

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE  
INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION

**DATE:** May 21, 2026

**TO:** Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, County Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Aaron Hertzberg, Executive Director, Department of Administrative Services, Guy Smith, Executive Director, Parks Department, Shakita LaGrant-McClain, Executive Director, Department of Health and Human Services

**SUBJECT:** Action Report Requesting Authorization to Execute Long-Term Leases with Easterseals Southeast Wisconsin for Wil-O-Way Grant and Underwood Facilities

**FILE TYPE:** Action Report

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**REQUEST**

The Department of Administrative Services (DAS), the Parks Department, and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) request authorization to execute long-term lease agreements with Easterseals Southeast Wisconsin for the Wil-O-Way Grant and Wil-O-Way Underwood facilities.

This proposed partnership represents a strategic opportunity for Milwaukee County to significantly reduce future capital and operating obligations while preserving and expanding inclusive recreation and respite programming for residents with disabilities. The proposed lease structure aligns with Milwaukee County's long-term facilities strategy, supports DHHS mission objectives, and ensures continued public-serving use of these parkland facilities.

**POLICY**

The Wil-O-Way properties are located on land zoned as parkland; therefore, Wisconsin Statute § 59.17(2)(b)3 applies, which provides that the County Board may continue to exercise authority over land zoned as a park. Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances § 56.10 requires County Board approval for Parks leases exceeding one year.

**STRATEGY**

DAS continues to evaluate opportunities to reduce long-term deferred maintenance liabilities, improve operational efficiency, and align facility management with core service delivery priorities. As discussed in File 25-746 and File 26-325, the County's broader facilities strategy includes leveraging partnerships with mission-aligned organizations to preserve valued community services while improving fiscal sustainability.

The final lease structure for the Wil-O-Way facilities reflects this strategy by transferring operational, maintenance, utility, and capital responsibilities to a trusted nonprofit partner while maintaining recreational and community-focused uses within the Milwaukee County Parks system.

**BACKGROUND**

Wil-O-Way Grant and Wil-O-Way Underwood Recreation Centers are longstanding facilities that provide inclusive recreation and respite programming for individuals with disabilities across Milwaukee County. Programming currently serves children, adults, seniors, families, and caregivers through structured recreational activities, camps, and community events.

Wil-O-Way Grant Recreation Center is located within Grant Park in the City of South Milwaukee and contains approximately 11,400 square feet of indoor space. Wil-O-Way Underwood Recreation Center is located within Underwood Park in the City of Wauwatosa and contains approximately 10,350 square feet of indoor space.

As outlined in prior County Board files, both facilities require substantial ongoing County investment to support operations, utilities, deferred maintenance, and future capital needs.

**FISCAL IMPACT AND STRATEGIC BENEFIT**

Absent approval of the proposed lease agreements, Milwaukee County would remain responsible for approximately \$4.84 million in anticipated capital needs over the next five years for the Wil-O-Way facilities, excluding splash pads and playgrounds. In addition, annual operating costs are estimated at approximately \$112,682.

Please see below regarding expected capital and operational costs for both properties:

Facility	Avg Capital			
	Capital Investments 2014-2025	Investment / Year	Avg Operating Spend / Year	5-Year Capital Needs*
Wil-O-Way Grant	\$355,195	\$32,290	\$43,934	\$1,552,500
Wil-O-Way Underwood	\$386,793	\$35,163	\$68,748	\$2,931,500
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$741,988</b>	<b>\$67,453</b>	<b>\$112,682</b>	<b>\$4,484,000</b>
*Excluding splash pads and playgrounds				

Under the proposed lease structure, Easterseals Southeast Wisconsin would assume responsibility for utilities, operational costs and capital obligations associated with the facilities, substantially reducing Milwaukee County’s long-term financial exposure while allowing continued investment in inclusive programming.

**KEY LEASE TERMS**

Lease Start Date	January 1, 2027
Initial Term	10 years
Renewal Options	Two additional five-year renewal periods
Rent	\$1 annually
Utilities	Tenant responsibility
Maintenance	Tenant responsibility
Capital Improvements	Tenant responsibility
Reserve Requirement	\$50,000 maintenance and replacement reserve fund
County Termination Rights	270-day termination for convenience; 30-day termination for continuing default

**DEPARTMENTAL IMPACT**

**Parks Department**

The proposed lease preserves community-serving recreational uses within Milwaukee County parkland while reducing facility-related maintenance and operational burdens.

**Department of Health and Human Services / Office for Persons with Disabilities**

The partnership supports continuity and expansion of inclusive recreation, respite, and life-skills programming for individuals with disabilities across Milwaukee County.

**Department of Administrative Services – Facilities Management**

The proposed agreement reduces deferred maintenance exposure and aligns with Milwaukee County’s long-term facilities stewardship and fiscal sustainability objectives.

**EASTERSEALS SOUTHEAST WISCONSIN**

Easterseals Southeast Wisconsin is a nationally affiliated nonprofit organization with a longstanding history of providing services to individuals with disabilities throughout Milwaukee County. The organization currently partners with Milwaukee County’s Office for Persons with Disabilities to provide programming at the Wil-O-Way facilities.

Programming includes inclusive recreation, respite services, camps, life-skills development, social engagement opportunities, and community-based programming for youth, adults, seniors, families, and caregivers.

The organization possesses the staffing, operational infrastructure, and financial capacity necessary to manage complex recreational facilities and deliver year-round programming aligned with Milwaukee County’s accessibility and inclusion goals.

**MISSION ALIGNMENT**

The proposed partnership advances Milwaukee County’s commitment to accessibility, inclusion, and health equity by preserving and expanding programming opportunities for individuals with disabilities across all age groups.

The lease structure supports Milwaukee County Strategic Plan objectives by:

- Expanding inclusive services for residents with disabilities
- Strengthening partnerships with trusted nonprofit providers
- Ensuring responsible stewardship of County-owned facilities
- Promoting fiscal sustainability and operational efficiency

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Department of Administrative Services, the Parks Department, and the Department of Health and Human Services respectfully request authorization to execute long-term lease agreements with Easterseals Southeast Wisconsin for the Wil-O-Way Grant and Wil-O-Way Underwood facilities substantially consistent with the terms outlined in this report.

**ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN**

3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities.

3B: Enhance the County’s fiscal health and sustainability.

**VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES**

Celia Benton, Economic Development Director, Department of Administrative Services:  
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Rami Peltz, Leasing Manager, Department of Administrative Services:  
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Sean Hayes, Director of Facilities, Department of Administrative Services:  
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Vanessa Koster, Director of Administration, Parks Department:  
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Blake Prusak, Park Infrastructure Manager, Parks Department  
[blake.prusak@milwaukeecountywi.gov](mailto:blake.prusak@milwaukeecountywi.gov)

Jacqueline Formanek, Director for Disability Services, Department of Health and Human Services:  
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Jenna Wampole, President, Easterseals Southeast Wisconsin  
[jennaw@eastersealswise.com](mailto:jennaw@eastersealswise.com)

**PREPARED BY:**

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Jacqueline Formanek, Director for Disability Services, Department of Health and Human Services

**APPROVED BY:**

*Aaron Hertzberg*

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Aaron Hertzberg, Executive Director, Department of Administrative Services

*Shakita LaGrant*

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Shakita LaGrant-McClain, Executive Director, Department of Health and Human Services

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Lease and Exhibits - Wil-O-Way Grant

Lease and Exhibits - Wil-O-Way Underwood

Power Point Presentation

Easterseals Southeast Wisconsin, Inc. Board Resolution

cc:

David Crowley, County Executive

MaryJo Meyers, Chief of Staff, Office of the County Executive

Liz Sumner, Comptroller

Members of the Committee on Parks and Culture

Members of the Finance Committee

Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board of Supervisors

Kelsey Evans, Committee Coordinator

Sandy Saltzstein, Research and Policy Analyst