

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: November 3rd, 2025

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

From: Joseph Lamers, Office of Strategy, Budget, and Performance *JOSEPH LAMERS*

Subject: Milwaukee County Zoo requests the creation of 4.0 FTE Maintenance Worker positions (Pay Grade NR17)

File Type: Informational Report

MCGO 17.05 and Wis. Stats 59.60(10), require the Office of Strategy, Budget, and Performance (SBP) to review departmental position create requests for need, appropriateness, and funding availability.

NEED AND APPROPRIATENESS

☒ SBP concurs with the department report on the need and appropriateness of this position request.

FUNDING AVAILABILITY

☒ The cost of this request will be absorbed within the department's existing salary budget. The department is responsible for managing their personal services budget and taking appropriate action to avoid a deficit. In the subsequent year requested budget, the department will include this position action inside their assigned tax levy target.

☐ Grant Revenue that expires _____

☐ Other

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Facilities Division Maintenance Section is responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the Zoo's mechanical systems, implementation of preventative maintenance programs, HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) systems, and electrical and plumbing repairs. Currently, the Zoo has 62 buildings requiring HVAC maintenance and an additional 137 structures that need ongoing upkeep. Staffing in the Section includes one Mechanical Services Manager, one Maintenance Supervisor, one Electrical Mechanic (Permits), one Plumber (Permits), one Steamfitter (Temperature Control), one Welder Mechanic, and one Maintenance Worker Assistant. In addition, there are five Maintenance Worker positions, for a total of 12 staff members, covering operations seven days a week, 365 days per year, across multiple shifts.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost of outside contractors has increased

substantially, with no anticipated decrease and likely further increases in the future. As the County and Zoo's finances face continued fiscal pressures, the Zoo is requesting the creation of four additional Maintenance Worker positions. Expanding in-house maintenance capacity will allow the Zoo to:

- Avoid contractor markups on materials and labor.
- Maintain consistent, predictable labor costs, whereas contract expenses can fluctuate based on project scope, urgency, or market rates.
- Reduce the premium costs contractors charge, which often include profit margins, travel, and administrative overhead.
- Enable faster response to daily repairs, animal area issues, or facility emergencies, minimizing downtime and improving guest and animal safety. Contractors often require advance scheduling, which can delay repairs and increase operational risk.

In-house staff have deep familiarity with Zoo-specific systems, including animal buildings, life-support systems, HVAC in sensitive habitats, water features, and public pathways. Staff adhere to internal standards and protocols for safety and animal welfare, ensuring consistent quality, whereas contractor work may vary in compliance or workmanship. Employees' investment in the Zoo's mission promotes proactive maintenance and higher-quality outcomes. Additionally, staff can prioritize internal needs based on weather, animal schedules, or visitor volume without waiting for external availability.

The Zoo projects that the savings generated from reduced reliance on repair and maintenance contractors will fully offset the cost of creating four additional Maintenance Worker positions, including pension and fringe benefits.

There is no fiscal impact on the 2025 Budget for this item, as it is requested for the December 2025 County Board cycle. The 2026 position cost, including social security, health and pension for the Maintenance Worker position, including the 2026 proposed 1% raise, is \$62,647 to \$84,890. Based on candidate experience, skills, and market conditions, the Zoo anticipates hiring at an average annual cost of \$71,952 per position, for a total of \$287,809 for the four positions.

Based on filling the four positions by pay period 6 in 2026, the total cost for these positions is \$243,295. An administrative fund transfer is requested to realign the repair and maintenance accounts to the appropriate position accounts for a zero net tax levy impact once the positions are filled.

Joseph Lamers, Director Office of Strategy, Budget, and Performance