

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
**INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION**

**DATE:** April 17, 2025

**TO:** Supervisor Marcelia Nicholson, Chair, County Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Celia Benton, Economic Development Director, Department of Administrative Services

**SUBJECT:** From the Economic Development Director, Department of Administrative Services requesting authorization to utilize ED Reserve 37005 to establish Economic Development's "Building Bridges" small business and commercial corridor activation program.

**POLICY**

The recommendation of the County Executive and review and approval of the Finance Committee is required for appropriation transfer procedures within a department, pursuant to MCGO § 56.03 and Wis. Stat. § 59.60(8).

**BACKGROUND**

Resolution 11-601 created an "Economic Development Fund" to develop sustainable jobs and new tax base in Milwaukee County. There is \$639,278 available in the account. The fund has previously been used for an investment in the UpLift MKE program, the development of a Master Property inventory, the implementation of a Foreclosure Mitigation initiative, and an appropriation for supportive housing with Heartland Housing, Inc.

Resolution 24-938 authorizing Milwaukee County Economic Development to apply for, accept and implement a Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) Small Business Development Grant. Milwaukee County Economic Development was recently awarded \$200,000 from WEDC for this program. Economic Development will use the fund to provide grants of \$10,000 to qualifying small businesses.

File 25-107 Annual Review of Trust and Agency Funds

**REQUEST**

Small and micro businesses are the backbone of Milwaukee County's local economy. They create a significant portion of available jobs, add value to our tax base and help create our identity as a community. Milwaukee County has historically leveraged roles and relationships to support small businesses because we have not had the resources and capacity to offer direct service. As part of a strategy to grow our impact in the small business ecosystem, Economic Development was awarded a \$200,000 grant from WEDC for the Small Business Development Grant program. This funding allows the County to directly support small businesses and municipalities in all 18 Supervisory Districts through grants of \$10,000.

In addition, Milwaukee County has the Economic Development Reserve Fund 37005 available to develop sustainable jobs and new tax base in Milwaukee County. There is \$639,278 in the account.

We have a rare opportunity to leverage the two funds to build a county-wide small business program focused on brick-and-mortar technical assistance for entrepreneurs and commercial corridor activation in partnership with municipalities. For the next four years, Economic Development would like to amplify and expand our work in small business support and commercial corridor activation by utilizing account 37005 “ED Reserve” to create a Building Bridges Small Business Support Program.

A cornerstone activity in this program will be the creation of a four-year limited-term Business Liaison position focused on fostering communication, collaboration and partnerships between municipalities and the local business community. The position will also focus on organizing marketing and communication of our small business economic development efforts and results. Additional funds would be utilized to promote commercial corridor activation (for example, small business brick-and-mortar design support or corridor renderings), marketing, branding and website development and maintenance.

This program will result in new jobs, small business investments, small business sustainability, commercial corridor activation and increased collaboration in the small business ecosystem throughout all 18 Supervisory Districts– all of which directly meet the goals of the ED Reserve Fund and supports all supervisory districts.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Economic Development Director, Department of Administrative Services requesting authorization to utilize ED Reserve 37005 to establish Economic Development’s “Building Bridges” small business and commercial corridor activation program.

### **FISCAL NOTE**

The use of the funds in the ED Reserve Account will result in no additional tax levy increase.

Prepared By:

  
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Celia Benton  
Economic Development Director, Department of Administrative Services

Attachment:           Resolution  
                              Fiscal Note

cc:     David Crowley, County Executive

MaryJo Meyers, Chief of Staff, Office of the County Executive  
Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services  
Liz Sumner, Comptroller  
Community, Environment and Economic Development Committee Members  
Finance Committee Members  
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board of Supervisors  
Allyson Smith, Committee Coordinator  
Sumaiyah Clark, Director of the Office of Equity