



Annual Report & Budget Recommendation

Conservation and Policy Council of the
Forest Preserves of Cook County



Submitted on November 5, 2020

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

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



November 5, 2020

**TONI PRECKWINKLE,
PRESIDENT**

**BOARD OF
COMMISSIONERS**

Frank J. Aguilar

Alma E. Anaya

Luis Arroyo, Jr.

Scott R. Britton

John P. Daley

Dennis Deer

Bridget Degnen

Bridget Gainer

Brandon Johnson

Bill Lowry

Donna Miller

Stanley Moore

Kevin B. Morrison

Sean M. Morrison

Peter N. Silvestri

Deborah Sims

Larry Suffredin

**GENERAL
SUPERINTENDENT**

Arnold L. Randall

Dear President Preckwinkle:

Seldom before has it become so apparent to so many how much we NEED nature—to reduce stress, help us stay healthy, offer solace. A century ago, far-sighted visionaries understood this need and worked tirelessly to establish the Forest Preserves of Cook County. Today the Conservation and Policy Council reaffirms its commitment to continue this work.

In December of this year, we will conclude the first phase of implementation for the Next Century Conservation Plan. Despite some setbacks caused by the pandemic, we end this phase showing significant progress.

- The Council has developed four position papers to guide future decisions related to racial equity, nature-compatible recreation, land acquisition and disposition, and scaling up volunteers. The racial equity position paper calls upon us to apply a racial equity lens to plans, policies and investment decisions; this recommendation has been incorporated into all the position papers and will guide our work going forward.
- Today 15,000 acres across the Forest Preserves are under restoration or active management. While more work is needed to achieve the high ecological quality called for in the plan, this milestone is very encouraging.
- More than 260,000 visitors have enjoyed the FPCC's campgrounds since they opened in 2016.
- 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 stronger than they have ever been. In total, more than 100 organizational partners have worked with the FPCC to advance the plan's ambitious goals. We are especially grateful to the Friends of the Forest Preserves and Openlands for their leadership and commitment to this effort.

When the pandemic hit, the Forest Preserves responded quickly to changing public health guidelines and site conditions. Staff from every department volunteered to monitor sites and direct FPCC police and other field staff to hot spots. Through these efforts, the FPCC was able to keep open the vast majority of sites and trails, even as local park districts and beaches closed down. As a result, record numbers of visitors flocked to the preserves seeking the solace of nature. As we enter the next phase of the Next Century Conservation Plan implementation, we have an historic opportunity to demonstrate the value of the preserves in people's lives, and we need to leverage boldly this opportunity to propel the Forest Preserves forward. This is not the time to be cautious; it is the time to make a big leap forward while the support for the preserves is so strong.

We are asking you and the Board to help stabilize the FPCC pension fund to give all of us time to secure the resources needed for long-term success. While we continue to strive to broaden the constituency for the preserves and engage more citizens in restoration and stewardship, securing needed resources will be a major focus for the next five years.

Wendy Paulson, *Chairman*

Conservation and Policy Council of the 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.

Introduction

The Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC) protects, restores and manages large landscapes for current and future generations. The preserves 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 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 necklace of 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 also protect and clean our water, purify our air and reduce flooding. And this year, as our nation struggles with the pandemic and social unrest, it has become ever more apparent that we also need nature to reduce stress, stay healthy, and find solace. Healthy forest preserves provide all these benefits to the citizens of Cook County.

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 in which “[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 aspiration, the plan calls for a significant commitment to restoring habitat to robust ecological health, to acquiring and protecting more land, and to making the Forest Preserves more inviting and accessible to all Cook County residents.

PROGRESS MADE DURING PHASE 1

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 64 priority initiatives to achieve specific outcomes during the first five years. In 2016 they began implementing these initiatives. As presented in this report, the first phase of implementation concludes with significant success. This initial phase focused on learning and sharing best practices, building and strengthening partnerships, and testing new approaches. Methods that worked well have been institutionalized; those which did not were modified, re-directed, or dropped entirely. As detailed in section 2 of this report, a full 88% of phase 1 initiatives have been successfully completed; 6% were redirected; and 6% are stalled, primarily due to a lack of resources.

To acquire the knowledge and understanding needed to advocate for the preserves and guide implementation of the NCCP, the Conservation and Policy Council has spent hundreds of hours meeting with staff and partners. Council members visited 27 sites throughout the preserves, including nature centers, campgrounds, restoration sites, golf courses, pools and trails. From 2018 to 2020, the Council developed four position papers to guide district decisions related to racial equity, nature-compatible recreation, land acquisition and disposition, and scaling up volunteers. The racial equity position paper calls upon us to apply a racial equity lens to all future plans, programs, policies and investments; this recommendation has been incorporated in all position papers and will be a key focus of the Council's efforts going forward. The position papers are posted to the website as they are adopted by the Board. More information can be found at fpdcc.com/about/conservation-policy-council/.

There also has been a significant culture change within the Forest Preserves to make the district more transparent and accountable. General Superintendent Arnold Randall and his team have implemented best practices to ensure limited resources are spent as efficiently and effectively as possible. In the past five years, the FPCC has received more than 50 awards—including the Excellence in Public Service Award presented by the Civic Federation to General Superintendent Arnold Randall in 2017. Polling conducted by the Trust for Public Land indicates that these efforts have indeed raised awareness and expanded support for the Forest Preserves. Today the Forest Preserves are broadly popular with county voters, and a clear majority trust that their tax money is being well spent by the district.

The key achievements of phase 1 and overall progress on initiatives and organizational reforms are summarized in sections 1, 2 and 3 of this report.

TRANSITIONING TO PHASE 2

As we enter the second phase of implementation, we have an historic opportunity to keep new visitors engaged and demonstrate broadly the value of the preserves in people's lives. More people than ever are availing themselves of the wonders and assets in the forest preserves, and we need to leverage boldly this opportunity to propel the FPCC forward. This is not the time to be cautious, but rather to make big leaps forward while the support for the preserves is so strong. An approach to this next phase is presented in section 4 of this report.

2021 BUDGET RECOMMENDATION

Section 5 of the report includes our recommendation related to the district's proposed budget for the upcoming year. To respond to the economic impacts of the pandemic, the FPCC is imposing a hiring freeze and reducing non-personnel costs. While we understand the need for these cuts, we cannot allow the opportunity discussed above to slip by. Therefore, we are recommending a draw down on FPCC reserve funds to continue outreach and engagement, make the preserves more welcoming and accessible, and to acquire targeted parcels while they are available. We are also asking the General Superintendent to target revenues from mitigation fees to fund highly visible restoration projects in order to build awareness and understanding of this critical aspect of the district's mission.

Finally, until the FPCC is successful in securing long-term, sustainable resources needed to address its structural budget challenges and to fully implement the NCCP, *we are asking the Board to stabilize the district's finances by incorporating the Forest Preserves' Pension Fund into the County's inter-governmental agreement with the County Pension Fund, thereby authorizing annual payments to both pension funds from the sales tax beginning in 2022.* We are also open to other approaches that would address the Preserve's outstanding pension gap, and we will continue to work with Commissioners Gainer and Anaya and all the members of the Board's pension committee to resolve this issue.

The important progress made during the past five years would not have been possible without the support of President Preckwinkle and the entire Board. We want to specifically acknowledge Commissioner Moore who serves as the Board's liaison to the Council. In addition, 26 sponsors and more than 100 partner organizations 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. Transitioning to Phase 2 of Implementation
5. Recommendation Regarding the 2020 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 that have been working to achieve measurable outcomes. While massive scaling up did not occur during the first phase of implementation, important progress was made.

We have made real progress toward our goal of restoring 30,000 acres, to healthy, biologically diverse habitat. Across the preserves, more than 15,000 acres of land are under restoration or active management. This very important milestone represents an increase of more than 160% since the plan was developed in 2014. While more work is needed to achieve the high levels of ecological quality called for in the NCCP, priority sites are being tracked to assess progress towards this goal. By the end of this year, a dashboard reporting on-going progress will be posted to the FPCC 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. From 2015 to July 2020, 1,633 Conservation Corps participants contributed more than 380,000 service hours and maintained more than 6,000 acres.

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 2016 the Forest Preserves opened five new campgrounds, which have since been visited by more than 266,000 campers. 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 by hiring an ADA advisor, launching ADA working groups, completing training of all FPCC staff on working with people with disabilities, and adding 55 accessible picnic shelters (over 25% of total shelters) and seven accessible fishing locations.

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.

FPCC leadership has achieved a fundamental change in the culture of the preserves, making them more transparent and accountable and implementing best practices to ensure limited resources are spent as efficiently and effectively as possible. Before the pandemic hit, staff, Council members and partners met with 87 village boards and civic organizations all across Cook County to discuss these changes and the important value the preserves bring to our region. Polling conducted by the Trust for Public Land indicates that these efforts have indeed raised awareness and built a broad base of support for the Forest Preserves. Today the Forest Preserves are broadly popular with county voters and a clear majority trust that their tax money is being well spent by the district. A full list of key achievements is presented in Table 1. As noted in Section 6 of this report, this progress would not have been possible without the assistance of more than 100 partner organizations which are leading or assisting on a wide range of projects and programs designed to advance the NCCP goals.

Section 2 of this report presents a status report for each of the 64 priority programs which comprised phase 1. As indicated in Figure 1, 88% of the priority programs are completed or underway, 6% have been redirected, and 6% have stalled—primarily due to a lack of resources. This reflects a healthy balance of steady progress, adaptability, and risk taking.

The inability to scale up to meet NCCP goals remains cause for concern. Furthermore, the pressures of addressing the FPCC’s backlog of deferred maintenance and its on-going pension deficit will continue to constrain the availability of public resources to support restoration, acquisition, accessibility improvements and other NCCP goals. As discussed further in Section 5, stable, sustainable resources must be secured.

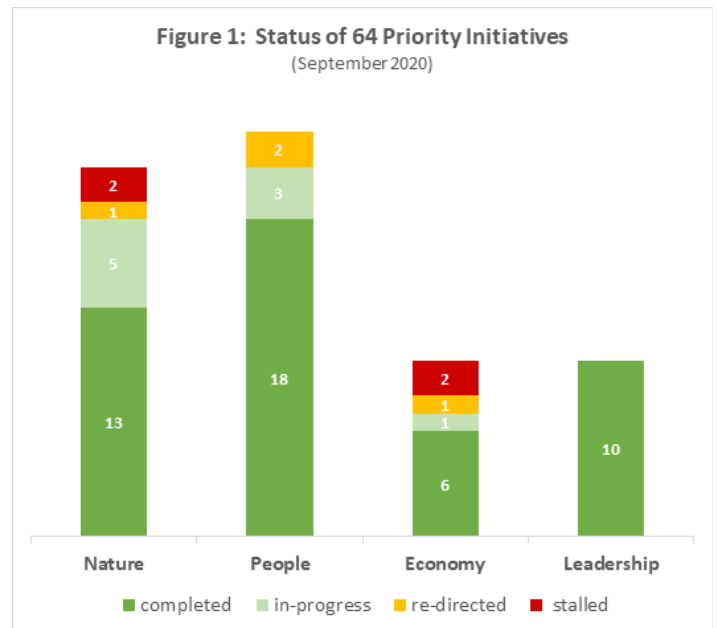


Table 1: Key Achievements to Date (2014–2020)

NATURE

Native landscapes will thrive for generations.

INVEST IN RESTORATION AND STEWARDSHIP

- ✓ Achieved more than 15,000 acres under restoration or active maintenance, an increase of 162% since the NCCP's debut in 2014
- ✓ Expanded the prescribed burn program to increase burn acreage to an all-time high of more than 42,500 acres in 2019
- ✓ Completed the Natural and Cultural Resource Master Plan to prioritize restoration efforts
- ✓ Conducted ecological health assessments at 74 preserves that are being monitored to track restoration progress over time
- ✓ Designated seven new sites as Illinois Nature Preserves and/or Illinois Land and Water Reserves, and enlarged one Nature Preserve
- ✓ Incorporated restoration funding into the FPCC's operating budget (starting in 2018)
- ✓ Established a native seed policy
- ✓ Completed field investigations for all high priority archaeological sites



Portwine restoration area summer 2016

MOBILIZE PEOPLE TO HEAL AND NURTURE THE LAND

- ✓ Received over 380,000 service hours from 1,600 Conservation Corps participants from 2015 through July 2020
- ✓ Served 535 youth and young adults via the Forest Preserves Experience summer program from 2016 through 2020
- ✓ Received over 437,000 volunteer hours from 2016 to 2020. This includes nearly 2,000 individual volunteers, 394 groups, and several hundred drop-in volunteers. (Note: During the pandemic, volunteer activities were modified to comply with public health guidelines.)
- ✓ Established robust training program for stewards and other volunteers, including on-line training opportunities. In the past 5 years, 3,342 volunteers have participated in 455 trainings.

CONNECT THE PRESERVES TO A WIDER WILDERNESS

- ✓ Acquired the 397-acre Horizon Farm site and the 164-acre Holy Family Villa
- ✓ Established the Conservation@Home Initiative in partnership with the University of Illinois Extension to expand the functional borders of the preserves by encouraging homeowners to plant native vegetation

LEARN FROM AND ADAPT TO A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

- ✓ Completed the Master Sustainability & Climate Resiliency Plan to reduce FPCC's greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050
- ✓ Developed a Tree Protection and Preservation Manual

Table 1: Key Achievements to Date (2014–2020)-continued

PEOPLE

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

INVITE, EXCITE AND ENGAGE DIVERSE VISITORS FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE

- ✓ Established stronger partnerships with community-based organizations by restructuring the Department of Conservation and Experiential Programs (CEP) to a zone model
- ✓ 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)
- ✓ Welcomed 266,339 campers at new or renovated campgrounds (2015 through Aug. 2020.)
- ✓ Added 32 miles of new regional trails (2016 to 2018)
- ✓ Completed 12 “Gateway” master plans for key activity hubs
- ✓ Installed a new zipline/rope course which has attracted over 88,000 visitors since opening in 2016
- ✓ Brought programming to the Chicago Riverdale Community, which includes Beaubien Woods and Altgeld Gardens housing development, via the Great Rivers Initiative and funding from the Chicago Community Trust
- ✓ Trained all FPCC programming staff to develop and facilitate early childhood nature play programs and expanded nature play sites throughout the preserves via partnership with the Zoo
- ✓ Created the Wildlife Connections Ambassadors program via partnership with Misericordia Chicago and Chicago Zoological Society to train adults with developmental disabilities to work with children at nature centers
- ✓ Built new models for community engagement via partnerships with the American Indian Center, ENLACE Chicago, and the Pathways to Adventure Council of Boy Scouts of America and created new funding opportunities for partner-led programs that require modest funding support

MAKE THE PRESERVES ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

- ✓ Hired advisor and launched ADA working groups; all FPCC staff trained on working with people with disabilities
- ✓ Added 55 accessible picnic shelters (over 25% of total) and seven accessible fishing locations
- ✓ Upgraded life-safety and accessibility improvements to trails, comfort stations, picnic groves and buildings; posted to the website information on 33 accessible picnic groves

EDUCATE VISITOR AND THE COMMUNITY ABOUT THE FOREST PRESERVES’ NATURAL TREASURES

- ✓ Participated in the Chicago Botanic Garden’s Bud Burst program to engage citizen scientists in a nationwide study documenting pollinators who visit native plants
- ✓ Planted native gardens at nine schools via the Conservation@Home and created a variety of school programs for e-learning, hybrid and in-classroom learning

PROVIDE PROGRAMS THAT EMPHASIZE HEALTH BENEFITS

- ✓ Launched Wellness in the Woods Initiative in partnership with Cook County Department of Public Health to engage residents to be active, playful and restful in nature; distributed 70,000 brochures (in English and Spanish) to 300 community health organizations



Table 1: Key Achievements to Date (2014–2020)-continued

ECONOMY

Communities will value the economic benefits of protected lands.

BUILD THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR NATURE

- ✓ 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
- ✓ Met with 87 village boards and civic organizations to share research related to the economic value of ecosystems and other ways the preserves add to the quality of life in our region. More than 2000 elected officials, civic leaders, and residents participated in these discussions. (Note: Presentations were suspended in 2020 due to the pandemic.)



NOTE: No local partners have been identified to lead business attraction efforts. Business recruitment is not an area of expertise for the FPCC, nor does it advance the district's primary mission. Therefore, the FPCC will make visitor data and other information available to local municipalities, but this action will not be advanced without a local partner willing to lead efforts to attract nature-compatible business development.

MARKET THE FOREST PRESERVES AS AN ICONIC ELEMENT OF METROPOLITAN CHICAGO

- ✓ Received over 380,000 service hours from 1,600 Conservation Corps participants from 2015 through July 2020
- ✓ Served 535 youth and young adults via the Forest Preserves Experience summer program from 2016 through 2020
- ✓ Received over 437,000 volunteer hours from 2016 to 2020. This includes nearly 2,000 individual volunteers, 394 groups, and several hundred drop-in volunteers. (Note: During the pandemic, volunteer activities were modified to comply with public health guidelines.)
- ✓ Established robust training program for stewards and other volunteers, including on-line training opportunities. In the past 5 years, 3,342 volunteers have participated in 455 trainings.

CONNECT THE PRESERVES TO A WIDER WILDERNESS

- ✓ Acquired the 397-acre Horizon Farm site and the 164-acre Holy Family Villa
- ✓ Established the Conservation@Home Initiative in partnership with the University of Illinois Extension to expand the functional borders of the preserves by encouraging homeowners to plant native vegetation

LEARN FROM AND ADAPT TO A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

- ✓ Completed the Master Sustainability & Climate Resiliency Plan to reduce FPCC's greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050
- ✓ Developed a Tree Protection and Preservation Manual

Table 1: Key Achievements to Date (2014–2020)-continued

LEADERSHIP

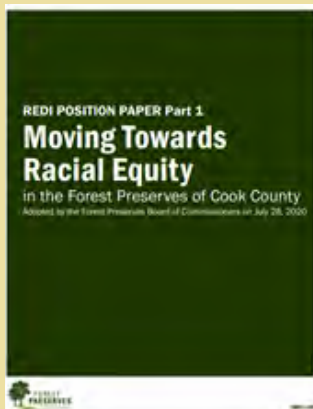
Visionary conservation leaders will safeguard, expand and bring increased resources to the Forest Preserves.

MANAGE WITH EXCELLENCE, TRANSPARENCY AND SOUND FINANCIAL PRACTICE

- ✓ Aligned performance metrics for all the FPCC departments with the NCCP goals
- ✓ Developed cost recovery guidelines for picnics and programs
- ✓ Completed concessions and permits master
- ✓ Completed phase one and two of the golf system analysis
- ✓ Completed first phase of cost-benefit analysis for aquatic centers
- ✓ Completed annual evaluations of the NCCP implementation
- ✓ Launched a new, mobile-friendly website

PROVIDE ENDURING, FOCUSED CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP AND INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY

- ✓ Developed position papers to guide future decisions related to racial equity, nature-compatible recreation, land acquisition and disposition, and scaling up volunteers
- ✓ Convened meetings of leaders from all Illinois forest preserve districts, conservation districts and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to align relevant public communications and exchange ideas on execution of public health guidelines in response to public facing operational changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic



MAXIMIZE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RESOURCES AND USE THEM WISELY TO ACHIEVE THE VISION FOR FUTURE GROWTH AND RESTORATION

- ✓ Deployed staff and resources strategically and effectively to keep the preserves open during the COVID pandemic
- ✓ Doubled non-tax revenue from \$4.3M in 2015 to \$9.2M in 2019
- ✓ Gained support from members of the General Assembly to introduce multiple bills and secure funding in a capital bill
- ✓ Refined cost estimates for major elements of the plan with assistance from the Civic Consulting Alliance
- ✓ Analyzed more than 50 initiatives to reduce costs or raise revenues; 27 have been implemented or are underway



The Conservation and Policy Council has visited 27 nature centers, campgrounds, restoration sites, trails and other sites throughout the preserves

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 made during phase 1 is summarized in Figures 2 through 6 which, as indicated below, present the goals, five-year-outcomes, and priority actions to be completed.

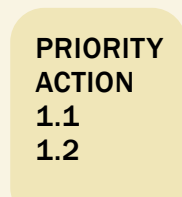
The vast majority of these initiatives (88%) are completed or continue to move forward. Six percent have been re-directed to adapt to lessons learned or to respond to new opportunities, and 6% are stalled due to a lack of resources. This reflects a healthy balance of steady progress, adaptability and risk taking. However, the economic impact due to the pandemic and 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. We address this concern further in Section 5.



CCP 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.

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 4 3 through 6 as:

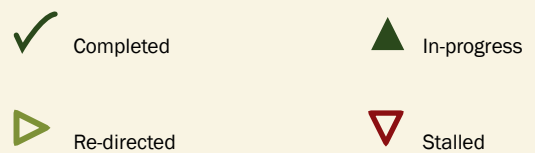


Figure 2 - NCCP: Measuring Progress During the First Five Years



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

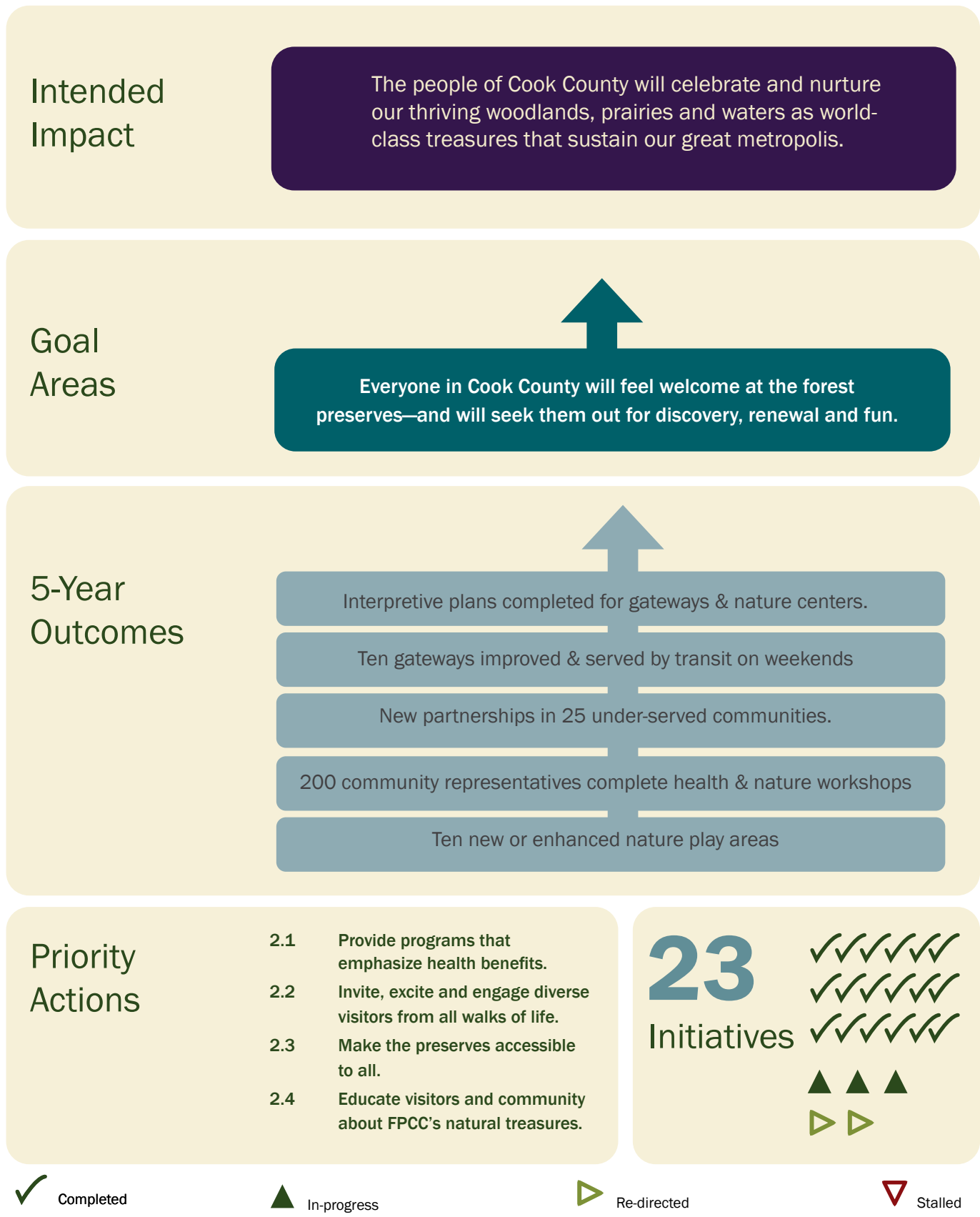


Figure 5 - Economy: Measuring Progress During the First Five Years

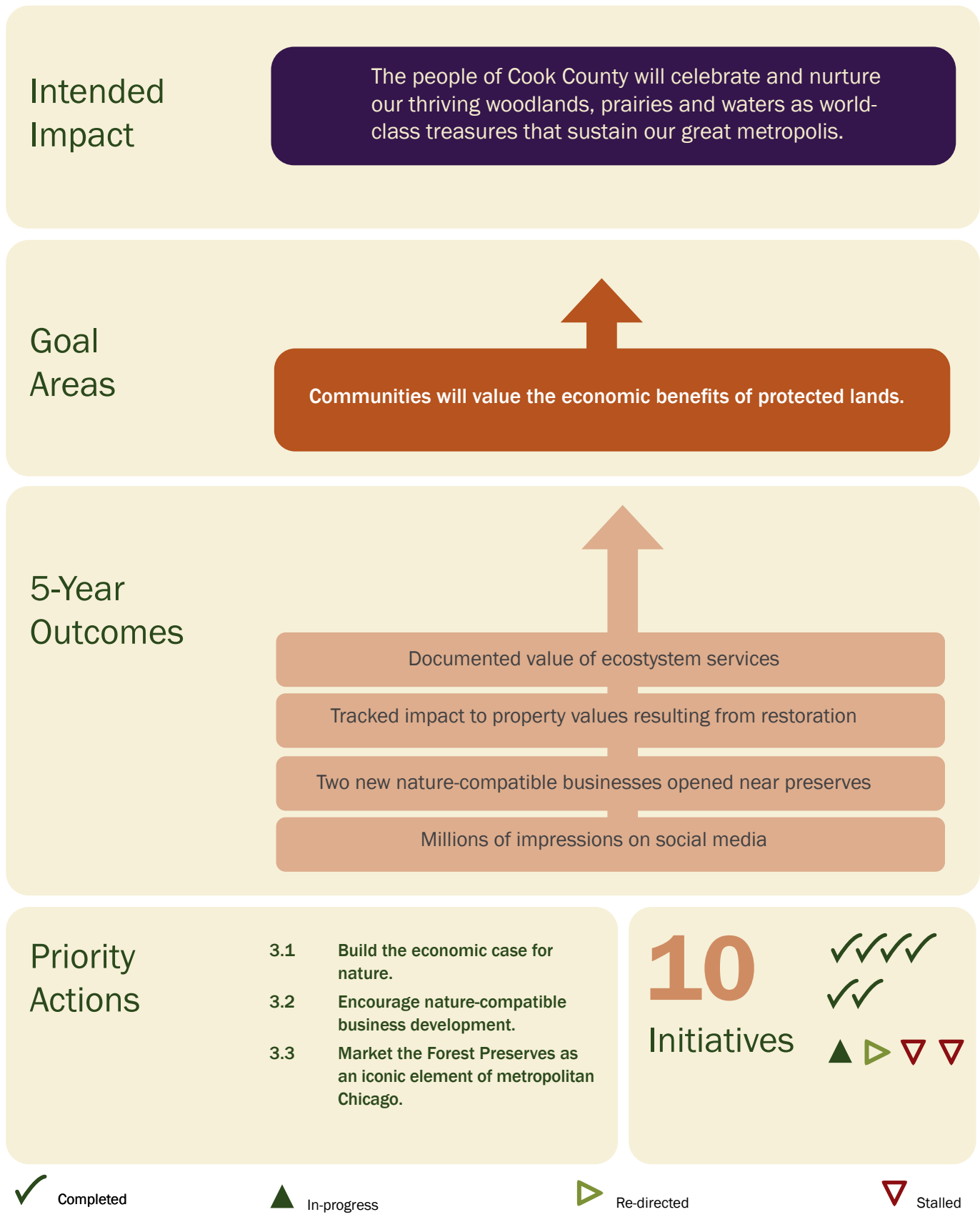


Figure 6 - Leadership: Measuring Progress During the First Five Years



3

ASSESSMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL REFORMS

"The Forest Preserves pivoted appropriately and proactively in the face of COVID. It brought out the very best in staff, and the citizens of Cook County now have a greater appreciation for the preserves than ever before."

Jim Boudreau
Chief Development Officer
Chicago Botanic Garden

Five committees (Nature, People, Economics, Leadership and Steering) comprised of staff and partners coordinated the first phase of NCCP implementation. During this initial phase, the committees and the Council recognized a critical need to focus on organizational reforms 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 needed to implement the plan successfully, and each year the Steering Committee conducts an annual evaluation of progress to date.

2020 was not a normal year. Both the pandemic and the nationwide calls for racial equity had enormous impacts on the Forest Preserves. The NCCP Steering Committee completed its 2020 annual evaluation in light of these historic challenges.

COVID19 Pandemic. While State and municipal parks and beaches closed down, the Forest Preserves kept the vast majority of its sites and trails open throughout the pandemic. As record numbers of visitors flocked to the preserves, FPCC leadership and staff worked collaboratively and strategically to protect visitors, employees, and nature. At the end of March, General Superintendent Arnold Randall convened a Rapid Response Team to quickly respond to changing public health guidelines and conditions on the ground as reported by FPCC police and field staff. For the next five months, FPCC police officers quickly adapted their work to keep our visitors and themselves safe. In addition to enforcing rapidly changing public health guidelines, officers protected sensitive ecosystems from visitors who were causing damage and assisted new visitors who were unfamiliar with the preserves and sometimes became sick during hot weather. In total, officers conducted over 5,800 dispersals to stop unsafe congregating or other unsafe conduct. Trail Watch volunteers and staff volunteers from all FPCC departments conducted

hundreds of site visits to assist with site monitoring, and signs posted at busy sites urged visitors to report concerns. Each day, the Rapid Response Team reviewed the data collected and used it to re-direct crowds away from sites with fragile ecosystems, initiate weekend lot closures to prevent unsafe conditions at over-crowded sites, remove picnic tables and other high touch surfaces, and to direct resources where they were most needed. The Rapid Response Team met daily from March 30 through the end of June, then three times per week thereafter. From March through August, the Rapid Response Team met 85 times, devoting 446 person-hours to this effort. As noted, Trail Watch volunteers and other site monitors contributed hundreds of additional hours. Through an op-ed published by the Herald, the Conservation and Policy Council urged visitors to protect the preserves and each other by following public health guidelines and observing FPCC rules.

Racial Equity and Calls for Social Justice. The killing of George Floyd and so many others are only the latest reminders of our country's legacy of individual and systemic racism. In light of these events, the FPCC and Council took several actions, including:

- The FPCC acknowledged that it did far too little for far too long to address institutionalized racism, and publicly re-committed to actively working toward equity.
 - Working with a racial equity consultant and trained facilitators, the FPCC convened a series of Racial Identity Caucuses to provide employees a safe forum to discuss and process the pain and frustration caused by recent events and systemic racism in our country.
 - The FPCC's internal Racial Equity Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) committee continued its work to modify hiring, training, and other internal operations to create a work culture that embraces diversity and is inclusive and welcoming to all employees and partners, and to all the people of Cook County.
- The Conservation and Policy Council completed a position paper urging the FPCC to apply a racial equity lens to all future plans, programs, policies and investments and to implement best practices for model policing.
 - The senior team has received training on the use of racial equity impact assessments, and over the next few months all FPCC employees will participate in racial equity workshops developed and facilitated by the FPCC REDI committee.
 - FPCC staff are exploring best practices in community engagement to ensure residents from communities impacted by racial inequity have a voice in the decisions that impact their lives.
 - In September, the FPCC issued a request for proposals for a professional police consultant to conduct an independent analysis of the Forest Preserves' police department and guide implementation of best practices for police/community relations.

2020 Report Card. On August 26, 2020, the NCCP Steering Committee conducted its annual evaluation of progress to date toward seven targeted 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.

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, scaling up the work received an A grade this year. The committee believes that the FPCC and partners continue to do the best they can to make progress in the absence of new resources. More importantly, this grade recognizes the FPCC's success in welcoming record numbers of visitors to the preserves and maintaining connections to the community through creative programming throughout the pandemic. However, raising new resources received a "C" grade once again. The committee is encouraged that recent polling indicates 70% of voters now support additional resources for the FPCC, but also recognizes that the FPCC cannot maintain the status quo much longer. Without new resources or a plan to stabilize the FPCC pension fund, significant cuts to programs and services will need to occur and much of the progress made during phase 1 may slip away.

"Having been an observer and participant for 40 years, the last ten years has been a sea change. We are definitely going in the right direction; more and more people are on board and supporting the Forest Preserves."

Jane Balaban

Key Steward and Nature Committee Co-Chair

FIGURE 7 - Evaluation of Organizational Reforms

| PRIORITY | GRADE | COMMENTS |
|---|-----------|---|
| 1 Scaling Up | A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The FPCC welcomed record numbers of visitors in 2020. Throughout the pandemic, the FPCC staff pivoted quickly and responded creatively. Through virtual programs and on-line events, the FPCC maintained its connection to the community. The FPCC is now streaming live programs and events via FB that have the capacity to pull in people from all over the world. This flexible, creative response is an important aspect of scaling up. There is still a lot of work to be done in terms of scaling up volunteers, protecting and restoring nature, and other key NCCP goals. |
| 2 Using Resources Efficiently | A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Throughout the pandemic, the FPCC remained open while state and municipal parks closed down. The FPCC created a rapid response team to gather information and respond quickly to changes and deployed limited staff and resources strategically. Staff from every department volunteered to monitor sites. The FPCC's small IT team quickly deployed hardware and software to allow employees to work from home and maintain close communication via virtual conferencing. By proactively preparing for Phase 3 of the pandemic, the FPCC was able to quickly reopen campgrounds and boating, and to restart permits for picnics and limited indoor events. |
| 3 Building Partnerships & Leveraging Resources | A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> During this first phase, 100 partner organizations have helped the FPCC implement priority initiatives. Friends of the Forest Preserves and Openlands have played key leadership roles, and partnerships with the Zoo and Garden are stronger than they have ever been. The FPCC strengthened relationships with state legislators and secured \$26 million in state infrastructure funds. The Zoo secured \$60 million. |
| 4 Changing Culture | A- | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The FPCC and the Council took several big steps forward on their equity work, including re-affirming the FPCC's commitment to racial equity, completing the racial equity position paper, and convening racial identity caucuses. FPCC's HR team has been very supportive, open and communicative with staff during the pandemic. Implicit bias training for all sworn officers began this year. |
| 5 Communicating | A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> During a time of rapid change, FPCC's small communication team delivered information in a clear and timely manner. On March 11, FPCC posted a COVID-19 information page to its website. Throughout the pandemic, the site has been quickly updated to inform visitors where they can go, when they can go there, how to stay safe, and what is required. Website visits reached record numbers as visitors sought information. Hundreds of residents contacted the FPCC via social media, email, or phone. Within hours and always within a workday, they received professional, informative responses. Nearly 1,000 signs in multiple languages were designed, produced, and installed across the preserves, with site-specific information related to public health and other guidelines. Signs and social media were used to educate visitors who did not understand how to properly use the forest preserves. The FPCC led an effort to coordinate messaging with surrounding forest preserve districts. The FPCC has not yet achieved a "culture of conservation." This will take a unified effort beyond the four-person communications team. |

For each priority, the NCCP Steering Committee considered where we 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 indicating failure.

A - Highest

F - Failure

FIGURE 7 - Evaluation of Organizational Reforms

| PRIORITY | GRADE | COMMENTS |
|-------------------------|-------|--|
| 6 Raising New Resources | C | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although a referendum did not move forward, the FPCC will receive \$26 M in state infrastructure funds; the Zoo will receive \$60M. • The FPCC will also receive \$25M over five years from the motor vehicle fuel tax via the County's Department of Transportation and Highways. • The Garden secured approval to modernize operations by phasing in an entrance fee; the Zoo raised its entrance fee. • The FPCC is working hard to hold steady, but has not yet solved its structural budget challenges. Until the referendum or something of that magnitude occurs, the FPCC will struggle. • TPL polling indicates 70% of voters now support additional resources for the FPCC. • The FPCC entered into a contract with a new vendor to promote sponsorships and successfully pursued a range of grants. |
| 7 Continuity | B+ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuity requires strong leadership and expanded relationships. The Council has gained the knowledge, done the work, and earned the respect to continue the legacy of the founders in protecting and promoting the forest preserves. Through its position papers, the Council has tackled on-going challenges that have beset the preserves for decades. The Council is advocating for the Forest Preserves through editorials and meetings with elected officials. In this way, the Council is playing a critical role in building awareness and expanding support necessary to ensure continuity. • The Council, staff and partners are also working to ensure continuity by institutionalizing the policies and practices recommended in the position papers. • All of this has resulted in broad public support for the Forest Preserves. • Without strong support and leadership in the Office of the President, such as demonstrated by President Preckwinkle, many of these efforts could be reversed. |

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

4

TRANSITIONING TO PHASE 2 OF IMPLEMENTATION

The inability to scale up to meet NCCP goals remains cause for concern. Furthermore, the pressures of addressing the FPCC's backlog of deferred maintenance and its on-going pension deficit will continue to constrain the availability of public resources to support restoration, acquisition, accessibility improvements and other NCCP goals. Stable, sustainable resources are needed.

When the pandemic hit in early 2020, the General Superintendent activated a rapid response team to respond quickly to changing public health guidelines and site conditions. Staff from every department volunteered to monitor sites and direct FPCC police and other field staff to hot spots. Through these efforts, the district kept the vast majority of sites and trails open, even as state and local park districts and beaches closed down. As a result, record numbers of visitors flocked to the preserves seeking the solace of nature—including many first-time visitors. As we enter the next phase of implementation, we have an historic opportunity to demonstrate the value of the preserves in people's lives. More people than ever are availing themselves of the wonders and assets in the forest preserves in Cook County and we need to boldly leverage this opportunity to propel the FPCC forward. This is not the time to be cautious, it is the time to make big leaps forward, while the support for the preserves is so strong.

As indicated in Figure 8, the second phase of implementation must focus on building a community of support and securing the resource needed to address on-going budget challenges and to scale up the work to achieve the ambitious NCCP goals. In addition, the next five years will continue to strengthen the important legacy of civic leadership to safeguard the preserves. The position papers developed and adopted by the Conservation and Policy Council will guide these efforts.

FIGURE 8 - NCCP Implementation Phases

| | | |
|---------|--------------|--|
| Phase 1 | 2016 to 2020 | Learn, Share and Implement Best Practices |
| Phase 2 | 2021 to 2025 | Build support and secure needed resources Continue the important legacy of civic leadership |
| Phase 3 | 2026 to 2030 | Stewardship |
| Phase 4 | 2031 to 2035 | Expansion |
| Phase 5 | 2036 to 2040 | Plan for next 25 years |

Within this context, the Steering Committee will develop “trail guides” to advance each NCCP goal (Nature, People, Economy, Leadership) in phase 2. To fund key initiatives, the committee recommends drawing \$2 million from reserve funds each year during phase 2. These funds should be leveraged via a Matching Challenge to encourage partners, foundations, nonprofits, governments, corporations, and individuals to match the investments. (The Steering Committee cautions against using the funds to “chase” matching dollars. Rather, matching funds should be leveraged to advance key actions needed for a successful phase 2.)

The current status of reserve funds is shown in Figure 9. As indicated, proposed draws include \$2 million for the acquisition of parcels which are currently available or likely to become available in 2021, including two priority parcels identified in the SE Cook County acquisition plan for which federal matching funds are being leveraged.

A draw of \$2.5 million will be used for priority capital projects to make the preserves more welcoming, accessible, and sustainable. This includes \$300,000 to leverage grant matching funds for accessibility and other improvements at Crabtree Nature Center and Caldwell warming shelter; \$350,000 for new trailhead, wayfinding and gateway signs at Eggers Grove; and \$1 million for sustainability and energy-saving improvements. Reserve funds will also be used to shore up the district’s self-insurance fund and to close a gap in the corporate fund created by increased costs and lost revenue related to the pandemic.

CFO Steve Hughes cautions that future tax collections and other revenue sources will likely be further impacted by the pandemic, and he suggests future plans to draw on reserve funds be reviewed on a year-by-year basis. The Council concurs with this recommendation.

FIGURE 9 - 2021 Use of Corporate Reserves
(\$ millions)

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------|
| Current balance | \$43.9 |
| Proposed 2021 Draws | \$2.0 |
| Land acquisition | \$2.0 |
| Capital projects | \$2.5 |
| Corporate Fund | \$1.5 |
| Self Insurance | \$12.0 |
| Demo | \$0.5 |
| Vehicles | \$0.5 |
| Subtotal | \$19.9 |
| Ending balance | \$24.9 |

5

RECOMMENDATION FOR THE 2021 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 2021 budget, and they presented an overview of the proposed budget to the full Council at the September 9, 2020 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 \$62.3 million corporate budget largely holds steady on current work, despite a hiring freeze and cuts to non-personnel funding. But this is simply not sustainable. 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. In 2021, the FPCC must draw upon its reserves to hold steady and to meet the most urgent capital maintenance needs.

To stabilize the FPCC's finances until it is able to secure the long-term and sustainable funding it needs, we are asking the Board to incorporate the Forest Preserves' Pension Fund into the County's inter-governmental agreement with the County Pension Fund, thereby authorizing annual payments to both pension funds from the sales tax beginning in 2022. This requires no increase to the sales tax and amounts to only a very small portion of the annual pension payments currently being made by the County—less than 2%—to help stabilize FPCC pension funding.

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 2021 budget for the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

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*

Mark N. Templeton, *Vice Chairman*

Michael DeSantiago, *Secretary*

Allen Bell

Terry Guen, FASLA

Emily Harris

Sylvia M. Jenkins, Ph.D.

Maria Pesqueira

Laurel Ross

Shelley Spencer

6

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/Serve Illinois
Arcelor Mittal
Bobolink Foundation
Caerus Foundation
Calumet Compact
CBS EcoMedia
Charity & Associates, P.C.
Cook County Department of Public Health
Cook County Department of Transportation
and Highways/Invest in Cook
Ford Motor Company Fund
Forest Preserves Foundation
Friends of the Parks (Arcelor Mittal Funds)
Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelley Foundation
Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
(Coastal Management Program, Land and
Water Conservation Fund, OSLAD Fund,
Recreational Trails Program, Wildlife
Fund)
Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
Landmarks Illinois/Barbara C. and Thomas E. Donnelley
II Preservation Fund for Illinois
Illinois Nature Preserves Commission
Morton Arboretum (USDA Forest Service Funds)
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Nazarus Foundation
Sally Mead Hands Foundation
Searle Funds at The Chicago Community Trust
Sustain Our Great Lakes (in partnership with
The Nature Conservancy)
USDA National Resources Conservation Service
USDI Fish & Wildlife Service
USDI National Park Service
Warren G. Lavey Family Charitable Fund
Wildlife Conservation Society

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 100 partners are working with the Forest Preserves to advance its goals. We are deeply grateful to all these partners.

| | |
|---|--|
| 29th U.S. Colored Troops Volunteer Regiment | Chicago Park District |
| Adler Planetarium | Chicago Public Art Group |
| Alliance for Healthy and Active Communities | Chicago Public Library |
| American Birding Association | Chicago Sustainability Task Force |
| American Indian Center | Chicago Voyagers |
| Antares Golf Management, Inc | Chicago Wilderness |
| Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides | Chicago Zoological Society |
| Altgeld Local Advisory Council | Citizens for Conservation |
| American Institute of Architects of Illinois in Chicago | City of Dolton |
| Audubon Great Lakes | City of Elgin |
| Backyard Nature Center | Clean Up-Give Back |
| Barrington Area Conservation Trust | Clearbrook |
| Barrington Natural History Society | Cook County Economic Development |
| Bird Conservation Network | Cook County Environment & Sustainability |
| Boy Scouts of America–Chicago Area | Cook County Housing Authority |
| Business and Professional People for the Public Interest | Cook County Juvenile Probation |
| Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods | Cook County Public Health Department |
| Cabinet of Curiosity | Cook County Transportation & Highways |
| Calumet Collaborative | Conservation Foundation |
| CAMBr- Chicago Area Mountain Bikers Association | El Valor |
| Center for Humans and Nature | Elk Grove Village |
| Center for Faith and Community Health Transformation | ENLACE Chicago |
| Central States SER | Environmentalists of Color |
| Chicago Audubon Society | Evanston North Shore Bird Club |
| Chicago Bird Collision Monitors | Faith In Place |
| Chicago Botanic Garden | Field Museum |
| Chicago Canoe and Kayak | Fishin' Buddies |
| Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership | Forest Preserve District of Will County |
| Chicago CRED | Fort Dearborn Audubon |
| Chicago Department of Transportation- Greencorps Chicago | FRESH |
| Chicago Housing Authority | Friends of Cycling in Elk Grove |
| Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning | Friends of the Chicago Portage |
| Chicago Ornithological Society | Friends of the Chicago River |
| | Friends of the Forest Preserves |
| | Girl Scouts |
| | Go Ape |
| | Harper College |
| | Hines VA Hospital |
| | Honeycomb |

NCCP Partners. *(Continued)*

Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Illinois Environmental Council
Illinois Natural History Survey
Illinois Nature Preserve Commission
Illinois Ornithological Society
Illinois Sustainable Technology Center
I&M Canal Authority
Lake County Forest Preserves
Lands' End
Little Bits Workshop
Little Calumet River Underground
 Railroad Project
Local schools across Cook County
Mary Crane Center
Metropolitan Family Services
Metropolitan Planning Council
Metropolitan Water Reclamation District
Metropolitan YMCA
Misericordia
Moraine Valley College
Mujeres Latinas En Acccion
Nature, Culture and Human Health
NeighborSpace
Northwest Coalition Against Hate
Northwest Portage Walking Museum
Northwestern University
Northwestern University's Segal
 Design Institute
Openlands
Opportunity Knocks
Orland Grassland Volunteers
Outdoor Afro
Outdoor Empowered Network
Palos Horseman's Association
Park Rx America
People for Community Recovery
Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum
Pride Roc
Project Onward
Proviso Partners for Health
REI
River Forest Library
River Forest Park District
Sand Ridge Audubon
Save the Prairie Society
Shedd Aquarium
Sierra Club
Stewards and Volunteers
Student Conservation Association
TCA Health
The Nature Conservancy
The Krew
Thorn Creek Audubon
Trust for Public Land
University of Chicago
University of Illinois
University of Illinois - Extension
University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
We Keep You Rollin'
West Cook Wild Ones
Westchester Public Library
Wild Communion
Wilderness Inquiry
WTTW Nature Cat
Xochitl Quetzal Aztec Dance

FPCC Budget Overview FY 2021

FY 2021 Budget Recommendation

- **\$62.3M Corporate Budget - Revenue**
 - \$1.2M decrease from last year (-1.9%)
 - **Property Tax up 1.0%** + \$ 763K
 - **PPRT down 1%** - \$ 22K
 - **Non-Tax Revenue down 26%** - \$ 2.5M
 - Permits (-\$998K)
 - Camps (-\$97K)
 - Aquatic Centers (-\$610K)
 - Interest Earnings (-\$565K)
 - **Reserves (\$1.5M in total from reserves)** + \$ 500K

FY 2021 Budget Recommendation

\$62.3M Corporate Budget – Expenditures cut \$1.2M

Personnel up \$665K

- FY 2021 COLA assumed (+2%) - labor contracts expire 12/31/2020
- Health benefit estimate (+5%) - rates not in from CC Risk Mgmt.
- No reduction in budgeted positions, but
 - Hiring freeze 1st quarter & possibly 2nd quarter
 - Exceptions for Law Enforcement & essential staff

Non-Personnel down \$1.9M

- Most non-personnel Corporate budgets cut 10% to 13%
- Close Aquatic Centers for FY 2021 saves approximately \$800K
- Contract to conduct daily COVID screening is being considered

Distribution of Tax Levy Increase Across 5 Funds

\$786K property tax levy increase over 2020 (+ 1.0%)

| | |
|------------------------------|-----------|
| - Corporate Fund | + \$ 786K |
| - Construction & Development | No Change |
| - Annuity & Benefits | No Change |
| - Bond & Interest | No Change |
| - Zoo & Garden | No Change |

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

Total Tax Levy For All Funds = \$100.1M

Construction and Development Fund

\$6.8M Budgeted for FY 2021

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

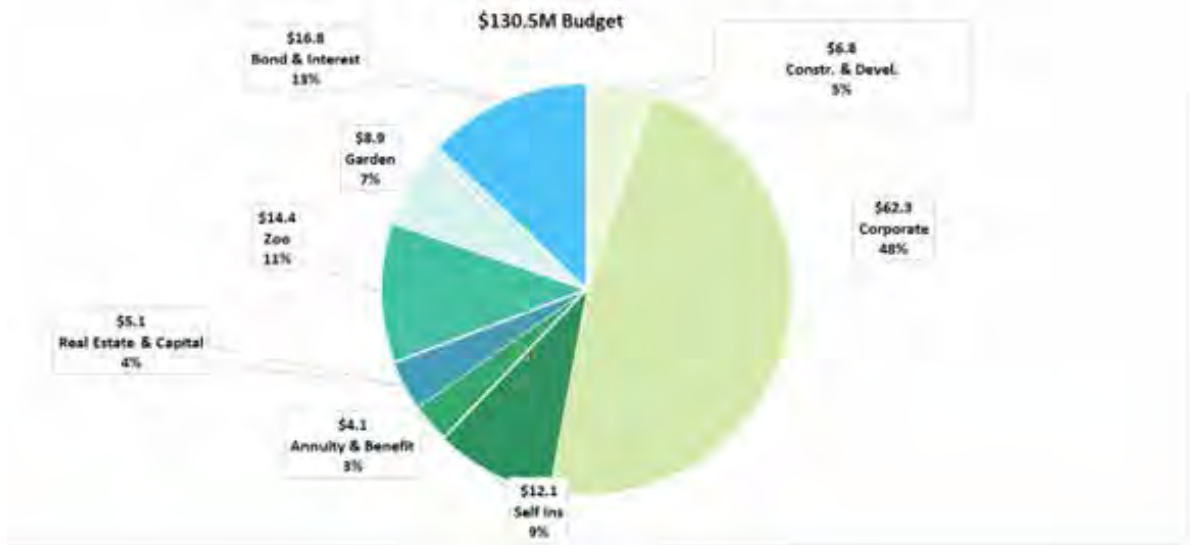
Planned Use of Reserves

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| Corporate Fund | \$1.5M |
| Self Insurance Fund | \$12M |
| Real Estate Fund | \$3.0M |
| Capital Improvement Fund | <u>\$1.0M</u> |
| Demolition & Vehicles | |
| TOTAL | \$17.5M |

NOTE:

The planned use of reserve funds was updated after the 9.9.20 Council meeting. The current proposed use of reserve funds is presented in Figure 9 of this report.

Total Budget for FY 2021



FY 2021 Non-Corporate Funds



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