Milwaukee County Parks
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Date: August 20, 2020

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, County Board of Supervisors

From: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks

Subject: **Parks Racial Equity Index (INFO)**

Issue

Milwaukee County has established a vision of becoming the healthiest county in Wisconsin by achieving racial equity. Milwaukee County Parks has been working to integrate tools for equity-based decision-making into daily internal practices.

Background

The Milwaukee County Parks System is comprised of 157 properties. The budget, personnel, and management of a system that is almost 16,000 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. Parks has sought, therefore, to develop a tool that could inform those evaluating choices related to parks to also consider racial 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.

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The approach to develop this tool had 5 key steps[1]:

1. Service Area Definition

   Based on park classification (regional, neighborhood, etc), define the service area for each park and create a buffer[2] 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[3] available through ESRI GIS's Community Analyst extension, 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 included income data, at risk population data, demographic data, access to health care data, and crime data.

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, 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[4] was created to assess each park site individually.

5. Index Score

   Using a formula to assign an equity index score of 0-10 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 pubic 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 is expected to be updated annually, as will involvement of racial equity ambassadors and

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[1] Also see attachment A1 for more information about project approach and process.
[2] See attachment A2 for equity buffer information.
[3] See attachment A3 for data source details.
[4] See attachment A4 for database details.

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OAAA. This tool is anticipated to be used in parks decision making for project proposals, operational decisions that stretch systemwide, and other appropriate uses.

Recommendation

No action required; report is provided for informational purposes.

Prepared By: Sarah Toomsen, Manager of Planning & Development Milwaukee County Parks

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

Attachments

- A1 Parks Equity Index, Project Approach
- A2 Parks Equity Index, Equity Buffer Map
- A3 Parks Equity Index, Data Source Information
- A4 Parks Equity Index, Database

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- David Crowley, County Executive
- Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office
- Sheldon Wasserman, Parks, Energy & Environment Chair, Supervisor District 3
- Steven Shea, Parks, Energy & Environment Committee Vice-Chair, Supervisor District 8
- Felesia Martin, Parks, Energy & Environment Committee Member, Supervisor District 7
- Sylvia Ortiz-Velez, Parks, Energy & Environment Committee Member, Supervisor District 12
- Liz Sumner, Parks, Energy & Environment Committee Member, Supervisor District 1
- Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board
- Julie Landry, 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
- Emily Peterson, Research & Policy Analyst, Office of the Comptroller
- Lindsey Peterson, Budget & Management Analyst, DAS-PSB

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