

Milwaukee County Executive Abele: Residents support our vision for parks

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MILWAUKEE – Results from a county-wide household survey on the Milwaukee County Parks system are in, and they show that Milwaukee County residents support County Executive Chris Abele’s vision for our Parks and that the County exceeds the national average in “satisfaction with overall value received” in County Parks.

The statistically-valid survey, administered by the ETC Institute in 2016 as part of the County’s Parks with Purpose master planning campaign, asked residents a variety of questions on the services and facilities offered by the park system, how the park system should be funded, and which areas can be improved. A total of 68 percent of households indicated they were either “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with the overall value received from Milwaukee County Parks, exceeding the national average for this question.

“People in Milwaukee County feel strongly about our Parks system, and for good reason – it’s one of the best in the world,” County Executive Chris Abele said. “As we move forward with our Parks with Purpose master planning campaign, which will ensure future generations enjoy the same vibrant and sustainable Parks system we all love today, it’s important to me that the public inform our efforts. I’m

encouraged that the community supports the investments we've made over the past several years and look forward to implementing improvements in the years to come."

Providing large parks with a variety of experiences, investing in small neighborhood parks, and walking/hiking/biking/nature trails were identified as the three most important services the County should provide. Respondent households also indicated that it was more important to them to invest in the repair and improvement of the current system rather than the development of new facilities or acquisition of additional parkland.

"These survey results confirm what we already know - residents love their parks and they recognize a continuing need for the maintenance and improvement of our world-class park system," Milwaukee County Parks Director John Dargle, Jr. said.

The survey results also highlighted opportunities for improvements to the park system, including increasing marketing, developing more public-private partnerships, expanding fundraising efforts, and enhancing trails. The department has already started making noticeable improvement in these areas, including three new hires to the Parks team: a Marketing & Communications Manager to boost awareness of parks programs and services; a Development Officer, tasked with growing alternative revenue sources; a Trails Coordinator to help maintain and improve our network of trails; and a Volunteer Services Coordinator, who is enhancing relationships with friends groups and broadening our volunteer base.

Work to update and improve parks and trails is also underway. Projects currently in progress include upgrades to sections of the Oak Leaf Trail, new green infrastructure at South Shore Park, and the installation of new water slides at Cool Waters Aquatic Park. Parks throughout the system, including Doctors Park and Whitnall Park, have also received upgrades thanks to the public-private partnership with Sprecher Brewery on the Traveling Beer Gardens - a model that survey respondents are very supportive of.

The survey results, along with input from a robust series of public listening sessions held in 2016, will inform the development of two related park master plans: the 10-Year Park System Master Plan and the 2050 Park & Open Space Plan.

The 10-Year Park System Master Plan will provide recommendations for facilities, programs and services, maintenance and operations, administration, and

management of the Milwaukee County Parks System.

The 2050 Park & Open Space Plan will address long-range land use considerations and make recommendations on the distribution of parks facilities throughout the County based on anticipated population scenarios.

Both plans will support Milwaukee County's vision as a model government in the way it serves residents and strengthens community.

Community input from the 2016 household survey will support the County's resident-driven planning effort to create a road map for the long-term sustainability of the parks, trails, and recreation facilities that make up the world-class Milwaukee County Parks System.