

Milwaukee Public Museum Proposal to Milwaukee County

DATE: February 8, 2022

SUBJECT: Proposed Relocation of Milwaukee Public Museum

FILE TYPE: Funding Proposal

FUNDING REQUEST

The Milwaukee Public Museum (“MPM” or “Museum”) requests Milwaukee County contribute \$45,000,000 in bonded funding to support the construction of a new museum facility to be located on the northeast corner of Sixth and McKinley Streets. This request is to support the bond-eligible expenses associated with developing, constructing, and equipping the physical infrastructure of a new building to serve as the future home of the Museum. The total project, which includes the inclusion of the Betty Brinn Children’s Museum in the facility, endowment funds and the cost of moving the collections, will cost \$240 million.

Milwaukee County’s approval of this request will:

- Ensure that Milwaukee continues to offer a world-class natural history museum to the community;
- Protect the four million precious objects and specimens in the Milwaukee County collections;
- Save the County \$2.5 million in annual operating support once the new Museum is open;
- Preserve the Museum’s accreditation; and
- Leverage \$195M in additional funding for the state’s largest-ever cultural project right here in Downtown Milwaukee.

BACKGROUND

MPM is the most visited museum in Wisconsin, welcoming 550,000 visitors annually, inspiring curiosity, advancing education and fostering new research for the public. Each year, more than 150,000 school children are awed by the exhibits and the four million objects and specimens in the County’s collections as they learn about science, different cultures, the natural world, and the history of the planet. As an academic institution, MPM supports 29 adjunct faculty members from universities across the state, engaged in critical research and major scientific contributions.

MPM faces a critical moment in its 140-year history. The Museum was chartered by the State of Wisconsin in 1882 and operated by the City of Milwaukee until the 1960s. Due to the Museum’s reach beyond the city, Milwaukee County purchased the Museum and continued to operate it until 1993, when MPM incorporated as a 501(c)3. The reach of the Museum has since grown to extend well beyond the County, and nonprofit status has enabled the Museum to take advantage of private donations as it has diversified its revenue model.

The current facility, owned by Milwaukee County, is not sustainable. The poor construction of the building and its deteriorating condition as a result of significant deferred maintenance are jeopardizing the care of the collections, the Museum’s accreditation status and financial sustainability. The concrete block building was built without a moisture barrier or insulation, resulting in significant energy inefficiency and large swings in humidity, which jeopardize the preservation of these invaluable collections. The building’s deferred maintenance well exceeds \$50M and the resulting structural deficiencies have exposed the exhibits and collections to significant leaking and water damage.

To bring the current facility up to museum standards would cost more than \$100 million, and that would not include updating any of the exhibits. Several of the exhibits—built in the 1960s and 1970s—have not kept current with scientific research and lack cultural competency. Visitors expect and deserve accurate information and representation from the museum they trust. A new facility provides a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the community to envision the Museum and its exhibits. The MPM team will co-curate the exhibits with members of the communities that will be represented. With a strong focus on diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion, this will be the museum **of the community, by the community.**

The Museum spent years evaluating alternatives, including thoroughly examining any potential to remain in the current facility. Dedicated to exploring how a move could potentially solve other community issues, MPM also participated in an independent feasibility study on colocating with the Milwaukee County Domes. Both alternatives were determined to be infeasible. MPM began conversations with BBCM in 2017 and in 2020, the two organizations publicly announced plans to colocate in this new facility, which will provide a dynamic visitor experience and allow for several efficiencies to be realized by both organizations.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The new facility will be Wisconsin’s natural history museum for future generations. Building on the tradition of immersive exhibits, the museum will explore the intersection of nature and culture, teaching science and honoring our world’s different cultures. A right-sized museum of approximately 220,000 sf will include:

- **Exhibit Space:** 80,000 sf of exhibit space will include several permanent galleries that showcase the collections in immersive environments. Also included will be a temporary gallery for traveling exhibits, a planetarium and vivarium (the popular butterfly wing).
- **Visitor Services:** Visitors will access a welcoming public lobby and other facility amenities, including a cafe and retail store. A parking structure will provide on-site parking and revenue for the museum.
- **Collections Research and Storage:** 35,000 sf will properly store and protect the onsite collections, and accommodate appropriate laboratory space for museum scientists, academic partners, and researchers across the state to study the collections. An additional offsite storage facility will provide 40,000 sf of “deep storage” for collections that are more rarely accessed for research and display.
- **Other:** The facility will additionally include classrooms, event venue space, offices, a small workshop for exhibit maintenance, and back-of-house spaces.
- **Betty Brinn Children’s Museum (BBCM):** MPM and BBCM have agreed to colocate in the new facility, reducing operating and capital costs and maximizing organizational

synergies for an expanded visitor experience. BBCM will occupy approximately 30,000 sf in the facility. (This will be funded through private funds.)

Given the theme of nature and culture, the Museum will incorporate sustainable design practices. The Museum will engage with underrepresented communities to co-curate the exhibits to be inclusive and accurate depictions of various communities. Community engagement is and will continue to be a key component of the design process.

Conceptual design began in August 2021. The design team, which includes architecture, exhibit design and landscape, was hired at the same time as the construction management firm, Mortenson, with partner Allcon (DBE/WBE/MBE). The design team is actively engaged in value engineering and cost modeling to ensure the project is designed to the budget. Groundbreaking is anticipated in 2023, with the museum opening to the public in 2026. (See Attachment 1: Alignment with Milwaukee County Strategic Plan)

MILWAUKEE COUNTY'S COLLECTIONS

The museum cares for the County's collections--four million precious objects and irreplaceable specimens--held in the public trust. These important collections are the library of Wisconsin life: the 440 million year-old Silurian Reef fossils that document Wisconsin's geological history, the skeleton of the Hebior Mammoth (the most complete mammoth found in North America, excavated in Kenosha), and the premier collection of artifacts that document the history and culture of the many Wisconsin Native American tribes.

Currently, most of the collections storage furniture is inadequate and very old. Most of it is wooden oak cabinetry, which off-gasses fumes that have long-term negative effect on the items. The Museum plans to purchase industry-standard compacted storage to ensure the long-term protection and preservation of the collections as part of the move.

Based on the proposed size of the new museum, some of the less frequently accessed collections will be stored offsite, which will reduce the overall cost of the new building. The space within the new off-site storage is contemplated to house these when not on display, on loan, or being researched. The off-site storage will be an upgraded warehouse or comparable space and the museum will operate it. The museum has built the expenses of upgrading an approximately 40,000 square foot warehouse to museum storage conditions, including the storage furniture and the staffing required to assess, document, pack and unpack the collections, in the capital project budget. The museum intends to select a site in 2024/2025 and transition the collections at the same time.

The total cost of compacted storage equipment, packaging and moving the four million objects and specimens in Milwaukee County's collections is approximately \$20 million. The museum has incorporated this expense into the overall project budget and will leverage additional funds to support the care and preservation of the collections.

“Turning the Museum Inside Out”: Milwaukee County Collections Recognition

In the future museum, the County's collections will be much more visible to the public. Currently, the collections are stored in the basement or on the fourth-sixth floors, where access is limited to authorized users only. The future museum will incorporate design aspects that engage the visitor in the collections – still preserving and protecting the collections but also inviting visitors to learn more

about the research and collections management aspects of the museum's mission. Where collections are visible to the public, "Milwaukee County Collections" will be visible through signage. This provides Milwaukee County with a much higher level of visibility than in the current museum.

FUTURE OPERATIONAL SUPPORT: SIGNIFICANT SAVINGS FOR THE COUNTY

With the County's capital support of \$45M, MPM's need for annual operational support in the future facility will decrease from \$3.5M to \$1M thereafter. This annual support will ensure the care of the four million objects and specimens in the County's collections, and provide the County with \$2.5M in annual savings.

ACCREDITATION

It is vital that MPM remains an accredited academic institution. The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) cited the condition of the building as a concern when MPM last went through accreditation. In 2020, MPM applied for re-accreditation and AAM tabled that application, giving the Museum one year to show "significant progress" against the future museum project, noting the building is "utterly inadequate to meet even the most minimal standards of care for the collections. MPM's progress report to AAM is due April 15, 2022 and MPM stands to lose accreditation if the following milestones have not been achieved: secure funding from the state (complete), develop and implement an interim plan for the collections most at risk (complete), launch a private capital campaign (underway), and secure funding from Milwaukee County.

Without accreditation, MPM risks losing federal grants, traveling exhibits, research opportunities, adjunct faculty, and the ability to teach museum studies for Wisconsin universities. This equates to millions of dollars in federal grants (most of which supports the care, management and study of Milwaukee County's collections) and lost revenue from traveling exhibits. Losing accreditation would also jeopardize the museum's ability to fundraise, and the damage to the museum's reputation and ability to attract researchers and professionals would result in steps toward closure.

CONCLUSION

For thirty years, MPM has valued its partnership with Milwaukee County. As capital needs have increased and deferred maintenance has accumulated, the museum is faced with either moving to a new facility that meets the standards of care for Milwaukee County's collections or losing accreditation and eventually closing. The museum has worked very hard to create a plan for the new facility that leverages funding beyond the County. The State of Wisconsin has invested \$40M in the project, and an upcoming capital campaign will secure an additional \$150M. New market tax credits and federal funding round out the project revenue. Milwaukee County's investment of \$45M ensures that Milwaukee continues to offer a world-class natural history museum to the community; protects the four million precious objects and specimens in the Milwaukee County collections; saves the County \$2.5 million in annual operating support once the new Museum is open; preserves the Museum's accreditation; and leverages \$195M in additional funding for the state's largest-ever cultural project right here in Downtown Milwaukee.

Attachment 1: ALIGNMENT TO MILWAUKEE COUNTY STRATEGIC PLAN

The museum's move to a new facility provides a rare and significant opportunity to advance racial equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility. MPM has long been a leader among museums in accessibility. The only museum in the state to have a full-time accessibility coordinator, MPM has led advancements in accessibility for years, with programs like Spark!, which serves persons with dementia and their caregivers, a sensory room which provides a space for persons with autism or other sensory sensitivities, to Braille and audio guides for visitors with sight impairments.

This work is informing MPM's efforts to become a more diverse and inclusive institution. In 2020, MPM consulted with the Office of African American Affairs to select a consultant to do a baseline assessment of MPM's racial equity work. That report's recommendations are being implemented and will support the work of a new position. The IDEA Director, Dr. Rhoan Garnett, will advance MPM's commitment to diversifying the staff and board, implement and promote inclusive programming and support incorporation of community voice in MPM's programming and future exhibits, similar to the Community Council of 50+ leaders of the recent Nelson Mandela exhibit MPM hosted, in partnership with America's Black Holocaust Museum, in Spring 2021.

Related to the future museum project, MPM has set aggressive IDEA goals. The design team is required to meet a minimum of 20% of expenditures with DBE/WBE/MBE. For the exhibit design team, because of the specialized nature of the industry, the requirement was altered to mandate at least 30% of the team working on this project meets Milwaukee County's definition of a "disadvantaged person." At this time, 100% of our exhibit design team meet that definition.

Additionally, the architect of record (Kahler Slater) has incorporated an internship for a student of color throughout the project. Several students will gain experience as team members. Mortenson is partnered with Allcon Construction, a certified DBE in a mentorship throughout the construction management process to enhance Allcon's portfolio of work beyond general contracting.

Workforce requirements exceed Milwaukee County's standard requirements. 40% of workers will qualify through Milwaukee's Residential Preference Program (RPP) and 50% of workers are required to reside in Milwaukee County. This local workforce ensures that the investment in this project will ripple through our own community and support local jobs and families.

Community engagement is at the heart of the future museum project. Thousands of community members have participated in focus groups, workshops, surveys, and more to provide input and share their aspirations for the future museum. Future exhibits will be designed in collaboration with members of the community, as was A Tribute to Survival (the Pow-Wow exhibit), so that the cultures are represented as they want to be, not how they are perceived or studied by others, as is often the case with natural history museum exhibits. The future museum exhibits will be inclusive and will provide an opportunity for every child who walks through to see themselves represented.

The museum cares for one of the most extensive collections of Native American history, both of the Wisconsin tribes and across the country. The museum has strong relationships with the various tribal communities in Wisconsin and is working with tribal members to inform and design the future museum exhibits and building.