



December Board Cycle

Milwaukee County Parks

9480 Watertown Plank Rd.

Wauwatosa, WI 53226

(414) 257-PARK

Date: November 13, 2020

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, County Board of Supervisors

From: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks

Subject: **Requesting Authorization to Accept a Greater Milwaukee Foundation Grant to Support Wisconsin Policy Forum Research (ACTION)**

Issue

Parks requests authorization to accept a grant from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation to support the Wisconsin Policy Forum in researching long-term, dedicated funding options to sustain the Milwaukee County Parks system for future generations.

Background

Milwaukee County Parks faces historic staffing and funding challenges, reaching all-time low levels of staffing and operating budget resources. Parks' long-term funding mechanisms have been in decline for over a decade, steadily becoming more dependent on revenue generation (60% of operations budget) with less tax funding (only 40%) directly supporting our non-mandated department. Parks' fiscal model is unsustainable, and alternatives must be identified; our system is at risk.

During this time of monumental societal crises, which includes the COVID-19 pandemic, racism as a public health crisis, and climate change impacts, the failure of our fiscal model has been amplified and accelerated. Parks are crucial to the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of our community – now more than ever. The department has been forced to reduce staffing, commodities, and division budgets for years and vital community recreation services are the only thing left to trim. New, long-term funding solutions are desperately needed if our system is to survive.

As such, Parks seeks to utilize grant funds from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation's (GMF) Milwaukee County Parks Fund to support the development of a research project to review the history of Milwaukee County's financial support for parks, reassess the department's current financial condition and challenges, and consider the range of options for



creating an equitable, sustainable financial path forward for the Milwaukee County parks system. This research would be conducted by the Wisconsin Policy Forum (WPF) at a total cost of \$37,300. Parks seeks to leverage \$27,500 from the GMF Parks Fund for this work with the additional \$10,200 coming from outside funding pursued by WPF.

WPF has conducted several analyses of the Milwaukee County Parks over the past two decades and that expertise – combined with its extensive experience researching and analyzing Milwaukee County’s finances – makes it uniquely qualified to conduct this project. Prior WPF research includes a 2002 report that documented the decline in the county’s property tax levy support for its parks and in departmental staffing during the preceding 25 years; a 2008 analysis that warned of the Parks’ growing infrastructure repair backlog; and additional follow-up reports in 2013 and 2018 that further tracked the growing severity of these challenges.

This research is anticipated to take place beginning in January of 2020 and last roughly six months.

Recommendation

Authorize Milwaukee County Parks to accept grant funding to support the Wisconsin Policy Forum in researching long-term, dedicated funding options to sustain the Milwaukee County Parks system for future generations.

Prepared By: Jen Francis, Deputy Director, Milwaukee County Parks



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

Attachments

- Resolution
- Fiscal Note

Copy

- 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

