

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION

**DATE:** December 28, 2023

**TO:** Supervisor Marcelia Nicholson, Chair, County Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Celia Benton, Economic Development Director, Department of Administrative Services

**SUBJECT:** From the Economic Development Director, Department of Administrative Services requesting authorization to apply for, accept, and implement an Idle Sites Redevelopment Program Grant in a maximum amount of \$200,000 from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation to assist in the Urban Ecology Center Riverland Development Project.

**POLICY**

Milwaukee County Board review and approval is required for the submission of grant funding applications, pursuant to MCGO 56.06.

**BACKGROUND**

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation ("WEDC") is the State of Wisconsin's lead economic development agency focused on sustainable business growth and job creation. The economic development resources WEDC provides to local governments and private parties include the Idle Sites Redevelopment Program Grant ("ISR") Program. This program is meant to incentivize community redevelopment in the State of Wisconsin by providing grants for the redevelopment of sites that "have been idle, abandoned, or underutilized for a period of at least two years." Funds from these grants can be used toward "demolition, environmental remediation, infrastructure or site-specific improvements to advance the site to shovel ready status or enhance the site's market attractiveness."

DAS-Economic Development is seeking authorization to apply for and act as passthrough grant recipient for the Urban Ecology Center, to seek an ISR grant in an amount up to \$200,000 to assist in their Riverland Development project (the "Project"). The Project involves the creation of a premiere event space in an historic warehouse to provide needed gathering and storage space in their Riverland property, adjacent to the current UEC Riverside Park branch. This land was previously contaminated with petroleum and metals before UEC took possession a decade ago, at which time they opted to grade the site, reuse materials on site and cap it. Now, the UEC is looking to repurpose an existing historic Cream City brick building on the site, previously used as a maintenance storage facility, to create a premiere, 300-person, eco-friendly event destination. In addition to the new event space, the Project will include the creation of easily accessible, flexible, and expanded storage capacity for essential site work and land management equipment, as well as a new outdoor gathering space and play area, and modifications to the existing Riverside Park building will create more classroom space, centrally-located office space, and much-needed storage solutions. The sites on which this development is planned abut County Park land, and one part of the project involves connecting this new development to the Oak Leaf Trail at Riverside Park by a

walking path. The Parks Department is aware of this plan and in support (see attached letter), and UEC will work with Parks to acquire the needed permit for this work. No other work or alteration will take place on County Park land.

More information on the Riverland Development project, and how it fits into UEC's Imagine Campaign, is included in the attached Riverland Proposal.

Construction and other work on the Riverland Development Project is set to take place over the next several months, with anticipated completion expected by Fall 2024.

The ISR grant requires a project to commit to a 50% match. Match funds would not come from the County, but from the UEC budget and fundraising for the project, which far exceeds the 50% match requirement. No funds will come from the County.

To implement the grant, if awarded, DAS-Economic Development will enter into an MOU with the Urban Ecology Center, which shall include, but not be limited to, the following terms:

- Submittal to WEDC of paid itemized invoices for eligible expenses with proof of payment for reimbursement purposes, as required by WEDC;
- Semi-annual performance reporting during the life of the project, with a final report due upon completion, as required by WEDC;
- Indemnification in favor of County in the event of a default entitling WEDC to a return of any grant funds expended;
- Guarantee that County is not responsible for financial obligations of the Urban Ecology Center;
- Access to project records during the life of the project and for at least three years thereafter for auditing purposes.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Director of the Department of Administrative Services - Economic Development recommends approval to apply for, accept, and implement an Idle Sites Redevelopment Program Grant in partnership with UEC in a maximum amount of \$200,000 from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation for their Riverland Development project.

### **FISCAL NOTE**

Acceptance of the grant will have a net zero impact on the division's budget. Milwaukee County's role in the process will be that of a government authorization for the application. Any staff time to provide support for the Project will be absorbed in the division's existing budget.

*Celia Benton*

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Celia Benton

Economic Development Director, Department of Administrative Services

Attachment:       Resolution  
                          Fiscal Note  
                          Project Proposal

Project Design  
Parks Department Letter of Support

cc: David Crowley, County Executive  
Scott Manske, Comptroller  
Economic and Community Development Committee Members  
MaryJo Meyers, Chief of Staff, Office of the County Executive  
Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services  
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board of Supervisors  
Allyson Smith, Committee Coordinator  
Ken Smith, County Board Research Analyst  
Guy Smith, Director, County Parks  
Sheldon A. Wasserman, Supervisor, District 3