



Annual Report & Budget Recommendation

Conservation and Policy Council of the
Forest Preserves of Cook County



Submitted on November 5, 2019

To President Preckwinkle and the Board of Commissioners
Forest Preserves of Cook County

By Wendy Paulson, *Chairman*, Conservation and Policy Council



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November 5, 2019

Dear President Preckwinkle:

Significant progress has been made in the five years that the Conservation and Policy Council and more than 70 organizational partners have worked with the FPCC to advance the ambitious goals of the Next Century Conservation Plan (NCCP). More than 13,000 acres across the Forest Preserves are now under restoration or active management, and more than 200,000 visitors have enjoyed the FPCC's new campgrounds. Organizational reforms have made the FPCC more transparent and accountable, and more than two dozen initiatives are helping the FPCC reduce costs and use resources more efficiently and effectively. Equally important, partnerships with the Chicago Zoological Society, the Chicago Botanic Garden, conservation advocates and other organizations are as strong as they have ever been .

But significant challenges remain.

Restoring a total of 30,000 acres of habitat and maintaining the woodlands, prairies and forests in a healthy condition will require thousands of dedicated volunteers to complement and sustain the work of the FPCC staff and contractors. Also, proactive efforts are required to promote racial and social equity and to make the preserves welcoming and accessible to all. And recurring pressures to use the preserves for uses inconsistent with its mission—or even worse, to sell land for development—must be firmly opposed. The Council has devoted much of our time this year to developing position papers to address these specific challenges, and we are confident these issues can be resolved.

The Council is concerned that the FPCC is still not able to scale up restoration, acquisition, and other work to meet the NCCP's long-range goals. We also recognize and affirm the FPCC's future obligations to retirees—many of whom have spent a lifetime in public service and will not receive federal social security benefits. While the proposed 2020 budget will allow the Forest Preserves to hold steady financially and programmatically for one more year, the need for additional resources must be addressed now to avoid significant reductions in programs and services in 2021 and beyond

Fortunately, there is currently a high level of support and collaborative leadership from General Superintendent Arnold Randall and his senior team, and from you, Madame President, and the entire FPCC Board of Commissioners. This is a historical anomaly, and it is a moment that needs to be capitalized on in order to reap lasting benefit from the

significant investments made in the NCCP. For this reason, Friends of the Forest Preserves, Openlands, The Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Lands are leading efforts to build support for a referendum in 2020 to increase public resources for the Forest Preserves. **The Council recommends that a referendum be placed on the March 2020 ballot to allow voters to decide whether to provide additional funding to restore and sustain the Forest Preserves, to acquire and protect other natural areas that are at risk, to maintain the preserves in a manner which is welcoming and accessible to all, and to meet the district's pension obligations.** My fellow Council members and I believe a referendum in 2020 is the best opportunity to ensure that this world-class treasure is protected for generations to come. Specifically, we recommend the following ballot language:

“Shall the limiting rate under the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law for the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, Illinois, be increased by an additional amount equal to 0.025 percent above current limiting rate to conserve and restore land to protect the water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams; provide outdoor programs for children; help control flooding; and improve and maintain existing forest preserves and trails for levy year 2021 and be equal to 0.079 percent of the equalized assessed value of the taxable property therein for levy year 2022? For the 2022 levy year the approximate amount of the additional tax extendable against property containing a single-family residence and having a fair market value at the time of the referendum of one hundred thousand dollars is estimated to be \$5.13.”

Sincerely,



Wendy Paulson,

Chairman

Conservation and Policy Council
Forest Preserves of Cook County

Next Century Conservation Plan Vision

The people of Cook County will celebrate and nurture our thriving woodlands, prairies and waters as world-class treasures that sustain our great metropolis.

ECOSYSTEM VALUATION

A recent study by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) estimates the ecosystem service value of the Forest Preserves in terms of the flood control, groundwater recharge, water purification, and carbon storage services provided. The analysis found that the Forest Preserves provide nearly \$470 million in annual value of ecosystem services as follows:

FPCC Annual Ecosystem Service

Flood Control	\$323,029,800
Groundwater Recharge	\$87,861,500
Water Purification	\$5,807,900
Carbon Storage	\$841,900
Total Annual	\$469,812,300

Source: Yeung, Louise. "Ecosystem Valuation." Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. (2015)

The Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC) protect and restore large landscapes for current and future generations. They offer opportunities for refuge from urban crowds and noise, learning and exploration, recreation, as well as habitat for Midwest wildlife and plant life. They are to the Chicago region what the National Parks are to our country. When the grand vision of the Forest Preserves of Cook County was first conceived in the early 1900s, the visionaries were far ahead of their time. No urban/metropolitan area in the country had anything approaching the scale of the majestic nature sanctuaries that make up the Forest Preserves of Cook County. The wisdom of that legacy could not be any more apparent than it is today as the earth is facing the existential threat of climate change. There are few things on earth as effective in combatting climate change as healthy forests and grasslands and wetlands. The preserves protect and clean our water, purify our air and reduce flooding. Healthy forest preserves provide all these benefits to the citizens of Cook County while performing the most critical function of ameliorating the impact of climate change by sequestering carbon.

In 2014, the Board of Commissioners adopted the Next Century Conservation Plan and began implementing a set of bold actions to protect and restore the Forest Preserves and to solidify Cook County as a national leader for ecological restoration in an urban setting. The plan envisions a future where "[t]he people of Cook County celebrate and nurture our thriving woodlands, prairies and waters as world-class treasures that sustain our great metropolis." To achieve this, the plan calls for a significant commitment to restore habitat to robust ecological health, to acquire and protect more land, and to make the Forest Preserves more inviting and accessible to all Cook County residents.

The FPCC and its partners are working together more closely than ever before to ensure steady progress to advance these ambitious goals. In 2015 they created the NCCP implementation committees and identified more than 60 priority initiatives to achieve specific outcomes during the first five years. In 2016 they began implementing these initiatives. The current status of each initiative is presented in the updated Five-Year Implementation Strategy; this report presents an overall assessment of the progress made to date and identifies opportunities and challenges going forward.

As always, this report includes our recommendation related to the district's proposed budget for the upcoming year. As indicated in Section 5 of the report, the Council is recommending approval of a status quo budget for the Forest Preserves for one more year. After 2020, the FPCC must move in one direction or another. The district will either secure additional resources to preserve and restore natural open land for all the people of Cook County, or it must plan to cut back services and programs in order to address its backlog of deferred maintenance and meet its pension obligations.

Fortunately, there is a window of opportunity today to ensure that our world-class Forest Preserves are protected for generations to come.

We recommend that a referendum be placed on the March 2020 ballot to allow voters to decide whether to provide additional funding to restore and sustain the Forest Preserves, to acquire and protect other natural areas that are at risk, to maintain the preserves in a manner which is welcoming and accessible to all, and to meet the district's pension obligations.

Finally, the important progress made during the past three years would not have been possible without the support of more than 26 sponsors and more than 70 partner organizations which have committed their time, expertise, and resources to this effort. We conclude our report by acknowledging these important contributors.

Our report is organized into six sections:

1. Key Achievements
2. Overall Progress Toward Priority Initiatives
3. Assessment of Organizational Reforms
4. Strategies for Addressing Critical Challenges
5. Recommendation Regarding the 2019 Budget
6. Sponsors and Partners

1

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

The Next Century Conservation Plan (NCCP) is focused on four priority goal areas: Nature, People, Economy and Leadership. For each goal area, the FPCC and its partners created implementation committees which have been working to achieve measurable outcomes. While massive scaling up has not yet occurred, important progress has been made.

Today, more than 13,000 acres of land preserved by the FPCC are under restoration or active management. Priority sites are being tracked to assess progress towards achieving high-quality ecological condition; in 2020 the results will be available on the FPCC's website.

The Conservation Corps, operated in conjunction with a wide variety of operational and funding partners, provides paid, hands-on experiences working in the preserves to participants from across Cook County's diverse communities—including youth and those with barriers to employment. The program has more than doubled in size in the last five years, from engaging 164 participants in 2014 to more than 329 in 2019.

The Forest Preserves has added nature play areas, installed new signage, extended trails and expanded programs to invite, excite and engage diverse visitors from all walks of life in the preserves. In 2014, the Forest Preserves opened five new campgrounds, and as of July 2019 more than 215,000 people have camped at these facilities, generating \$2 million in revenue. New and innovative partnerships such as the Maywood Paddling Program are connecting more people to nature—including residents of communities which have historically not had strong connections to the Forest Preserves. And the FPCC has expanded its commitment to accessibility, including hiring an advisor, launching ADA working groups, and completing training of all FPCC staff on working with people with disabilities.

To address climate change, pollution, invasive species, habitat loss and other pressing environmental issues of our time, the FPCC developed a Sustainability & Climate Resiliency Plan which is guiding efforts to harness the

various strengths within the Forest Preserves to help clear the air, reduce flooding, and recharge groundwater.

As good stewards of public resources, the FPCC has explored more than 50 initiatives to reduce costs and/or to use resources more effectively. Cost savings have been generated by establishing in-house pavement repair teams, reducing printing, converting to a fuel-efficient fleet, and refinancing bonds. In all, 27 of the cost savings initiatives have been implemented or are underway.

These and other key achievements to date are highlighted in Figure 1. As noted in Section 6 of this report, this progress would not have been possible without the assistance of more than 70 partner organizations which are leading or assisting on a wide range of projects and programs designed to advance the NCCP goals.

NATURE

Native landscapes will thrive for generations.

- ✓ More than 13,000 acres under restoration or active management
- ✓ Expanded the prescribed burn program to increase burn acreage by more than 155% from 2014 to 2019 (16,638 vs. 42,563)



CCLC Crew

- ✓ More than doubled the size of the Conservation Corps program, from 164 participants in 2014 to more than 329 in 2019
- ✓ Completed the Master Sustainability & Climate Resiliency Plan designed to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050
- ✓ Ecological health assessments underway at 42 sites
- ✓ Five sites designated as Illinois Nature Preserves and/or Illinois Land and Water Reserves (2016 to 2019)
- ✓ Restoration funding incorporated into the FPCC's operating budget (starting in 2018)
- ✓ Completed the *Natural and Cultural Resource Master Plan* to prioritize restoration efforts
- ✓ 4538 volunteers contributed more than 65,000 hours in 2018

PEOPLE

Everyone in Cook County will feel welcome at the forest preserves—and will seek them out for discovery, renewal and fun.

- ✓ Restructured the Department of Conservation and Experiential Programs (CEP) to a zone model and developed a campus model in Calment City to establish stronger partnerships with community-based organizations
- ✓ Welcomed 215,364 campers at new or renovated campgrounds (2015 through Sept. 2019)
- ✓ Developed new approaches to engage community leaders and connect urban communities to nature, such as nature play, Camping Leadership Immersion Courses, and Greater Maywood Paddling Program
- ✓ Added 32 miles of new regional trails (2016 to 2018)
- ✓ Hired advisor, launched ADA working groups, and completed training of all the FPCC staff on working with people with disabilities
- ✓ Upgraded life-safety and accessibility improvements to trails, comfort stations, picnic groves and buildings
- ✓ In partnership with Cook County Department of Public Health, launched Wellness in the Woods Initiative to engage residents to be active, playful and restful in nature; distributed 70,000 brochures (in English and Spanish) to 300 community health organizations
- ✓ Completed 12 "Gateway" master plans at sites to serve as activity hubs
- ✓ Established the FPCC as a premier birding destination by developing the Bird the Preserves initiative and creating a strong, on-going partnership with the birding community

NATURE

Native landscapes will thrive for generations.

- ✓ Robust training program established for stewards and other volunteers; on-line training added in 2018
- ✓ Acquired the 397-acre Horizon Farm site and the 164-acre Holy Family Villa
- ✓ Field investigations completed for all high priority archaeological sites
- ✓ Established a native seed policy
- ✓ Developed a tree protection manual
- ✓ In partnership with the University of Illinois Extension, established the Conservation@Home Initiative to expand the functional borders of the preserves by encouraging homeowners to plant native vegetation



Through the Conservation@Home program, residents of Cook County are encouraged to adopt “Forest Preserves Friendly” practices while providing wildlife and native plant habitat in residential, school and workplace gardens.

PEOPLE

Everyone in Cook County will feel welcome at the forest preserves—and will seek them out for discovery, renewal and fun.

- ✓ Installed new zipline/rope course, which has attracted nearly 57,000 visitors since opening in 2016
- ✓ In partnership with the Chicago Zoological Society, trained all the FPCC programming staff to develop and facilitate early childhood nature play programs and expanded nature play sites throughout the forest preserves
- ✓ In partnership with Misericordia Chicago and Chicago Zoological Society, created the Wildlife Connections Ambassadors program to train adults with developmental disabilities to work with school children at nature centers
- ✓ Developed training and lending libraries for kayaking and camping programs
- ✓ In partnership with Chicago Botanic Gardens, nature centers participated in the Bud Burst program to engage citizen scientists in nation-wide study documenting pollinators who visit native plants
- ✓ Established formal partnership agreement with Pathways to Adventure Council of the Boy Scouts of America to collaborate on programming, camping and service projects
- ✓ Planted native gardens at nine schools via the Conservation@Home program
- ✓ Developed nature play guidelines and expanded nature play at campgrounds and nature centers
- ✓ Via the Great Rivers Initiative and funding from the Chicago Community Trust, brought programming to the Chicago Riverdale Community, which includes Beaubien Woods and Altgeld Gardens housing development

ECONOMICS

Communities will value the economic benefits of protected lands.

- ✓ Promoted the FPCC to hundreds of thousands of people via billboards, radio, TV, and an
- ✓ Emmy-award-winning documentary
- Collaborated with the Zoo, Garden and other partners to market special events such as Bird the Preserves
- ✓ Completed ecosystems analysis estimating \$469M annual regional benefit generated by the FPCC via flood control, water recharge and purification, and carbon storage
- ✓ Documented the FPCC's \$1.5B economic impact to region for the period of 2003 to 2015

LEADERSHIP

Visionary conservation leaders will safeguard, expand and bring increased resources to the Forest Preserves.

- ✓ Launched the Conservation and Policy Council
- ✓ Refined cost estimates for major elements of the NCCP
- ✓ Analyzed more than 50 initiatives to reduce costs or raise revenues; 27 have been implemented or are underway
- ✓ Developed cost recovery guidelines
- ✓ Completed concessions and permits master plan
- Completed drafts of phase one and two of the golf system analysis
- ✓ Completed first phase of cost-benefit analysis for aquatic centers
- ✓ Aligned performance metrics for all the FPCC departments with the NCCP goals
- ✓ Completed annual evaluations of the NCCP implementation

2

OVERALL PROGRESS TOWARD PRIORITY INITIATIVES

For each NCCP goal area, the plan identifies specific outcomes and priority actions. The NCCP implementation committees used these outcomes and priority actions to create a work plan with 64 initiatives to be undertaken during the first phase of implementation (2016 through 2020). Progress to date is summarized in Figures 2 through 6 which, as indicated below, present the goals, five-year-outcomes, and priority actions to be completed. For a detailed progress report on all 64 initiatives, please see the updated five-year plan at tinyurl.com/fpdcc-cpc2019

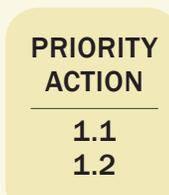
As indicated, the vast majority of the initiatives (86%) are completed or moving forward. Six percent have been re-directed to adapt to lessons learned or to respond to new opportunities, and 8% are stalled due to a lack of resources. For the most part, the Council believes this reflects a healthy balance of steady progress, adaptability and risk taking. However, the Council remains concerned that several initiatives are not on target to meet 2020 milestones. Furthermore, the pressures of addressing the FPCC's backlog of deferred maintenance, its on-going pension deficit, and other rising costs will continue to constrain the availability of resources to support key restoration, acquisition, capital improvements and other NCCP goals. As described in Section 5 of this report, the proposed 2020 budget addresses only some of these issues.



NCCP envisions a future where “[t]he people of Cook County will celebrate and nurture our thriving woodlands, prairies and waters as world-class treasures that sustain our great metropolis”. The plan has four primary goal areas: Nature, People, Economy and Leadership.



For each goal area, the specific outcomes to be achieved during the first five years are summarized in Figures 2 through 6.



Priority actions defined in the plan and intended to achieve both short-term and long-term outcomes are summarized in Figures 3 through 6.

As indicated, the NCCP implementation committees identified 64 specific initiatives (programs, projects and other work) to be completed by 2020 to achieve desired five-year outcomes. This includes 21 Nature initiatives, 23 People initiatives, and 10 initiatives each for Economy and Leadership. The current status of each initiative is depicted in Figures 3 through 6 as:

- Completed
- In-progress
- Re-directed
- Stalled

Figure 2 - NCCP: Measuring Progress During the First Five Years



Figure 3 - Nature: Measuring Progress During the First Five Years



✓ Completed

▲ In-progress

▶ Re-directed

▼ Stalled

Figure 4 - People: Measuring Progress During the First Five Years



Figure 5 - Economy: Measuring Progress During the First Five Years

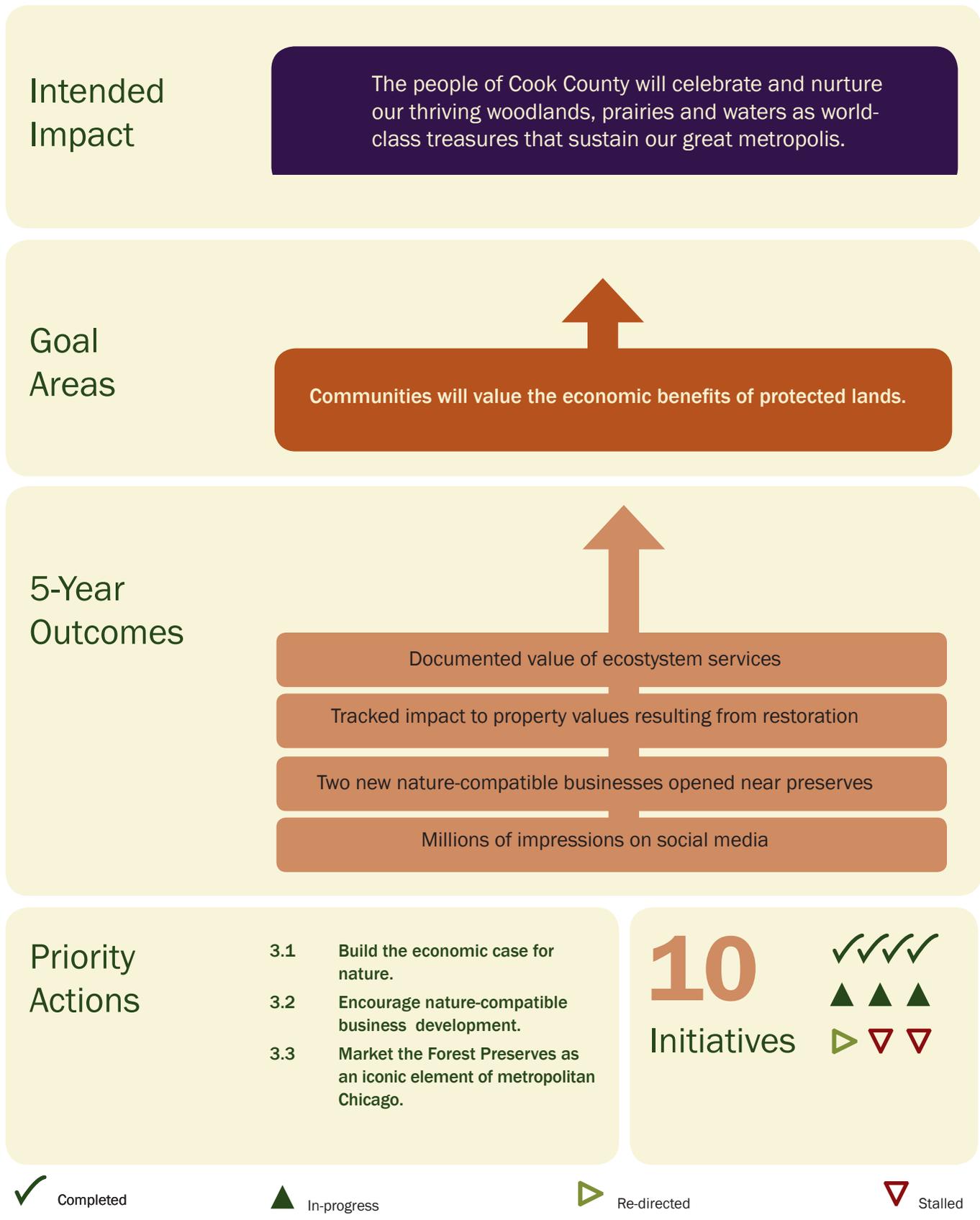


Figure 6 - Leadership: Measuring Progress During the First Five Years



3

ASSESSMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL REFORMS

Five committees (Nature, People, Economics, Leadership and Steering) comprised of staff and partners coordinate the implementation of the NCCP. The committees and the Council recognized that organizational reforms for the FPCC were needed to improve transparency and accountability and to ensure that the district's limited resources are used in the most efficient and effective way possible. In 2016, the committees agreed to focus on seven operational changes which must be made in order to implement the plan successfully.

On September 5, 2019, the NCCP Steering Committee conducted its annual evaluation of progress to date toward these organizational reforms. A summary of the committee's findings is presented in Figure 7. (The committee's full discussion is documented in the meeting minutes.)

For each organizational reform, the committee considered where the Forest Preserves started, the challenges that have arisen, and any additional changes needed. The committee then assigned a grade of A, B, C, D or F, with A being the highest and F the lowest. An arrow is used to depict whether efforts are moving in the right direction, staying the same, or slipping back.

The grades presented in Figure 7 do not indicate whether the priority has or has not been achieved; rather they are intended to reflect progress to date.

As indicated, two closely related organizational reforms—scaling up and raising new resources—received “C” grades once again. The committee believes that the FPCC and its partners are doing the best they can to make progress towards NCCP goals, and committee members are encouraged that conservation advocates and other partners support a plan to raise the resources needed to successfully implement the plan. But the committee also recognizes that the FPCC cannot maintain the status quo much longer, let alone scale up as needed. Without new resources, significant cuts to programs and services will need to occur and much of the progress made in recent years may slip.



FIGURE 7 - Evaluation of Organizational Reforms

PRIORITY	GRADE	COMMENTS
<p>1 Scaling Up</p>	<p>C ↑</p>	<p>In the absence of new resources, the FPCC and partners are doing the best they can to make progress. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The FPCC’s Conservation and Experiential Programs (CEP) team has re-organized into zones and is building relationships with communities within each region. The Preserves are awarding small grants to partners which provide activities aligned with the FPCC mission, and an increasing number of partners are leading and co-leading events which bring thousands of visitors to FPCC sites. • The FPCC is utilizing the Gateway Plans to attract private donations for big capital investments. (For example, the FPCC and the Foundation are working with the Village of Winnetka to raise funds for a new boathouse at the Skokie Lagoons.) • The Foundation is helping to attract donations for benches and trees. • The FPCC is partnering with various groups and hundreds of volunteers to do restoration, but it is unable to scale up further without additional resources.
<p>2 Using Resources Efficiently</p>	<p>A</p>	<p>The FPCC has worked hard to ensure existing resources are used as efficiently and effectively as possible. More than 50 initiatives to raise revenues and cut costs have been analyzed. Recent efforts include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requests for proposals to install cell towers and billboards at non-sensitive sites have been issued, but have not yet attracted investment. • Energy efficient light fixtures and alternative fuel vehicles are being incorporated. • Room rentals, pool operations, and campground management have been outsourced and costs reduced. • In-house capacity to repair parking lots has been expanded. • \$100K in over-billing from Com Ed was identified and recovered.
<p>3 Building Partnerships & Leveraging Resources</p>	<p>B ↑</p>	<p>FPCC continues to build partnerships and leverage resources. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships with Friends of the Forest Preserves (FOTFP) and the Cook County Housing Authority have expanded workforce training programs • Partnerships with hundreds of volunteers and with Openlands, Audubon, and other conservation agencies allow restoration and maintenance work to continue (though it cannot scale up without additional resources) • Science research projects, nature play, and other collaborations with the Zoo and Garden have increased each year • The FPCC is working with County Highways and private companies to direct mitigation funding to Forest Preserve sites • CAMBR is maintaining bike trails • The County’s Department of Environment has provided substantial time and expertise to develop and implement the FPCC sustainability plan • Westchester Library bought a whole section of books on nature and kayaking to promote and support the award-winning Maywood Paddle program <p><i>“If you try to measure this against the long-term goals of the plan, we are behind. But if you look at where we started and what we have achieved in these first five years, we are doing great.”</i></p> <p><i>Benjamin Cox NCCP Steering Committee Co-chair</i></p>

For each priority, the committee considered where we started, the challenges that have arisen, and any additional changes still needed. The committee then assigned a grade of A, B, C, D or F, with A being the highest and F indicating failure. An arrow is used to depict whether things are moving in the right direction, staying the same, or slipping back.

A - Highest
 F - Failure
 Right Direction 
 Staying the Same 
 Slipping Back 

FIGURE 7 - Evaluation of Organizational Reforms

PRIORITY	GRADE	COMMENTS
<p>4 Changing Culture</p>	<p>A</p>	<p>There has been a profound culture shift to incorporate best practices and to make the FPCC more transparent and accountable. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FPCC conducts on-going customer service surveys and uses the results to make operational changes. Significant improvements have resulted. Public facing staff, including FPCC police, are achieving very high marks in these surveys. • The Superintendent and senior staff are visible around the district and field staff see them. The senior team acknowledges and thanks volunteers for the work they are doing. • The FPCC green team is implementing strategies to make the forest preserves more sustainable and resilient. • The FPCC REDI team is implementing strategies to foster a work culture which is welcoming to all employees and all visitors. <p>“Has the FPCC culture changed? This is almost a laughable question when I look at where we were ten years ago compared to today.”</p> <p><i>John McCabe Director of Resource Managment</i></p>
<p>5 Communicating</p>	<p>B</p> <p>↑</p>	<p>FPCC and its partners are working to raise awareness and connect more people to nature. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 70 presentations have been given to village boards, Rotary clubs and the like, and other civic organizations. • Many of the villages air these presentations on their local cable channel; some have also aired the FPCC documentary. • FPCC has also been highlighted on websites and in organizational newsletters. • FPCC is strategically investing its modest advertising budget to reach a broad and diverse audience via radio interviews on WVON, a live FB feed on Univision live-FB feed, short videos produced and aired by Univision, etc. • FPCC launched a new, mobile friendly website which can be translated into multiple languages and is accessible to people with disabilities • RM hosted the Illinois Prescribed Fire conference at Moraine Valley; this was great PR for the FPCC. <p>“We are yelling as loud as we can, but we need a bigger megaphone.”</p> <p><i>Carl Vogel Communications Director</i></p>
<p>6 Raising New Resources</p>	<p>C</p> <p>↓</p>	<p>The steering committee is well aware of the need to raise resources. Advocates have a plan, and this is important progress. But there is potential of slipping back. And the hole is getting deeper and the window is closing.</p>

For each priority, the committee considered where we started, the challenges that have arisen, and any additional changes still needed. The committee then assigned a grade of A, B, C, D or F, with A being the highest and F indicating failure. An arrow is used to depict whether things are moving in the right direction, staying the same, or slipping back.

A - Highest
 F - Failure
 Right Direction 
 Staying the Same 
 Slipping Back 

FIGURE 7 - Evaluation of Organizational Reforms

PRIORITY	GRADE	COMMENTS
7 Continuity	B ↑	<p>The NCCP calls for “visionary conservation leaders to safeguard, expand and bring increased resources to the Forest Preserves.” The Council has really helped turn a corner. As a result, the probability of enduring, focused leadership and increased accountability is much stronger today. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council is playing an important leadership role in development of the position papers. • New council members are very engaged. • Council members have met with Commissioners, village boards, and other organizations to raise awareness and build support. • Mike DeSantagio designed an evaluation matrix and spent hours working with staff to identify criteria and assess various recreational activities and facilities. • The Council played a key role advocating to maintain an independent FPCC police force.

For each priority, the committee considered where we started, the challenges that have arisen, and any additional changes still needed. The committee then assigned a grade of A, B, C, D or F, with A being the highest and F indicating failure. An arrow is used to depict whether things are moving in the right direction, staying the same, or slipping back.

A - Highest

F - Failure

Right Direction



Staying the Same



Slipping Back



4

STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING CRITICAL CHALLENGES

As indicated in Section 2 (Overall progress toward priority initiatives), a lack of resources has prevented the FPCC and its partners from scaling up their work as required to achieve the ambitious goals of the NCCP. This, and the other funding challenges discussed in section 4.1, remain the most significant obstacles to success. Other critical challenges related to land acquisition and disposition, racial equity, compatible recreation, and scaling up volunteers are addressed in sections 4.2 through 4.5. The Council has devoted much of this year to developing position papers to address these challenges.

In this section, we present the initial thinking of the subcommittees of Council members, partners and staff on these important topics. These positions will be vetted with stakeholders and further refined. The Council will present the final version of these papers to the President and Board of Commissioners in 2020.

4.1 Raising Resources Needed to Restore and Sustain the Forest Preserves

The Next Century Conservation Plan envisions a future where “The people of Cook County will celebrate and nurture our thriving woodlands, prairies and waters as world-class treasures that sustain our great metropolis.” To achieve this, the plan calls for a significant commitment to restore habitat to robust ecological health, to acquire and protect more land, and to expand opportunities for people to connect to nature. The Civic Consulting Alliance estimates it will cost more than \$2 billion dollars to meet these goals over the next several decades. Raising these kinds of resources is a significant challenge, but if the FPCC and its partners are successful, all the people of Cook County will benefit from cleaner air and water and improved climate-resilience, native ecosystems will be restored to health, and opportunities to escape our busy urban environment and enjoy a hike, bike ride, picnic or fishing trip in a beautiful natural setting will be safeguarded for generations to come.

The plan also calls for investments to make the Forest Preserves more inviting and accessible to all Cook county residents and visitors. In recent years, the FPCC has repaired and expanded its system of trails, invested in new and renovated campgrounds, and installed accessible ramps and bathrooms at various picnic groves and other sites. But the capital funding available is insufficient to keep pace with a growing backlog of urgent needs—including roof replacements, parking lot repairs, boiler replacements and other critical maintenance. In 2019, the FPCC issued a modest capital bond of approximately \$8 million to fund its most urgent capital needs. However, these funds are inadequate to cover the \$197 million of capital needs outlined in the district’s current capital improvement plan. Furthermore, the FPCC’s two key partners, the Chicago Zoological Society and the Chicago Botanic Garden, both have their own critical and significant capital needs.

Finally, the FPCC has a legal and ethical duty to meet its pension obligations to retirees. The average pension payment to a Forest Preserves retiree is \$32,127 per year, and most of these retirees do not receive federal social security. The FPCC currently contributes \$4.1 million per year to pensions and has budgeted to do the same in 2020; an additional \$9.2 million per year would be necessary to eliminate the existing pension gap over 30 years. If the FPCC does not increase its payments into the pension fund, the fund will be depleted by approximately 2040. Current law does not allow the FPCC to increase its payment, but even if the law did, the FPCC would not be able to contribute the \$9.2 million per year without massive cutbacks. The FPCC will continue to work with state and local elected officials to reach a long term and sustainable solution to pension underfunding. Meeting its pension obligations remains a critical challenge for the district.

These are significant challenges. Yet we believe there is an opportunity to solve these challenges and to create a far more effective and lasting partnership between the FPCC, volunteers and partner organizations working to implement the NCCP. We believe there is an opportunity

today to protect and sustain the forest preserves for generations to come and to provide much needed assistance for the Chicago Zoological Society and the Chicago Botanic Garden.

The Council is working with Friends of the Forest Preserves, Openlands, the Nature Conservancy, the Trust for Public Lands and other advocates and partners to build public support for raising the resources needed to achieve NCCP goals and meet the FPCC pension obligations.

We recommend that the Board place a referendum on the March 2020 ballot to allow voters to decide whether to approve a modest increase in the property tax for these purposes. The Trust for Public Lands reports that voters across the nation are generally supportive of modest tax increases (e.g., \$20 to \$30 per household per year) for conservation purposes. While this insufficient to cover all the needs of the NCCP, let alone the entire FPCC, it will allow significant progress to be made—especially if the FPCC, its partners and advocates leverage those resources. To achieve this, we recommend the following:

- **Allocate a majority of new resources to fund land acquisition, habitat restoration , and other NCCP goals.** Land acquisition and habitat restoration are the two major cost drivers of the NCCP and should receive substantial increases and sustained support. Additional accessibility improvements and investments in improved signage, trails, nature centers and other public-facing facilities will make the preserves more welcoming and accessible to all, and increased investments from the FPCC and partners can help drive a dramatic ramp-up of volunteers. A majority of new funding should be allocated to implementing these and other NCCP goals.

4

STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING CRITICAL CHALLENGES *(continued)*

- **Monitor and confirm restoration effectiveness across the preserves.** The NCCP articulates specific goals for the ecological health of the preserves. To ensure that current and future investments are used effectively, the Preserves need a system through which stakeholders can confirm the Preserves are on the right path or course correct, as needed. The FPCC is working with the Prairie Research Institute and six citizen-scientist programs to establish a system to measure and document restoration effectiveness across the county. Results should be posted to the FPCC’s website and reviewed with partners on a regular basis so restoration efforts can be adapted and modified as needed to improve effectiveness.
- **Expand collaborations with the Zoo and Garden.** The Zoo and the Garden are located on Forest Preserve land and receive on-going financial support from the FPCC. Each organization has a broad range of expertise and resources that can help promote the FPCC and advance its mission. We recommend continued and expanded collaborations with these partners and ask that they emphasize their relationship with the FPCC and support for the goals of the NCCP with programming, exhibits, signage, communications and outreach, connecting urban communities to the Preserves. We ask that both partners help the FPCC connect urban communities to nature and promote the mission and work of the FPCC via on-site signage at the Zoo and Garden and via their newsletters and magazine.
- **Provide transparency and accountability regarding the expenditure of resources.** The Council will work with the FPCC and partners to produce and disseminate an annual report on the “State of the Preserves.” This report will detail how resources were spent and leveraged, and the resulting benefits for Cook County residents. It will include illustrative vignettes to build awareness and appreciation for the preserves.

4.2 Land Acquisition & Disposition

The Land Acquisition and Disposition subcommittee notes that land protection by fee simple acquisition has been the hallmark activity of the Forest Preserves of Cook County for more than a hundred years. That investment has paid off wonderfully well, resulting in a world class preserve system within a major metropolitan area that contributes to clean air and water, improves stormwater mitigation, reduces urban heat island effect, and elevates the quality of life for people in the region. Building on the FPCC's extraordinary history, the Next Century Conservation Plan presents a goal of acquiring 21,000 acres over 25 years, which, if achieved, would result in the expansion of the forest preserves to approximately 90,000 acres. The Forest Preserves of Cook County should increase the amount of land conserved in Cook County both by acquiring more land and by influencing conservation by others, to realize the people and nature goals of the Next Century Conservation Plan. In alignment with its mission, the FPCC should prioritize opportunities and expand existing strategies, including taking a lead role on identifying opportunities for collaboration. The disposition of the FPCC land by sale or other conveyance should be considered only in extreme instances. The functional disposition of land through the approval or tolerance of inappropriate land uses on the FPCC land by others should be forbidden and robust efforts should be made to reverse this practice. (See 4.3 below.) Recommendations include:

- ✓ **Find ways, perhaps creative, to continue to buy more land**
- ✓ **Promote conservation of sites by other methods, new for the Forest Preserves, including models that do not include ownership**
- ✓ **Ensure that the FPCC land currently remains in the Forest Preserves and is maintained in accordance with its mission**
- ✓ **Consider equity as a key factor when determining where to acquire land**

4.3 Prioritizing Compatible Recreation

The Compatible Recreation subcommittee notes that the debate about recreation within the Forest Preserves has been around for a long time—both in terms of the amount of land which should be developed for recreation and the types of recreation that are (and are not) compatible with nature. The Conservation and Policy Council is committed to working with the FPCC and its partners to prioritize “Compatible Recreation” experiences which foster human health, wellness, and a lifelong love of nature and outdoor activity. Recommendations include:

- ✓ **Ensure everyone has access to Compatible Recreation opportunities.** Ensure major recreational facilities are well-distributed across the Forest Preserves, accessible, and well-maintained. Offer special programs and outreach to connect residents in the urban core—especially those within impacted communities—to the forest preserves. Continue to promote racial equity by engaging people from impacted communities to plan and implement programs.
- ✓ **Divest from programs and facilities which are incompatible or unsustainable.** The Council reviewed several tools which can be used to identify programs and/or facilities which are not compatible, or which may be unsustainable due to cost. Further analysis is needed to finalize recommendations.
- ✓ **Ensure all new uses are compatible and sustainable.** Assess all new proposals for recreation facilities and programs to ensure they are compatible with the district's mission and they are economically, ecologically and socially sustainable.

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STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING CRITICAL CHALLENGES (continued)

4.4 Scaling Up Volunteers

The Volunteer subcommittee recognizes that volunteers have been an essential force in the health and progression of the Forest Preserves over the past century. The Council is committed to working with the FPCC to ensure that we invest in the best available strategies to engage, train, inspire and retain more dedicated volunteers. Recommendations include:

- ✓ **Engage: Formulate a strategy tuned to the needs of the community.**
Engage advocates, partners, elected representatives and community leaders to help recruit long-term, committed volunteers for the FPCC to build a robust, sustainable volunteer program that draws individuals from across Cook County. The Forest Preserves must increase the number of volunteers, the level of their commitment, and the roles they play within the Preserves.
- ✓ **Train: Empower volunteers to achieve success.**
Build a more comprehensive training program that coincides with a variety of volunteer skills and experience. A strong training program allows volunteers to see that they are a part of the FPCC mission and where they can apply and grow their skills.
- ✓ **Retain: Build volunteer satisfaction and a sense of place.**
Explore creative new methods to retain committed and effective volunteers and help them to feel part of the team. Fully embrace volunteers as critical partners in the common mission.
- ✓ **Sustain: Ensure that the resources and systems are in place to continue and expand volunteer programs.**
Volunteer programs are a powerful resource, but they require long-term investment, support, and innovation to be effective.

4.5 Promoting Racial Equity in the Forest Preserves

The Racial, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion subcommittee states that the Conservation and Policy Council will work with the FPCC and its partners to promote racial equity in order to connect more people to nature and better protect nature. We will do this by giving greater voice to communities that are impacted by racial inequity throughout the planning and decision-making process, and by applying a racial equity lens to major policy and budget decisions. Recommendations include:

- ✓ **Apply a racial equity lens to all future plans, policies and investments by asking:**
 - Does it expand access to protected nature in an impacted community? If so, how can we prioritize this work?
 - Does it burden an impacted community? If so, how can we mitigate or remove the burden?
 - Will the proposal contribute to a cycle of disinvestment, and if so how can we reverse that cycle?
 - How have we meaningfully reached out to impacted communities to seek input (both broadly and for specific proposals), and how are we using that input to shape plans and inform decisions?
- ✓ **Expand outreach and engage residents of impacted communities in on-going decisions making. Provide practicable opportunities to connect these residents to nature.** Expand partnerships with the Chicago Zoological Society, the Chicago Botanical Garden and other like-minded organizations working within impacted communities to promote the importance of protecting native habitats and animals. Expand opportunities for volunteers from impacted communities to engage with the Forest Preserves via restoration, events, etc. Explore best practices and

implement new models for volunteering that address barriers such as time, transportation, language, different abilities, etc., and welcome people from impacted communities.

- ✓ **Create a culture that emphasizes customer service, embraces diversity, and is welcoming to all.** From upper management to staff out in the field, we must create a culture that emphasizes customer service, embraces diversity, and is welcoming to all. And, recognizing the nation's long history of fraught relationships between police and people of color, we must strive to create a model of equitable policing, public safety, and positive community relations.
- ✓ **Engage more people in conservation.** Current restoration efforts are directed to (i) areas of highest ecological value, and (ii) areas actively being managed by volunteer stewards. A racial equity lens should be used to engage youth and adults from impacted communities in conservation by expanding the Conservation Corps and Forest Preserve Experience programs. Volunteers from impacted communities should be engaged in restoration workdays, and more stewardship sites should be established in and adjacent to impacted communities. This may require new models of volunteer stewardship, and new models of community outreach and education that build trust and meet communities where they are.

5

RECOMMENDATION FOR THE 2019 BUDGET

Each year the Conservation and Policy Council reviews the FPCC's annual budget and makes a recommendation to the General Superintendent, the President, and the Board of Commissioners about the budget and its alignment with the five-year implementation strategy. Council Vice-chairman Mark Templeton met with CFO Steve Hughes to review the FPCC's proposed 2020 budget, and they presented an overview of the proposed budget to the full Council at our September 23 meeting. (See Attachment 1.)

The Council agrees with the NCCP Steering Committee that the FPCC is using its limited resources in an effective and efficient manner, and the proposed \$62.9 million corporate budget largely holds steady on current work. But this is simply not sustainable beyond 2020. Each year, the Council has sounded the alarm about the district's inability to scale up work to achieve the NCCP goals, the under-funding of its pension obligations, and its backlog of deferred maintenance.

The FPCC has reached a fork in the road; it can no longer maintain the status quo, but must move in one direction or another. The district will either secure additional resources to preserve and restore natural open land for future generations, or in the very near future, it will cut back Forest Preserves services and programs in order to address its backlog of deferred maintenance and its pension obligations.

Based upon our review of the FPCC's recent accomplishments, current needs, and future goals, the Conservation and Policy Council recommends approval of the proposed 2020 budget for the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

We also recommend that a referendum be placed on the March 2020 ballot to allow voters to decide whether to approve a 0.025 percent increase to the property tax rate to provide additional funding to restore and sustain the Forest Preserves, to acquire and protect other natural areas that are

at risk, to maintain the preserves in a manner which is welcoming and accessible to all, and to meet the district’s pension obligations. The Trust for Public Land has estimated that the increase would cost the average homeowner in Cook County \$17.01 per year. Therefore, for less than the cost of a cup of coffee a month, voters can ensure the Forest Preserves are on a sustainable path and expand all the benefits the Preserves offer to everyone in Cook County. Specifically, we recommend the following ballot language:

“Shall the limiting rate under the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law for the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, Illinois, be increased by an additional amount equal to 0.025 percent above current limiting rate to conserve and restore land to protect the water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams; provide outdoor programs for children; help control flooding; and improve and maintain existing forest preserves and trails for levy year 2021 and be equal to 0.079 percent of the equalized assessed value of the taxable property therein for levy year 2022? For the 2022 levy year the approximate amount of the additional tax extendable against property containing a single-family residence and having a fair market value at the time of the referendum of one hundred thousand dollars is estimated to be \$5.13.”

The Council thanks Commissioner Stanley Moore for serving as liaison to the Council. We appreciate the opportunity to advise the President and the Board as we work together to ensure the success of the Next Century Conservation Plan and the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

Sincerely,

Wendy Paulson
Chairman

Terry Guen
FASLA

Mark N. Templeton
Vice Chairman

Emily Harris

Michael DeSantiago
Secretary

Sylvia M. Jenkins, Ph.D.

Maria Pesqueira

Alan Bell

Laurel Ross

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SUPPORTERS AND PARTNERS

NCCP Supporters. The success achieved to date would not have been possible without the generous support of foundations and other funders. We offer our thanks to the following :

AmeriCorps/ServeIllinois
Arcelor Mittal
Bobolink Foundation
Caerus Foundation
CBS EcoMedia
Cook County Department of Public Health
(Center for Disease Control Funds)
Cook County Department of Transportation
and Highways/Invest in Cook
Ford Motor Company Fund
Forest Preserves Foundation
Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelley Foundation
Friends of the Parks (Arcelor Mittal Funds)
Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
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Illinois Department of Natural Resources
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Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
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Morton Arboretum (USDA Forest Service Funds)
Nazarus Foundation
Sally Mead Hands Foundation
Sustain Our Great Lakes
(in partnership with The Nature Conservancy)
USDA National Resources Conservation Service
USDI Fish & Wildlife Service

NCCP Partners. Conservation advocates, cultural and research institutions, volunteers, state and federal government agencies, and other partners have long supported conservation efforts. Today more than 70 partners are working with the Forest Preserves to advance its goals. We are deeply grateful to all these partners.

- | | |
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| 29th U.S. Colored Troops Volunteer Regiment Alliance
for Healthy and Active Communities | Fishin' Buddies |
| American Birding Association | Fort Dearborn Audubon |
| American Indian Center | Friends of the Chicago River |
| Audubon Great Lakes | Friends of the Forest Preserves |
| Barrington Area Conservation Trust | Go Ape |
| Barrington Natural History Society | Hines VA |
| Billy Casper Recreation | Illinois Department of Natural Resources |
| Bird Conservation Network | Illinois Ornithological Society |
| Boy Scouts of America – Chicago Area | Illinois Natural History Survey |
| Central States SER | Illinois Nature Preserve Commission |
| Chicago Audubon Society | Illinois Sustainable Technology Center |
| Chicago Botanic Garden | I&M Canal Authority |
| Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership | Lake County Forest Preserves |
| Chicago Department of Transportation –
Greencorps Chicago | Local schools across Cook County |
| Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning | Mary Crane Center |
| Chicago Ornithological Society | Metropolitan Water Reclamation District |
| Chicago Park District | Metropolitan YMCA |
| Chicago Wilderness | Moraine Valley College |
| Chicago Zoological Society/Brookfield Zoo | Mujeres Latinas En Acccion |
| Citizens for Conservation | NeighborSpace |
| City of Dolton | Northwestern University |
| City of Elgin | Openlands |
| Cook County Economic Development | Orland Grassland Volunteers |
| Cook County Environmental Control | Outdoor Afro |
| Cook County Housing Authority | Outdoor Empowered Network |
| Cook County Juvenile Probation | Proviso Partners for Health |
| Cook County Public Health Department | REI |
| Conservation Foundation | Sand Ridge Audubon |
| El Valor | Stewards and other volunteers |
| Elk Grove Village | The Nature Conservancy |
| Environmentalists of Color | The Krew |
| Evanston North Short Bird Club | Thorn Creek Audubon |
| Faith In Place | Trust for Public Land |
| Field Museum | University of Chicago |
| Forest Preserve District of Will County | University of Illinois |
| | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers |
| | WTTW Nature Cat |

FPCC Budget Overview FY 2020

Budget Challenges

2020

- Increase Self Insurance Fund**
 - \$3M from Corporate for claims & settlements

- Increase Capital Funding**
 - \$500K From Corporate for demolition

- Decrease Vacancy Allowance**
 - Lowered by 1% for quicker hiring

LONG TERM

- Pension Funding**
 - \$9.2M more is needed annually

- Implementation of NCCP**
 - Referendum to increase Levy

FY 2020 Budget Recommendation

\$63.5M Corporate Budget - Revenue

- \$847K increase over last year (1.4%)
- Property Tax Levy up 1.8% \$ 921K
- PPRT up 0.2% \$ 33K
- Non-Tax Revenue Up 1.2% \$ 132K
 - Investments earnings (+ \$250K)
 - Camps (+\$50k)
 - Aquatic Centers (- \$200K) – optimistic 2019 revenue projection

- TIF Surplus down (- \$200K) -\$200K

FY 2020 Budget Recommendation

\$63.5M Corporate Budget - Expenditures

- Personnel up \$620K
 - FY 2020 COLA & planned step increases
 - Add 3 Full time positions
 - OGS – convert Volunteer Steward from part time to full time
 - Permits – provide full time staff for Dan Ryan Visitor Center
 - Law Enforcement – add Deputy Police Commander

- Non-Personnel up \$227K
 - Facilities – higher utility costs (mostly water)
 - Law Enforcement – training, equipment (tasers, body cameras)
 - Conservation & Experiential Programming (CEP) – supplies & programming activities
 - Permits, Rentals & Concessions (PRC) – Consulting to upgrade permit system

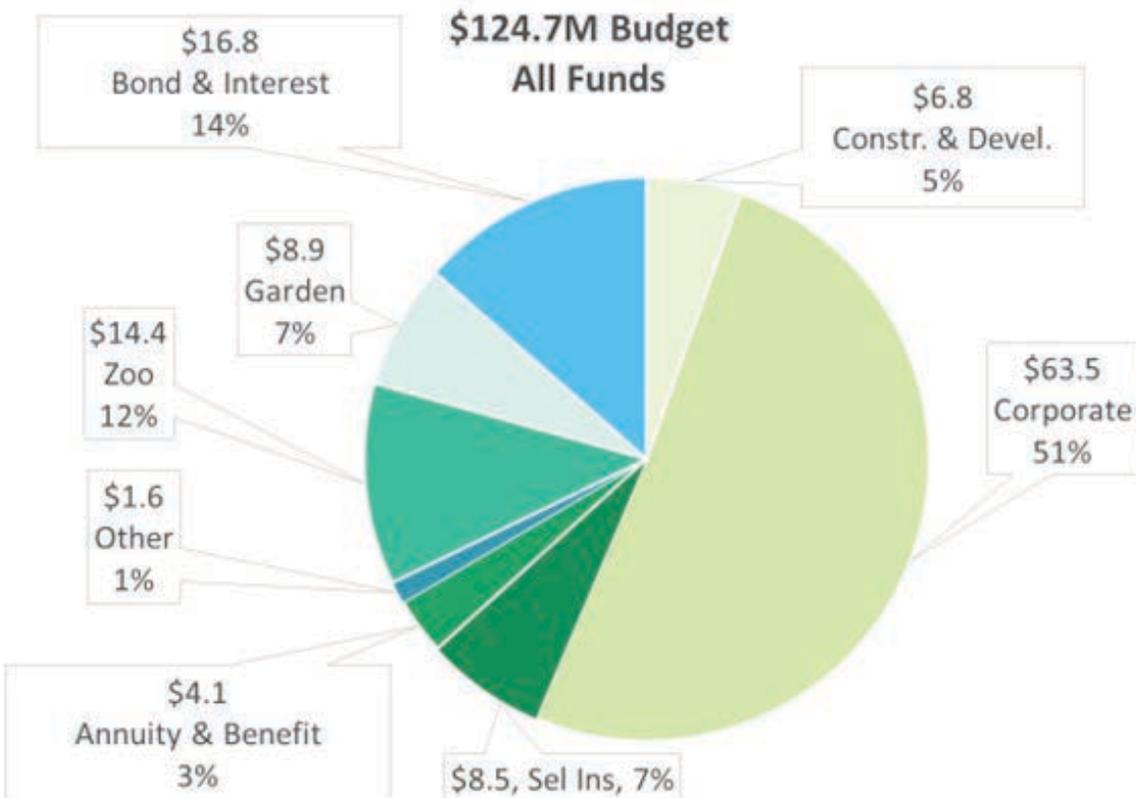
Distribution of Tax Levy Increase Across Funds

\$2.2M property tax levy increase over 2019 (+ 2.3%)

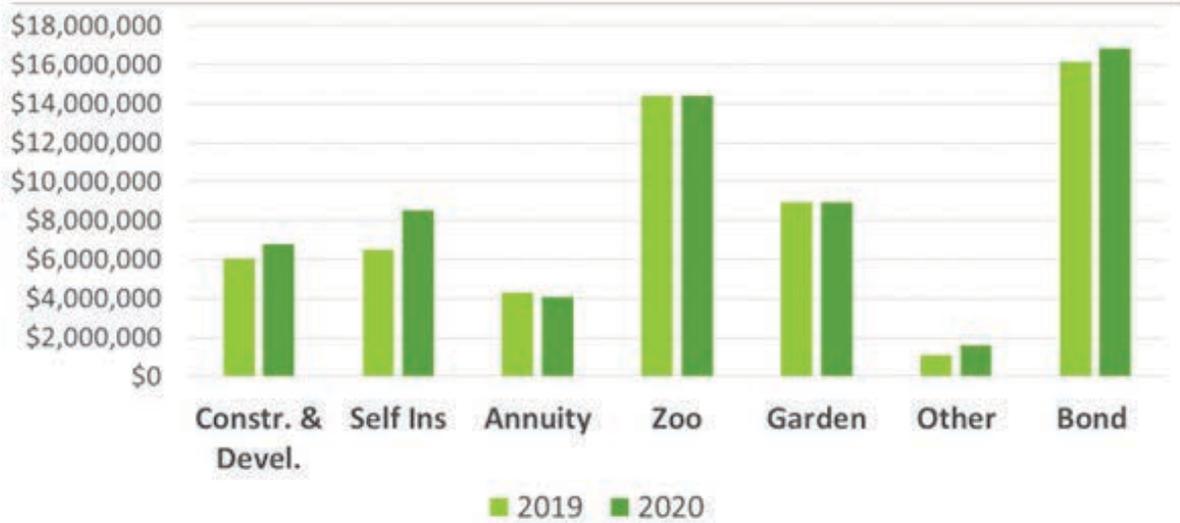
□ Corporate Fund up	\$ 921K
□ Construction & Development up	\$ 737K
□ Annuity & Benefits down	\$ (201K)
□ Bond & Interest up	\$ 683K
□ Zoo & Garden	No Change

- Property Tax Levy increase captures inflationary growth allowed under PTELL
- The Annuity and Benefits levy decrease is per formula as required by state law

Total Tax Levy For All Funds = \$99.3M



Non-Corporate Funds 2019 v. 2020



Construction and Development Fund

\$6.8 M (net) budgeted for FY 2020 (+7%)

- Resource Management for conservation & restoration \$4.1M
- Facilities & Fleet (deferred maintenance, vehicles & equip.) \$563K
- Planning & Development (capital improvements) \$1.8M
- Landscape Maintenance (parking lot paving) \$375K

Forest Preserves of Cook County
536 N. Harlem Avenue, River Forest, IL 60305