

# Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory (Domes) Task Force Interim Report and Request for Action

December 28, 2018

“[T]here are viable approaches that can help to provide for a sustainable and economically viable Domes facility in Mitchell Park in the future. These approaches will require initial and ongoing investment by the public and private sectors. The results of implementing a sound strategy for revitalization of the Mitchell Park Domes will bring substantial economic and community benefits to Milwaukee County while preserving the iconic historically significant structures.” Phase I Domes Future Path and Feasibility Study.

**Eight options narrowed to two:** The Task Force has narrowed eight options for the path forward to two that it believes should be examined by the Domes Task Force in more detail before making a final recommendation to the County Board and County Administration. The Task Force’s next phase and additional needs are described below.

**Request for action.** The Task Force respectfully requests County Board approval for transfer of up to \$320,000 from account WP55301, Mitchell Park Conservatory Planning, to the Long-Term Planning subaccount within Sub-Project WP49003, Mitchell Park Domes Long Term Planning, and authority to access the funds transferred to engage consultants to do more detailed design, cost estimating, operating and governance planning respecting the two options the Task Force has selected. County Board approval for the transfer and for access is required. The funds in account WP55301 are currently \$320,000, are adequate, and no additional funds are requested.

A summary of Consultants<sup>1</sup> conclusions is attached as App. A and the 90+ page Phase I report is attached as App. B.

## Both options:

- **Envision investing proactively in the Domes** to create a much more valuable and impactful asset for the residents of the County, visitors to the County, and for its economic development.
- **Include repairing the building envelope of all three of the Domes and addressing ADA and Code issues.**
- **Save the historic Domes structures and improve plant conditions.**
- **Will be implemented in phases.** A phased approach takes more time, but a given phase of investment or change will likely be more doable and feasible than a single large redevelopment of the Domes complex.

**Governance changes will be necessary, but not now:** For both options, capital funding for improvements beyond deferred maintenance will likely require a public-private partnership to raise needed capital and to implement the adopted plan. The format and timing of governance changes will depend on the vision for the future of the Domes; the commitment Milwaukee County can make to achieve that future; and the partners and community that join in achieving the vision for the Domes. For option 1, targeted investments, consultants recommend considering changing the Domes on the County organization chart for direct reporting to leadership. The Domes would have its own budget and report to the County Executive directly and to the Parks, Energy and Environment Committee of the Board. The destination option, Option 2, would merit consideration of an operating partnership with responsibilities split between the County and a not-for-profit organization, or adoption of a County ownership/ not-for-profit operating organization governance model. Until the path forward and the likely partners are known the Task Force is not prepared to recommend governance changes for adoption.

## Option One: Targeted Investments in both facilities and operations will:

- **Achieve higher levels of attendance from current 200,000+ to target of 250,000**

- Increase earned revenues and opportunities for gifts and grants and community benefits.
- Improve the ratio of expenses to costs.
- Increase education and conservation benefits.
- Have potential for increased private sector involvement and opportunities for new partnerships.
- Moderately enhance visitor experience and dwell time growth.
- Moderately increase as a tourism draw, and as an economic benefit.

The targeted facilities and operating enhancements required for this option are described in App. C.

**Option Two: Destination attraction.**<sup>2</sup>

- In addition to the targeted investments of Option One invest in facilities and operations to make the Domes a regional or national leading horticultural conservatory and destination attraction.
- The Domes would become a destination education, conservation and recreational attraction focused on ecological habitats and horticultural themes.
- Presents a major opportunity to enhance collections.
- Requires partners and outside investment.
- It likely needs an operating partnership with a not-for-profit organization.
- It will be flexible and designed to meet community and tourism needs.
- Attendance increases from 200,000+ to target 400,000.
- Provides a destination experience with much longer attendee time on site. Will extend use as a 12-month attraction/venue.
- Tickets, auxiliary revenue, contributions and grants substantially increase and higher earned and contributed revenues support increased operations costs.
- It is likely that the County contribution can be capped at an agreed amount.
- Major benefits for tourism and major increase in economic benefits and job creation.
- Transformative education, conservation, social and community benefits.
- Transforms Domes to a major Milwaukee asset.

The Destination Attraction Option facilities and Operating enhancements are described in App. D.

**Public support for both options:** The decisions of the Task Force on what options to pursue took into consideration the input received from the public. Input came from a public meeting, five meetings with selected focus groups and an online survey. Over 2,300 responses were received on the website. Many respondents submitted comments in addition to indicating the option they preferred. The two options the Task Force has decided to pursue further received the highest number of votes. 32% of respondents (784 votes) preferred the EcoDome destination attraction. The next largest option preferred was targeted investments, 21% (498 votes). The full results are in the Phase 2 Report of the Domes Future Path and Feasibility Study that is Appendix E.

**Targeted Investments as a phase of becoming a destination attraction:** Public survey results suggest that starting with Targeted Investments, Option One, could also phase into improving the Domes into a destination venue, Option 2, as funding becomes more certain.

**Costs:** Projections of capital and operating costs for the two options are preliminary, order-of-magnitude estimates that need to be refined in the next phase to the Task Force's work. Consultants estimate an allowance of approximately \$25 million to address deferred maintenance issues with the Domes structures. Engineering reports indicate that the Domes are structurally sound and can be restored. With funds authorized in the 2018

budget, County Administration has awarded a contract to test the Domes concrete and steel support structure to better inform repair and maintenance needs and options. No action has yet been taken on a second study of repair and restoration options for the glass and its support structure to halt moisture infiltration. Results will help in the refinement of cost estimates. The consultants also project an allowance of an additional \$20 million for adding the targeted investments, for a total of \$45 million. To fully achieve the Destination Attraction option an additional approximately \$40 million might be required, for a total of \$85 million. Detailed planning in Phase III will produce more accurate and meaningful cost projections.

**Coordination with other studies: The Task Force will coordinate its work with the Hemp Study, File Number 18-690 and the Milwaukee Public Museum Site study from the 2019 Adopted Budget (Amendment 1A003).** The Task Force will meet with the MPM Site Study group at their final two meetings. The Task Force will endeavor, with the help of consultants, to identify elements of its proposals for a path forward that may be affected by the results of the efforts of both studies. The Task Force will include partnership with the Milwaukee Public Museum among the potential partners to be evaluated with the assistance of consultants in the next phase of its work.

**The Task Force's next Phase:** The future path and feasibility study being conducted by the Task Force has been undertaken with the assistance of consultants that were engaged for the first two stages of a three-phase study. The rfp for the study described the third phase as follows: Phase III: Development of schematic programming and space needs costs for Task Force selected alternates. 1. For up to three (3) selected alternatives, based on the results of phases I and II, work with County staff and prepare schematic programming diagrams and space needs analysis. 2. Development of cost estimates for Capital Improvements including structure, support infrastructure, O&M costs and funding alternatives, will be expected in order to present fully the alternatives to the Task Force so they are able to make a thorough and clear recommendation to the County Board. 3. A minimum of three (3) Task Force meetings and one Parks Committee meeting will be required for updates 4. The diagrams and estimates will be presented to the task force along with a digital report and a multimedia presentation.

The result of Phases I and II have produced two alternatives, one fewer than the three that might have needed phase III analysis. The two alternatives are closely related. The destination option includes accomplishing the targeted investments option. Based on the results of Phases I and II, however, additional assistance from consultants will be needed to better define a path forward that is feasible. These additional needs may require a team of consultants with a broader range of capabilities than originally anticipated. The Task Force seeks approval from the County Board for engaging consultants to meet these additional needs. Additional assistance not specified previously includes:

**Additional consulting needs:** In addition to the tasks previously described for Phase III the rfp should provide assistance with partnerships, funding sources and fundraising feasibility, facilities, business plans and pro forma projections, Domes restoration alternatives, and year-round and outdoor activity and program areas. See App. F.

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<sup>1</sup> The Consultant team for the first two phases was led by HGA, an architectural and engineering firm with Milwaukee offices, and included in Phase I, ConsultEcon, a nationally prominent economic research and management consulting firm that serves the museum, attractions and tourism industry domestically and internationally. For the community outreach phase (Phase II) the team also included a local firm, Quorum Architects.

<sup>2</sup> Based on the total public feedback received, over 70% of the 2,300+ participants in the Domes poll are interested in having Milwaukee County lead a process toward restoring, redeveloping and improving the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory into a destination attraction for Milwaukee County for generations to come.