

3
4
5 **A RESOLUTION**
6

7 Rescinding the policy position adopted in File No.16-200 and recognizing a new County
8 policy to expand the scope of strategic planning associated with the Mitchell Park
9 Horticultural Conservatory (the Domes) to enable the Milwaukee County Board of
10 Supervisors to consider all options for the future of the Domes
11
12

13 WHEREAS, the original Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory, a Victorian-era
14 greenhouse built in 1898 and demolished in 1955 due to structural safety concerns, was
15 replaced by a new horticultural conservatory colloquially known as “the Domes”, which
16 opened in 1964 with First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson in attendance; and
17

18 WHEREAS, from December 2013 to February 2014 the Department of Parks,
19 Recreation and Culture closed the Tropical Dome to repair concrete whose weathering
20 had accelerated due to the high heat and humidity within that dome, and subsequent
21 inspection of the other two domes was authorized in File No. 14-89; and
22

23 WHEREAS, by September 2015, the Director of the Department of Parks,
24 Recreation and Culture reported to the County Board that the domes’ deterioration had
25 accelerated, moved for the installation of netting to protect patrons from falling concrete
26 debris, and also requested a \$500,000 study of how to move forward with the 1964
27 Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory (File No. 15-601); and
28

29 WHEREAS, after the Administration indefinitely closed all three domes on
30 February 5, 2016 due to concrete debris falling from the structure, the Milwaukee
31 County Board of Supervisors adopted File No. 16-200 which requested the Domes
32 reopen to the public by the end of 2016, established the Domes Task Force to develop
33 a comprehensive long-term plan for the facility, and officially set the County policy to
34 “pursue the repair and preservation of the existing Mitchell Park Horticultural
35 Conservatory”; and
36

37 WHEREAS, in 2018 the Domes Task Force and their consulting team comprised
38 of HGA and ConsultEcon, Inc. released the “Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory
39 Future Path and Feasibility Study” (Phase I and Phase II) which evaluated eight
40 potential options for the future of the Domes ranging from demolition to expansive re-
41 envisioning of the facility, and documented an extensive community outreach process
42 (File No.18-164); and

43 WHEREAS, while the Phase I and Phase II studies may have explored the costs
44 and impacts of demolition or reconstruction of the Domes, these options were not
45 consistent with the County Board's stated policy to repair, preserve, and prolong the
46 existing Domes; therefore the Task Force is limited to only recommending an option that
47 is consistent with the current policy; and

48 WHEREAS in September 2019, the Domes Task Force's Phase III report by
49 ArtsMarket, LLC presented a Business Plan and Conceptual Design which
50 recommended preservation of the Domes and redevelopment of Mitchell Park with a
51 proposed funding model utilizing various tax credits, grants, private fundraising, and
52 County financing (File No. 19-677); and

53 WHEREAS, Milwaukee County contracted with Husch Blackwell and Baker Tilly
54 to evaluate the Business Plan presented in File No. 19-677, and their report released in
55 File No. 22-697 revealed that due to the complexity and laws relating to tax credits, the
56 proposed "capital stack" presented by ArtsMarket, LLC was found to not be a viable
57 financial mechanism to move forward with financing the Domes' rehabilitation and re-
58 investment without significant County investment and/or private fundraising; and

59 WHEREAS, considering its ongoing fiscal challenges, if the Domes are going to
60 continue operating, Milwaukee County must find a way to improve the Domes' business
61 and operating models to enhance community impact and perhaps raise sufficient
62 revenue to sustain operations and assist in grant and donor opportunities (File Nos. 18-
63 164, 18-627, 19-57, 19-102, 21-233, 21-772, & 22-697); and

64
65 WHEREAS, the County Board passed File No. 22-980 to have the Administration
66 obtain the Domes' listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, but was
67 vetoed by the County Executive due to concerns that historic designation is not
68 appropriate at present; and

69
70 WHEREAS, despite significant resources in both time and money spent on
71 planning for the future of the Domes, the County has not yet been able to take a
72 definitive step towards a chosen outcome; and

73 WHEREAS, as the policymakers for the County, the Milwaukee County Board of
74 Supervisors should have the opportunity to weigh all relevant strategies and their
75 respective fiscal impacts and constraints, economic impacts, and alignment with the
76 County's strategic plan regarding the future of Mitchell Park Horticultural Center (the
77 Domes); now, therefore,

78 BE IT RESOLVED, the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors hereby rescinds
79 the policy position adopted in File No. 16-200 committing the County to the pursuit of
80 the repair and preservation of the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory (Domes) and
81 officially recognizes a new County policy to expand the scope of strategic planning
82 associated with the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory (Domes) to enable the

83 Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors to consider all options for the future of the
84 Domes and their respective fiscal and economic impacts to make the best, informed
85 decision on future action; and

86 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture,
87 coordinating with the Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance, Office of Corporation
88 Counsel, and Office of the Comptroller if necessary, shall present a report to the County
89 Board at the July 2023 cycle which shall evaluate options including:

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

99 and provide the following information:

- 100 • How long can the Domes remain open in their current state?
- 101 • Updated cost estimates for all options listed above with a description of the
102 project scope
- 103 • In what ways could status on the State and/or National Registers of Historic
104 Places impact each option?
- 105 • What is the lifetime on the improvements?
- 106 • Provide any known funding sources, whether the project would be eligible for
107 bonding, and an estimate of General Obligation Bonding that would be
108 necessary to complete the project

109 ; and

110 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture,
111 coordinating with the Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance, and Office of
112 Corporation Counsel shall present the Board of Supervisors with options of business
113 plans and governance structure changes to effectuate the enhancement of the Mitchell
114 Park Horticultural Conservatory as a destination for residents and tourists, and bring the
115 Conservatory to perform in line with peer conservatories across the country; and
116

117 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in addition to reporting on the future Dome
118 options above, the Parks Department shall present long-term options for Mitchell Park,
119 independent of plans for the Domes, with the goal of greater revitalization of the park
120 space and further activation of the surrounding neighborhoods.