are just beginning their careers. This population is capable of performing many of the entry-level duties that are needed to manage the parks system and finding the right folks at a young age who are connected to parks, recreation and open spaces could spark a lifelong interest in working in the parks industry. There is also a significant public benefit to focusing on recruitment from under-represented populations in our community as these individuals need additional support to achieve equity in the job market.

Parks has recent experience in managing youth employment programs and conservation corps employment programs as envisioned in the Board's request for this feasibility study. These programs have at times been successful but for a number of reasons have not led to sustainable, year over year impact on achieving the program's goals. Employment in many cases has been temporary and not led to long-term positions, there are challenges to maintain the commitment of youth recruits with the programs and last throughout the summer season, and funding is sporadic and not committed over a period of multiple years that is necessary to grow a foundation for a successful program.

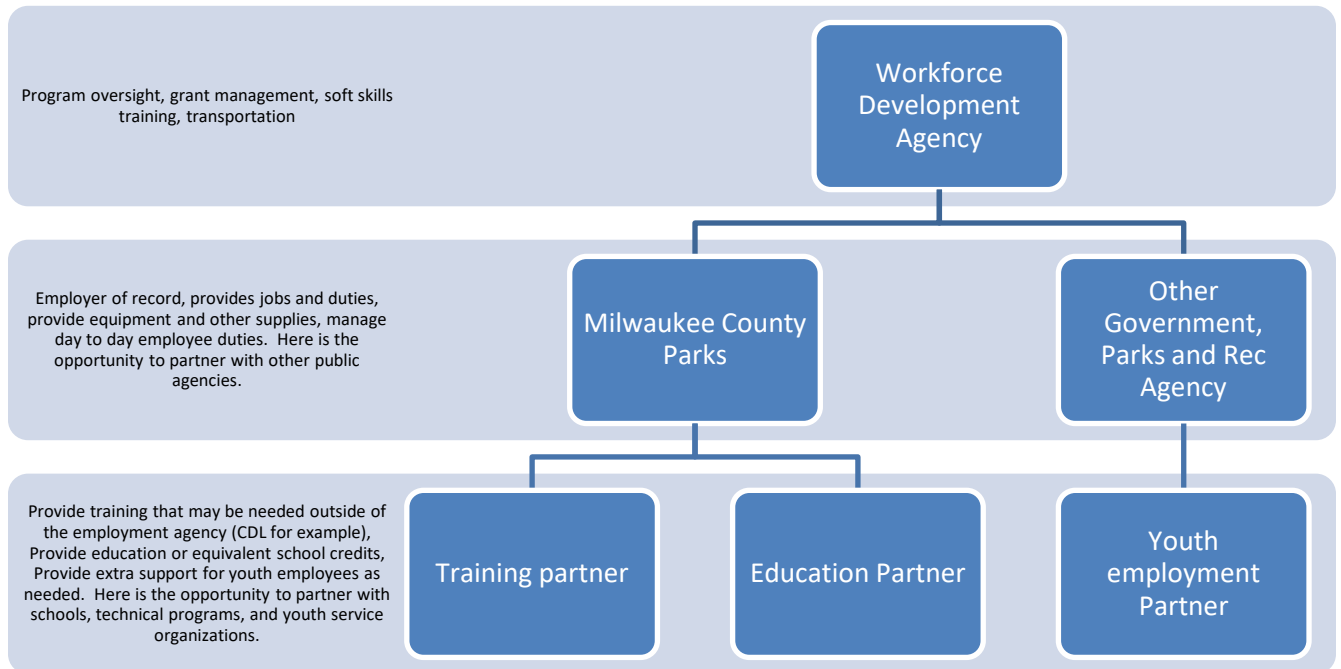
In 2021, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) introduced a three-year pilot workforce development program called Fresh Coast Fresh Start (FCFS). MMSD has committed \$500,000 over the next three years in support of FCFS and has contracted with Cream City Conservation and Consulting (Cream City), a local workforce development organization, to implement the program. FCFS is an 8-month, holistic workforce program connecting unemployed, underemployed, and reentering citizens with training, work experience, and wrap-around services. The program relies on partners who can provide project sites, hands-on work experience, and opportunities for future fulltime employment, thus aligning well with Parks' needs. Parks staff have built a collaborative partnership with MMSD and Cream City to leverage each other's strengths and offer a more robust workforce experience than we could have achieved on our own.

Parks partnered with MMSD and Cream City on two specific workforce programs for youth and young adults: Fresh Coast Ambassadors and Trails & Conservation Crew. MMSD chose to not extend either program after the 2021 season, due to a variety of challenges, including recruiting youth for the program.

In this report, Parks will provide a response to the Board of Supervisors' request for information but also offers the following insight to consider from experience trying to operate youth conservation employment programs –

1. Milwaukee County is not a workforce development entity and a successful youth employment program should be led by a workforce development agency. Milwaukee County Parks, and other similar potential employers, are more ideally suited to be locations where youth work but in a partner-role rather than a programmatic lead role. Any successful program will require addressing the myriad of employment issues that folks in the community face – transportation, soft skill development, personal accountability, financial literacy, etc. Workforce development agencies are oriented to provide the wraparound services that first-time job seekers need, expecting Milwaukee County government to provide employment services without having an agency leading the effort will result in not meeting the program's goals. A model for a workforce development program that follows this suggested framework is illustrated in the graphic below.
2. Milwaukee County Parks is desperate for additional staff to manage the parks, but this desperation does not mean that temporary employment programs make

a meaningful impact on addressing the gap in staff that we need versus positions that we have. Prior youth employment programs have operated similar to Parks' seasonal park worker employment program which can provide jobs to 600-800 people in one year. The Fresh Coast Fresh Start employment program began with 16 engaged individuals and ended with only 1 person still employed in the last few weeks of the program. Addressing the staff shortages at Parks requires a commitment to grow the full-time workforce through dedicated support and not the reliance on temporary employment programs.



Response to questions asked in File #22-870 -

1. What would be an appropriate stipend per individual and how would we propose to pay for it?

- a. A typical summer-long employment program running concurrent to the school summer break period would last for 10 weeks from June through August. Assuming 40 hours of work per week and payment of \$15 per hour this would result in payment of \$6,000 in wages per person. Ideally payment to individuals in a summer youth employment program could function similar to how Parks hires seasonal park workers. Currently Parks is budgeted to maintain a status quo staffing level and does not have additional funding to be able to accommodate additional employees

in a youth corps type program.

2. How can we engage the schools so that students can receive academic credits for participating?

- a. The decision to offer academic credits for participating in a summer youth corps employment program is made by schools and school districts and not Milwaukee County Parks. It can be assumed that if a school or school district considered this as an idea worth pursuing that there could be an educational requirement of the employment program for the individual. While this may be possible to provide it would also require the administration of the program with additional staff and the participation of staff capable of providing an educational experience. It can also be assumed that additional oversight and documentation would be needed to ensure that academic standards are being met as opposed to an employment that is not including academic credits for participating youth. In the graphic included in this report an education or training partner could be identified to work with the employment agency and the employer of record to meet this requirement, with guidance from participating schools.

3. What is a pipeline that could create opportunities for youth corps members to become Park Workers

- a. Milwaukee County Parks is always seeking ways to build pipelines from employment programs to seasonal or full-time employment. It is recommended that if this program were to be more fully developed that the participating youth could be employed as Seasonal Park Workers initially. The challenge in creating pipelines to employment is a lack of full-time positions for folks to move into. That is one reason why the Parks 2023 budget included a significant change in moving resources from seasonal labor to full time labor and the creation of 17 new full-time positions. Parks desires to create a pipeline for interested youth to enter the full-time workforce but will need a multi-year commitment to grow the full-time workforce if the youth corps employment program is meant to generate sustainable jobs for folks participating in it.

4. What are opportunities for collaboration with DHHS DYFS, Commission on Youth and One Milwaukee Taskforce?

- a. Efforts like the ones listed in this question and similar employment programs that are offered by other County departments should be connected. Parks, or other County departments, could serve as an employer of record while these other youth-oriented programming efforts could serve as a pipeline for interested program participants.

5. Include a financial literacy component

- a. A successful version of this concept would involve a workforce development agency as the lead entity and that agency could bring financial literacy services to the overall program. This could function similarly to the Fresh Coast Fresh Start program from 2021.

6. What is learned from Fresh Coast Fresh Start program?

- a. Employment programs can serve the purpose of engaging youth in the green industry or parks and recreation industry, but this is not the same as

building a sustainable pipeline to grow a full-time workforce. If the goal is the latter, then supporting the growth of County seasonal and full-time positions is needed so that the pipeline has more opportunities for recruitment and placement.

7. Who are community partners who could participate in the program?

- a. A lead agency is needed for a youth conservation corps program to be successful, this lead agency should have the skills and capabilities of a workforce development agency. Employ Milwaukee is one such organization that operates in Milwaukee County and has partnered with Milwaukee County government for workforce development programs such as Uplift Milwaukee.

Related File No's:	21-419, 21-973, 22-870
Associated File No's (Including Transfer Packets):	
Previous Action Date(s):	September 9, 2022

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

None

FISCAL EFFECT

This item has no fiscal effect.

TERMS

None

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

None

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None

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