

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE

MEMORANDUM

Date: June 13, 2022
To: Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
From: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks
Subject: Statement Regarding Amendment to ARPA projects - Parks Golf Course Irrigation and Cart Path Project; Parkway Conversion to Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail Project

Update 6/13/22: An original memo was distributed to the Board of Supervisors for their meeting on 5/26/22 relating to an amendment to remove ARPA funding from the golf course infrastructure projects in File #22-592. During the proceeding of that meeting an additional amendment was discussed which would have also removed ARPA funding for a project intended to create new bicycle and pedestrian trails. This updated memo addresses this second amendment.

Every year the Milwaukee County Parks golf program generates enough net revenue to sustain the operations of the Community Centers, maintenance of picnic areas, plowing of County Park parkways and many other non-revenue generating responsibilities of the Parks Department. The health of the golf program is dependent on the condition of the golf courses and Parks staff's ability to maintain them on a daily basis. The fiscal health of the Parks Department is dependent on the golf program. The last two years have seen record growth in the game of golf which has opened up accessibility to traditionally under-represented populations like women, people of color, disabled individuals, and younger people. Causing harm to the golf program at this point would threaten the positive gains that have been seen in the sport, reverse years of progress in becoming more accessible to all people, and directly cause harm to the Parks Department's annual operating income.

Allocating funds to make needed improvements to other areas of the Parks does not need to harm the golf program and take funds away from this important ARPA project.

Project Overview – Golf course projects:

The ARPA project addressed in this memo intends to replace the irrigation systems at Lake, Warnimont, and Noyes golf courses, install synthetic greens at Zablocki golf course and install cart paths at Whitnall and Dretzka golf courses. The project would address millions of dollars worth of deferred maintenance and grow direct revenue to

Milwaukee County Parks. Milwaukee County Parks operates thirteen traditional golf courses. These are community and regional amenities that encourage recreation and serve as a vital revenue source for Park operations. The condition of the golf courses and amenities offered directly correlates to the revenue that each one can generate. This request will replace obsolete irrigation infrastructure with modern, efficient infrastructure that will reduce staff time due to manual watering, ongoing maintenance, and utility operating expenses. Additionally, this project proposes to install cart paths at courses scheduled to experience infrastructure improvements to take advantage of already in-progress capital projects. The goal of these cart path projects is to maximize already ongoing construction work and mitigate service disruption to the public so that the cart path construction can occur simultaneously to other course disturbances. Cart paths are important because they increase the number of days that golf carts can be rented which grows direct revenue for the department providing longer term sustainability for the systemic decline of tax levy support for Parks. Improving services at Parks' Par 3 golf courses (Lake, Warnimont, Noyes and Zablocki) will help grow the game of golf for Milwaukee County residents who have been traditionally under-represented in the game of golf. For example, Parks had considered closing Noyes Par 3 due to the poor condition of the course, but our programming partner First Tee of Southeastern Wisconsin operates out of that course and is currently developing plans to expand operations and outreach based on this potential ARPA investment.

Update 6/10/22: Project Overview – Trail Conversions:

This project proposes to convert the Little Menomonee Parkway segment from Appleton Ave to Leon Terrace (total of length of .9 miles) and the Lincoln Creek Parkway from N 23rd St to N 27th St (.3 miles) to a dedicated bicycle and pedestrian trail with no motorized vehicular thru access. These segments of parkway were identified because they do not connect park users to recreational assets, the street network provides alternatives for vehicles, the roadways are in poor condition, reckless driving is an issue for park users and staff safety, the Active Streets program in 2020 closed the Parkway to vehicles which was strongly supported by local park users, and the Oak Leaf Trail is routed on these parkways. Similar projects have been converted in Greenfield Park and along Underwood Parkway and have added value to the parks system in the process. Although parkways are part of the Oak Leaf Trail system, these roadways function as shortcuts for drivers which can create unsafe conditions for bicyclists, pedestrians, and staff. Parks has received complaints and staff have directly witnessed excessive speeding on these parkway segments. These segments have become shortcuts for people driving but other options exist in the street network and their conversion to trails will not significantly reduce access for drivers to properties in both areas. The proposed conversion does not produce an undue burden on drivers.

Converting these car-focused roadways to trails supports the County's mission of achieving racial equity by becoming the healthiest County in Wisconsin in key ways. It encourages healthy activities like bicycling, walking, and running, reduces reckless

driving, and is a direct investment in communities of color that are underserved in terms of trails. This proposal also addresses a key operational inefficiency which is Parks' inability to address deferred maintenance and being chronically under-staffed to address day to day responsibilities. The Little Menomonee segment is currently maintained by Parks Operations staff that are based out of McGovern Park which is 4 miles away. The staff are not able to continuously monitor the use of this parkway and the result is that it has become a recurring illegal dumping site. This parkway also has a pavement rating of 32, making it a candidate for funding through the County's capital budget. However, due to the significant capital backlog throughout the parks system, this project is unlikely to be funded in any upcoming capital budget.

Fiscal Health – Golf course projects:

This project will increase the fiscal health and environmental sustainability of the County by increasing sustainable earned revenue, reducing operating costs, reducing water usage and leveraging existing and future capital projects for maximum benefit. Milwaukee County Parks generates over half its annual budget through direct revenue derived from fees for services. Golf rounds generated \$9.8 million for the Parks Department in 2021.

Milwaukee County Golf Courses generate more than one-third of that annual revenue covering the expenses for golf operations and providing surplus financial support for non-revenue generating functions of the department like community centers and the Mitchell Park Domes.

The irrigation systems at Lake, Warnimont and Noyes golf courses leak water, incur significant repair expenses and require an inordinate amount of staff time to maintain playable conditions and produce revenue. Irrigation maintenance is an operating cost of owning a golf course asset and is accounted for in annual operating budgets, while replacement of the infrastructure is not. Improved irrigation will be more efficient with reduced water loss and targeted application. Zablocki golf course will require irrigation replacement soon but is a prime location to pilot advances in synthetic greens. Synthetic greens would virtually eliminate the need for water, fertilizer, and specialized mower equipment and will eliminate the capital and labor costs associated with each. Experience with synthetic greens will determine if future irrigation capital projects could be avoided and replaced with an inorganic playing surface. A 2019 comparison between Oakwood Golf Course which has cart paths and Whitnall Golf Course which does not have cart paths showed that despite similar total rounds played (28,985 vs. 28,347) Oakwood was able to produce \$71,000 in more revenue than Whitnall due to the ability to offer golf cart rentals. In 2019 the golf season was 211 days long. That same year there were over 60 instances where Oakwood was able to accommodate carts and Whitnall was not (29%). The difference is due to the weather and turf conditions, if there is no cart path and the course is wet then carts cannot be rented. If

there are cart paths, golf carts can be rented despite adverse weather and poor course conditions. When utilizing only cart revenue data, adding 50 days of golf cart rentals at Whitnall and Dretzka golf courses would yield \$110,000 in new revenue each year. This is notwithstanding additional rounds played or food and beverage sales.

Update 6/10/22: Fiscal Health – Trail Conversions:

Parkways and mixed-use trails do not generate direct revenue since both are free to use public amenities. This proposal enhances the County’s fiscal health by supporting efficiency in Park operations, reducing maintenance needs, and addressed deferred maintenance. Through this proposal, operational efficiencies are realized since the lifespan of a bicycle/pedestrian trail is significantly longer than the useful lifespan of a road for vehicle travel. The Little Menomonee River Parkway has a pavement rating of 32 which places it in a category of needing replacement, this proposal would address this deferred maintenance need and remove it from future capital planning. Parkway construction is 40% more expensive than trail construction and maintenance follows the same trend.

Update 6/10/22: Racial Equity:

In order to prioritize equity in decision making, the Parks Department has developed a Park Equity Index score for every park that it manages in Milwaukee County. This equity index considers park typology (regional park, neighborhood park, etc.), racial demographic data, and other US Census data relevant to park and open space access (access to health insurance, households without a vehicle, etc.). Using this Park Equity Index, the locations targeted for investment in this proposal were ranked and submitted to the ARPA Task Force for consideration. Both the Lincoln Creek segment (N 23rd to N 27th St) and the Little Menomonee River Parkway segments are in areas of high equity needs as illustrated in the attached map.

During the Board of Supervisors deliberation of this item at the 5/26 meeting, the following statement was made by a County Board Supervisor -

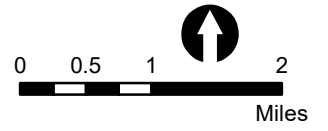
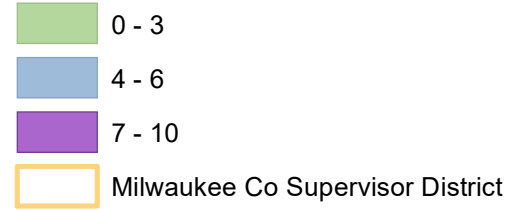
“The \$6.5 million and \$2.6 million allocated for bike trails and golf courses unfortunately does not meet the standards of Milwaukee County when it comes to racial equity.”

It is clear that additional information should be provided as to where these projects are located and how they align with the County’s vision of achieving racial equity. For the golf course project, courses are targeted for repairs in both urban and suburban communities. This includes courses in Cudahy (Warnimont), Greenfield (Zablocki), Franklin (Whitnall), as well as the City of Milwaukee (Noyes, Dretzka, Lake). The Noyes Par 3 course in particular is the current home of the First Tee of Southeastern Wisconsin program who organize school and community programs in the City of Milwaukee to improve access to the game of golf for youth and teens. First Tee seeks to grow their model and attract more future golfers at the Noyes Par 3 course.

For the trail conversion project, Parks is currently undergoing a planning process for trails on the Northwest Side of the County that has identified these two corridors (Little Menomonee River Parkway and Lincoln Creek) as having great potential to benefit the predominately African American populations in these areas. Throughout Milwaukee County, there are disproportionately fewer trails in communities of color, forcing residents of these areas to have to travel further than residents of predominately white areas to access trails and live active healthy lifestyles. This project intends to improve trail access to communities of color and support the County's vision of becoming the healthiest county in Wisconsin by achieving racial equity.

Milwaukee County Parks

2022 Equity Index (1-10)



2/2/2022

- Trail Enhancements
- Golf course projects

