

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
Inter-Office Communication

Date: February 17, 2023

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

From: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks

Subject: 2023 Parks Equity Index

File Type: Informational Report

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**REQUEST**

Informational report regarding the 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 third annual update to work on the Parks Equity Index.

Related File No's:	20-638, 21-414; 22-384
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 sought, therefore, a tool that could inform those evaluating choices related to parks to also consider equity as a determining factor. The Planning & Development 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. Service Area Definition

Based on park classification (regional, neighborhood, etc), define the service area for each park and create a buffer around each park. For instance, neighborhood parks serve the area around them for a distance of 0.5-miles, so circles with 0.5-mi radii were created around those parks classified as neighborhood parks.

2. Weighted Composite Data Analysis

Using data available through the Centers for Disease Control, ESRI GIS's Community Analyst extension, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, evaluate 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 the Trust for Public Lands' 10-minute walk analysis.

3. Project Review

Several reviews were held (and are still ongoing) to vet the project process and products. These internal controls were completed by staff working in the planning field, parks leadership, GIS analysts across the Milwaukee County Departments, staff at the Medical College of Wisconsin, ESRI, as well as racial equity ambassadors. Review through OAAA is being coordinated as of the date of this memo.

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.

While never a replacement for public engagement or representation from diverse voices in decision making, this 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

### **PREPARED BY:**

Sarah Toomsen, Parks Manager of Planning & Development

### **APPROVED BY:**

Guy Smith, Parks Executive Director 

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

Parks 2023 Equity Index Process Presentation

Parks 2023 Equity Index Map

Parks 2023 Equity Total List

cc: David Crowley, County Executive  
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office  
Sheldon Wasserman, Supervisor District 3, PC Chair  
Steven Shea, Supervisor District 8, PC Vice Chair  
Felicia Martin, Supervisor District 7, PC Member  
Juan Miguel Martinez, Supervisor District 12, PC Member  
Steve Taylor, Supervisor District 17, PC Member  
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  
Kelsey Evans, Committee Coordinator, Office of the County Clerk  
Ciara Miller, Research & Policy Analyst, Office of the Comptroller  
Anthony Rux, Budget & Management Analyst, DAS-PSB