

June 13, 2012

Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele
Milwaukee County Courthouse
901 N. 9th Street, Room 306
Milwaukee, WI 53233

Dear Chris,

First, congratulations on your recent election as Milwaukee County Executive. Certainly our community has a great need for strong leadership and the Rotary Club of Milwaukee will do its best to support you as we can. We appreciate your willingness to spend a few minutes with our Board on Tuesday after your talk at our lunch meeting. There are two topics of special interest to us that we would like to discuss: the Milwaukee Rotary Centennial Arboretum and the Great Johnsons Park initiative.

Milwaukee Rotary Centennial Arboretum

As a long time member and past chair of the River Revitalization Foundation (RRF) and a citizen committed to protecting and restoring our natural resources, you have supported the development of the Milwaukee Rotary Centennial Arboretum (MRCA)—a collaboration with the County, the Urban Ecology Center, RRF, Pieter Godfrey, the Milwaukee Urban River Foundation and Rotary.

As you know, the intention is to develop this arboretum and then give the land to the Milwaukee County Park System. The County has been an active participant in our planning and we are grateful for the unwavering support and assistance from Sue Black, Kevin Haley, Guy Smith, Ramsey Radakovich and others. Ramsey is an integral member of the MRCA task force.

The tragic loss of our good friend and partner, Pieter Godfrey, will likely impact the timeline for development of the Arboretum. However, for our purposes today, let's assume that we will open the Arboretum as planned in September, 2013. To do this, timely action by Milwaukee County is necessary. Specifically Milwaukee County:

- Must agree to accept title to the Arboretum property in advance of the application for a Knowles –Nelson Stewardship grant which we plan to submit by May 1, 2012. The property would be turned over the Milwaukee County at a later date once work is complete and the land has been certified as meeting environmental requirements.
- Must agree in concept to a long range maintenance plan for the Arboretum. (We envision developing an agreement similar to the one that exists today between the Urban Ecology Center and the County regarding maintenance of Riverside Park.)

As a first step, Milwaukee County Park staff has been working with the Urban Ecology Center to put this issue on the agenda of the July meeting of the Milwaukee County Board's Parks, Energy and Environment Committee. Eventually, action will be required by the full Board and the County Executive.

The passing of Pieter will add to the complexity of the project. But we cannot forget that the Arboretum was an essential piece of Pieter's vision for the Milwaukee River corridor. Chris, we hope that we can look to you and your staff for leadership and guidance to insure the completion of Pieter's dream.

Today the Rotary Club of Milwaukee remains committed to seizing this opportunity to convert old industrial land along the revitalized Milwaukee River into a natural jewel for the community -- a living forest classroom that our grandchildren will be able to enjoy and share with their grandchildren for many generations to come.

Greater Johnsons Park and Brown Street Academy

We would like to bring it to your attention that when we chose the Arboretum as our centennial project, we also made a commitment to the Greater Johnsons Park initiative, located in the vicinity of Fond du Lac Avenue and Brown. A 2002 Public Policy Study rated Johnsons Park as the least desirable of all the parks in our county—in an area very under served with green space. The Johnsons Park project is a critical element of a larger scale transformation taking place across the community and Rotary is honored to have the opportunity to participate.

We continue to be involved and have seen significant progress in several areas. Alice's Garden, created on county land, recently won a MANDI award for "the creation or use of public space that contributes significantly to the overall well-being of the community." If you were to drive by today, you would likely see gardeners tending their plots. It is quite a sight.

We were directly involved in restoring the Brown Street Academy playground, including the creation of the first Nature Explore classroom in the state of Wisconsin. It shows great promise. We continue to work toward an accumulation of funds to complete that schoolyard, after which we plan to focus more on the balance of the Johnson's Park grounds.

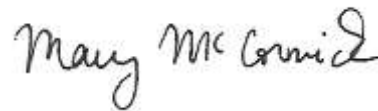
We are grateful for the help we've already had from the County (for example, moving the berms), but there's a great deal left to be done in this long-neglected area of Milwaukee. It would be a travesty if the entire Greater Johnson's Park project wasn't completed.

Sincerely,



Joe Caruso
President 2010-11

Jeffrey Remsik
President 2011-12



Mary McCormick
Executive Director