

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: April 22, 2022

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

From: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks

Subject: Parks Department Overview and Initiatives for 2022

File Type: Informational Report

REQUEST

This report is for informational purposes, there is no request at this time.

POLICY

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

BACKGROUND

Related File No's:	21-973
Associated File No's (Including Transfer Packets):	
Previous Action Date(s):	

Parks Department Overview

The Milwaukee County Parks Department is comprised of three Divisions – Administration and Planning, Operations and Skilled Trades, and Recreation and Business Services. These Divisions work collaboratively to provide all Parks services. Milwaukee County Parks are unique among American metropolitan parks districts in its abundance and accessibility to all citizens. Parks provide natural areas for connection to nature, recreational spaces for active living, community centers to support the health of people of all ages, and unique assets like the Mitchell Park Domes, waterparks, hundreds of miles of trails, and dozens of miles of Lake Michigan shoreline. The Milwaukee County Parks system operates at the scale of a municipality in terms of land

managed, scope of services, and skilled workforce but it is limited by its geographic disbursement, a decades-long trend of staffing declines, and an inability to keep pace with deferred maintenance.

The Administration and Planning Division has 35 full time staff that oversees Planning, Contract Management, Engagement, Finance, Marketing and Communications, and Safety, Security and Training. These functions are both customer-facing and internal services that support other operational areas of the Parks Department.

The Operations and Skilled Trades Division has 146 staff that oversee Park Operations, Skilled Trades, Forestry, Land Resources, Playgrounds, Trails, and Natural Areas. Park Operations are organized around geographic park units. The North Region includes the Brown Deer/Dretzka, Carver, Dineen, Lincoln, McGovern and Washington Park Units which has 23 full time staff members overseeing 52 parks and 1,698 acres of land. The Central Region includes the Currie, Downtown, Greenfield, and Lake Park Units which has 17 full time staff members overseeing 44 parks and 1,495 acres of land. The South Region includes the Grant, Humboldt, Kosciuszko, Jackson, Whitnall, and Wilson Units which has 27 full time staff members overseeing 54 parks and 1,869 acres of land. The Skilled Trades shop is comprised of 25 skilled trades staff members who take care of all Park facilities. These employees include carpenters, electricians, HVAC technicians, ironworkers, painters, plumbers, and construction coordinators. The Forestry and Land Resources Team of 37 members cares for the over 1.4 million trees in the parks system as well as parks' physical infrastructure such as roads. The Natural Areas team cares for over 10,000 acres of passive-use natural park land. Parks has over 210 miles of trails which are managed by one full time position. The Forestry Team also maintains the 113 playgrounds in the parks system with one full time position. Our Golf Team of 17 full time employees maintains 13 golf courses throughout the County that have witnessed a dramatic increase in play in 2020 and 2021.

The Recreation and Business Services Division has 76 staff that oversee recreation facilities such as the King and Kosciuszko Community Center, Wilson Recreation Center and Ice Arena, Milwaukee County Sports Complex in Franklin, Mitchell Park Domes, Boerner Botanical Gardens, Wehr Nature Center, McKinley Marina, Pulaski and Noyes indoor pools, 8 outdoor deep well pools, and 3 outdoor water parks. This Division also programs and permits organized sports rentals, special events, and picnic and pavilion rentals. Golf pro shop operations are managed by this division at 13 golf courses. Food and Beverage operations such as South Shore Terrace, the Whitnall Park Beer Garden, the Vine Humboldt Beer Garden and the traveling beer gardens are managed by this division as well as Slice of Ice at Red Arrow in the winter and catering and concessions operations throughout the parks system.

Initiatives for 2022

The Milwaukee County Parks system is a far-reaching network of natural areas and recreational amenities that is comprised of 157 parks and over 15,000 acres of land. The Parks Department manages and stewards this parks system and seeks to do so in a manner that respects its history while also being responsive to the needs of current residents and park users. The Parks system is an incredible resource that faces many challenges such as a deferred maintenance backlog that approaches a half billion dollars in expense, a changing climate that brings damaging storms and weather events to fragile infrastructure, and the basic struggle of providing a system that was designed to be staffed by over 1,000 people with only one quarter of that amount still in the County's workforce. Throughout 2021 Milwaukee County worked with the Wisconsin Policy Forum to produce a report (File #21-973) that outlines the fiscal challenges and staffing declines at the Parks Department that also proposes potential solutions. These solutions are undergoing a review and due diligence process and in the meantime the Department continues to operate under the limiting conditions described in the report.

For the Parks Department to meet its mission and provide valuable services to the public, Parks has established 4 key initiatives that it is pursuing in 2022.

Parks Department Initiatives for 2022

1. Sustainability – become more sustainable in all ways.
2. Multi-modal infrastructure – continue to grow the multi-modal (bicycle and pedestrian) trail network.
3. Improve safety – address public safety concerns to improve overall safety of park users and staff.
4. Support operations – provide support for how parks facilities are operated.

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

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

1B: Create and nurture an inclusive culture across County government – Parks Department initiatives for 2022 prioritizes the needs of front line staff in terms of resources provide to them and improving working conditions.

2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity – Parks will focus on expanding bicycle/pedestrian trails which encourage active and healthy lifestyles

2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions - Parks employs a Park Equity Index scoring system to help prioritize needs of the parks system

3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities – Parks will address public safety concerns and access to trails which will have an impact on health equity

3B: Enhance the County's fiscal health and sustainability – Parks will leverage outside resources from ARPA and other funding sources to limit annual County obligations to achieve these initiatives

FISCAL EFFECT

None

TERMS

None

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

None

PREPARED BY:

Jim Tarantino, Interim Deputy Director

APPROVED BY:

Guy Smith, Parks Executive Director *Guy Smith*

ATTACHMENTS:

Parks 2022 Initiatives.ppt

Park Operations Map (bubble map)

cc:

David Crowley, County Executive
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office
Parks, Energy and Environment Committee 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
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