

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE  
Inter-Office Communication

Date: August 15, 2025

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

From: Celia Benton, Director, Milwaukee County Economic Development

Subject: From the Economic Development Director, Department of Administrative Services, providing an informational report on the preservation of the Milwaukee County Collection and the disposition process for surplus property during the Milwaukee Public Museum transition

File Type: Informational Report

---

**REQUEST**

An informational report on the process for preserving the Milwaukee County Collection and the disposition of any surplus property during the Milwaukee Public Museum transition.

**POLICY**

This is an informational report.

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

**BACKGROUND**

Milwaukee County, in partnership with the Milwaukee Public Museum, the State of Wisconsin, and many generous donors, is undertaking a once-in-a-generation effort to ensure the long-term preservation of the Milwaukee County Collection, the financial sustainability of the institution, and continued public access to scientific and cultural knowledge through a new, state-of-the-art facility.

This work is rooted in longstanding policy direction and professional guidance. The current museum facility, constructed more than 60 years ago, has been the subject of multiple evaluations, including a 2015 comprehensive assessment conducted by Milwaukee County’s Department of Administrative Services and third-party consultants. That report documented nearly \$100 million in deferred maintenance, needed updates, and maintenance needs—costs that have only grown with time (File No. 18-650). More critically, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), the national accrediting body, determined that the building fails to meet minimum standards for collections care, and

has made reaccreditation contingent upon demonstrable progress toward a new facility.

The County's collection of more than four million objects and specimens is a public trust, entrusted to MPM professionals, for the benefit of current and future generations. These items form the cornerstone of the museum's scientific research, educational programming, and exhibits. Their preservation must remain the foremost priority. By contrast, certain exhibit elements—such as built environments and props that are not part of the formally accessioned collection—were designed for interpretive purposes and are not governed by the County's approved Collections Policy. Many of these items are permanently affixed to the existing building, are in deteriorated condition, or no longer reflect contemporary standards of cultural competency or scientific accuracy.

The relocation of the museum requires a careful and phased approach to the disposition of these non-Collection materials. Milwaukee County and MPM have worked in close partnership to develop a transparent, safe, and public process for any remaining property that will not move with the museum. The disposition process is attached to this file.

This project has evolved over many years of public discourse, community engagement, and elected policymaking. The County Board has reviewed and approved all major funding and governance agreements, including a \$45 million capital commitment to support construction of the new facility, and MPM has fulfilled all contractual requirements for the disbursement of these funds. When complete, the County will no longer bear the substantial operational and capital costs associated with the current facility, resulting in an estimated \$2.5 million in annual operating savings and eliminating the significant and ongoing capital obligations tied to an aging building.

The new museum represents a sustainable path forward. It preserves the County's Collection in an environment designed to national standards; enhances public access to research and exhibits; and ensures that future generations can engage with the natural and cultural history of our region in new and meaningful ways. This new museum is an act of preservation, stewardship, and progress.

Related File No's:	13-598, 16-180, <a href="#">18-532</a> , 18-650, <a href="#">20-482</a> , <a href="#">20-753</a> , 21-259, 21-606, 21-1086, <a href="#">22-454</a> , <a href="#">24-616</a> , <a href="#">25-238</a> , <a href="#">25-506</a>
Associated File No's (Including Transfer Packets):	
Previous Action Date(s):	

### **ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN**

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

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

### **FISCAL EFFECT**

N/A

**TERMS**

N/A

**VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES**

Erica Goblet, Project Manager, [erica.goblet@milwaukeecountywi.gov](mailto:erica.goblet@milwaukeecountywi.gov)

Celia Benton, Director, [celia.benton@milwaukeecountywi.gov](mailto:celia.benton@milwaukeecountywi.gov)

Ellen Censky, MPM President & CEO, [censky@mpm.edu](mailto:censky@mpm.edu)

Rebecca Ehlers, MPM VP of Marketing, Communications and Visitor Experience  
[ehlersr@mpm.edu](mailto:ehlersr@mpm.edu)

Dr. Jennifer Zaspel, Head of Zoology, [zaspelj@mpm.edu](mailto:zaspelj@mpm.edu)

**PREPARED BY:**

Erica Goblet, Project Manager, Milwaukee County Economic Development

**APPROVED BY:**

Celia Benton, Director, Milwaukee County Economic Development

*Celia Benton*

---

**ATTACHMENTS:**

PowerPoint

Disposition Plan

CC: David Crowley, County Executive

Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office

Sheldon A. Wasserman, Supervisor District 3, PEEC Chair

Steven Shea, Supervisor District 8, PEEC Vice Chair

Felesia A. Martin, Supervisor District 7, PEEC Member

Juan Miguel Martinez, Supervisor District 12, PEEC Member

Steve F. Taylor, Supervisor District 17, PEEC 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

Ciara Miller, Research & Policy Analyst, Office of the Comptroller

Anthony Rux, Budget & Management Analyst, DAS-PSB