

Milwaukee County Sup. Haas: Budget amendment bolstering park system recommended by Finance Committee

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MILWAUKEE – The County Board’s Finance Committee unanimously recommended for adoption a budget amendment that adds more than \$1.6 million to the Parks Department budget to address mission critical needs in the park system.

“Our park system is the crown jewel of Milwaukee County,” said Supervisor Jason Haas, a sponsor of the budget amendment. “While our parks remain drastically underfunded, I am proud that we were able to advance a substantial investment into parks across all of Milwaukee County with unanimous support from the Finance Committee.”

The funds will be placed in a contingency account in the Parks Department budget and may be used for opening and staffing additional aquatic facilities and splash pads, major maintenance of mission critical infrastructure, community engagement, seasonal staffing to maintain parks and staff major events, technology improvements related to Wi-Fi access, and LED lighting improvements.

The Parks Department will provide a report to the County Board no later than the March 2022 meeting cycle on the planned use of the funds accompanied by a request to release the funds.

“County parks are a valued public asset beloved by residents for the energy they bring to our daily lives,” said Chairwoman Marcelia Nicholson. “I am proud to put

forward a budget amendment informed by the Wisconsin Policy Forum's recent report detailing Milwaukee County Parks' troubled finances and potential solutions. This amendment does not overcome the state-imposed limits on our ability to generate new revenues. But it does provide a needed investment administered through a racial equity lens."

The amendment also includes an additional appropriation of \$90,000 to install speed bumps, speed tables, or other traffic slowing devices at numerous parkways and parking lots within the park system where speeding and reckless driving has been an issue.

Funding for six Lead Ranger positions is allocated in the amendment. The Lead Rangers will be responsible for assisting with encroachments and fee compliance, preventing illegal dumping, and responding to calls from parks staff. The rangers' primary responsibility is to be ambassadors for the park system to obtain voluntary compliance with rules and regulations.

The amendment is paid for with a revised sales tax revenue projection which estimates an additional \$2.1 million in sales tax revenue for 2022 and by removing a \$700,000 capital project in the Office of the Sheriff's budget to procure and install cameras at Bradford Beach.