

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE

Inter-Office Communication

Date: 11/9/2025

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

From: Amos Morris, Executive Zoo Director *Amos D. Morris, Jr.*

Subject: From the Executive Zoo Director of the Milwaukee County Zoo requesting a transfer of \$215,000 from Capital Project WZ0160 - Zoo Administration Building Roof Replacement and \$396,000 from Capital Project WZ0176 - Zoo Aviary Air Conditioning to allocate additional funds for Capital Project WZ0174 - Zoo Front Entrance

File Type: Action Report

REQUEST

The Executive Zoo Director of the Milwaukee County Zoo is requesting a transfer of surplus funds of \$215,000 from Capital Project WZ0160 - Zoo Administration Building Roof Replacement and from Capital Project WZ0176 - Zoo Aviary Air Conditioning in an amount not to exceed \$396,000 to Capital Project WZ0174 – Zoo Front Entrance. This transfer will provide adequate contingency funding to effectively manage construction risks associated with the Front Entrance capital project.

POLICY

Wisconsin State Statutes:	
Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	Chapter 56.03
Specific Adopted Budget:	
Specific Adopted Budget Amendment:	
Specific Adopted Capital Project:	2026 Capital Budget – WZ0174

BACKGROUND

The Front Entrance Capital Project was initially requested at \$17.6 million as part of the Zoo's 2026 Capital Budget request. At the August 12 Capital Improvements Committee (CIC) meeting, the Zoo was asked to reduce the project cost and present a revised proposal at the August 19 meeting. The Zoo subsequently submitted a reduced-scope project totaling \$14.2 million. The CIC further reduced the project budget to \$13.6 million. The County Executive's Recommended 2026 Capital Budget included the CIC recommendation of \$13.6 million for the construction phase of the Zoo Front Entrance project. During the October 15 Finance Budget hearing, the Zoo expressed concerns that the reduced project budget of \$13.6 million did not include a sufficient construction contingency.

To mitigate the contingency shortfall, the Zoo is requesting a fund transfer from two Zoo capital projects that have the following surpluses:

1. WZ0160 – Administration Roof Replacement (fully closed out)
2. WZ0176 – Aviary AC Replacement (construction complete: one encumbrance pending closeout)

The current project schedule requires the Zoo to enter into a Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) agreement with Gilbane in early January 2026. This timing will allow the County to lock in pricing and schedule before bid award, complete bidding in Q1 2026, and begin Phase 1 construction before the summer peak season, maximizing progress and supporting the goal of completing Phase 1 within 2026.

The December Board Cycle Fund Transfer request represents a critical milestone. With an effective County Board date of December 21, 2025, this action will provide the Zoo with an appropriate level of contingency to responsibly enter into the GMP and manage typical construction risks, while acknowledging that some level of uncertainty remains inherent to complex capital projects.

If the Zoo were to wait for the January Board Cycle Fund Transfer (effective 2/15/26), the resulting delay would impact the project and add significant schedule risk to achieving Phase 1 completion in 2026.

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

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

- 1C: Increase the number of County contracts awarded to minority and women-owned businesses
- 3B: Enhance the County's fiscal health and sustainability
- 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities

FISCAL EFFECT

Approval of the fund transfer request increases the Front Entrance project contingency account to provide sufficient contingency to manage construction risks.

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

Amos Morris, Executive Zoo Director, Amos.Morris@milwaukeecountywi.gov
Vera Westphal, Deputy Zoo Director, Vera.Westphal@milwaukeecountywi.gov

PREPARED BY:

Vera Westphal, Deputy Zoo Director

APPROVED BY:

Amos Morris, Executive Zoo Director

ATTACHMENTS:

Resolution, Fiscal Note

cc: Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Manager, Office of the County Clerk
Allyson R. Smith, Finance Committee Coordinator
David Crowley, County Executive
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive
Liz Sumner, Comptroller
Aaron Hertzberg, Executive Director Administrative Services
Joseph Lamers, Director of Strategy Budget and Performance
Jim Moon, Deputy Comptroller
Steve Cady, Director Research and Policy, Comptroller's Office
Anthony Rux, Sr Analyst Budget and Management, DAS-SBP
Vera Westphal, Deputy Zoo Director