

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE

INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION

DATE: February 6, 2026

TO: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Aaron Hertzberg, Executive Director, DAS
Shakita LaGrant-McClain, Executive Director, DHHS

SUBJECT: An action report providing and update on the status of the McGovern Senior Center and requesting \$100,000 from Org. Unit 194-1945 - Appropriate for Contingencies fund planning, design, and cost estimating expenses by the Department of Administrative Services Facilities Management Division as they work with the Department of Health and Human Services for a long-term senior center solution on the Northwest Side of Milwaukee

File Type: Action Report

BACKGROUND

On August 9-10, 2025, the Milwaukee region experienced historic flooding. Department of Administration (DAS), Facilities Management Division (FMD) staff closed the McGovern Senior Center, 4500 W. Custer Avenue, to address significant water damage.

During efforts to remediate, air quality issues were identified that made it unsafe for human occupancy. Additional investigation and testing determined there was significant mold throughout the facility. Air quality and mold issues persisted even after multiple efforts to remediate the space. A full timeline of actions from the initial flooding until October 6th, with the associated test results are attached to the file (*McGovern Park Senior Center Remedial Action Timeline and Analytical Results*).

Remediation, testing and analysis continued in the building through October. After regular communication, staff from the City of Milwaukee Health Department completed a walkthrough with County staff to review concerns in November. The visit confirmed the concerns related to mold and air quality.

On November 11th, staff hosted a listening session with McGovern seniors at the Clinton Rose Senior Center to provide an update on the conditions of the facility and to outline next steps. The City of Milwaukee Health Department also presented and outlined the risks associated with mold and changes in climate that suggest heavy rain and flooding

risk may continue to increase. Staff from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) also outlined additional programming sites and resources including available capacity at the four other Milwaukee County owned senior Centers: Kelly, Wilson, Washington and Clinton-Rose. A copy of the slides presented at this meeting are attached to the file (*McGovern Park Senior Center Mitigation*).

As previously noted, DAS FMD staff had addressed flooding in the building multiple times over the last several years. Throughout the 2025 cleanup efforts and investigations, staff and partners speculated that many factors could make the McGovern Senior Center susceptible to ongoing flooding issues. Prior to investing the resources necessary to clean up the facility, DAS leadership called for an engineering analysis to consider what facility infrastructure should be addressed alongside cleanup efforts to mitigate the risk of future flooding.

A copy of that report is attached to the file with a cover memo from Milwaukee County Facilities Director, Sean Hayes, providing context for the resources required to address facility cleanup, immediate flood risk mitigation and on-going capital needs.

While working with consultants on the engineering analysis, staff from the DAS Office of Economic Development and Real Estate Services worked with DHHS to consider alternative programming locations. Staff thanks Supervisor Martin and others from the community that suggested alternative locations for consideration.

A thorough analysis is outlined in the report below.

POLICY

Milwaukee County General Ordinances		Ch. 56.10 - procedures for leasing of county-owned land or building space
Milwaukee County Board Informational Reports		Files 25-746, 25-414, 24-730, 19-448
Wisconsin State Statutes:		

OVERVIEW

McGovern Facility Overview

McGovern Senior Center has a long history of basement flooding. The significant flooding event in August 2025, and the resulting high cost of mold remediation, underscored the need to identify and correct the underlying sources of moisture intrusion, rather than continuing to address symptoms.

In response, DAS recommended a formal engineering investigation to determine the root causes of moisture entering the building and to recommend corrective actions to reduce the likelihood of future flooding, flood-related damage, and facility closures. Milwaukee County's Architecture, Engineering and Environmental Services team (AE&ES) completed this analysis in January 2026. See the attached McGovern Senior Center Moisture Investigation Report.

Key Findings

AE&ES does not recommend proceeding with a final, comprehensive mold cleaning until the underlying moisture issues are corrected. Completing final remediation without addressing root causes would create a high likelihood of recurrence, resulting in additional closures, repeat remediation costs, and continued disruption to programming.

The engineering report identifies multiple pathways for moisture intrusion, including deficiencies associated with the building's internal storm sewer system.

Repair Options

The report presents two options:

1. Minimal Repairs: \$905,000
2. Comprehensive Repairs (Recommended): \$1,910,000

AE&ES does not recommend the Minimal Repairs option because it is unlikely to provide a durable, long-term solution. The appropriate path forward depends on Milwaukee County's long-term intent for the facility. If the County plans to continue occupying and operating McGovern Senior Center, AE&ES recommends the Comprehensive Repairs option to address the primary drivers of moisture intrusion and reduce the risk of recurring mold and future closures.

Operational Impacts

The facility remains closed to the public until repairs are completed and final mold remediation can be performed. The estimated timeline for design and construction of

the recommended repairs is 12–16 months upon receipt of funding, during which the facility would remain closed.

Funding Considerations

No budget is currently identified for these repairs. If leadership directs AE&ES to proceed, emergency funding authorization from the County Board would be required to implement repairs and complete final remediation.

The recommended repairs should be considered in the broader context of Milwaukee County's planned investment in the facility. The McGovern Senior Center building was originally built in 1974 as a park pavilion and was later converted to a Senior Center. The building is the smallest of Milwaukee County's five senior centers at 12,983 square feet, more than 4,000 square feet smaller than any other center operated by Milwaukee County.

Investment in the \$905,000–\$1,910,000 range is most appropriate if Milwaukee County also intends to continue capital investment in the facility over the next five years or more. Any investment should be evaluated in coordination with the Office of the Comptroller to confirm expected useful life and depreciation assumptions.

The County's 5-year capital plan includes approximately \$1,860,000 (present value) in additional investment in McGovern Senior Center through 2030. This estimate is slightly lower than prior projections because some planned scope would be addressed by the Comprehensive Repairs identified in the attached report.

The repairs outlined and 5-year capital plan should be considered in the context of File 25-746, previously presented to the Board. Broadly speaking, capital investment in Milwaukee County's five senior center buildings has not kept pace with need. Significant investment over the next several years will be necessary to rehabilitate these facilities. Without major investment additional building failures should be expected.

The facility repairs outlined in this report and the 5-year capital plan only address core infrastructure needs of the building and doesn't consider any upgrades or modernizations to enhance or support programming. The building design doesn't allow it to be cost effectively retrofitted to meet DHHS and the Commission on Aging's vision for MKE Hub facilities.

McGovern Senior Center Alternatives Analysis

Below is an outline of alternative service locations on the Northwest Side of Milwaukee. The list is organized into potential short and long-term solutions. Short term options

could serve Milwaukee County for an estimated 1 to 5 years. Long-term solutions would be more permanent, seeking a purpose-built space to provide services. This could include new or redevelopment spaces, or combined developments with other public or private partnerships.

Based on feedback during consideration of File 25-414, a proposal for a public-private senior housing facility to be built with a new senior center at McGovern Park, only sites outside of County park land would be considered. Milwaukee County solicited sites to consider from community members, partners, and senior center participants including members from McGovern Park senior center. In addition, the County conducted an analysis to determine the areas with the highest density of older adults in the northwest sector of the County and explored the availability of commercial properties within this area of interest. DHHS and DAS staff worked together to identify sites with potential for suitability as an alternative senior center and conducted a preliminary space, cost, suitability analysis. This process is ongoing.

Short Term Alternatives (1-5 Years of Operation)

Short term options are in shared spaces with other, non-County program users and are not ideal for long term tenancy. They should be viewed as stop-gap solutions only.

- Embassy Center MKE - 3725 N. Sherman Boulevard, Milwaukee, WI 53216
 - Community Partnership: Embassy Center MKE
 - ~19,000 available square footage
 - Existing Cafe/Kitchen. Near grocery store, connection w/ pantry that could offer synergy w/ DHHS
- Goodwill Facility - 6055 N. 91st Street, Milwaukee, WI 53225
 - Community Partnership: Goodwill
 - Entire complex is 220,520 sf (mainly industrial). Goodwill is considering a sale of the property; leasing excess space is not a priority. This is an existing cafe/kitchen as well as a section of the building that are classrooms that could be an option.
- Elks Lodge #46 - 5555 W. Good Hope Road, Milwaukee, WI 53223
 - Community Partnership: Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks (BPOE)
 - Property is 41,368 sf.
 - Existing meal site for senior dining. It has potential for very limited additional programming.
- Other options may be identified – The three options above are readily available. This remains a dynamic exploratory effort. We acknowledge that other opportunities may materialize as efforts continue.

Capital Cost Estimate: \$350,000¹

¹ All estimates are preliminary. They remain subject to actual bid/pricing and negotiations.

Annual Leasing Cost Estimate: \$165,000¹

Estimated Time to Implement Once Resources are Allocated: 3 to 6 months

For any option that moves away from the existing McGovern Senior Center, funding should be considered for demolition of the building. Estimates range from \$400,000 to \$750,000¹ depending on the intended final site condition required for the park space.

Long-Term Alternatives (3-5 Years Completion)

- Aldi - 5301 N. Hopkins Street, WI 53209
 - Existing site: 17,261 sf and 2.7 acres
 - Potential to partner with a developer as the owner of the property that would provide affordable housing onsite to defray capital costs of the project.
- MKE REC at Browning Playfield – 5575 N 76th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53218
 - \$54 million redevelopment that will be completed by the summer of 2027.
 - Co-location with MKE REC.
- Other Alternatives – Yet to be Determined (NW side location). The above options were those that seem to be immediately available. If Milwaukee County is committed to a long-term solution, staff may consider additional locations to ensure the best possible fit for senior services. As noted, this would only include sites outside of County Park Land.

Capital Cost Estimate: Estimated \$7¹ million capital need from Milwaukee County and/or other fundraising efforts. This estimate is based upon the concept proposed as part of File 25-414, for a mixed-use development proposed with Jewish Family Services at McGovern Park. Any future development opportunities would be considered outside of Park Land. Any mix of uses or reasonably appropriate partners may be considered.

In addition, to move forward on a long-term alternative, we should consider engaging an architect. Cost estimates range from \$100,000 to \$150,000 for conceptual design by an architect/consultant. Once authorized, conceptual designs could be ready within 3 to 6 months.

Annual operating expenses: unknown.

For any option that moves away from the existing McGovern Senior Center, funding should be considered for demolition of the building. Estimates range from \$400,000 to \$750,000¹ depending on the intended final site condition required for the park space.

DHHS on the vision for the MKE HUBS

In 2023, the Commission on Aging endorsed the “MKE HUBS” report that highlighted a vision for the future of senior centers. The vision included specific attributes to make senior centers more accessible, acceptable, and attractive to seniors as spaces for community, recreation, and health/wellness. The attributes included physical spaces like: accessible entrances, a clear welcome center, and sufficient space for: health checks, mental wellness activities, crafting space, exercise equipment, dance/aerobics classes, individual classrooms and large community spaces, and community dining. It also included attributes that can be achieved through different programming and partnerships, like having cafe-style food provision, continuing education classes, using technology, and having programming beyond the traditional senior center operating hours.

In the MKE HUBS report, the Commission resolved that the County need not own senior center buildings and specifically stated that the two smaller facilities (Kelly and McGovern) were not designed to be used as senior centers and meet few of the attributes contained in the Commission’s vision. Instead of maintaining these facilities, it recommended that “new expanded facilities, built to meet the intent of the attributes from ground up, could better serve existing participants, while at the same time expanding their reach and accessibility.” DHHS is committed to supporting the Commission on Aging in achieving this vision and have adopted it as a guiding document for decision-making around senior center priorities.

DHHS has also engaged in the work through AARP’s Livable Communities model, as Milwaukee County was designated as a Livable Community in 2025. This model promotes a two-year planning cycle around eight potential domains of livability. 2025 was the first year of that cycle and focused on discovery of needs and gaps in Milwaukee County. In all eight domains, the northwest side of Milwaukee County shows notable needs and gaps in services. Investing in the northwest side will advance Milwaukee County’s vision of a Livable Community.

DHHS is currently working with DAS and the Commission on Aging on a long-range plan for all County-owned senior centers that is grounded in achieving the Hubs vision and centers around these principles:

- Geographic diversity
- Dedicated programming for older adults
- Creating true public spaces embraced by the community
- No Wrong Door
- Fiscal Sustainability

Information in this report is presented to guide decision-making regarding the current McGovern facility, so that long-term planning regarding the MKE HUBS system can move forward.

Considerations

The unexpected floods and on-going capital needs of the McGovern Senior Center put Milwaukee County in a challenging position. Three clear options exist:

1. Invest in the existing McGovern Senior Center:
 - a. Immediate Funding Need: \$1,910,000
 - b. Additional Costs: 5-Year Capital Need: \$1,860,000 (present value)
 - c. Timeline: Re-opened facility within 12-16 months

This option maintains historical presence in the Park, is perhaps a long-term solution, but many risks to the aging facility persist. The existing facility cannot reasonably be adapted to meet the MKE Hubs vision for Senior Centers.

2. Pursue a short-term alternative:
 - a. Immediate Funding Need: \$465,000¹ for buildout and 2026 lease costs.
 - b. Additional Costs: On-going Lease costs of approximately \$165,000¹+ any annual lease adjustments.
 - c. Timeline: Open for operation within 3 to 6 months of having access to funds.

A short-term alternative requires the lease initial funding start up and likely the quickest option to return senior services to the Northwest Side of Milwaukee. That said, adapted and shared space provides less control to meet the MKE Hub vision for the seniors. This option also doesn't provide long-term clarity on how or where services will be provided.

3. Pursue a long-term alternative:
 - a. Immediate Funding Need: \$100,000 for conceptual design and cost estimating.
 - b. Additional Costs: Approximately \$7,000,000¹ estimated for a senior center facility.
 - i. Estimates based on the development proposed in File 25-414.
 - ii. Fundraising, partnership or other alternative funding sources could help reduce costs.
 - c. Timeline: Estimated 3-5 years until occupancy

The time and resources to develop and deliver a long-term solution is higher than the other options. That said, it creates the best long-term commitment to senior services on the Northwest Side of Milwaukee.

Conclusion

The McGovern Senior Center faces significant structural and functional limitations that make continued investment in its current form impractical. While short-term alternatives can provide temporary relief, they are not sustainable solutions for meeting the long-term needs of Milwaukee County's aging population. A strategic approach that prioritizes purpose-built or redeveloped facilities, in partnership with public and private entities, is essential to align with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Commission on Aging's vision for senior services. Without decisive action, the County risks further deterioration of critical infrastructure and diminished service quality for older adults.

To advance this effort, we recommend allocating \$100,000 from contingency to support immediate planning, design, and cost estimating by DAS Facilities Management. This investment will ensure that the County can move forward with a well-informed, actionable plan that addresses both short-term needs and long-term sustainability. The resources would also help inform on-going stakeholder and community engagement.

Moving forward, collaboration, innovation, and commitment to long-term planning will be key to ensuring equitable and accessible senior services across the Northwest Side of Milwaukee. Once a clearer vision for a long-term solution is identified, staff would return to the Milwaukee County Board for further presentation, consideration of next steps and a plan for any further funding requests.

Fiscal Effect

\$100,000 would be transferred from the contingency fund to support planning, design and cost estimating for a long-term solution for providing senior services on the Northwest Side of Milwaukee.

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

Sean Hayes, Director DAS Facilities Management
Celia Benton, Director, DAS Economic Development
Rami Peltz, Project Manager, DAS Economic Development
Emily Kenney, DHHS
Tina Anderson, DHHS
Dan Idzikowski, DHHS

PREPARED BY:

The Department of Administrative Services

The Department of Health and Human Services

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ATTACHMENTS:

- *McGovern Park Senior Center Remedial Action Timeline and Analytical Results*
- *McGovern Park Senior Center Mitigation (11/11/25 Community Presentation)*
- *McGovern Park Senior Center Moisture Investigation Report*

cc: County Executive David Crowley
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Manager, Office of the County
Steve Cady, Research and Policy Director, Comptroller's Office
Guy Smith, Executive Director of Milwaukee County Parks