



January Board Cycle

Milwaukee County Parks
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Date: December 31, 2020
To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, County Board of Supervisors
From: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks
Subject: **Update on the Status of a Request for Proposals (RFP) for Hemp Production at the Mitchell Park Domes (INFO)**

Issue

Milwaukee County Parks is providing a status update on the progress of an RFP requested by the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors in the 2021 Budget Amendment #1A025.

Background

The Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors adopted an amendment to the 2021 Operating Budget (#1A025) which states –

“The Department of Parks, Recreation, and Culture (DPRC) shall issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) related to the lease of a greenhouse at the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory (Domes) to a private entity for the purpose of propagating hemp clones. DPRC shall provide a report to the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors by the end of January 2021 with an update on the status of the RFP and options for moving forward.”

A Milwaukee County Board resolution from 2019 (File #19-718, amended) originally requested that the Parks Department issue an RFP for a similar purpose. Plans for issuing an RFP were developed with DAS-Procurement in early 2020, however the issuance of that RFP was put on hold due to the COVID pandemic. Beginning in mid-March 2020 and lasting for 6 months the Mitchell Park Domes were closed and Domes staff were redeployed to support other areas of the Department as a hiring and spending freeze prevented the hiring of seasonal staff and challenged operations throughout the entire parks system. The Domes reopened in September 2020 under strict COVID operating protocols that includes a dramatically reduced capacity within the building, and adherence to the County’s Administrative Orders impacting workspace rules. As such, there has been very little non-essential use of the entire facility with all private rentals cancelled and events limited to just the Winter Farmers Market to maintain access to food during the pandemic.



The Board's resolution requesting the RFP in 2019 was amended and states the following –

“BE IT RESOLVED, the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors (County Board) requests that the Director, Department of Parks, Recreation, and Culture (DPRC) issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) related to the lease of a greenhouse, for a minimum of two years, which could include the possibility of leasing any necessary ancillary spaces and options for maximizing revenue, at Mitchell Park, to a private entity for the purpose of propagating hemp clones; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that acceptable responses to the RFP must include information related to the following items:

- Costs related to additional security infrastructure, including, but not limited to, intruder detection, security guards, video surveillance, and additional physical barriers; and
- Ongoing documentation that product(s) contain no more than 0.3 percent of THC on a dry weight basis; and
- Plans for preparations for possible seizure of hemp plants, seeds, and related material by State and Federal agencies”

Parks staff have re-engaged with DAS-Procurement regarding a new issuance of this RFP to account for all of the stipulations requested by the County Board. As of the date that this report was required to be submitted to be heard in January 2021 (December 31), the RFP is in development and has not been made public.

The assumption that the Domes greenhouses are “turnkey ready” for hemp clone propagation is false and would result in significant negative impacts to the departments operations. Given the numerous challenges to host a hemp clone operation at the Domes the RFP that will be issued will account for the resolution of each challenge noted in the Board's resolution and in previous staff reports. As such, the revenue upside of supporting such a program would need to be significant to justify the downside. This may result in a set of requirements that are unattractive to a potential bidder, and to mitigate that Parks proposes to add an additional location to the RFP for consideration. The RFP will include the option to submit a bid for the Rainbow Airport Park Storage Facility, 10010 S 76th St., Franklin, which is used for indoor storage. There is a much lighter scale of facility improvements that would be needed to alter this facility for the intended use and as such may provide a more attractive location for a potential bidder.

Parks staff worked with DAS-Procurement staff to issue a Request for Information related to this same topic on December 21, 2018 which was open until January 21, 2019. The purpose of that RFI was to obtain responses that fulfill the Board's request and stated that, “The information requested is to provide possible options for utilizing all or part of the 60,000 square foot greenhouse facility that has built in systems to provide precise control of temperature, irrigation, lighting, shade, and water retention.” Three responses were received which included one suggestion to not grow hemp and rather to focus on other uses of the greenhouses that had a higher public purpose. Another response



proposed a business plan that would require an investment of \$200,000 in new lighting and equipment, the use of County staff and materials, and the installation of a solar facility in Mitchell Park at an unknown expense. Given the lack of actionable response to the prior RFI, the recommendation at that time was to allow for the State to align their laws and processes with the changes at the federal level and to not invest in infrastructure at that time.

Throughout the last two years of requests to support hemp clone propagation at the Domes, whether directly or through a third-party vendor, Parks staff have consistently reiterated certain challenges to supporting such a program at that facility. These challenges include the basic premise that the greenhouses are entirely used to grow plants for shows at the Domes and other parks facilities and reducing or removing this core function would result in the need to purchase plants. This would reduce the appeal of shows at the Domes due to purchasing plants that lack uniqueness and add expense of approximately \$80,000 every year. The Domes are reliant on show attendance to bolster earned revenue and to provide a reason for attendees to return to the Domes multiple times in a year. In addition, the COVID pandemic presents new challenges for allowing additional non-essential people into the Domes greenhouses to staff a hemp growing operation. We are currently operating with staggered shifts and physical distancing of employees to prevent the spread of the virus, and the introduction of any new activity to this space only serves to put our staff at risk. Ongoing uncertainty related to the resolution of the COVID pandemic means that implementing any hemp clone operation will likely be delayed until the safety of staff and the public can be ensured.

Recommendation

This item has no recommendation and is provided for information only.

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Approved By: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks



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- Steven Shea, Parks, Energy & Environment Committee Vice-Chair, Supervisor District 8
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- Julie Landry, Director, Department of Administrative Services
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