

3/4/2025

**Letter to the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors and MPM**

**RE: Agenda Item 25-51**

**Relocation and Cost Justification**

Milwaukee taxpayers own the Public Museum's collection, and I respectfully request the establishment of a 5-member oversight commission to protect our cultural heritage. This commission should establish a rule that any artifact or non-artifact object over \$20 may not be disposed of or intentionally damaged without prior approval, consist of Milwaukeens not holding office, and be completely independent of MPM, Inc., giving us confidence that accounting ledgers will not drive the destruction of our heritage. Construction on the \$240 million Haymarket museum has begun—a decision suggesting it was more cost-effective to build a new, 'right-sized' facility we will not own, shifting from visceral to virtual and omitting exhibits like Streets of Old Milwaukee, than to restore our current building. What are the \$80-90 million in 'equity updates' MPM cites? A staff member called exhibits 'old and culturally irrelevant,' but the authority to decide rests with us, the owners.

**Deaccession Policy Shift**

MPM's policy now permits selling, removing, or destroying any item under \$5,000 without board approval—an alarming change. Where is this authorized in the Collections Policy? The American Alliance of Museums states, "It is important that the museum understand the legal and ethical implications of deaccessioning and write a policy that helps the museum be transparent and accountable with the public... disposal of collections... is solely for the advancement of the museum's mission." How does this align with MPM's guidelines and emails mandating transparency?

**Public-Private Partnership Risks**

Milwaukee has always had a unique culture, yet transparency has been elusive. How will we maintain oversight in a building we don't control? Indianapolis faced litigation over a stadium's unclear finances. San Diego's civic center stalled amid hidden costs. Seattle's museum struggled with exhibit disputes due to limited public input.

**Funding Concerns**

Will donations for capital purposes be redirected to fund operating costs? If DOGE cuts grants, will MPM shift funds, incentivizing unnecessary exhibit disposal for capital expenses?

**Preservation vs. Disposal**

Disposal of exhibits has already robbed us. During the 20th century, battle dioramas made by Grand Army of the Republic members were disposed of, which I suppose made additional space for professionally made exhibits. Yet if MPM had the battle dioramas today, they would be priceless. Let's not repeat the mistakes of the past. Our cultural heritage demands protection through the oversight commission I've proposed.

**Call to Action**

“Museums rely on the public... they need to maintain the highest level of accountability and transparency” (museum stewardship). I urge citizen involvement—a board representative, taxpayer liaison, deaccession records, and an open meeting—and call on the board to prioritize Milwaukee’s history.

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