MILWAUKEE COUNTY PARKS

Five Year Strategic Plan 2015 – 2020

Veterans Park Lagoon

Photo by: Jake Rostermundt

Milwaukee County
Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture

These are Your Milwaukee County Parks:

A Rich History, a Strong Heritage, and a Bright Future

"It should be well thought of that a park exercises a very different and much greater influence upon the progress of a city in its general structure than any other ordinary public work."
– Frederick Law Olmstead

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Acknowledgements

Our community of citizenry across Milwaukee County and our region and state who enjoy and value our parks

Our workforce of over 200 full-time and 1,000 part-time and seasonal employees

Strategic Planning Team Participants

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Special Thanks

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Greetings!

There is no doubt we have a great park system and we haven't even reached our full potential yet! The purpose of this 5-year Strategic Plan is to strengthen the Milwaukee County Park System to 2020 and beyond. Like the population, the County's park and recreation needs are growing and, with that, our commitment to our mission of sustaining the legacy of our world-class park system by managing and conserving natural, cultural and recreational resources for the benefit of the community. Now we are faced with the challenge to maintain a mature park system, meet public expectations for safe, clean, accessible parks, and reposition our parks in rallying with the community to resolve community issues.

Since my arrival to Milwaukee County in 2013, I've toured the system and spoke at length with residents, staff, friends groups, business partners, advocacy groups, and elected officials. I've held eight public listening sessions to hear directly from the community how they perceive the parks, and to listen to how the parks can participate in addressing community needs. Though there were a wide range of topics discussed at each meeting, I observed some common threads.

- There is a universal passion for parks
- We have extensive organizational knowledge
- There is a substantial backlog of capitalized maintenance needs
- We must invest in marketing, communication and promotion activities
- We must identify and invest in our core park visitor services and facilities
- Protection, conservation and preservation of natural and cultural resources must be a priority

In light of increasing demands and shrinking resources, it is more critical than ever that we strategically determine priorities together. Our strategic response will include a heightened focus on core services and financial sustainability, adjusted programmatic offerings and operational standards, investing in our staff, and leveraging alternative funding and partnerships.

Investing in a 10-year Community Needs Assessment and finalizing our core service business plans will provide critical direction and data to ensure we align our offerings and capital development with what the community most values and needs.

As the Director for the Milwaukee County Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture, I am fortunate to lead an agency with an outstanding record. We face many opportunities ahead and as such we will work tirelessly with all stakeholders to lead a unified effort of identifying and achieving growth and sustainability. Our award winning staff and park system, with continued support from the County's electorate and leadership, guarantee that the same excellence will carry our parks into the future. My promise is to continue striving for consistency and quality in all that we do.

John W. Dargle, Jr.

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Our Mission, Our Vision and Our Values

Like any great organization, analyses, reviews, assessments, and audits are conducted at multiple levels to assess our status. As part of our 5-year planning cycle, we will review our mission, vision and values to ensure they continue to accurately reflect our beliefs.

The **mission** of the Milwaukee County Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture, which represents what we do best as an organization and what we believe will continue to define us five years from now, is:

To sustain the legacy of our world-class park system by managing and conserving natural, cultural and recreational resources for the benefit of the community.

Our **vision** statement expresses what our department looks like when our strategies and actions outlined in this strategic plan are implemented to achieve our full potential. Our vision, our desired future state is:

To inspire passion for parks as a part of people's lives, encouraging participation, learning and stewardship.

Our **values**, which demonstrate our beliefs as individuals, as a department, and through the culture we create in partnership with our workforce, our citizens and our partners, are:

1. ***Our Committed Stewardship****: We value our leadership in the stewardship of Milwaukee County's rich natural and cultural resources.*

2. ***Our Strong Community****: We value and embrace the diversity of our community and the social interaction that occurs within our green spaces; we value our volunteers, friends, advocates, and partners who work tirelessly and collaboratively to strengthen our park system.*

3. ***Our Quality****: We value our high standards for service delivery that distinguish us in the park and recreation industry.*

4. ***Our Parks:*** *We value the product that is our park system as a unique, safe, clean, and accessible space that provides opportunities and experiences to the public.*

5. ***Our Dedicated Workforce****: We value and support our quality workforce by fostering a positive work environment through learning and growth.*

Executive Summary

Milwaukee County Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture's 2015-2020 Strategic Plan provides direction for the entire department and presents stakeholder-centered strategic goals and objectives which determine a strong course of investment in the park system. Thirteen strategic issues, formed as questions, emerged from our environmental analysis and serve as a guide for our investment over the next five years. The four categories of strategic investment – **People, Parks, Processes, and Partners** – best describe a strategic alignment of actions that address the strategic issues to achieve identified outcomes.

People are the 200 full-time and 1,000 part time and seasonal employees that make up our dedicated and passionate workforce.

Parks are our 15,316 acres of 156 parks and parkways across 19 municipalities in Milwaukee County that offer a diverse inventory of amenities, programs and natural capital.

Processes define how we do business through standards, policies and procedures; our fiscal responsibility to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of our park system.

Partners are our community of committed volunteers, advocates, business partners, donors, non-profit and government agencies that we collaborate with to provide service to the public.

Milwaukee County Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture
2015-2020 Strategic Issues

Investing in our:	
People	How will we invest in, support, and develop our high quality and dedicated workforce? How will we improve internal structures of communication within the organization and foster a positive work environment? What is the most appropriate organizational structure for the parks?
Parks	How will we conserve, preserve and protect our natural resources and lands toward a healthy condition? How will we optimize use of our parks and facilities? How will we maintain and update our aging facilities to best serve the community?
Processes	How will we organize policies and improve business practices? How will we best measure and evaluate our performance to accomplish our mission? How will we communicate our public value and enrich citizen quality of life? How will we diversify and stabilize our funding sources? How will we improve cost recovery?
Partners	How will we engage, leverage and develop community partners and corporate partners/sponsors to optimize and broaden our programs and services? Which community priorities and issues of quality of life will we actively invest in and how will we meet the needs of a diverse community?

People

Goal 1: Create a culture of creativity, collaboration and empowerment among our diverse workforce

Objective: Invest in, support and develop our highly skilled, quality and dedicated workforce

Action item examples

- Invest in workforce development and training
- Create employee awards and recognition programs
- Establish leadership development/succession program
- Implement performance management and development plans

Objective: Improve internal structures of communication within the organization and foster a positive work environment

Action item examples

- Optimize technology
- Convene staff forums and conduct surveys
- Enhance teambuilding, mentoring and cross divisional work teams

Objective: Create the most appropriate organizational structure for the Parks

Action item examples

- Align workforce planning efforts to business and operational needs
- Analyze staffing models and explore opportunities for efficiencies

Outcomes:

- 25% of full-time staff holding professional certifications or licenses
- Hold ten staff forums and develop specific action plan from staff surveys
- Achieve 90% workforce satisfaction rating

Parks

Goal 2: Broaden and strengthen park stewardship

Objective: Conserve, preserve and protect our natural resources and parklands in a healthy condition

Action item examples

- Continue development of site-specific ecological management and restoration plans
- Develop energy management plan while replacing or renovating obsolete or inefficient energy infrastructure
- Invest in natural capital maintenance & projects
- Organize waterway operation and management program
- Minimize impact by invasive plant and animal species

Objective: Optimize use of our parks

Action item examples

- Complete 10-year Community Park and Recreation Needs Assessment
- Broaden service and programming opportunities

Objective: Maintain and update our aging facilities and equipment to best serve the public

Action item examples

- Develop ADA-Compliance transition plan
- Complete park master plans
- Refine capital development criteria and evaluation process

Outcomes:

- Complete 25 park master plans
- Complete 15 ecological management and restoration plans
- Reduce energy consumption by 15%
- Plant 5,000 trees
- Complete system-wide GIS inventory

Processes

Goal 3: Maintain excellence in public and fiscal management

Objective: Diversify and stabilize our funding sources

Action item examples

- Adopt a common financial philosophy
- Establish enterprise funds/revenue stabilization reserve
- Create a Park Foundation
- Grow concessions opportunities
- Leverage Parks Amenities Matching Fund

Objective: Improve cost recovery

Action item examples

- Invest in revenue-generating facilities to grow programs and services to improve over-all cost recovery
- Complete core service analysis and develop business plans
- Develop facility renovation, replacement and repurposing plan

Objective: Develop consistent, logical and relevant policies and procedures

Action item examples

- Complete accreditation process
- Update policy and procedure manual
- Update ordinances/statutes

Objective: Develop effective performance measures and evaluation processes

Action item examples

- Hold public listening forums and conduct surveys
- Develop budget performance measures
- Identify and implement industry best management practices & standards
- Expand customer satisfaction survey program

Objective: Communicate our public value

Action item examples

- Invest in marketing and communication
- Complete agency branding study
- Conduct economic impact study
- Create dynamic, updated website

Outcomes:

- Be awarded accreditation by the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies
- Win the Gold Medal for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management
- Host ten public listening forums and report results and actions
- Achieve 90% customer satisfaction rating
- Achieve cost recovery of 50%
- Complete six (6) business plans
- Expand e-commerce to increase revenue by 15%

Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies
CAPRA
ACCREDITED

Partners

Goal 4: Strengthen partnerships to become more responsive to community needs

Objective: Engage, leverage and develop community and corporate partners to optimize and broaden programs and services

Action item examples

- Develop a centralized volunteer and internship management program
- Expand intergovernmental partnerships
- Collaborate with community-based organizations and stakeholders to enhance service delivery and help address quality of life issues

Objective: Establish investment priorities for diverse community needs and quality of life initiatives

Action item examples

- Complete 10-year Community Park and Recreation Needs Assessment
- Expand public outreach and participation in park system planning processes
- Conduct annual community survey

Outcomes:

- Increase volunteer hours by 25%
- Connect with 80 actively-engaged friends groups
- Conduct five community surveys and develop action plans to address results

Traveling Beer Garden partnership with Sprecher Brewing Company

Clean water, clean beaches partnership with MillerCoors and UWM – School of Freshwater Sciences

Plan Implementation and Integration

After this strategic plan is adopted, implementation will be led by process champions and sponsors from internal and external stakeholder groups, under the leadership of the Director and his executive leadership. This plan is an integral piece of our overall planning effort that includes the 10-year Community Park and Recreation Needs Assessment, 3-5 year business plans, annual work plans, and individual performance plans. These plans are cohesive and provide us a flexible and dynamic framework to build upon for continued success. Through an Annual Report we will present our accomplishments and report the upcoming year's work plan once the budget is adopted.

Overall success of this plan will take teamwork, commitment, communication, and a good attitude from staff and stakeholders. The Parks team is energized and along with our Friends, partners and colleagues we will advance the Milwaukee County Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture while honoring the legacy, this gift, which has been entrusted to us.

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