

LOVE YOUR PARKS - 2021 FORECAST



MILWAUKEE COUNTY PARK SYSTEM FUNDING IS BROKEN

And this directly impacts the services that we are able to provide to you. Going back to the way things were pre-pandemic won't solve the problem. Within the context of limited staff capacity, failing facilities, budget constraints, and reduced service levels, we remained 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. With a keen mindfulness of the entire system, here are a few of the service level changes anticipated for 2021...



2021 SERVICE LEVEL REDUCTIONS

1 - OPERATIONS SERVICE REDUCTIONS

There's nothing left to trim but services, which means that many of the cost-saving initiatives implemented in 2020 may return, including:

- Seasonal staffing interruptions resulting in reduced mowing and trash collection, limited restroom openings, and other basic service level reductions. Seasonal labor will be prioritized to support revenue-generating services.
- Lifeguard shortages due to lack of training sites because of COVID-related pool closures.
- Continued facility closures at McCarty, Jackson, Grobschmidt, Hales Corners, and Holler pools.
- Partial opening of wading pools and splash pads equitably distributed throughout the county.

2 - ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE REDUCTIONS

Due to the ongoing constraints of reduced staffing, the following services will be suspended or extremely limited, per Parks discretion and pending public safety, over the next year. It is our hope to resume these processes in 2022, pending staff capacity.

- External/third party/community project requests including Park Improvement Project requests
- Non-budget approved initiatives and/or other requests that do not align with Parks mission or staffing capacity
- Land utilization permit requests
- Land acquisition requests
- Art installation requests (including murals)

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Over the past decade, funding for basic park operations, staffing, and commodities (supplies) 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. Many County services are mandated, which means that by law they must be funded. This is not the case for Parks and the result is that 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.

Unfortunately, with COVID-19, the public health crisis of racism, and ongoing climate change, years of operating under unsustainable funding structures are catching up with the system. Parks' staff were stretched all too thin during 2020, and similar impacts will continue to be felt throughout the system in 2021. Parks must continue many of the cost-saving initiatives implemented over the past year. **And think hard about what we can become in the future.**

HAVE A PARKS ISSUE? [REPORT IT HERE.](https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Parks/Contact/IssueReport) Or visit: [https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Parks/Contact/IssueReport.](https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Parks/Contact/IssueReport)

BEYOND A TRIPLE THREAT

RACISM AS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

We know that historically government has played a role in creating and perpetuating racial disparities in our communities of color. Milwaukee County Parks is a part of the solution, committed to advancing the County's vision that... **By achieving racial equity, Milwaukee County will be the healthiest county in Wisconsin.**

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Parks has been hit hard by COVID-19 resulting in all-time staffing lows, county spending freezes, service reductions, and extreme revenue losses from the closure and delayed opening of the majority of our revenue-generating activities and facilities. The impacts have accelerated the issues created by years of budget cuts and deferred maintenance.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Make no mistake that our warming atmosphere is directly impacting the Midwest. Strong winter storms left **millions of dollars of damage along our shoreline** and record high water levels in Lake Michigan are accelerating bluff erosion, washing away beaches and parking lots, and eroding the footings of bridges along our waterways.

TACKLING CHALLENGES TOGETHER

Your parks support you, and right now, they need some love. Milwaukee County Parks is tackling three crises at once: the COVID-19 pandemic, systemic racism, and climate change - all while navigating the decline of the system's fiscal model.

These crises have magnified social disparities and accelerated negative fiscal consequences - challenging the long-term viability of our parks. Despite these challenges, parks spaces have become even more 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.**

And so, the Love Your Parks remains an ongoing campaign to build a path to support the equitable, long-term sustainability of the parks system through community education and action.

**HAVE A PARKS ISSUE?
CLICK TO LET US KNOW!**

**Milwaukee County Parks
are amazing community spaces.
That need resources.
When we ensure our parks thrive,
we will thrive.**

BUT WHAT CAN I DO?

REPORT YOUR ISSUE!

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 [HERE](https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Parks/Contact/IssueReport). Or visit: <https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Parks/Contact/IssueReport>. This issues "bank" is consistently monitored by Parks. Submissions are logged immediately and supported by staff as quickly as possible. Because of the volume of issues we receive, public health and safety issues are prioritized.

IMPORTANT: PLEASE REFRAIN FROM CONTACTING STAFF DIRECTLY WITH INDIVIDUAL ISSUES, AS IT REDUCES OUR LIMITED CAPACITY TO MAINTAIN THE SYSTEM.

YOU CAN HELP!

We know you want to help and right now, these are the most impactful things you can do! Find out more by downloading the [Parks App](https://www.loveyourparks.com/). Or visit: <https://www.loveyourparks.com/>.

VOLUNTEER

It doesn't need to be fancy. On your next walk in the park, bring along a garbage bag and fill it up. Throw bag in trash. Repeat. Believe it or not, your help will go a long way!

DONATE

To the Milwaukee Parks Foundation. You didn't know we have a foundation? We do! And they're awesome. Any amount is welcome, and every little bit helps no matter how big or small.

SHARE YOUR STORY

Why do you love Milwaukee County Parks? We want to know! We are collecting your stories about why parks matter to you... we'd like your statements, your videos, your testimonials. We'll be compiling them to create our collective story of how we love our parks.

BE PATIENT

We don't like seeing the grass get high, garage spilling over, or things falling apart any more than you do. In fact, it breaks our hearts. Let us know of issues you encounter in the parks, and please be patient as we do everything we can to make things better - as soon as we can! And let your friends know the scoop too.