

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: August 18, 2023
To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
From: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks
Subject: Mitchell Park Domes Future State Planning and Cost Estimating Update #2
File Type: Informational Report

REQUEST

This report is for informational purposes, there is no request at this time.

POLICY

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

BACKGROUND

Related File No's:	22-1184, 23-666
Associated File No's (Including Transfer Packets):	
Previous Action Date(s):	

In December 2022, the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors passed a Resolution which requested information from the Parks Department related to the future state of the Mitchell Park Domes. Among other things, the Resolution asked the Parks Department to “present a report to the County Board at the July 2023 cycle which shall evaluate options including:

- (1) Demolition, which should include an estimate for recommended site improvements for Mitchell Park if the Domes are demolished
- (2) Limited scope repairs to address deferred maintenance and code compliance Concerns
- (3) Full building renovation including the building envelope (glass, seals, concrete coating)
- (4) Phase III ArtsMarket, LLC proposal for a New Urban Botanical Park and Conservatory”

A preliminary report was provided in July 2023 which highlighted the results of a fundraising feasibility study. The results of that fundraising study are attached to this report.

Update 2 – September 12, 2023

File #22-1184 requested answers from the Department regarding the following questions. As of the date that this report was submitted, a partial response is included below.

1. How long can the Domes remain open in their current state?

To answer this question the County must consider multiple factors – 1) sustainability of the annual operating budget of the Conservatory, 2) financial and staff capacity to provide the maintenance and capital replacement of building systems needed to remain open, and 3) effectiveness of the mesh netting safety system currently in place. Each factor is addressed individually.

Sustainability of the annual operating support for the Mitchell Park Conservatory.

When the Domes were opened in Mitchell Park in 1965 the facility was staffed by 39 full-time positions. Presently the Conservatory is staffed by 13 full-time individuals with support from seasonal park workers. The dramatic reduction in the workforce that operate the Domes is consistent with the staffing reductions and funding limitations experienced at Milwaukee County Parks overall which has seen its total workforce shrink from 1,073 FTE employees in 1989 to 469 FTE in 2019. The Skilled Trades staff at Milwaukee County Parks are responsible for maintaining all 450+ buildings and facilities within the parks system and while these individuals are not dedicated to maintaining the Domes, they do spend more time performing repairs and routine maintenance at the Domes than at any other Milwaukee County Park facility. Parks' Horticulture, Forestry and Skilled Trades staff do amazing work to maintain and improve the Domes, but the status quo level of staffing and investment is the bare minimum necessary to keep the facility open.

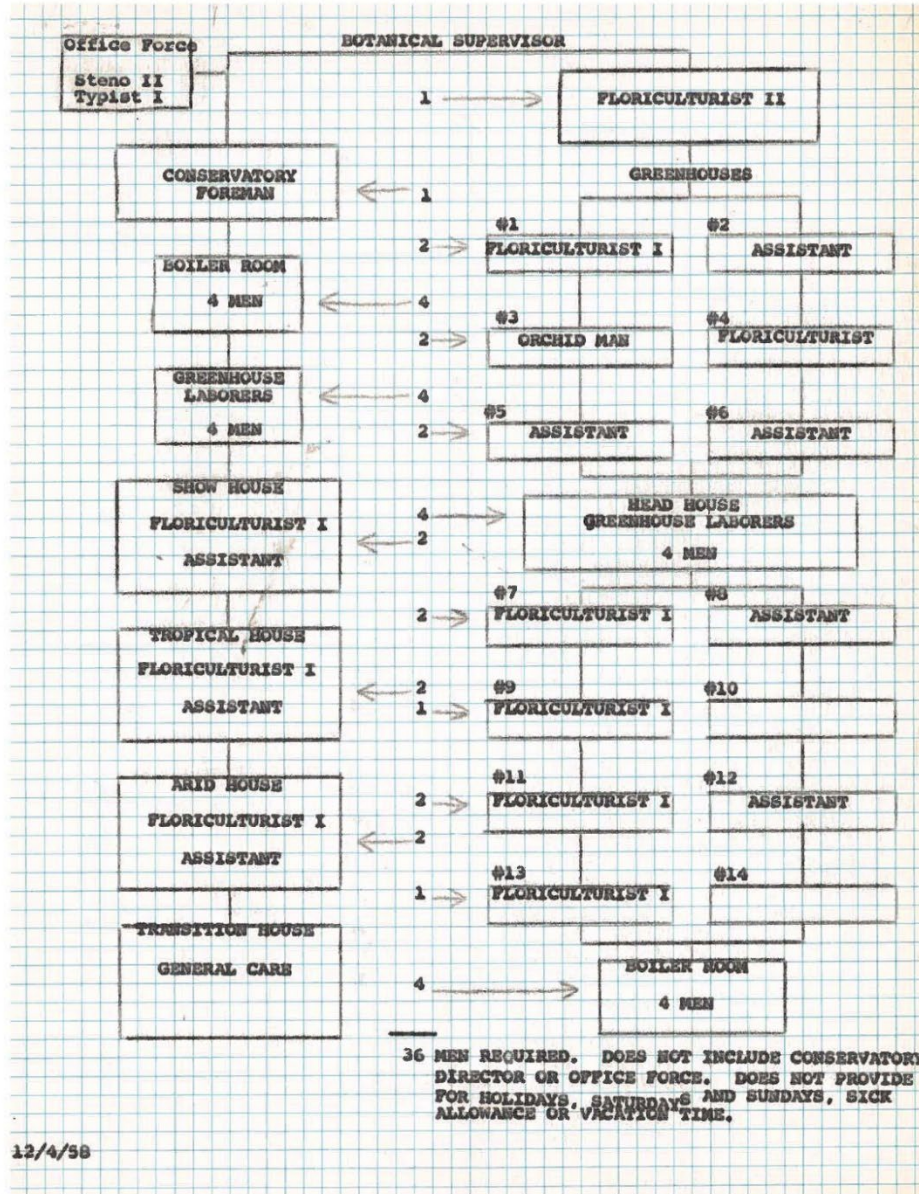


Image: Original staffing model for the Domes called for 39 full-time positions.

The 4-year average of the net annual tax levy support (expenses less earned revenue) for the Domes is \$1,699,927 which represents between 5% and 10% of Milwaukee County Parks annual tax levy funding.

Year	Annual Operating Expense	Revenue	Net Tax Levy Operating Support	Personnel (FT)	Annual Major Maintenance (est.)*	Total Tax Levy Support
2019	\$2,354,613	(\$1,182,584)	\$1,172,029	13	\$375,000	\$1,547,029
2020	\$2,173,163	(\$446,782)	\$1,726,381	13	\$150,000	\$1,876,381
2021	\$2,329,711	(\$691,903)	\$1,637,807	13	\$375,000	\$2,012,807
2022	\$2,031,969	(\$1,043,485)	\$988,483	13	\$375,000	\$1,363,483

**Major maintenance estimate of cost considers unallocated staff labor of the Milwaukee County Parks Skilled Trades staff (\$250,000) and an annual average major maintenance direct expense (\$125,000), 2020 is pro-rated at 40% due to pandemic-related closures.*

Financial capacity to provide maintenance needed to remain open.

As mentioned in the response above, Milwaukee County Parks Skilled Trades Staff spend an exorbitant amount of time maintaining the Domes on a daily basis. This is estimated to cost about \$250,000 per year in labor and \$125,000 per year in contracted services. Despite ongoing and continued maintenance there are multiple significant capital investments that are needed for the building and its mechanical systems which cannot be addressed through the Parks’ annual operating budget. Replacing the building mechanical systems (HVAC, electrical, power, plumbing), building envelope (doors, roof, windows), and needed operational investments (security, lighting, Wi-Fi connectivity, LED lighting) would all require new capital projects. These needs also include the well-known capital replacement needs of the glass, aluminum, and concrete Domes structures. If Milwaukee County Parks were to create a capital improvement plan (CIP) to address all of the expected needs it would overtake the annual capital improvement request that is submitted through the budget. Providing adequate funding for this new capital plan within Milwaukee County’s fiscal constraints would result in most or all new capital projects being focused on the Domes at the expense of other Park facilities for the next several years. To illustrate this, based on the capital improvement plan that Parks submitted in the 2022 budget, the following list of capital projects is an example of existing needs that would likely compete with investments at the Domes in a capital budgeting process.

Existing project in Parks’ 5-Year CIP	New Project Needed at Domes
Cannon Park Pavilion ADA Accessibility	Domes ADA Accessibility
Humboldt Park lighting Replacement	Domes LED lighting renewal
Dineen, KK Parkway, Cooper, Grant parking lot replacement	Mitchell Park parking lot replacement
Center St Pavilion, Noyes pool, Pulaski pool, KK Sports restroom renovations	Domes restroom renovation
Sports Complex, Whitnall clubhouse, Oakwood HVAC replacement	Domes HVAC systems replacement
System-wide Wi-Fi enhancements	Domes Wi-Fi enhancement
Noyes pool, Pulaski pool window replacements	Domes window replacements

Effectiveness of the mesh netting safety system currently in place.

Visiting the Mitchell Park Domes is a safe experience despite the deteriorating condition of the glass and concrete building frame. This is possible because in 2015 and 2021 Milwaukee County invested in the installation of a wire mesh netting system in each of the three Domes which protects visitors from any falling debris. This netting was recently inspected in 2022 and verified to be functioning and safe. From the consultant’s report provided to the County –

“The wire mesh appears to be in good condition, and functioning as intended, at all three domes. The mesh encapsulates 100% of the concrete structure – from the compression ring down to the base of the domes. The circumferential steel wires that hold the mesh tight to the structure also appeared to be in good condition and fully-tensioned. ZS did not observe any damage that would permit falling material to pass through.” (ZS LLC, May 27, 2022)

The consultant working on the mesh inspection, ZS LLC, also assessed the condition of the concrete structure and repairs that were performed in 2015.

“The concrete structure is in fair condition. The repairs completed during the 2015 campaign are mostly in good condition. ZS observed a few locations with cracking in the concrete patches but the material around the cracks is sound... The deterioration that has occurred since the 2015 repair campaign is sporadic and generally consists of spalls caused by corroding reinforcing steel. Of the twenty-six concrete frame segments in each dome, ZS observed recent deterioration (occurring after 2015 review) on five segments in the arid dome, on eighteen segments in the tropic dome and on sixteen segments in the show dome.” (ZS LLC, May 27, 2022)

2. Updated cost estimates for all options listed above with a description of the project scope

This update will be provided at the September Committee meeting when the consultant’s work is complete.

3. In what ways could status on the State and/or National Registers of Historic Places impact each option?

This update will be provided at the September Committee meeting when the consultant’s work is complete.

4. What is the lifetime on the improvements?

This update will be provided at the September Committee meeting when the consultant’s work is complete.

5. Provide any known funding sources, whether the project would be eligible for bonding, and an estimate of General Obligation Bonding that would be necessary to complete the project.

This update will be provided at the September Committee meeting when the consultant’s work is complete.

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

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

2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity

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

- 3B: Enhance the County's fiscal health and sustainability
3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities

FISCAL EFFECT

None

TERMS

None

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

None

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APPROVED BY:

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ATTACHMENTS:

Fundraising feasibility study

CC:

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