

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: February 13, 2026

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

From: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks

Subject: Amending MCGO Chapter 13 - Guidelines for County Departments Establishing Partnerships with Support Groups

File Type: Action Resolution/Ordinance

REQUEST

Authorization to amend Milwaukee County General Ordinance Chapter 13, Guidelines for County Departments Establishing Partnerships with Support Groups.

POLICY

Milwaukee County Parks proposes amending Chapter 13 to update the terms that govern Support Group (aka “Friends group”) agreements. The amendment expands the definition beyond Friends groups to include all non-profit entities under Wisconsin Statute Chapter 181. It also aligns financial reporting requirements with Wisconsin Statute Chapter 202.12. The amendment would streamline the process for county departments to terminate agreements with Support Groups when necessary. It also requires executed agreements before Support Groups can fundraise on behalf of county departments.

Wisconsin State Statutes:	
Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	13
Specific Adopted Budget:	
Specific Adopted Budget Amendment:	
Specific Adopted Capital Project:	

BACKGROUND

Support Groups play an important role in the success of Milwaukee County Parks and other County departments. Support Groups provide financial and in-kind contributions that allow county departments to accomplish more than tax revenue alone can fund. This ordinance amendment establishes clear, consistent policies to govern Support Group relationships with the county, ensuring transparency and fairness across all groups. It also promotes mutual understanding and successful partnerships that benefit both the county and the public.

This ordinance updates and clarifies Milwaukee County’s policies governing relationships with nonprofit “Friends Groups,” now consistently referred to as Support Groups. The revisions establish a uniform, transparent, and enforceable framework for how County departments may partner with nonprofit entities that provide ongoing financial, programmatic, or in-kind support.

Key elements of the ordinance include:

- **Clear Definitions and Applicability**
 The ordinance distinguishes between one-time or intermittent nonprofit donors and ongoing Support Groups. Nonprofits providing ongoing support are classified as Support Groups and are subject to additional requirements.
- **Mandatory Written Agreements**
 All Support Groups must operate under a formal, Board-approved agreement that clearly defines roles, responsibilities, authority, financial controls, insurance, ethics compliance, and termination rights. Support Groups may not fundraise on behalf of the County or operate on County property without an executed agreement aligned with this chapter.
- **Preservation of County Authority**
 The ordinance reaffirms that the County retains all statutory authority over County facilities, employees, and programs and may not delegate those responsibilities to Support Groups. Support Groups are expressly recognized as independent entities with no authority over County operations.
- **Financial Reporting and Oversight Requirements**
 Support Groups are required to submit annual financial and compliance documentation, including state charitable organization filings, federal tax returns (Form 990 or equivalent), and independent audits where applicable based on revenue thresholds. The ordinance also requires accounting for the use of County resources and documentation when reimbursement is waived.
- **Capital Project Contributions**
 Contributions from Support Groups toward capital projects require a separate agreement defining planning, fundraising, ownership of improvements, and long-term operations and maintenance responsibilities.

Overall, the ordinance strengthens accountability, consistency, and transparency across all County departments while continuing to encourage partnerships with Support Groups that enhance public facilities, programs, and services.

Related File No’s:	
Associated File No’s (Including Transfer Packets):	
Previous Action Date(s):	Chapter 13 was created on March 16, 1989, to establish guidelines for Support Groups, and Section 13.06(d) was

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

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

1A: Reflect the full diversity of the County at every level of County government

1B: Create and nurture an inclusive culture across County government – Parks supports establishing a consistent policy governing Support Groups for all County departments.

1C: Increase the number of County contracts awarded to minority and women-owned businesses

2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity

2B: Break down silos across County government to maximize access to and quality of services offered

2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions

3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities

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

3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities – Parks supports changes that may increase the formation of Support Groups throughout the Park system.

FISCAL EFFECT

None

TERMS

None

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

James Davies, Assistant Corporation Counsel, james.davies@milwaukeecountywi.gov

Vera Westphal, Deputy Zoo Director, vera.westphal@milwaukeecountywi.gov

PREPARED BY:

Vanessa Koster, Director of Administration

APPROVED BY:

Guy Smith, Executive Director Milwaukee County Parks *guy smith*

ATTACHMENTS:

Resolution/ordinance

Fiscal Note

Chapter 13 Amendment

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
Justin Rodriguez, Capital Finance Analyst, Comptroller's Office
Allyson R. Smith, Committee Coordinator, Office of the County Clerk
Anthony Rux, Budget & Management Analyst, DAS-PSB
Sandy Saltzstein, Research and Policy Analyst