

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: June 3, 2025

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Guy Smith, Executive Director for Milwaukee County Parks

Subject: Removal of abandoned boat

File Type: Informational Report

REQUEST

This report is for informational purposes, there is no request at this time.

POLICY

Wisconsin State Statute 66.0139 "Disposal of abandoned property."

Wisconsin State Statutes:	Wis. Stat. § 66.0139
Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	
Specific Adopted Budget:	
Specific Adopted Budget Amendment:	
Specific Adopted Capital Project:	

BACKGROUND

In October 2024 a boat was abandoned along the shore of Lake Michigan between North Point and McKinley beach. After initial efforts to recover the abandoned boat failed, winter weather took over and the boat, named Deep Thought, was encased in ice. Once Spring thaw enabled new removal efforts Milwaukee County Parks was able to work with a towing contractor who successfully pulled Deep Thought out of the lake, over the rock revetment wall, and onto a trailer where it was towed offsite after careful planning on May 6, 2025. The boat removal was a success but it did generate an additional unplanned for expense that was absorbed by Milwaukee County Parks' operating budget.

During the winter months when Deep Thought was unable to be removed due to a frozen Lake Michigan shoreline, Milwaukee County determined its responsibility to remove the boat. Based on Wis. Stat. § 66.0139 it was acknowledged that the boat is personal property that has been abandoned which then provides guidance to the next steps for removal and disposal. Section (2) of that statute states –

"A political subdivision may dispose of any personal property which has been abandoned, or remained unclaimed for a period of 30 days, after the taking of

possession of the property by an officer of the political subdivision by any means determined to be in the best interest of the political subdivision. If the property is not disposed of in a sale open to the public, the political subdivision shall maintain an inventory of the property, a record of the date and method of disposal, including the consideration received for the property, if any, and the name and address of the person taking possession of the property. The inventory shall be kept as a public record for a period of not less than 2 years from the date of disposal of the property. Any means of disposal other than public auction shall be specified by ordinance. If the disposal is in the form of a sale, all receipts from the sale, after deducting the necessary expenses of keeping the property and conducting the sale, shall be paid into the treasury of the political subdivision.”

At the time that this report was submitted the Parks Department is assessing various means of disposition of the boat which is currently in a tow lot. Statute provides guidance that this disposition can be in a sale open to the public.

Milwaukee County Parks has received and is in the process of paying an invoice to All City Towing for the work they performed in removing the boat from the lake. The total cost for work performed to date is \$50,000. Parks has received interest from community members to donate funds to help offset this unforeseen expense. During this entire process, various members of the community have expressed a willingness to purchase small pieces of Deep Thought, to do that would require additional time and investment in deconstruction of the boat. Community members and organizations can make a tax deductible donation to the Milwaukee Parks Foundation to aid in reducing the cost to County taxpayers.



Image: boat removal on May 6, 2025.

Related File No's:		
Associated File No's (Including Transfer Packets):		
Previous Action Date(s):		

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Describe how the item aligns to the objectives in the [strategic plan](#):

- 1A: Reflect the full diversity of the County at every level of County government
 - 1B: Create and nurture an inclusive culture across County government
 - 1C: Increase the number of County contracts awarded to minority and women-owned businesses
 - 2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity
 - 2B: Break down silos across County government to maximize access to and quality of services offered
 - 2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions
 - 3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities
 - 3B: Enhance the County’s fiscal health and sustainability
 - 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities
- None

FISCAL EFFECT

None

TERMS

None


VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

None

PREPARED BY:

Jim Tarantino, Deputy Director

APPROVED BY:

Guy Smith, Executive Director Milwaukee County Parks 

ATTACHMENTS:

None

CC: David Crowley, County Executive
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office
Sheldon Wasserman, Committee on Parks & Culture Chairperson
Steve Taylor, Committee on Parks & Culture Vice Chairperson
Priscilla Coggs-Jones, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Jack Eckblad, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Felesia Martin, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Juan Miguel Martinez, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Anne O'Connor, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Mgr, Office of the County Clerk
Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services
Joseph Lamers, Fiscal & Budget Director, DAS
Vince Masterson, Fiscal & Strategic Asset Coordinator, DAS
Pamela Bryant, Capital Finance Manager, Comptroller's Office
Justin Rodriguez, Capital Finance Analyst, Comptroller's Office
Allyson R. Smith, Committee Coordinator, Office of the County Clerk
Anthony Rux, Budget & Management Analyst, DAS-PSB
Sandy Saltzstein, Research and Policy Analyst