4.4 Engagement Strategies and Outcomes

A two-part engagement strategy was utilized for this planning process: city-wide engagement, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and youth focused engagement. Historically, in Madison and across the U.S., BIPOC communities are often marginalized or left out in planning processes due to the legacies of racism. Therefore, special focus and intentionality was given to engaging with Madison's Black and brown communities, as well as young people given, they are a core demographic of park user. All Together, a creative agency based out of Chicago that specializes in equitable public engagement, was hired to design and implement engagement activities specifically intended to welcome BIPOC and youth voices into the planning process.

Overall, the engagement activities for this POSP update included:

- A city-wide survey conducted through the University of Wisconsin Survey Center
- Four Public Input Meetings (PIMs) open to the general public
- Four Youth-focused "Pop-Ups" held at City-run Parks Alive Events
- Three BIPOC and Youth Focus Groups, held both virtually and in-person
- 13 'Wish Boxes' distributed to libraries and community centers across Madison to gather comment cards
- A supplementary Youth and BIPOC-focused online survey, promoted via the wish boxes and po-up events

A detailed accounting of all the engagement activities and their results can be found in **Appendix X.**

City-Wide Survey

A survey was mailed to 5,000 randomly selected Madison addressed in early 2024; 898 households completed it, representing an 18% response rate. Survey respondents reported visiting Madison parks regularly, with 54% visiting neighborhood parks with a 10-minute walk of their homes on a weekly or daily basis. Walking and private vehicles were the primary modes of transportation for visiting Madison parks at 83% and 67%, respectively. The most popular activities survey respondents participated in or supervised others doing were leisure activities like picnicking, celebrations, or nature viewing; general physical fitness such as walking, hiking, or running; and attending festivals or events. The majority of respondents felt that the City was providing the right mix of facilities and activities, with the exceptions being swimming pools and splash pads (30% felt there were 'too few') and golfing (12% felt there were 'too many'). Nearly 50% of survey respondents felt that the recreational needs of adults 19-64 were being met 'very well;' by comparison, only 17% felt the same for adolescents aged 13-18.

An additional analysis was conducted to evaluate how perceptions differed across different demographic categories, including race and ethnicity, housing tenure, income, and self reported disability status. Overall, 83% of survey respondents identified as white and 15% identified as either Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, or other. Non-white respondents were more likely than their white peers to find Madison's park and open spaces only "somewhat" accessible (21% versus 12%). Additionally, 29% of non-white respondents 'sometimes' avoided a park because they felt unsafe in comparison to 17% for white respondents; 43% of white respondents 'never' avoided a park because they felt unsafe,

while 34% of non-white respondents felt the same. Please refer Appendix X to review the full survey results.

Public Input Meetings

Between April and May 2024 four public input meetings were held to solicit feedback from the Madison community and provide an overview of the planning process. Attendees participated in a number of activities, including a mapping exercise to identify different parks or areas of the city they enjoyed visiting versus those they felt were in need of improvement, and voting exercise to identify which budget categories should receive more or less funding , and comment boards connected to the different issues discussed in Chapter 5 of this report. For the mapping exercise, the majority of red dots (parks/areas in need of improvement) were concentrated in Demetral Park and Starkweather Park. Warner Park and Olbrich Park received the most dots overall, with the majority being green and blue (favorite place to enjoy nature and favorite place to take children to, respectively). For the funding exercise, attendees felt that more funding should be allocated to ecological management and maintenance, repair, or replacement of facilities in existing parks as opposed to additional programming.

152 comments relating to the topics discussed in Chapter 5 were collected across the 4 meetings. A summary of the comments for each board are as follows:

- **Climate Resilience:** support for maintaining natural areas, preservation of the tree canopy, reduction of hard surfaces, and special attention to habitats for pollinators and birds. Additionally, participants were interested in additional educational resources and opportunities for the public.
- **Volunteers in Parks:** participants cited a number of potential opportunities for improvement, including improved access to information, stronger inter-organizational communication, and more tailored opportunities for specific groups. More broadly, PIM participants desired volunteering efforts which are rooted in the needs, wants, and ideas of the prospective and active volunteers.
- **Golf:** Participants expressed both excitement and concerns about the future of golf in Madison Parks. Some expressed concern about ecological health, limited usage, and financial costs and benefits. However, some residents also note the financial accessibility of an otherwise costly spot, and the potential for economic sustainability of the Parks Department due to the popularity of the sport.
- **Activating Parks:** participants were eager for more skateboarding, pickleball, and dog parks. Additionally, there was community interest for cultural events, and ensuring that Madison Parks are a hub for cultural celebrations for the diverse residents, and education for the public.
- **Recreational Biking:** Participants showed interest in an interconnected system of bike paths through Madison and extending into the surrounding municipalities. However, some emphasized the importance of being environmentally sensitive to the natural habitats throughout Madison Parks.
- **Lake Monona Waterfront:** With upcoming changes planned for the Lake Monona waterfront, community comments focused on protection of natural and ecological health and quality communication between the city and residents.

BIPOC and Youth Engagement

Focus Groups

Madison Parks, MSA Professional Services, and All Together held a total of 3 focus groups, 2 virtual and 1 in-person, to collect feedback from community members that often are left out of community planning processes. These focus groups were designed to engage underrepresented voices, including Hmong residents, BIPOC advocacy groups, and youth. Participants provided valuable insights on their experiences, needs, and aspirations for Madison's parks, helping to shape a more inclusive and responsive park system for the entire community.

Across the focus groups, participants felt that the biggest things missing from the park system were additional shelters with clean restrooms and more seating; they noted that some of the current facilities couldn't accommodate large gatherings. They also noted the need for better communication and information with the Parks Division on how to rent park shelters, suggesting the information could provided via posters or QR codes in the shelters themselves. In the youth focus group specifically, some participants noted a need for better lighting for evening use and the need for more facilities geared specifically for teenagers.

Pop-Ups & Wish Boxes

An estimated 144 kids engaged with the Parks Division's pop-up booth across four Parks Alive events held over the summer of 2024. Kids were asked to write their favorite things to do in the parks as well as their "wishes" for making the parks a better place. The most popular activities amongst the kids were swings and slides, with 35 and 23 mentioned each. Amongst the 'wish boxes,' from both the pop-ups and those distributed to libraries and communities centers, people expressed a desire for more accessible playground features for those with disabilities; additional sports courts and fields; more shade structures and trees; wildlife and habitat protection; open space preservation; more drinking fountains and restrooms; and additional pool and splash pad facilities.

Online Survey

62 folks took the additional online survey promoted at the pop-ups events and wish box stations. This survey was designed intentionally to be short, simple, and easier for teenagers to take. In comparison to the city-wide survey, 45% of the online survey takers identified as Black or African American and an additional 21% identified as Hispanic or Latino, Asian or Asian American, Native American, or another race of combination; nearly 50% were between the ages of 14-18 years old. 14.5% of these survey respondents reported feeling unwelcome at a park, and when asked to explain why, expressed they felt judged or stared at or didn't feel safe. These survey takers also believed adding more shade and places to sit, fun events, and more bathrooms would help improve Madison parks. The full results of this survey are available in Appendix X.

Key Takeaways

Overall, Madisonians place great value on their park system and the important role it plays in their day to day lives. They are passionate about protecting parks and open spaces and see them as integral to the city's character. At times, the desire for environmental protection is at odds with developing more facilities and amenities, especially additional bike paths and sport courts. Across the different engagement activities, residents expressed a desire for more basic park facilities such as benches, picnic

tables, shade and shelters, drinking fountains, and clean restrooms. There were also many calls for additional water-based facilities such as pools and splash pads.

From the BIPOC and youth focused engagement, it is clear that there is still work to do to ensure all Madisonians feel comfortable, safe, and welcome within the parks. This can be addressed in part through improved communication regarding park polices, especially regarding sound/music and shelter reservations. There is also a need for more faculties and events geared specially for the teenage age cohort, who generally lack free, safe, and accessible spaces to gather and recreate.