

Park Ordinance Community Engagement

Updated 6/25/21

The overall process of the ordinance revision can be broken down into three distinct components:

- Internal review
- Equity review
- Wider stakeholder engagement on critical topics

Phase 1

Internal reviews:

These were conducted with the following Ramsey County departments in the winter of 2020 through spring of 2021:

- Parks & Recreation
- Sheriff's Department
- Ramsey County Attorney's Office
- Policy & Planning

The primary questions during the internal review: Does the ordinance...

- Treat people fairly?
- Reduce recreational conflict?
- Protect park property adequately?
- Reflect modern advances and understanding?
- Promote positive park usage?

Partner engagement: This phase engaged partner entities with a focus on racial equity. Starting in April 2021, Parks & Recreation staff engaged the groups listed below to comb through the ordinance and uncover ways that the current ordinance could be discriminatory and/or have a negative racial equity impact. Several virtual focus groups occurred to gather perspectives.

Partners in this phase of public engagement included:

- Members of the Ramsey County Equity Action Circle
- Public Health Law Center
- Public Defenders working in Ramsey County
- Parks & Recreation Parks Commission
- Parks Racial Equity Leadership Team

Several key issues and priorities emerged from these Phase 1 engagements:

- The ordinance should be written in plain language to support accessibility, comprehension and compliance.
- Current park hours are too restrictive and should be expanded to provide greater access.

- Currently, every ordinance infraction can be cited as a misdemeanor, which is a criminal penalty carrying a maximum of a \$1,000 fine and 90 days in jail. This can disproportionately impact communities of color and people in poverty, and efforts should be made to decriminalize ordinance violations.
- Foraging for fruits, nuts and mushrooms is important to some communities and cultures, and should be balanced with protecting natural resources.
- Smoking is detrimental to health and limiting its use in the parks should be considered. This should not include smoking for cultural and ceremonial purposes.
- The loitering section of the ordinance can be used in discriminatory ways and should be removed.
- Elements of the ordinance that are redundant with state statute should be removed.

Phase 2

Phase 2 engagement is concluded. A summary of activities is below:

- Wider Public Engagement
 - Two virtual community conversations
 - August 11th, noon, 40 participants
 - August 17th, 7:00 p.m., 5 participants
 - Online survey
 - Open July 17th through August 20th.
 - 1,495 participants. 8,673 comments.
 - Survey and community conversations communicated through county website, multiple newsletters, signage throughout park system, organic and paid social media ads to Ramsey County residents, partnership with cities, Spokesman Recorder, and outreach to stakeholder groups.
 - Three main topics derived from equity review: park hours, smoking and tobacco use, fines and penalties for violations.
 - Every part of ordinance open for feedback, with side-by-side comparisons of current language and revised language.

This document will be updated as Phase 2 results are processed.