

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
Inter-Office Communication

Date: April 19, 2024  
To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors  
From: Guy Smith, Executive Parks Director for Milwaukee County Parks  
Subject: Parks Equity Index, 2024  
File Type: Informational Report

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**REQUEST**

Informational report regarding updated internal tools developed by the Parks Department to improve equity-based decision-making practices.

**POLICY**

Milwaukee County has established a vision of becoming the healthiest county in Wisconsin by achieving racial equity.

Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	<b>108.01. - Achieving racial equity and health</b>
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**BACKGROUND**

This is the fifth annual update to work on the Parks Equity Index.

Related File No's:	20-638, 21-414; 22-384; 23-306
Associated File No's (Including Transfer Packets):	
Previous Action Date(s):	

The Milwaukee County Parks System is comprised of 154 properties. The budget, personnel, and management of a system that is over 15,000 acres takes the effort of many people, who are often making decisions at a pace that matches the activity in the parks. There are 19 different municipalities within Milwaukee County, and the populations served within each community are unique and diverse. In order to appropriately serve those who live in and use Milwaukee County Parks, it is necessary to have the needs of park users reflected in the guiding decisions of the department.

The most effective way to hear the opinions and needs of park users is to directly interface or have representation in the decision-making process. Because there are so many choices being made daily within the parks system, direct connection to community

members is not always an option. The Parks Department has therefore sought a tool that could inform those evaluating choices related to parks to also consider equity as a determining factor. The Planning Division of Parks frequently uses GIS (Geographic Information Systems) to assess issues through mapping of known information like natural resources, property information, etc. In order to overlay equity information in a similar way, GIS was used to compile information that could be expressed spatially, or by park.

The approach to develop this tool had 5 key steps:

1. Area Definition

Analysis areas for each park site were created to represent buffers around each park. These areas were then the basis for a focused data review at each site. The 2024 adjacency-driven approach means that a 1/2-mile service area for each park site has been used in order to focus on a 10-minute walk, or the measure of the time and distance it will take an able-bodied person to walk to a park. This 10-minute walk standard is becoming more frequently used across the nation and is the subject of work by the Trust for Public Land as well.

2. Weighted Composite Data Analysis

Evaluation of a variety of data that can give an impression of the community information for those who live within each park's service area. Data types include the CDC's Social Vulnerability Index, the AGS personal crime Index, Milwaukee County tree canopy data, and current population data available via the census. Data is then weighted and added into an overall equity calculation, applied to each park.

3. Project Review

Several reviews were held to vet the project process and products. These internal controls were completed by staff working in the planning field, Parks leadership, GIS analysts across Milwaukee County, the Milwaukee County Office of Equity, staff at the Medical College of Wisconsin, ESRI, and County racial equity ambassadors.

4. Weighted Composite Results

Compiling all available data and weighting it within the evaluation to appropriately capture equity considerations, a database was created to assess each park site individually.

5. Index Score

Using a formula to assign an equity index score of 1-10 based on equal ranges of scoring, a value was assigned to give a snapshot view of the equity score for each park's service area. In this evaluation, a higher score represents higher equity need present for the identified location.

The 2024 application of the equity index has focused on an adjacency-driven model that uses a 1/2-mile service area for each park site in order to focus on a 10-minute walk, or the measure of accessibility that is being used across the nation as the distance it will take an able-bodied person to walk to a park. The typology-driven model of the equity index that uses service area by the classification of the park type (regional park, neighborhood park, etc.) has also been updated and will continue to be used internally for decisions that warrant this type of analysis.

While never a replacement for public engagement or representation from diverse voices in decision making, the parks equity index tool provides Parks with a way to evaluate different locations in the County with a scale that measures need specific to each park site. Data validation will continue to be updated annually, as will involvement of racial equity ambassadors, Milwaukee County GIS staff, and the Office of Equity. This tool is anticipated to be used in parks decision making for project proposals, operational decisions that stretch systemwide, and other appropriate uses.

**ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN**

2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions

**FISCAL EFFECT**

NA

**TERMS**

NA

**VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES**

Sarah Toomsen, Principal Landscape Architect, Parks Assistant Director of Planning  
Pam Nooyen, Natural Resources Specialist - GIS

**PREPARED BY:**

Sarah Toomsen, Principal Landscape Architect, Parks Assistant Director of Planning

**APPROVED BY:**

Guy Smith, Executive Director Milwaukee County Parks *Guy Smith*

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**ATTACHMENTS:**

A1 - Parks 2024 Equity Index Process Presentation

A2 - Parks 2024 Adjacency-Driven Equity Index Park Listing, by Rank

A3 - Parks 2024 Adjacency-Driven Equity Index Park Listing, Alphabetically

A4 – Parks 2024 Adjacency-Driven Equity Index Park System Map

**CC:**

David Crowley, County Executive

Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office

Committee on Parks & Culture Chair

Committee on Parks & Culture Members

Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Mgr, Office of the County Clerk

Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services

Joseph Lamers, Fiscal & Budget Director, DAS

Vince Masterson, Fiscal & Strategic Asset Coordinator, DAS

Pamela Bryant, Capital Finance Manager, Comptroller's Office

Justin Rodriguez, Capital Finance Analyst, Comptroller's Office

Allyson R. Smith, Committee Coordinator, Office of the County Clerk

Ciara Miller, Research & Policy Analyst, Office of the Comptroller

Anthony Rux, Budget & Management Analyst, DAS-PSB