



June Board Cycle

Milwaukee County Parks

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Date: June 9, 2020
To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, County Board of Supervisors
From: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks
Subject: Milwaukee County Parks Response to Peaceful Assemblies and Recent Events **(INFO)**

Issue

Public assemblies, rallies, marches and protests have become a daily occurrence since the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25th. Milwaukee County Parks have become a de facto meeting point for these assemblies to occur. This report addresses the Department's approach in response.

Background

Public assemblies in the form of rallies, marches, protests, and other similar gatherings have become a daily occurrence in American cities following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020. Milwaukee County Parks have become a de facto meeting place for these assemblies to occur including, but not limited to, Cathedral Square, Veteran's, Red Arrow, Sherman, Humboldt, and Washington Parks as well as Lincoln Memorial Drive. Recent events and assemblies have been peaceful and have had minimal impact on the parks' physical infrastructure. In some rare occasions damage to the parks has occurred, but this has generally been limited to an incident in Gordon Park on June 4th caused by reckless driving.

Milwaukee County Parks has traditionally permitted public meetings and assemblies per MCGO 47.02 which states "Public meetings, religious services, assemblies and like events, and sporting or athletic events are allowed in parks and parkways only by written permit issued by the director of parks, recreation and culture, or designee." The events of the last few weeks have occurred at such a rapid pace that we acknowledge that written permission has not been provided in advance, but also that these peaceful assemblies have had minimal negative impact on the parks system that would otherwise be addressed through the permit process. Additionally, the permit function has been used to coordinate events with other rentals in the park such as picnics, but since all rentals have been cancelled due to COVID-19, no such conflicts currently exist.



Instead of asking for permit fees, Milwaukee County Parks is asking for members of the public and event organizers to be respectful of the park and each other if they choose to gather. That means practicing physical distancing of at least 6 feet with all other people from outside your household, wearing face masks, and practicing good hygiene.

We are also asking that people clean up after themselves and take the same approach within our parks that you would a national park – pack it in, pack it out. As a result of the budgetary impacts of COVID-19, Parks staffing levels are at an all-time low. Despite all best efforts, this summer Parks simply does not have enough staff or resources to properly maintain our Parks. The community will notice changes to the level of service they are used to experiencing in parks making pack it in, pack it out even more critical.

Parks is committed to advancing the county's vision that: by achieving racial equity, Milwaukee is the healthiest county in Wisconsin. We recognize that historically and today, government has played a role in creating and perpetuating disparities within our communities of color. Parks is dedicated to taking direct action to transform the impacts of systemic racism and racial injustice within our community. Improvements for our most historically disadvantaged populations will result in healthier outcomes for all Milwaukee County residents.

Recommendation

No recommendation, report for informational purposes only.

Prepared By: Jim Tarantino, Director of Recreation and Business Services, Milwaukee County Parks

Approved By: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks



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