

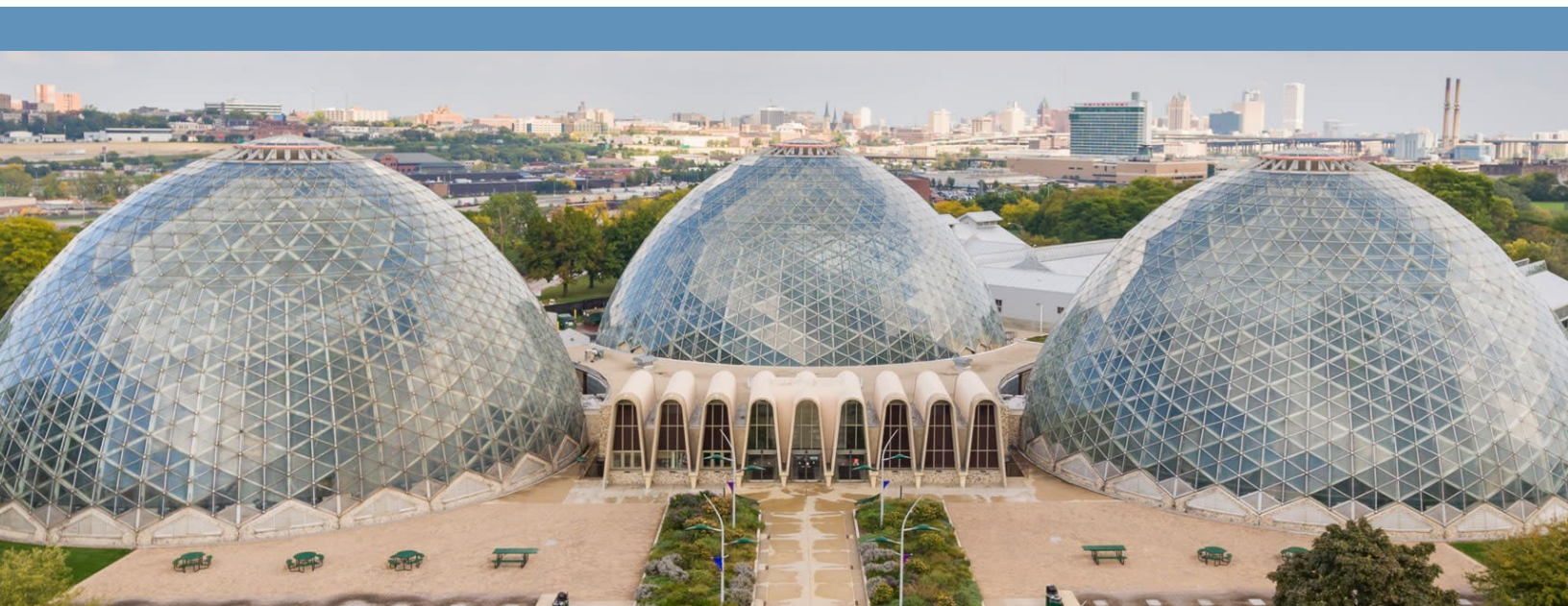
Ter Molen Watkins & Brandt LLC

Strategies. Solutions. Success.

Friends of the Domes and Milwaukee County Parks

Philanthropic and Community Stakeholder Study: Executive Summary

June 23, 2023



Executive Summary

Purpose of Project

Before creating a specific plan for the future of the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory, Milwaukee County Parks and Friends of the Domes (FOD) sought fundraising counsel through a Request for Proposals to conduct a philanthropic and community stakeholder scan with a stated goal of helping Parks and FOD understand the philanthropic community’s “interests and hesitations,” as well as gather feedback about whether the community has the capacity and affinity for a possible \$20M capital campaign.

This study, conducted between March and June 2023, included a survey open to the wider community, promoted by more than 30 partner organizations and the media, and hosted on FOD’s website. This dual process provided valuable, new information from the philanthropic community and beyond to help inform next steps for the Friends of the Domes and Milwaukee County Parks but did not provide specific guidance about capacity or affinity for a possible \$20M capital campaign.

Ter Molen, Watkins & Brandt, a national consulting firm with an office in Milwaukee, was hired to conduct this study.

This report focuses on themes revealed by interviews with representatives of foundations, corporations, and individuals selected by Friends of the Domes because their interests align with a potential, mission-aligned vision for The Domes. Through the community survey, we gathered community perceptions and observations about The Domes and Milwaukee County Parks from other stakeholders with unique perspectives on The Domes (such as current donors, members, and architects), as well as interested members of the Milwaukee community who could offer perspective about The Domes, Milwaukee County and County Parks.

Two options for the future of The Domes were presented to the philanthropic community: to restore The Domes with targeted enhancements, or to construct a new conservatory in Mitchell Park while repurposing The Domes’ facility. Our conversations – and survey questions – attempted to illuminate the differences in perception and understanding of Friends of the Domes and Milwaukee County Parks as well as the dome structures themselves, the Mitchell Park Conservatory housed within them, and their context within Mitchell Park.

Think Big

Most of those interviewed in this study encouraged decision-makers to think bigger and consider the future of The Domes holistically - not only as a historic structure, a plant conservatory, a gathering place, or a provider of environmental education. Interviewees suggested it is unfortunate that the years-long debate about “saving The Domes” has diverted attention from potential community solutions this major project could deliver.

In a city where many capital projects compete for philanthropy and Milwaukee County funding, it's clear that nothing concrete will happen until those responsible for moving the project forward put a stake in the ground. We heard from the philanthropic community that until a vision and specific options are brought to the community to consider - alongside a committed level of public funding - a philanthropic campaign cannot move forward.

A “future for The Domes” should not be considered in the context only of their structure or purpose as a conservatory. While most people have a fondness for The Domes, most were also pragmatic about the level of neglect and anticipated costs of either scenario they were offered: investing or replacing. Instead of this binary, we heard clearly, and with great enthusiasm, the opportunity for these iconic structures to be not the singular focus of a capital campaign but rather a catalyst for needed changes in Mitchell Park; changes that would increase use of the park, and create a more inviting neighborhood, community, and tourist destination.

Some offered ideas for co-location of cultural amenities, citing the Betty Brinn Children's Museum as an example. Others suggested building a conservatory to the Milwaukee County Zoo, with a similar goal of economics of scale, increased attendance, and other impact for both community treasures. Similarly, a survey respondent imagined a “Central Park-like environment” if a conservatory was built near the Milwaukee Public Museum. Others recommended adding assets like a summer farmer's market or restaurant. One respondent suggested job creation strategies could activate Mitchell Park, thus improving its safety and making it a destination. Any of these ideas could be part of a solution for the community's broader issues by revitalizing Mitchell Park as a beloved destination.

Financial Realities

While our interviewees hesitated about an immediate campaign for The Domes, the community survey hosted on the website of Friends of the Domes suggested a public phase of a capital campaign would be well received: 75% said they were somewhat likely, likely, or very likely to make a financial gift of “any size” to a campaign “to ensure that there's a conservatory in Mitchell Park for generations to come.”

We caution that the public phase of a capital campaign is about including the public – not about raising money from the public. While the percentage of respondents identifying as members of Friends of the Domes is high, messaging would need to encourage community members to give a gift beyond their membership in order to support the campaign.

For now, the philanthropic community is not prepared to consider any financial commitment to the future of The Domes without being certain it would be a shared commitment with Milwaukee County Parks. Considering the history of inaction surrounding The Domes, including deferred maintenance, our interviewees did not trust the County will commit necessary resources.

It Comes Down To Leadership

FOD is an independent nonprofit organization that operates within the County-run Mitchell Park, similar to the way the Zoological Society of Milwaukee operates within the County-run Milwaukee County Zoo. Most respondents see the potential for FOD to become a catalytic driver of change in the 62-acre Mitchell Park, positioning The Domes as the iconic face of change in a diverse neighborhood on the city's south side that lacks engaging and activated green space and nearby amenities to make the area more vibrant as a park.

But for this to happen, FOD must increase their visibility, fully develop key partnerships, define a vision for the larger Mitchell Park, and demonstrate they can “get something done.” They need to make the case that philanthropic investment through FOD, as a nonprofit catalyst, can drive innovation in Mitchell Park. Although FOD is not currently perceived as the powerhouse to lead such a transition or a capital campaign, interviewees acknowledged that FOD has taken the first steps towards growth by leading this process and conducting strategic internal planning to guide both a future direction and necessary changes for the board, staff, and programming.

As a nonprofit organization, Friends of the Domes can and should innovate and lead an initiative to meet its mission utilizing The Domes as a catalyst for community change. As the steward of an iconic Milwaukee institution, Milwaukee County Parks must step up. As one interviewee pointedly remarked: “Stop the studies and surveys and make a decision.”

Conclusion

Ter Molen Watkins & Brandt is honored to present this report on our study on behalf of Friends of the Domes and Milwaukee County Parks. Thank you for your joint trust in this project.

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June 2023

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Philanthropic & Community Stakeholder Study Summary Report

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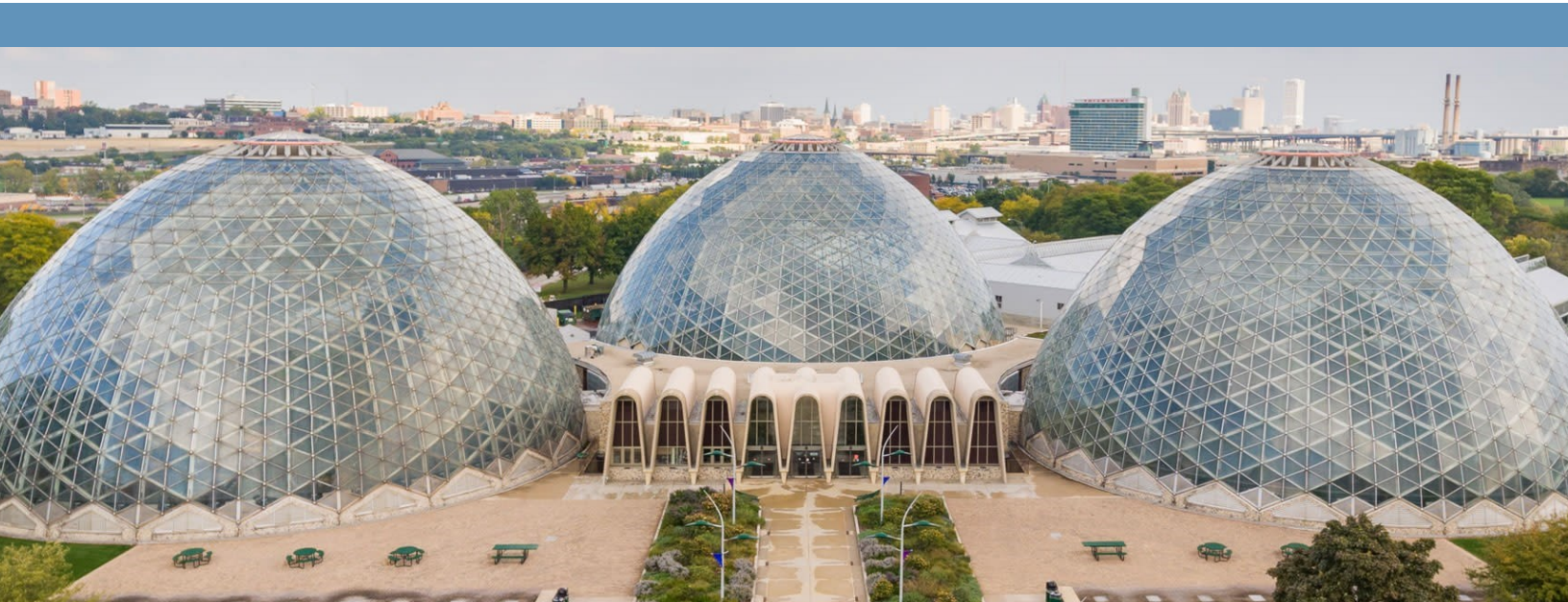


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I. Introduction

Project Purpose

Milwaukee County Parks (Parks) and Friends of the Domes* (FOD) sought fundraising counsel through a Request for Proposal to conduct a philanthropic and community stakeholder scan. The stated goal of the scan was to inform the development of a specific plan for the future of the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory. Parks and FOD hoped to understand the philanthropic community’s “interests and hesitations.” They also sought feedback about whether the community has the capacity and affinity for a possible \$20M capital campaign.

Ter Molen, Watkins & Brandt, a national consulting firm that specializes in fundraising campaign strategy, conducted this study between March and June 2023.

This report focuses on themes revealed by confidential interviews with representatives of foundations, corporations, individuals, and other stakeholders with unique perspectives selected by Friends of the Domes. It also includes results from a survey that was open to the wider community.

Through the community survey, we gathered perceptions and observations about The Domes and Milwaukee County Parks from interested community members who offered perspective about The Domes, Milwaukee County and County Parks. More than 30 partner organizations and the media promoted the survey, which was hosted on FOD’s website. The high visibility of the survey drove thousands of responses.

Two options for the future of The Domes were presented to the philanthropic community: 1) to restore The Domes with targeted enhancements, or 2) to construct a new conservatory in Mitchell Park while repurposing The Domes’ facility. Our interviews – and survey questions – sought to illuminate the differences in perception and understanding of Friends of the Domes and Milwaukee County Parks as well as the dome structures themselves, the Mitchell Park Conservatory housed within them, and their context within Mitchell Park.

The survey results provide a general understanding of the views about and importance of The Domes to respondents, who were primarily members of and occasional visitors to The Domes. The philanthropic perception interview process provided valuable information from the philanthropic community and beyond to help inform next steps for the Friends of the Domes and Milwaukee County Parks.

**Friends of the Domes is a 501c(3) organization whose mission is to promote and support the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory (The Domes) and surrounding park by creating and enhancing the visitor experience of this globally significant urban destination.*

II. Summary Findings

Think Big

Most interviewees encouraged decision-makers to think bigger and consider the future of The Domes holistically—not only as a historic structure, a plant conservatory, a gathering place, or a provider of environmental education. Some interviewees suggested it is unfortunate that the years-long debate about “saving The Domes” has diverted attention from potential community solutions this community asset could deliver.

Milwaukee has many capital projects that compete for philanthropic support and Milwaukee County funding. It’s clear that nothing concrete will happen until those responsible for moving the project forward for community consideration develop a clear and compelling vision and specific options to support that vision. In addition to the need for a vision and specific options, the philanthropic community stated that there would need to be a committed level of public funding before a philanthropic campaign could move forward successfully.

We heard from most interviewees that a “future for The Domes” should not be considered in the context only of their structure or purpose as a conservatory. While most respondents have a fondness for The Domes, they were also pragmatic about the level of neglect and anticipated costs of either scenario 1 or 2: investing or replacing. Instead of this binary, the majority of those responding conveyed with great enthusiasm that there exists an opportunity for these iconic structures to be not the singular focus of a capital campaign but rather an impetus for needed changes in Mitchell Park; changes that would increase the use of the park, and create a more inviting neighborhood, community, and tourist destination.

Plan Within Financial Realities

While interviewees hesitated about an immediate campaign for The Domes, the community survey hosted on the website of Friends of the Domes suggested a public phase of a capital campaign would be well received: 75% said they were somewhat likely, likely, or very likely to make a financial gift of “any size” to a campaign “to ensure that there’s a conservatory in Mitchell Park for generations to come.”

For now, the data secured from this study demonstrates that the philanthropic community is not prepared to consider any financial commitment to the future of The Domes without being certain it would be a shared commitment with Milwaukee County Parks. Considering the history of inaction surrounding The Domes, including deferred maintenance, most interviewees did not trust the County will (or can) commit the necessary resources.

It Comes Down To Leadership

FOD is an independent nonprofit organization that operates within the County-run Mitchell Park, similar to the way the Zoological Society of Milwaukee operates within the County-run Milwaukee County Zoo. Most respondents see the potential for FOD to become a catalytic driver of change in the 62-acre Mitchell Park. They could do so by positioning The Domes as the iconic

face of change in a diverse neighborhood on the city’s south side that lacks engaging and activated green space and nearby amenities to make the area more vibrant as a park. But for this to happen, FOD must increase its visibility, fully develop key partnerships, define a vision for the larger Mitchell Park, and demonstrate they can “get something done.”

They need to make the case that philanthropic investment through FOD, as a nonprofit catalyst, can drive innovation in Mitchell Park. Although FOD is not currently perceived as the powerhouse to lead such a transition or a capital campaign, interviewees acknowledged that FOD has taken the first steps towards growth by leading this process and conducting strategic internal planning to guide both a future direction and necessary changes for the board, staff, and programming.

As a nonprofit organization, Friends of the Domes can and should innovate and lead an initiative to meet its mission utilizing The Domes as a catalyst for community change.

III. Perception and Reputation

We asked interviewees their perceptions of the reputations of both Milwaukee County Parks and Friends of the Domes. Most people interviewed agreed that The Domes is a distinctive, iconic living museum whose structures “meld power with beauty and whimsy.” Many reflected on its skyline presence and how it created positive, personal experiences with family and friends. Many noted with regret that the ongoing political saga of “what to do about The Domes” played out over the last decade has created fatigue. They also felt that Friends of the Domes is taking the early steps to rebuild community excitement for a 21st-century solution, using the opportunities of more than 60 acres of green space in urban Mitchell Park.

Commitment is Crucial

We heard a clear message from almost all interviewees that the County will need to make a formal commitment—including the commitment of financial resources—to a specific plan before the philanthropic community will consider participating in a fundraising effort. Many interviewees referenced the “community debate” about the future of The Domes over the past many years, citing frustration with the County’s lack of commitment to or ownership of a plan to take specific steps forward.

Some noted that the County’s planning process for The Domes that began in 2019 has not yielded a clear path forward, four years later. Interviewees signaled a lack of trust in the County to follow through on funding to address the situation with The Domes. This lack of clarity and commitment has stalled the project indefinitely.

A Point of View

Interviewees were emphatic on the need for Friends of the Domes and Milwaukee County Parks to come to the process with a point of view. In particular, we heard that Friends of the Domes must not be agnostic about the future of The Domes. They must create a plan, build credibility to create a bold future for The Domes, and advocate publicly for it in a way they will be heard.

Those with prior knowledge of the 2019 planning process—and its lack of resulting action—were direct in their feedback. They said the plan contained some good ideas but the County, in partnership with Friends of the Domes, must demonstrate how their planned strategies will incorporate The Domes as a catalyst for moving towards a greater vision for Mitchell Park.

Who's Who?

The relationship between Friends of the Domes and Milwaukee County Parks must be formalized and clarified publicly before any planning and fundraising efforts will be successful. Funders—and the public—must understand the roles each play in the upkeep, programming, and fundraising for The Domes.

One reason that clarification of this relationship is important is that Friends of the Domes is relatively unknown. Some interviewees were completely unaware of FOD or its role. Those interviewees familiar with Friends of the Domes generally had a positive impression, but most had an impression of a small, limited organization focused on maintaining current programming and operating the way they have for the past two decades.

The majority of interviewees (86%) were unaware of the long-range plans of Friends of the Domes; many (72%) were not familiar with their impact on and contributions to the community. Of the interview respondents, 76% said they were not familiar with The Domes' leadership.

Other respondents credited the new executive director of FOD with bringing a fresh perspective. Many interviewees said they hope that stronger, more vocal leadership and a willingness to be bold and innovative will lead to a realistic, yet visionary future for The Domes.

Friends of the Domes and Milwaukee County are aware of the challenges related to their reputations, real and perceived. The feedback from respondents provides FOD and the County information which they can use—or not—to set direction and a timeline about their immediate next steps. Now is the opportune time to demonstrate whether the commitment to The Domes is real—and realistic—or if it has been hopeful yet theoretical. Friends of the Domes has an opportunity to aim high, working in partnership to discover ways The Domes can be part of a solution to a community challenge.

IV. Response to the Case for Support

Interview conversations used as a framing device a document prepared by Friends of the Domes titled “What’ll We Do With The Domes?” which functioned in our interviews as an introduction to the importance of and issues concerning The Domes. Using this case for support, FOD hoped to gain an understanding of two potential options for The Domes; “repair and invest” versus “repurpose and replace.” We provide a summary of interviewees’ assessment and evaluation of the case for support.

A Vision for Mitchell Park

Our interviews began with the binary frame offered in the FOD's case for support, but our conversations quickly moved beyond those boundaries. Those we spoke with shared their fatigue from the years-long debate about "saving The Domes." In addition, they also clearly and enthusiastically voiced their belief that the opportunity exists for these iconic structures to be the driver for desired changes in Mitchell Park; changes that would increase activation and safety in the park, creating an inviting neighborhood, community, and tourist destination.

We encourage FOD and Parks to consider the future of Mitchell Park holistically, lifting their vision beyond The Domes' place in the Milwaukee skyline and their purpose as a conservatory.

Related to the notion that The Domes could fulfill a larger community purpose, it is important to understand that, among respondents, The Domes are not yet considered a neighborhood asset.

There was strong recognition that The Domes could become a valued asset as part of a larger initiative that stabilizes and supports the neighborhood and contributes positive change in Mitchell Park. Donor interviewees understood the facilities issues that have been the catalyzing factor in many conversations about The Domes. But they want to move beyond the structures. In fact, our interviews (and the community survey) uncovered dozens of ideas—from practical to fanciful.

Discrete ideas included adding assets like a summer farmers market, maker space, youth after-school programs, a small business incubator, a cafe or full-service restaurant, and free Wi-Fi. Suggestions like making the Show Dome a temperate Wisconsin climate, creating an aviary or butterfly room, adding outdoor gardens or native plantings, and building a community garden in the park could all transform elements of the current infrastructure.

Big picture development ideas included partnering with city government to consider job creation strategies, with the park becoming a training site for water management and green infrastructure jobs. Others suggested improving the connection between Mitchell Park and Three Bridges Park, converting the Mitchell Park pavilion (rather than repurposing The Domes themselves), or adding new community buildings. Some offered ideas for co-location of cultural amenities and programmatic synergies positioning the park as a destination for local families and tourists to spend several hours between institutions, citing the Betty Brinn Children's Museum as an example.

Some interviewees were interested in creating a "campus" elsewhere in the County by building a new conservatory at the Milwaukee County Zoo or Boerner Botanical Gardens, where economies of scale might be realized, and serve as a strategy to increase attendance. There is merit to the idea of building a new conservatory elsewhere; the move could maximize aligned missions in compelling ways and increase attendance and other impacts for both organizations. But that strategy would further degrade Mitchell Park, which philanthropic respondents believe could—and should—be a beloved park destination.

Regardless, we heard clearly that any plan should incorporate reimagining how to activate Mitchell Park while maintaining the fabric of the neighborhood.

What's the Value?

Those who told us they visited The Domes spoke most directly about the FOD case document and the information it provided. A key part of the case document was an account of six “values.” The Domes believes it does—or can—provide to the community: urban oasis & environmental epicenter; community wellness; social equity & community affirmation; generational connectivity; economic driver; and architectural significance. Importantly, many respondents do not believe The Domes is currently providing all the values listed in the FOD document noting, in particular, the “social equity” and “economic driver” values. Of note: These same interviewees expressed great interest in seeing how these values *could* be part of the role of The Domes.

Building Community

Interviewees were interested in building forward momentum, and we found that our clarifying questions opened the door for interviewees to share big ideas. Many wondered about potential partnerships as a way forward and prioritized partnerships with organizations from the immediate surrounding neighborhoods—a desire echoed in responses to the community survey.

In responding to questions about their funding interests and hesitations, several respondents suggested that while they appreciated being asked for their insights early in the process, they felt Parks and Friends of the Domes should have identified their point of view for this feedback process. Related, they challenged FOD to think bigger, beyond the confines of the current iconic structures. Of importance, they cautioned FOD not to plan in a vacuum or speak for community interests and priorities.

Who Will Make the Case?

Most respondents were very direct in sharing their perceptions that FOD doesn't currently hold a vision for the future and has not fully risen above its previous reputation as a “volunteer garden club.” As FOD increases its visibility, develops key partnerships, guides a vision for Mitchell Park, and demonstrates they can “get something done,” they can make the case that philanthropic investment will drive changes in Mitchell Park that the County and Parks alone cannot.

As an independent nonprofit organization (that operates within the County-run Mitchell Park) FOD can innovate to respond to 21st-century needs and priorities. Overall, most respondents simply felt neutral (54%) about the document—that there was not enough within the FOD case to meaningfully react to it. Those who reacted negatively to the document (30%) did so because the document didn't include enough details about the potential future nor a sense of urgency.

The Buildings Themselves

While most people have a fondness for The Domes, most were also pragmatic about the level of neglect and anticipated costs to address either future.

Our interviews went well beyond the binary choice framed by FOD’s case for support, but even considering the simple question of “repair and replace” vs “repair and upgrade,” we did not hear a strong preference: 30% preferred to repair and replace, 35% to repair and upgrade, and 9% preferred neither. Tearing down The Domes was not an alternative presented for feedback, and while a few interviewees brought this up as an option, for the most part, we did not hear an outcry to tear them down. Nor did we hear in our interviews an outcry to “save The Domes for preservation’s sake.”

Of note: In almost every conversation, interviewees referenced The Domes as “iconic”—a memorable and unchanging fixture of Milwaukee. But very seldom were they referenced as “historical.”

Learn From the Past, Plan Carefully for the Future

Some respondents participated in the 2019 task force or told us they were informed about its process and outcomes.

We encourage FOD and Parks to reexamine this comprehensive report to see what remains relevant today. These well-informed members of the philanthropic community recognize that prior mistakes—including offering up non-viable options to the community—should be avoided. Overwhelmingly, interviewees told us they appreciated the opportunity to share their thoughts. Most voiced an affection for The Domes as a city icon, a destination, or a fond memory. With appreciation for this process, interviewees believe FOD should immediately open a focused and intentional dialogue with the community—go beyond the din of the ongoing, directionless debate—and inspire a broader, more sweeping project.

V. Support for a Potential Campaign

Through our interviews, we heard clearly that until a compelling vision that encompasses both The Domes as well as Mitchell Park overall is presented, philanthropy will not support “a new future for The Domes.”

We also heard that Friends of the Domes and Milwaukee County Parks both need to build community credibility, and that FOD must improve and demonstrate its fundraising ability before moving forward.

Many respondents suggested that an articulation of how The Domes could be part of a solution to community challenges—and how broadening The Domes’ revival to include reactivation of Mitchell Park—would be a compelling case for philanthropic support. Meanwhile, those funders involved in the 2019 planning encouraged FOD to reach out to them for more insights, and to be bold in cherry-picking ideas that would resonate in today’s environment.

Another concern was the price tag for the project. Some believed that given the many community needs and interests that could be addressed with \$20M, The Domes should not be a priority. To some respondents, the state of The Domes’ disrepair, compared to the price tag for

either repairing and upgrading, or repurposing and replacing, simply did not make financial sense. Others were concerned that current and recent campaigns and priorities would limit a new campaign's success.

Unsurprisingly, the ongoing financial situation of the County and its impact on Parks was an overarching concern for most respondents. A major concern voiced by interviewees about a potential campaign was the need to understand explicitly—in advance of any campaign—the plan for financing the public portion of the project.

Because the relationship and working partnership between Friends of the Domes and Parks was unclear to most respondents, several of them recommended that a strong case for this partnership be articulated and, in the short term, FOD and Parks plan a small strategic initiative that demonstrates their effectiveness in working together.

They also recognized that FOD's board of directors would need to drive the creation of a vision, find ways to fully represent it with FOD members and the community, and lead negotiations with the Parks and County to develop a mutually beneficial partnership.

Preferred Future

About a third of interviewees felt that The Domes serve Milwaukee best as the home of the Mitchell Park Conservatory; they did not feel the conservatory should be moved out of the park.

Interestingly, very few interviewees or respondents preferred an option in which The Domes were repurposed, and the conservatory placed in a new building. They cited concerns over what the new replacement would look like and what the build quality would be, as well as how Parks could afford maintenance on two buildings.

Financial Feasibility

There was a sense among interviewees that a \$20M campaign could be a reasonable campaign goal, but 78% recommended caution citing the need for a strong and compelling plan and committed partners. "Fixing The Domes" was not seen as compelling. None of the interviewees told us The Domes should not pursue a campaign.

While 90% of respondents indicated a willingness to support a campaign, it is critically important to understand that while some participants have the capacity to make a gift significant to a future campaign, the majority of those who participated in the philanthropic perception study do not have the capacity to significantly impact the success of a \$20M campaign.

One potential funder indicated potential willingness to consider a \$500,000 gift. However, most interviewees either would not discuss a dollar amount or indicated that the project—no matter the direction—would not be a funding priority for them. Almost everyone indicated the need to know the specifics of a plan and budget before they would be willing to share opinions about their potential financial support.

To give some context to the benefit of a potential \$500,000 gift, Table 1 shows the gifts necessary in a typical campaign to reach a \$20 million campaign goal. The table below illustrates that a lead gift of \$4 million (20%) of the campaign goal is typical for such a campaign. In addition, the table suggests one gift of \$2.5 million and three gifts of \$1 million would be necessary to complete a \$20 million campaign. Furthermore, while the interviews identified one possible \$500,000 prospect, the gift table illustrates that five \$500,000 gifts are required.

Range	Goal	Cumulative Goal	Prospects Required by Range (4:1)
\$ 4,000,000+	\$ 4,000,000 (1)	\$ 4,000,000 (1)	4
\$ 2,500,000 - \$3,499,999	\$ 2,500,000 (1)	\$ 6,500,000 (2)	4
\$ 1,000,000 - 2,499,999	\$ 3,000,000 (3)	\$ 9,500,000 (5)	12
\$ 500,000 - 999,999	\$ 2,500,000 (5)	\$ 12,000,000 (10)	20
\$ 250,000 - 499,999	\$ 2,000,000 (8)	\$ 14,000,000 (18)	32
\$ 100,000 - 249,999	\$ 1,400,000 (14)	\$ 15,400,000 (32)	56
\$ 50,000 - 99,999	\$ 1,250,000 (25)	\$ 16,650,000 (57)	100
\$ 25,000 - 49,999	\$ 1,000,000 (40)	\$ 17,650,000 (97)	160
\$ 10,000 - 24,999	\$ 750,000 (75)	\$ 18,400,000 (172)	300
\$ 5,000 - 9,999	\$ 750,000 (150)	\$ 19,150,000 (322)	600
\$ 1,000 - 4,999	\$ 350,000 (350)	\$ 19,500,000 (672)	1,400
\$ < 1,000	\$ 500,000 (many)	\$ 20,000,000 (many)	many
TOTAL	\$ 20,000,000 (672+ many)		2,688 + many

Table 1 Possible \$20 Million Gift Table

Respondents understand that something must happen, or The Domes will further fall into disrepair and become a safety hazard. Given the need for action, respondents encourage Friends of the Domes to identify ways The Domes can become part of a solution to a community challenge.

Regardless of their likelihood of a financial gift respondents appreciated the thoughtful nature of Friends of the Domes’ process and the opportunity to share their input.

VI. Community Survey Results

As part of our engagement, we conducted a community survey which provided the broader Milwaukee community with the opportunity to voice its collective views on the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory (The Domes) and interest in supporting its future.

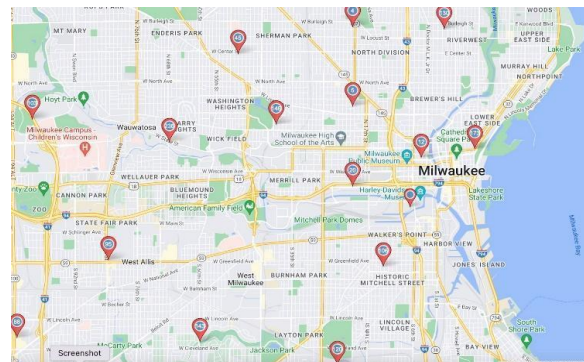
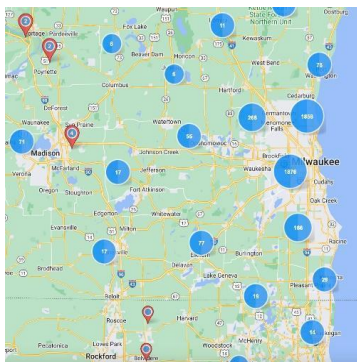
The survey results provide us with a general understanding of the views about and importance of The Domes to respondents, who were primarily members of and occasional visitors to The Domes. The survey was not designed as a deep dive into the needs and desires of residents of the neighborhoods surrounding The Domes; nor did it address larger questions of the value, use, and/or improvement of Mitchell Park overall.

The following represents an overarching analysis of the results from the survey as well as highlighting several key takeaways.

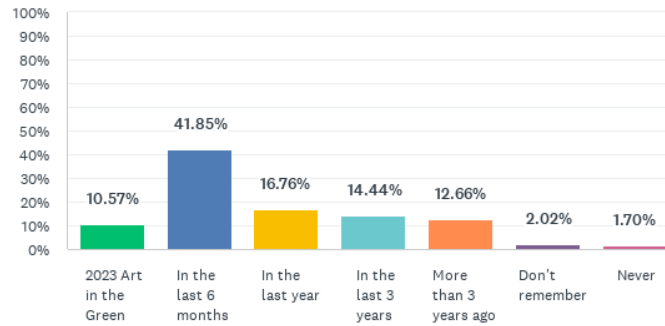
Respondent Demographics

We received 5,688 survey responses from individuals from across Milwaukee, the Midwest, and even the world. Both English and Spanish versions of the survey were hosted on the Friends of the Domes website for approximately one month, and—in addition—to the Friends of the Domes email list of members, donors, supporters, and event attendees—was shared with more than 30 community organizations for distribution to their constituents. The survey also received media mention.

Of total respondents, 3,355 were located in Greater Milwaukee and surrounding suburbs, with higher concentrations on the near south and west sides of the city. Not surprisingly, because the bulk of distribution of the survey was to the Friends of the Domes mailing list, the greatest portion of respondents were members and occasional visitors (95%). (Note that this survey question allowed multiple responses.) Respondents were overwhelmingly white (83%), primarily lived outside the area immediately surrounding The Domes (94%) and predominantly identified as female (72%). Between the ages of 25 to 74, respondents were fairly evenly split, with slightly more respondents stating they were between 35 and 44. Given the significant percentage of written responses valuing the opportunity to come to The Domes with small children, it makes sense that this age range that generally represents adults with children, is higher.



Q1 When was the last time you visited The Domes?



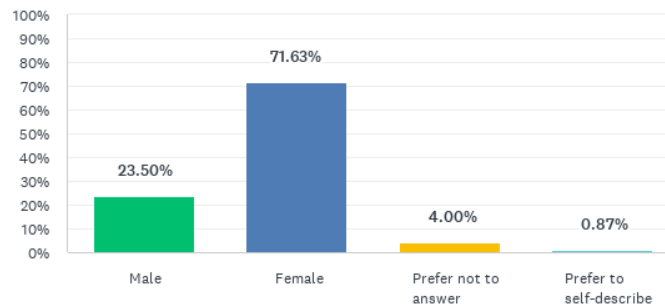
(all respondents)

Q2 What is your relationship to The Domes? (Choose all that apply.)



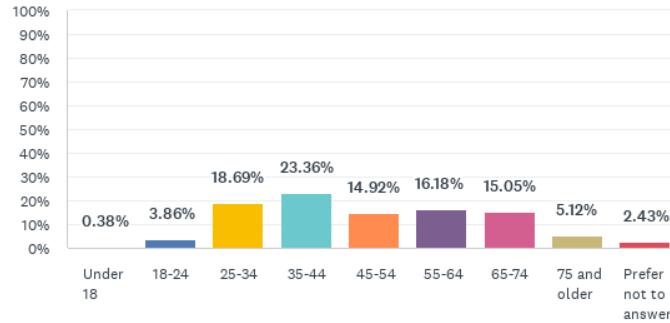
(all respondents)

Q9 Gender



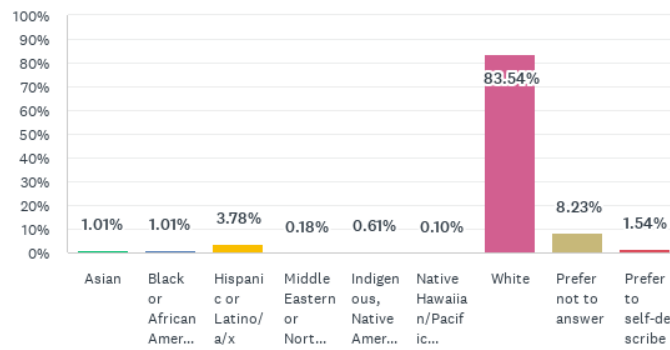
(all respondents)

Q10 Age



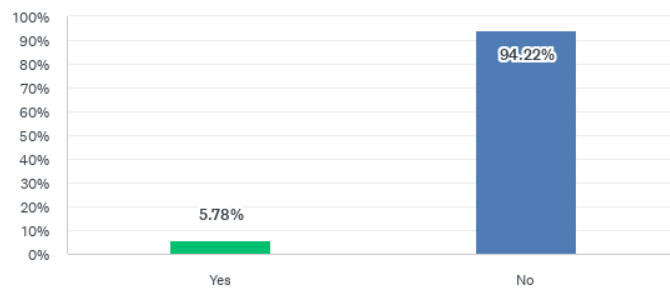
(all respondents)

Q11 Ethnicity



(all respondents)

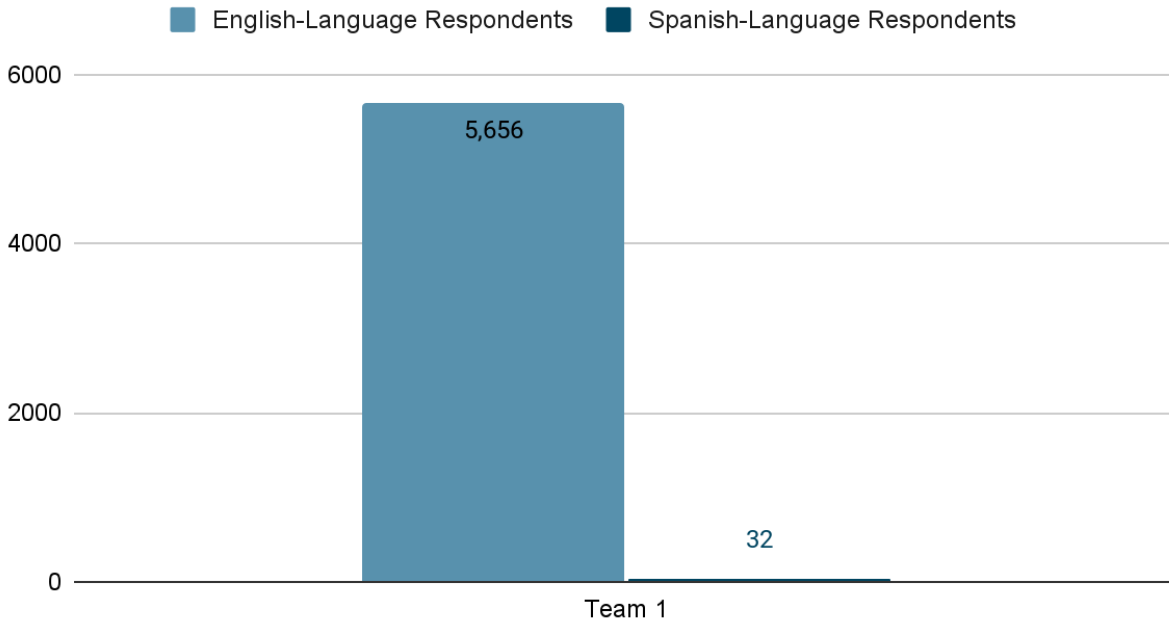
Q12 Do you live in the neighborhood immediately surrounding the Mitchell Park Domes? (Clarke Square, Walker's Point, etc.)



(all respondents)

Although the communities surrounding the Mitchell Park Domes are bilingual, the survey was overwhelmingly completed in English. It is beyond the parameters of the survey process to attempt to better understand this.

Survey Responses



Community and Philanthropic Values

Both the community survey and the philanthropic perception interviews asked respondents about a set of six values identified by Friends of the Domes as relevant to The Domes.

Urban Oasis & Environmental Epicenter: Milwaukee is fortunate to have such captivating indoor green space. People can stroll the planet in a single afternoon—from the desert to the tropics in mere moments (and even in the dead of a Milwaukee winter!). Year round, Milwaukee school children wonder at dangling bananas and towering cacti, bursting blooms and arresting aromas. Visitors discover the vital importance of nature to our vulnerable world's future.

Community Wellness: Health researchers have documented the indisputable link between the connection to nature and one's physical and emotional health. For nearly 200,000 visitors each year (half from Milwaukee County), the Conservatory offers a restorative, contemplative balance to our urban existence — for everyone, not just those who can afford a plane ticket to exotic climates.

Social Equity & Community Affirmation: The Domes' Clarke Square neighborhood is comprised of residents from many cultures, particularly Latino. In this "Opportunity Zone" — a Milwaukee County-designation for economically challenged communities — the residents are rich in heritage, culture, and family ties. Increasingly, our neighbors see The Domes as their gathering place, a source of pride and commerce that brings visitors from all over.

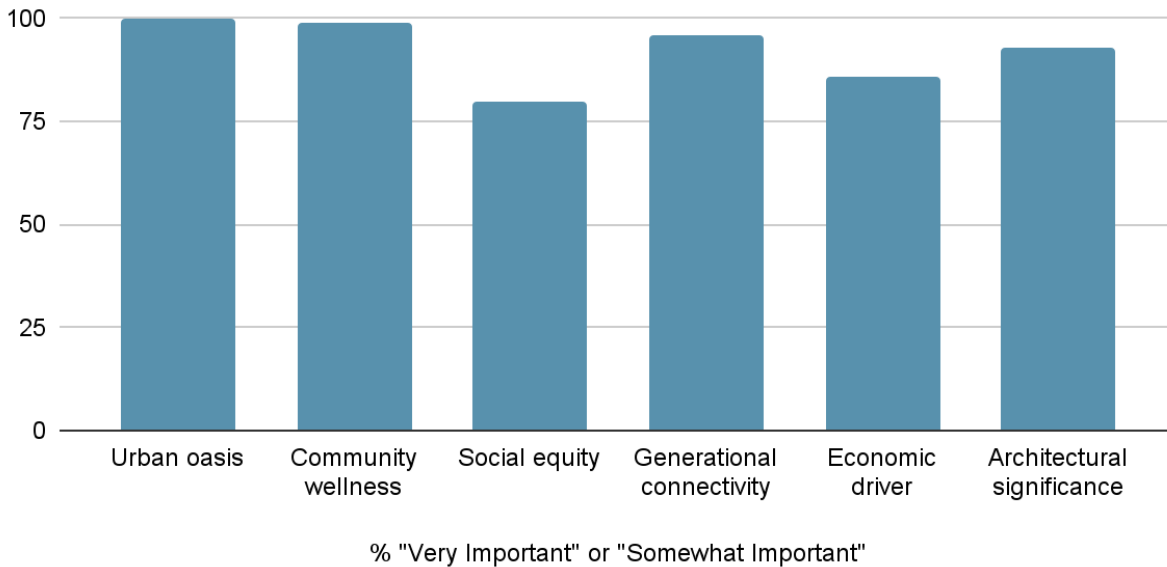
Generational Connectivity: Perhaps The Domes' greatest contribution is its outsized role as a touchpoint for generations of families. The staff continually receives messages from those professing their love for this community icon. Whether focusing on last week's visit or on decades-old memories, these storytellers rhapsodize The Domes as their favorite family outing, their place of treasured discovery, their haven of serenity.

Economic Driver: Attracting as many as 100,000 non-Milwaukee County residents annually, The Domes generates a significant source of revenue for Milwaukee, most especially for its surrounding southside neighborhoods. In addition, nearly 50 local businesses and artists sell their goods through The Domes gift shop and at the many community events that attract thousands of local residents.

Architectural Significance: Housing the plant collection did not require a world-class architectural marvel; how marvelous the founders chose to create one anyway. At their mid-century debut, The Domes was designed to express and celebrate Milwaukee's bustling energy and optimism. Few local buildings preserve their purpose with such elegance and eloquence. You don't have to love plants to love The Domes.

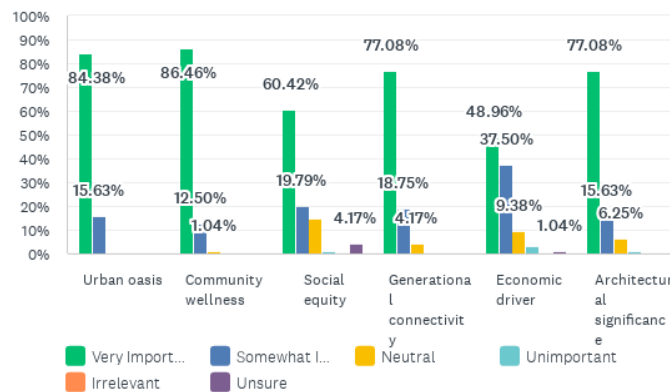
The community survey asked about respondents' general responses to the six values: "The Mitchell Park Domes play various roles for Milwaukee County, the surrounding communities, and the State of Wisconsin. In thinking through these, how important are they to our community's well-being?" The question did not require forced ranking, and the survey results show that respondents rated the six values similarly when combining "very important" and "somewhat important" ratings.

The Mitchell Park Domes plays various roles for Milwaukee County, the surrounding communities, and the State of Wisconsin. In thinking through these, how important are the following to our community's well-being?



But—the overall results show that the survey respondents believed that social equity and economic drivers were less important than access to an urban oasis, community wellness, generational connectivity, and architectural significance. It’s important to note here that only about 5% of respondents were from communities directly surrounding The Domes.

Q6 The Mitchell Park Domes plays various roles for Milwaukee County, the surrounding communities, and the State of Wisconsin. In thinking through these, how important are they to our community's well-being?



This ranking and focus contrasts with what we heard from interviewees during the philanthropic perception interviews, when we asked interviewees to directly rank the same six values as they

related specifically to The Domes and the interviewee’s philanthropic interest. Overall, interviews showed that interviewees thought that the greatest opportunities for The Domes were to serve as a catalyst for social equity and as an economic driver. The interviewees noted that these opportunities are not evident now.

Ideas for the Future

The survey also solicited input from community members on changes and improvements that could be made: “What changes or improvements could The Domes make to its space, services, or programs to encourage you to visit or use this Milwaukee landmark more often?” Several key areas emerged: a desire for more rotating exhibits, an expansion of equitable access opportunities such as free days and discounted fees for lower-income or local visitors; more programming – both horticultural and beyond; more partnerships; and the addition of amenities like a café, seating areas with Wi-Fi, and play opportunities for kids.

There was also a large group of respondents who desired to see The Domes expand services and programming into Mitchell Park, for example through more festivals or fairs, adding formal or natural plantings beyond The Domes, connecting Mitchell Park and The Domes more directly to Three Bridges Park via the Hank Aaron State Trail, and using frontage along South 27th Street. Many respondents cited a desire for The Domes to engage more closely with the community both in special events and daily practice. All of these ideas would go far to improve safety in the park, a significant desire of many respondents.

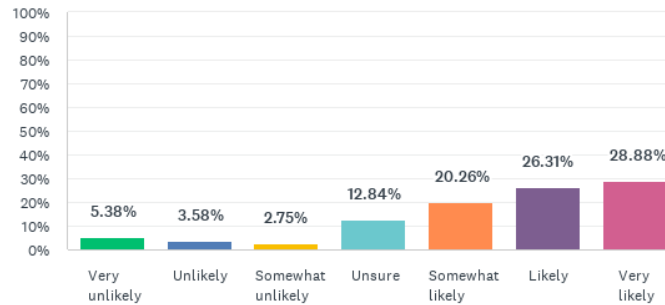
“Repair and Invest” or “Repurpose and Replace”?

Although not directly asked about a preferred scenario for the future, many respondents provided feedback on their preferred future for The Domes. Many who value the iconic architecture desired to see The Domes restored (similar to the “repair and invest” option outlined in the perception interview case for support), while others saw a need for a new building (similar to the “repurpose and replace” option in the case).

Community Support for a Campaign for The Domes

Of all respondents, 75% said they were somewhat likely, likely, or very likely to make a financial gift “of any size” to a campaign “to ensure that there’s a conservatory in Mitchell Park for generations to come.” In our experience, this interest indicates that the public phase of a campaign would be well received, but we caution that this public phase would be about including the public rather than relying on this strategy to raise the majority of funds needed. While the percentage of respondents identifying as members is high, work must be done to message the need for community members to give a gift beyond their membership in order to support the campaign.

Q7 If Friends of the Domes, in partnership with Milwaukee County Parks, were to do a fundraising campaign to ensure that there's a conservatory in Mitchell Park for generations to come, how likely would you be to make a financial gift (of any size)?

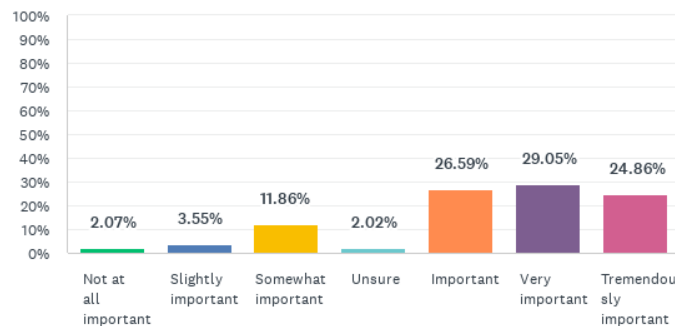


(all respondents)

Given the iconic nature of The Domes, we wanted to understand what messaging would be most effective for a campaign. Were individuals more likely to give to a campaign “for themselves” and the value The Domes provide them personally, or “for Milwaukee” and the value The Domes provide the community? Analysis showed that overall, people rated the importance of The Domes to the community as slightly greater than their own, and those respondents likelier to give to a campaign rated both personal and community importance as slightly higher than respondents who were less likely to give.

Among all respondents, 80% rated the importance of The Domes to them personally as important, very important, or tremendously important, while 90% rated the importance of The Domes to the greater community as important, very important, or tremendously important.

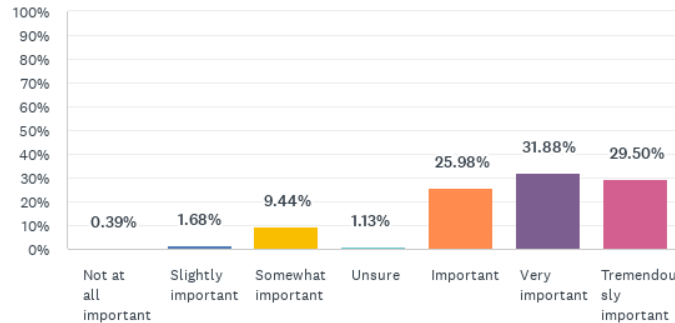
Q3 How would you rate the importance of The Domes to you personally?



(all respondents)

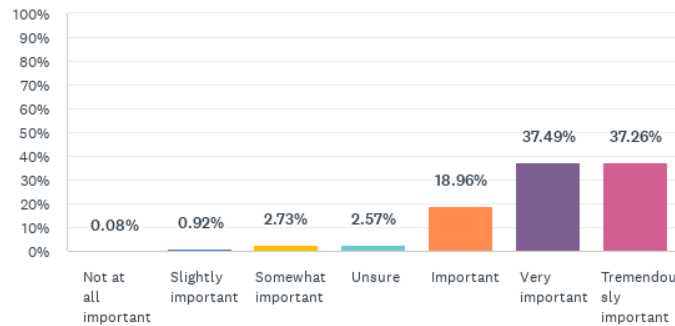
Among respondents likely to give to a campaign, 87% rated the personal importance of The Domes as important, very important, or tremendously important, while 93% rated the importance of The Domes to the community as important, very important, or tremendously important.

Q3 How would you rate the importance of The Domes to you personally?



(respondents likely to give)

Q4 How would you rate the importance of The Domes to the broader community?



(respondents likely to give)

VII. Conclusion

A bold and inspirational vision that looks beyond just The Domes and towards the revitalization of Mitchell Park overall will be crucial to attracting the interest and support of the philanthropic community.

The survey results provide a general understanding of the views about and importance of The Domes to respondents, who were primarily members of and occasional visitors to The Domes.

The philanthropic perception interview process provided valuable information from the philanthropic community and beyond to help inform next steps for the Friends of the Domes and Milwaukee County Parks.

We strongly recommend a comprehensive review of the community survey results, especially the qualitative responses, and use these as one guide to gain meaningful input and feedback once a specific plan for the future has been developed. Likewise, we encourage Friends of the Domes to engage in meaningful conversations with interviewees seeking their advice and feedback. As important, we recommend FOD further cultivate community partnerships and neighborhood relationships to gain their input in planning.

Friends of the Domes and Milwaukee County Parks have an opportunity to guide the creation of a broad vision that increases the vibrancy and use of The Domes and Mitchell Park. Realistic and intentional preparation will ensure this process – and the resulting campaign and efforts – will be successful.