



January Board Cycle

Milwaukee County Parks
9480 Watertown Plank Rd.
Wauwatosa, WI 53226
(414) 257-PARK

Date: December 30, 2020
To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, County Board of Supervisors
From: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks
Subject: Milwaukee County Parks: Department Status Update **(INFO)**

Issue

Within the context of historic staffing and funding challenges, Milwaukee County Parks' "Love Your Parks" campaign forecasts operational and administrative service level reductions in 2021 similar to those experienced in 2020.

Background

The Love Your Parks campaign was launched on July 3rd, 2021 to build a path to support the equitable, long-term sustainability of the parks system through community education and action. Over the past six months, several events and initiatives have come out of this campaign including partnerships with local businesses (ex. Sprecher Brewery, Stone Creek Coffee, Purple Door Ice Cream), public education campaigns, the Parks Explorer App, and more.

With the 2021 budget approved, the winter 2020 installment of the Love Your Parks campaign is focused on providing a service level forecast to build community awareness and understanding of Parks' needs in preparing for the year ahead.

Over the past decade, funding for basic park operations, staffing, and commodities have been cut past lean. Our shrinking staff have carried the burden of cuts for years, doing more with less and less. Since 2017, our budget has been reduced by \$5 million, continuing a decades-long pattern of required annual budget reductions for Parks.

Parks receives little-to-no funding from the State because it is a non-mandated service. When financial crisis hits the County, Parks is among the first departments to face fiscal cuts. Additionally, taxes cover less than 40% of our annual operating budget with the remaining 60% coming from user revenues. For context, Parks & Recreation agencies across the country generate an average of 23% of their annual budgets from user revenues. Parks' staff were stretched all too thin during 2020, and similar impacts will continue to be felt throughout the system in 2021. As a result, Parks must continue many of the cost-saving initiatives implemented over the past year.



Unfortunately, with COVID-19, the public health crisis of racism, and climate change ongoing, years of operating under unsustainable funding structures are catching up with the system. These crises have magnified social disparities and accelerated negative fiscal consequences - challenging the long-term viability of our parks. Despite the challenges, parks spaces have become even more a of a necessity for our community. Over the past year, park use has skyrocketed. We have relied on them as one of the few accessible public space that support our individual & collective health. We need our parks more than ever.

PLEASE NOTE: Whether you have a Parks maintenance issue, a project request, a big idea, or need access to a park, all issues and requests MUST be submitted via <https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Parks/Contact/IssueReport>. This issues "bank" is consistently monitored by Parks staff. Submissions are logged immediately and supported by staff as quickly as possible. Due to the volume of issues we receive, public health and safety issues are prioritized. ALL issues must be submitted through the Parks Issues Form. Staff should not be contacted directly with individual issues, as it reduces our limited capacity to maintain the system.

Lack of adequate funding for Parks directly impacts the service levels we can provide to the community. Going back to the way things were pre-pandemic will not solve these problems. Within the context of limited staff capacity, failing facilities, budget constraints, and reduced service levels, Parks remains focused on racial equity and public health. We owe it to future generations to re-envision what we can become - with the resources we have - to ensure that our parks system will be there for them.

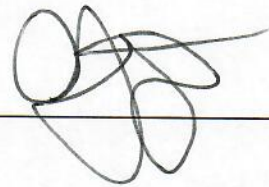
People may continue to support the Parks through the Love Your Parks campaign by volunteering, donating to the Milwaukee Parks Foundation, and sharing stories on why they love the parks at www.LoveYourParksMKE.com.

Recommendation

No action required; report is provided for informational purposes.

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

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



Attachments

- Love Your Parks – 2021 Forecast

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

