

A LONG-RANGE PARK AND OPEN SPACE PLAN FOR MILWAUKEE COUNTY



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Credit: Milwaukee County

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Milwaukee County has a long history of park and open space planning, including the periodic updating of the County park and open space plan, the current version of which was adopted by the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors in 1992. With the assistance of the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) in 2015, Milwaukee County initiated work on an update to its park and open space plan, with the goal of extending the planning horizon to the year 2050. This report documents that planning process and presents the resulting updated County plan.

By encouraging the protection and wise use of the underlying and sustaining natural resource base, planning for parks and open space promotes the implementation of the adopted regional land use plan. SEWRPC, charged by law with the duty of preparing and adopting a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the seven-county Southeastern Wisconsin Region, adopted VISION 2050 as an update to the regional land use and transportation plan in 2016. VISION 2050 contains numerous major elements pertaining to parks and open space and serves as a guide for park and open space planning for the Region, including Milwaukee County.

1.2 PARK AND OPEN SPACE PLANNING FOR MILWAUKEE COUNTY

History

This park and open space plan is an update to previous editions of the park and open space plan for Milwaukee County. The first such plan was included as part of SEWRPC Planning Report No. 27, A Regional Park and Open Space Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin: 2000, which was adopted by the Regional Planning Commission on December 1, 1977. In 1991, the regional park and open space plan as it applied to Milwaukee County was amended in the first edition of this report, SEWRPC Community Assistance Planning Report No. 132, *A Park and Open Space Plan for Milwaukee County*, which has a design year of 2000 and was adopted by the Regional Planning Commission on June 17, 1992 and by the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors on June 18, 1992.

The Milwaukee County Park System

The Milwaukee County Park System began with the establishment of the Milwaukee County Park Commission in 1907. That Commission envisioned and developed a park system composed of a series of greenways and parks encircling the County. The County Park Commission proposed connecting existing parks within the City of Milwaukee to outlying areas, which were selected based upon the active and passive recreational opportunities offered by, and the aesthetic appeal of, the landscape. This expansion of the park system was envisioned as an opportune means to accommodate residential growth.

Milwaukee County Parks is responsible for managing the Milwaukee County Park System within budget and policy guidelines established by the County Board. Funding for Milwaukee County Parks' operations comes from the County tax levy, park user fees, Federal and State grants, and from non-profit partners and corporate sponsors. Milwaukee County Parks' mission is to steward a thriving park system that positively impacts every Milwaukee County park visitor.

Plan Purpose

The purpose of park and open space planning is to identify the existing and future needs for recreational and open space within a geographic area and to develop a workable plan that can effectively meet those needs. Park and open space planning should also guide long-term park management and maintenance, as well as the potential acquisition and development of lands as public park and open spaces for outdoor recreational use and natural resource preservation, taking into account all the recreational facilities, public and private, provided within the subject geographic area. The conduct of park and open space planning indicates an appreciation of the value of a well-developed system of park and open space sites within a community and provides guidance and rationale for long-range planning.

This park and open space plan may be considered a tool for analyzing and planning for the future of the Milwaukee County Park System. This plan has been developed to assist the Milwaukee County Executive, the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, and park system administrators in making decisions affecting the maintenance and improvement of the Milwaukee County Park System commensurate with the outdoor recreation and natural resource management needs of present and future County residents. The purpose of this plan is to ensure the efficient and effective use of public funding while protecting the County's natural resources and satisfying the park and open space needs of County residents.

In November 2015, Milwaukee County requested that SEWRPC assist in the preparation of this plan, which is to be considered an amendment to the regional park and open space plan and an update to the County's 1991 park and open space plan. This plan is intended to ensure County eligibility to apply for and receive Federal and State aids in support of the maintenance and improvement of park and open space sites. The plan is also utilized by granting agencies to confirm that project requests align with the long-range planning goals for the park system.

Plan Preparation and Approval

The preparation of this park and open space plan was a collaborative effort between Milwaukee County Parks and SEWRPC. The preparation of this plan required Milwaukee County to consider the services it provides to County residents and review the role it plays as a park and open space provider within the regional context. The plan was prepared under the guidance of Milwaukee County Parks staff; the Parks, Energy, and Environment Committee (PEEC); the County Board of Supervisors; and the County Executive.

Plan Framework

This plan addresses additional park, open space, and recreation considerations not included within previous County-related park and open space planning efforts, including information relating to land use, population levels and distribution, anticipated growth and development, and natural resources stemming from VISION 2050, which also provides a framework that is the basis for many of the recommendations contained in this plan. This plan considers park and open space and development activities within the County and identifies the need for future studies related to a long-term funding strategy for County-owned parks, open spaces, and facility needs, including deferred maintenance.

This plan lays the groundwork for the future of the Milwaukee County Park System in the following ways:

- Planning for and developing the park system to serve the diverse interests of County citizens
- Assessing public input while planning for and developing the park system
- Establishing guidelines for the maintenance, improvement, and development of park and open space sites and outdoor recreation facilities and natural resource management
- Fulfilling requirements and providing groundwork for obtaining grants and other resources for developing and maintaining the park system

Report Format

This report sets forth findings and recommendations from the park and open space planning effort as follows:

- Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents information about the County pertinent to park and open space planning, including information on the existing resident population, land use pattern, and natural resource base of the County
- Chapter 3 provides information on existing park sites and facilities and open space lands within the County
- Chapter 4 presents a framework for plan development, which summarizes existing reports and public input opportunities that may influence the development of the plan
- Chapter 5 contains level of service information; preservation, acquisition, and development objectives, principles, and standards; and an analysis of the County's park and open space needs
- Chapter 6 sets forth the recommended park and open space plan and identifies the actions required to carry out the recommended plan

