

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: August 12, 2022

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks

Subject: From the Executive Director Milwaukee County Parks providing and informational report on a proposed partnership with The Ability Center to improve Wisconsin Avenue Park

File Type: Informational Report

REQUEST

From the Executive Director Milwaukee County Parks providing and informational report on a proposed partnership with The Ability Center to improve Wisconsin Avenue Park

POLICY

Wisconsin State Statutes:	59.17(2)(b)(3)
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BACKGROUND

Milwaukee County Parks looks to continue a successful partnership with The Ability Center to construct a Universal Park at Wisconsin Avenue Park (10300 W. Wisconsin Avenue) within the Milwaukee County Parks system.

Milwaukee County Parks and The Ability Center have partnered on multiple projects to improve accessibility to recreational amenities. Partnerships include the placement of accessible wheelchairs at Bradford Beach in 2015, accessible ice skating sleds in Red Arrow & Wilson Parks in 2016, hand cycles in Veterans Park in 2016 and the installation of an accessible ramp and matting at Bradford Beach in 2020. The Ability Center also headquarters their offices in a building at Wisconsin Avenue Park.

Milwaukee County Parks and The Ability center are proposing the first entirely accessible park in Southeast Wisconsin. This would make an entire Park (not just a playground) – all 17 acres – accessible to EVERY visitor to the Park. This project will be a collaborative effort with many partners including GameTime, one of the country's leading recreation industry equipment providers, and the YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee. Wisconsin Avenue's Universal Park will set the inclusion standard for future parks and provide accessible equity for Milwaukee, and an entire region.

The Park project is proposed to be completed in two phases. The first phase will include

changes to the park clubhouse, fields and adjacent playground spaces, which will be designed for all abilities to play side-by-side on all play elements. Replacing and modernizing the existing 1960's-era clubhouse building to be the central hub for the Park experience and provide amenities critical to ensuring all users feel safe, welcomed and wanted. In addition to standard restroom facilities, this space will include caretaker restrooms, changing tables for both youth and adults, charging stations for mobility and communication devices, a multipurpose space capable of accommodating a concessionaire, and a community meeting room that can be used freely by all members of the community. The exciting Universal Field will be the first-of-its-kind field with surfacing for youth and adult wheelchair baseball and softball, with moveable wall to accommodate various levels of play. The YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee has partnered on planning this element and plans to make this field the home of their existing Miracle League programming.

Phase two of the proposed project will include a meandering half-mile path through the hardwood forest, carefully routed to prevent harm to the existing trees. With fitness stations, activity areas, and sensory destinations, the trail will provide enjoyment throughout this currently underutilized area of the Park. A first-ever inclusive challenge course will be designed for those with impairments and able-bodied individuals to enjoy together, providing an engaging, fun and exciting play opportunity to interact side-by-side. Featuring varying types of obstacles with different levels of difficulty, this course will be a centerpiece of Universal Park, remove all barriers to play for everyBODY, and be a best practice element for other park projects.

The total cost of the project is estimated at \$7M, with all funding being provided by public and private funders. The YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee has committed to help fundraise \$1M, and the project is actively engaged with many other organizations.

Related File No's:	18-869, 19-60, 19-444
Associated File No's (Including Transfer Packets):	
Previous Action Date(s):	3/5/19, 6/10/19

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Describe how the item aligns to the objectives in the [strategic plan](#):

This proposal supports the strategic plan of Milwaukee County through objectives:
2A – Determining what where and how we deliver services to advance health equity
3A - Investing “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities
3C – Dismantling barriers to diverse and inclusive communities.

In Wisconsin, opportunities for children and adults with disabilities to be fit, active and healthy are not only limited, but they leave much to be desired when compared to our surrounding Midwest states (2A). This Park will be a catalyst for change in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and the country.

In addition to economic difficulties, Greater Milwaukee needs to, and can do, better for a population that comprises 11.5% of the population in Southeast Wisconsin; approximately 247,000 people in this area report a disability. That includes nearly 189,000 people in greater Milwaukee (17,700 children), with about 50% residing in Milwaukee County alone (123,000 including 11,000 school-aged children). This is just those with a disability; statistically 2 out of 7 families are impacted by disabilities and seeking opportunities to play, TOGETHER. These are just some of the tens of thousands of reasons why The Ability Center has forged ahead over the last decade to create inclusive spaces (3C).

This group also sees a significant increase in health disparities across all categories — from physical and mental health to secondary conditions of obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Health care services as a whole are far from equitable. With disability on the rise in America (1 in 4, 26%, 61 million people) and disability-associated health care expenditures accounting for 26.7% of all health care — the need for equitable, DAILY, and hourly access to programs and services that provide an outlet for those with disabilities to be well are vital to a sustainable economy, community, and healthcare system (3A). 54% of people with disabilities engage in no leisure-time physical activity and youth are leading increasingly sedentary lifestyles, exacerbating existing and future health issues.

FISCAL EFFECT

None

TERMS

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

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APPROVED BY:

Guy Smith, Executive Director Milwaukee County Parks



ATTACHMENTS:

None

CC:

David Crowley, County Executive
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office
Sheldon Wasserman, Supervisor District 3, PEEC Chair
Steven Shea, Supervisor District 8, PEEC Vice Chair
Felicia Martin, Supervisor District 7, PEEC Member
Juan Miguel Martinez, Supervisor District 12, PEEC Member
Steve Taylor, Supervisor District 17, PEEC Member
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Mgr, Office of the County Clerk
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