

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: May 21, 2025

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

From: Guy Smith, Executive Director for Milwaukee County Parks

Subject: Update on Public Engagement Related to the Mill Pond and Dam in Oak Creek Parkway

File Type: Informational Report

REQUEST

Update regarding project WP069401-Oak Creek Parkway S. MKE Mill Pond Dam, specifically public input and potential design alternatives provided in the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission report *Restoration Plan for the Oak Creek Watershed*.

POLICY

Wisconsin State Statutes:	59.50
Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	
Specific Adopted Budget:	2022
Specific Adopted Budget Amendment:	
Specific Adopted Capital Project:	WP069401

BACKGROUND

The 2022 adopted budget included project WP069401-Oak Creek Parkway – S MKE Mill Pond Dam in the amount of \$283,681 provided through sales and use taxes. The initial scope of work was to execute planning, design & construction of repairs to the Mill Pond Dam and drain structure. The need for the departmental request was an active order from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) to complete sluice gate repairs, masonry repairs and vegetation removal.

Concurrently, the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) completed a study on the Oak Creek Watershed, which included recommendations to improve water quality, habitat, and recreational access and use, and to reduce flooding. WDNR allowed a continuation of the existing conditions at the dam while site alternatives and related funding were being evaluated.

In 2023, Milwaukee County Parks received approval from the Milwaukee County Board to revise the scope of project WP069401 to include public input on the recommendations included in the SEWRPC watershed restoration report. The SEWRPC plan included five alternatives as potential solutions to address environmental concerns and improve conditions at Mill Pond and the dam area. Milwaukee County Parks undertook a public engagement campaign in 2024-25 to assess community input of these alternatives prior to expending capital funding to replace/repair the sluice gate in-kind.

Public Engagement

Following the 2023 project scope change, the consulting firm G. Moxie was hired to lead a robust public engagement effort focused on identifying public preferences for the future of both the Mill Pond and the Mill Pond Dam. Initial information was organized and published on the Parks' Departments project webpage: [Oak Creek Parkway - S. Milwaukee Mill Pond Dam | Projects | Milwaukee County Parks](#).

The objective of the public information program for the Mill Pond was to:

- Identify and actively involve stakeholders
- Solicit input to ensure that the project will best meet the needs of the community
- Communicate remaining alternatives to enhance community understanding and build consensus

Mill Pond Survey

A survey was conducted to gain valuable insight regarding the users of the Mill Pond, their values when it comes to the Pond, and their preferred activities when utilizing the Mill Pond area. The survey was promoted via yard signs put up at the Mill Pond and in the surrounding area. In addition, a QR code for the survey was included on nearly 5,000 direct mail pieces that were sent out inviting the public to the first public information meeting. The survey garnered 865 responses with over 500 of those providing an email address to receive updates about the project.

Public Information Meetings

Two Public Information Meetings (PIMs) were held for the project. To inform the public of the meetings, the USPS Every Door Direct Mail program was utilized. A post card invitation was mailed to 4,813 residents living close to the Mill Pond. The postcard included information about the Public Information Meeting as well as a call to take the survey. The invitation was also sent to a Mill Pond stakeholder list which was comprised of individuals from related municipalities, agencies and friend groups.

The first PIM was conducted to discuss the project scope and three remaining alternatives. The second PIM was conducted to share community survey results, two remaining alternatives, and a cost breakdown.

Public Information Meeting 1

PIM #1 was held Tuesday, December 3 at Wil-O-Way Grant from 4-6PM. Nearly 100 attendees were in attendance to learn more about the SEWRPC study and the three proposed alternatives. Milwaukee County and SEWRPC staff were on hand to walk attendees through alternatives and answer questions. Two sets of display boards were present, with boards illustrating the three alternatives and associated costs. The public was encouraged to view the exhibits and provide comments. Public comment was taken verbally by staff, submitted in writing on comment forms, or via the project website. Thirty-five comment forms were received and thirteen comments were received on the project website. Guests were also provided an informational handout that included the remaining alternatives and cost breakdown.

Public Information Meeting #2

The invitation for PIM #2 was sent to the Mill Pond stakeholder list and to the 542 survey

respondents who provided email addresses. PIM #2 was originally scheduled for Wednesday, February 12, 2025, but had to be rescheduled due to severe weather. The cancellation of the event was communicated directly to these stakeholders via email. PIM #2 was rescheduled and held on Wednesday, February 19, 2025 at Grant Park Clubhouse from 4-6PM. Nearly 50 attendees were in attendance to learn more about the remaining proposed alternatives. Milwaukee County staff was on hand to walk attendees through alternatives and answer questions. Two sets of display boards were present, illustrating the remaining two alternatives, associated costs, and the results of the survey. The public was encouraged to view the exhibits and provide comments. Public comment was taken verbally by staff or submitted in writing on comment forms or via the project website. Twenty-six comment forms were received and 14 comments were received on the project website. Guests were also provided an informational handout that included the remaining alternatives and cost breakdown.

Takeaways and Next Steps

Public opinion on dam removal with stream restoration versus pond dredging and dam maintenance was essentially split. Those in favor of restoration generally discussed long-term maintenance costs, and habitat benefits as the basis for their opinion. Those in favor of pond dredging generally wanted to be able to reestablish historical uses like ice skating.

Preliminary design analysis indicates that due to sediment contamination, costs for disposal of sediment will likely have a multimillion-dollar impact on the project costs. Grant opportunities appear more readily available for stream and habitat restoration and dam removal than dam maintenance and contaminated sediment removal.

Next steps for the project will be to target project objectives to meet community input including environmental cleanup, passive recreation, and resource appreciation. Coordination will take place with potential grant funders, and pre-proposals will be prepared to gauge funding potential. Work will also take place to refine total disposal costs for contaminated sediment, as well as long-term maintenance for a proposed solution.

Related File No's:	23-308; 23-789
Associated File No's (Including Transfer Packets):	
Previous Action Date(s):	9/21/2023

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

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

This action aligns to strategic objectives 3A & 3B by attempting to address historical accumulation of sediment and impairments to healthy habitats as well as investigate how to advance a footprint for the Milwaukee County Parks system that is sustainable both financially and environmentally.

FISCAL EFFECT

No impact, sufficient project funding remains in place.

TERMS

None

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

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APPROVED BY:

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**ATTACHMENTS:**

PowerPoint Presentation

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
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Allyson R. Smith, Committee Coordinator, Office of the County Clerk
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