

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
Inter-Office Communication

Date: April 17, 2025

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

From: Celia Benton, Economic Development Director, Department of Administrative Services

Subject: From the Director of Economic Development providing an Informational Report on the Future of Trimborn Farm

File Type: Informational Report

---

**REQUEST**

From the Director of Economic Development providing an Informational Report on the Future of Trimborn Farm. This report is for informational purposes only.

**POLICY**

Trimborn Farm is zoned Parks District, so Wisconsin Statute § 59.17(2)(b)3 applies, which states that the “county board may continue to exercise the authority under s. 59.52(6) with regard to land that is zoned as a park...”. In the law of property, authority over “land” includes authority over all rights appurtenant to the land.

Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances 56.10 requires that Parks leases over one year require County Board approval.

Wis. Stat. § 66.1111 outlines requirements for a political subdivision’s ownership, use and disposition of property. If the County conveys historic property, Wis. Stat. § 66.1111 applies and the County “shall obtain a conservation easement under s. 700.40 to protect the historic character and qualities of the property.”

Wisconsin State Statutes:	§ 59.17(2)(b)3, § 66.1111
Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	56.10
Specific Adopted Budget:	
Specific Adopted Budget Amendment:	
Specific Adopted Capital Project:	

**BACKGROUND**

Trimborn Farm is Milwaukee County’s only historical park. It is located in Greendale at 8881 W. Grange Avenue, in a residential neighborhood, and is zoned park. It has nine period buildings including a stone barn, cream city brick farmhouse, a granary/bunkhouse, four kilns, and a machine shed. Trimborn Farm was placed on the

National Register of Historic Places in 1980. The stone barn, farmhouse, and granary/bunkhouse are considered contributing factors to the National Historic designation.

The property was used for lime manufacturing from 1847 to 1899. From 1900 to 1935 it was a working dairy farm and then was acquired and owned by the federal government from 1935 to 1952 as part of the Greendale Project. A portion of the farm was used as a housing and staging area while constructing the greenbelt community of nearby Greendale. The remaining property passed into private ownership until 1980 when the Milwaukee County Park System acquired the property and began developing it into a historic site. The Park People began restoring, preserving, and interpreting the buildings and structures on the property until January 2004 when the Milwaukee County Historical Society took over management of the property.

The Milwaukee County Historical Society has been a valued partner in managing the property on behalf of the County these past 21 years. The Historical Society has a caretaker onsite and provides for minor maintenance and repairs and utilities, which costs approximately \$6,500/year. The County remains responsible for all major upkeep and capital improvements. Current operational costs are approximately \$15,000/year for the County. Like the County, the Historical Society is experiencing growing fiscal pressures and is seeking to reduce its expenses—one of which includes ending its management of Trimborn Farm.

Milwaukee County's infrastructure needs far exceed its current funding capacity through cash and debt financing. The Parks system alone faces over \$500 million in deferred maintenance, and the estimated cost for a new criminal courthouse stands at \$480 million. To ensure long-term fiscal sustainability, the County must consider reducing its asset portfolio or exploring innovative ways to lessen its capital obligations.

Historic structures are simply beyond the County's financial reach. This is clear from both the growing demands of core, mandated services and the limited past investment in historic properties. Without a shift in approach, the urgent capital needs of essential services will continue to overshadow and erode the County's ability to preserve its historic assets.

For these reasons, Economic Development will be releasing a Request for Proposals (RFP) in June to seek out a partner that will take on management of the property, reducing the County's capital and maintenance needs. Prior to the RFP, Supervisor Kathleen Vincent, Economic Development, and the Milwaukee County Historical Society, will be meeting with the Greendale Village Board on May 20 at 6pm at the Village Townhall located at 6500 Northway, Greendale, WI 53129, as well as hosting a public meeting on June 5<sup>th</sup> from 6:30 to 8:00 pm at Highland View Elementary, located at 5900 S 51st St, Greendale, WI 53129, to seek input from the community on viable options for this historic property.

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](#):

3B: Enhance the County's fiscal health and sustainability

**VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES**

Ben Barbera, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Historical Society,  
[BBarbera@milwaukeehistory.net](mailto:BBarbera@milwaukeehistory.net)

**PREPARED BY:**

Erica Goblet, Economic Development Project Manager, Dept. of Admin. Services

**APPROVED BY:**

*Celia Benton*

---

Celia Benton

Economic Development Director, Department of Administrative Services

**ATTACHMENTS:**

PowerPoint

**CC:**

David Crowley, County Executive

Liz Sumner, Comptroller

Parks and Culture Committee Members

MaryJo Meyers, Chief of Staff, Office of the County Executive

Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services

Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks

James Tarantino, Deputy Director, Milwaukee County Parks

Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board of Supervisors

Kelsey Evans, Committee Coordinator

Sandy Saltzstein, County Board Research Analyst