

MILWAUKIE PARK DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES FOCUS GROUP + INTERVIEWS

FEEDBACK SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The City of Milwaukie conducted a focus group and phone interviews with several people to understand the needs of people with disabilities when they go to and visit parks. Participants were asked the following questions in the focus group and one-on-one interviews:

1. What experiences do you like to have at parks?
2. What experiences do you not like to have at parks?
3. What are barriers to using parks?
4. What amenities do you want to see at parks?
5. Using the three parks as scale examples and budget examples to gather information on what makes sense to put in the parks.

A total of **six (6) people were engaged**, with two people participating in the focus group, which was held virtually over Zoom on July 25, 2022, and two people participating in one-on-one phone interviews. Input received will help inform the designs of Balfour, Bowman-Brae, and Scott Parks. The City of Milwaukie followed up with interviews and a second focus group over Zoom on September 7, 2022, with two additional individuals.

SUMMARY

Overall, participants strongly preferred parks with natural amenities, like landscaped areas and trees that provide shade. Nearly all participants mentioned that providing shelters, which provide shade and protection from the elements, were crucial to having a good experience at parks. Many also mentioned a need for accessible restrooms - not just for themselves, but for caregivers who help them. Other common themes included providing wide, accessible pathways for people to get around in parks.

Below is a summary of the feedback, organized by theme and question:

Experiences enjoyed at parks

The majority of participants said that natural landscapes and shade, open play equipment such as swings or playhouses, and benches that look out onto green spaces were preferred. Wide paths that accommodate wheelchairs are important to this group, as well as privacy buffers. Participants requested buffers between public spaces and residencies to reduce noise and to respect the privacy of neighbors. Many people said that they enjoy going to parks and view parks as a place to build community and to socialize. To this end, they would like to see amenities and facilities (like trees, picnic tables, benches, etc.) that help people engage with one another.

Barriers to using parks

Sidewalk maintenance - or the lack thereof - was an issue raised by the participants. Incomplete sidewalks, ramps, and steep inclines, also lack of handicap parking or having gravel instead of pavement, were also mentioned as accessibility issues for multiple participants. One participant mentioned that while they need smooth and wide paths to enjoy a park space, they feel it is important to offer a variety of amenities that allow everyone to do what they want to do at the park. For example, it is important to provide paved, accessible paths, while also providing gravel nature paths at parks. Layout of events in parks was a topic of concern with some participants as it relates to space for people with mobility devices and ensure access through and around crowds.

Amenities requested by participants

Restrooms were mentioned frequently by participants. Many would like to see larger stalls that can accommodate wheelchairs and people that help them use the restroom. Working latches that are easily accessible by wheelchair users, clean and maintained restrooms, good lighting, were all very important components as well.

Spaces accessible for all people, such as open lawns and winding paths or wheelchair accessible picnic tables, was frequently mentioned as a method of community building. Someone said they would like to see more barbeque areas as well. Water fountains with lower access to the ground was another amenity brought up by interviewed participants. The addition of extra benches was requested by all participants.

How to keep others engaged in disability access work in parks

Multiple people requested that these conversations occur more often. Participants suggested reaching out to organizations that support people with disabilities (specifically by email), sending postcards to residents, and posting neighborhood association notices and flyers. They also asked that there be different activities and events for younger and older generations to encourage participation and engagement. Providing hybrid meetings and opportunities to attend meetings virtually or watch recorded meetings was expressed as a way for people to be engaged as remote access does not require transportation arrangements or transportation time commitments.

Improvements focused on one park or spread across all three?

Participants didn't seem to have a preference over one park or another. They did however have a strong inclination toward the City focusing on improving parks that already have established trees, as these parks already have shade, and they are more like to go to them. Someone suggested hosting a tree planting party to add trees to parks that need more shade.