

Framework for the  
Long-Term Strategic Planning  
*of the*  
Mitchell Park  
Horticultural Conservatory







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## Executive Summary

The Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory has faithfully served generations of Milwaukeeans as a sanctuary from the kinetic pace of urban life. Perched atop the southern rim of the Menomonee Valley, the Conservatory is an oasis in the highly dense residential neighborhoods of the Near South Side. The untimely temporary closure of the Conservatory in 2016 focused the community's attention on its value as a cultural asset, the future of the iconic structures, and the potential for new opportunities. Since the late 19th century, the Conservatory's relationship with the outdoor areas of Mitchell Park have provided residents and park goers with indoor and outdoor botanical features and displays, including specialty gardens, reflecting pools, a dancing pavilion, and a lagoon. The community engagement process that has occurred over the last year gathered facility data, community feedback, and best management practices from conservatories around the United States. This information should provide the engaged stakeholders with the details needed to begin charting the collective future of the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory and the Domes.

### The Netting & Its Lifespan

The wire mesh netting is a temporary solution to ensure public safety, but it is not a structural repair to the concrete or glass framing systems. It is estimated to last five years, at which point, another structural intervention will need to occur. This means that the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory has a time frame of five years for implementation. The process must continue as scheduled and be pursued with diligence and purpose.

### The Conservatory's Current Operations & Programming at the Domes

Through cooperation between Domes' staff, Milwaukee County, and Friends of the Domes volunteers, facility enhancements have been made and program offerings and events have been expanded. The community has responded enthusiastically to the positive changes with a 29 percent increase in attendance over the last five years. With the wire mesh netting successfully installed in each of the Domes, the 2017 events calendar is full and a resurgence in attendance is expected to continue. Please consult Part I of this report for details about attendance trends and the events schedule.

The recent construction of seven new greenhouses at the Domes to support the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory and Boerner Botanical Gardens has added additional space for growing plants and hosting events, most notably in the



Annex where the Winter Farmers' Market is held. The \$12 million in funding provided by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation allowed for the construction of these new state-of-the-art greenhouses, which include sustainable features and energy efficient systems, such as a rainwater capture and re-use system and a greenhouse control system that opens and closes the glass roof based on environmental conditions. Milwaukee County also added a permeable paver plaza at the entrance and a green roof over the Education Center. The seven greenhouses were functional replacements for those demolished as a result of the Zoo Interchange Project on Watertown Plank Road in Wauwatosa.

Despite the increased attention, the Conservatory continues to operate at an annual deficit within the Domes. In large part, the physical limitations of the Domes – that is, the physical area and available facilities – contribute to the inability to host more events and become a more popular venue. The key physical limitations of the Domes that inhibit revenue growth and an expanded events calendar include:

- Inefficient heating, cooling, and watering systems that incur additional operating and maintenance expenses; and
- Physical layout of the facility that prohibits private events while the Conservatory is open to the public, simultaneous events, and a larger events calendar (e.g., special events, school field trips, and floral shows).

## Case Study Research

Five conservatories from around the United States were studied for their characteristics pertaining to programming and operations, revenue, finance, and management, social and economic impact, and structure and functionality. These categories are identified as the Facility Framework in this report. Special attention was paid to their comparison with the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory. The conservatories studied were identified as “peer conservatories” and included: Missouri Botanical Garden (St. Louis, MO), Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens (Pittsburgh, PA), Lucille Halsell Conservatory (San Antonio, TX), Garfield Park Conservatory (Chicago, IL), and Garfield Park Conservatory (Indianapolis, IN).

The research produced key takeaways that were used to develop the long-term planning goals and facility options. These takeaways summarize key facility features that strengthen successful conservatories. The features include:

- Larger operations, including staff, programming, and other revenue sources (cafés, special events, etc.);
- The leveraging of assets and personnel through public-private partnerships to achieve operational efficiencies;
- Operation by private non-profits, with admission fees and revenue that are much higher than at the Domes (likely in part because of the more extensive inside and outside gardens);
- Full-time development staff to conduct annual giving and capital campaigns;
- Reaching a higher “critical mass” of integrated programming activities, facilities, and a broad spectrum of revenue sources;
- Operating neighborhood engagement and educational programs for children and adults;
- Integration with botanical gardens or other outdoor parks with one admission to view all; and,
- Promotion of their historic structures in marketing campaigns to drive attendance and attract new funding sources.



## Community Engagement

One of the cornerstones of this phase of the project was the multi-pronged community engagement process. Because of the community's appreciation for the Domes, the engagement strategy was crafted to involve multiple stakeholder groups in different formats, including larger public events, focus group discussions, and County-facilitated discussions. The intent was to reach a diverse set of opinions, especially those that may otherwise be left out of the process.

To ensure the equitable representation of community voices, a list of community groups was drafted as a key starting point. These community groups were categorized as follows: adjacent neighborhood groups, commerce and tourism, education and youth, general community and civic groups, health, historic preservation, and park and horticultural groups.

Between March and December of 2016, GRAEF supported four events to engage neighborhood stakeholders, the Friends of the Domes organization, and the broader Milwaukee community. In addition, GRAEF partnered with Milwaukee County to host an electronic survey to gather feedback on an ongoing basis. The four engagement events included:

- One Open House at the Show Dome Opening – April 30, 2016
- Two Meetings with Friends of the Domes Board of Directors and Members – May 14 and June 12, 2016
- One Public Discussion at the NEWaukee Night Market – September 14, 2016

Milwaukee County developed the electronic survey modeled on GRAEF's paper survey. The survey was deployed in summer 2016 and was designed to be continuously available throughout the engagement process to provide new stakeholders and participants with the opportunity to provide their feedback.

After the successful installation of the wire mesh netting in the Show Dome, an Open House was held on April 30, 2016, to allow stakeholders to learn about what was happening with the Domes and provide their feedback. Many stakeholders participated by sharing their thoughts on comment cards, completing the written survey, and discussing the project with Milwaukee County and GRAEF staff. The themes that emerged from the feedback include:

- Repair the Domes
- Consider a new form
- Ensure that the facility (current or new) is self-sustaining
- Maintain the facility in Mitchell Park
- Diversify operations and management of the facility
- Restore the sunken gardens
- Consider the National Historic Register



## Recommended Long-Term Planning Goals & Facility Options

While the information collected in this phase of the project was intended to inform stakeholders, it also acted as a guide that was used to craft the critical next steps in the future phases of the project. Following the community engagement events, the following goals were identified as key guiding principles for the forthcoming long-range planning process:

1. Find a solution that expands earned revenue through programs, events, and associated activities.
2. Develop an organizational and financial structure that enhances both earned and contributed revenue, expands program and staff capacity, and ensures public accountability.
3. Create a combined facility that serves as a valued, community-wide cultural asset.
4. Clearly address the current strengths and limitations of the facility, including its historic value.

Facility options for the Conservatory should be developed and modified through an à la carte selection of desired facility features. This allows for the consideration of a variety of choices and pairings of programmatic and garden features that are desirable. The choices included below are neither mutually exclusive, nor collectively exhaustive. Stakeholders and the community should commit to detailed considerations of these options to ensure an informed discussion and thorough feasibility analysis.

- Extensively rehabilitate all three Domes to prolong their structural integrity for the longer term, subject to the availability of substantial capital resources.
- Extensively rehabilitate only one Dome to prolong its structural integrity, thus requiring fewer capital resources in the short term, and then work to accumulate the capital resources needed for rehabilitation of one or both of the other Domes.
- Rehabilitate all three Domes with fewer resources that will still prolong their structural integrity on an interim basis (approximately 5-10 years), while actively fundraising to fund their extensive rehabilitation for the longer term.
- Along with any of the above options, repurpose one or more of the Domes for a use other than a conservatory which could help generate funds and serve a significant community purpose.
- Along with any of the above options, construct a new conservatory in Mitchell Park subject to revised programming, while rehabilitating one, two, or three Domes for different community purposes at a later date when resources are available.
- Construct a new conservatory in Mitchell Park and remove the three Domes.
- In conjunction with any of the above options, design and construct outdoor park features consistent with the goals of the neighborhood and the Conservatory.
- Remove the three Domes and move the Conservatory to another location in Milwaukee County.
- Repurpose the three Domes and move the Conservatory to another location in Milwaukee County.
- Remove the three Domes without replacement and make investments in other Milwaukee County needs.

Programmatic and garden features could include:

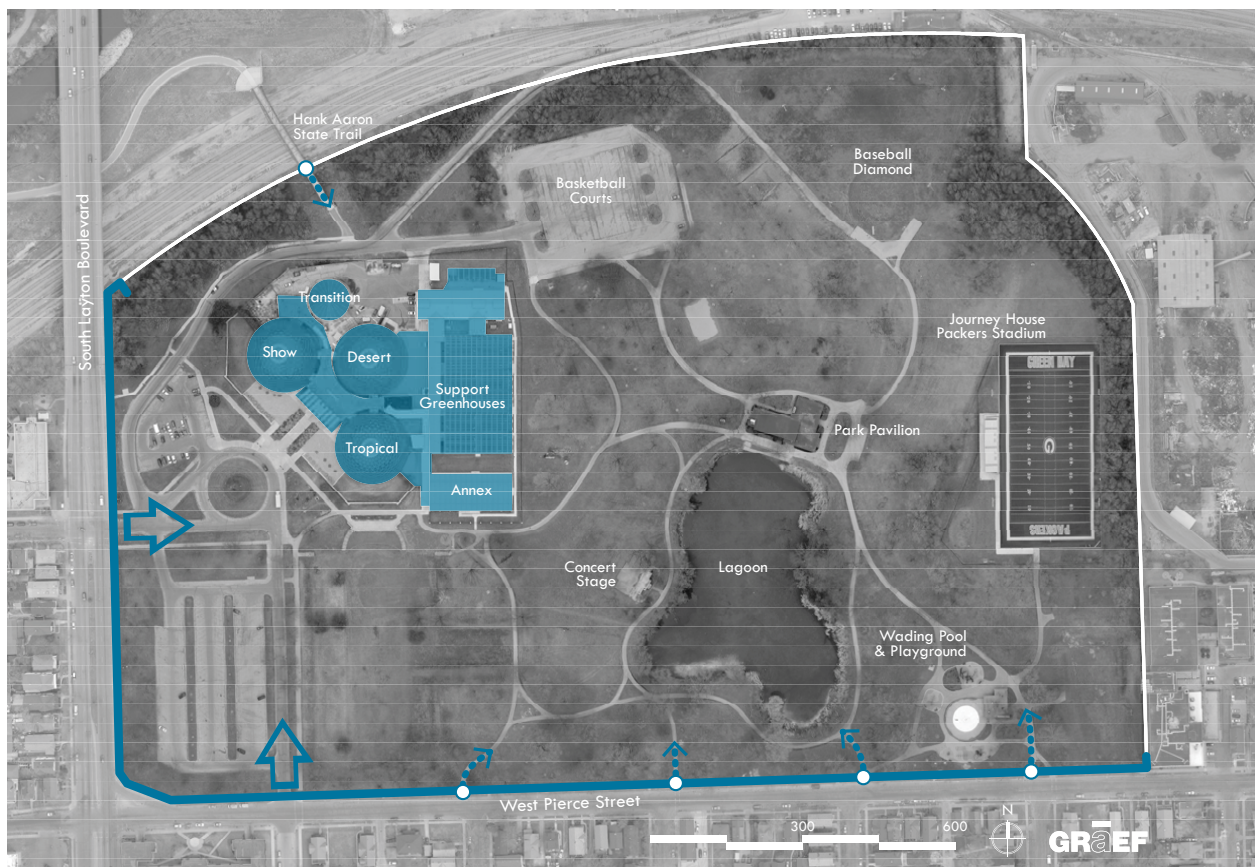
- Offering a variety of food service options, including a café, restaurant, and commercial kitchen for caterers.
- Enlarging classroom and education space to accommodate field trips, run themed camps, and teach adult enrichment courses.





- Enhancing research facilities to host scientists, curate an endangered plant collection, and operate a conservation program.
- Enlarging special events space with high quality acoustics and audio-visual equipment to host multiple groups simultaneously, including weddings, corporate events, and other social, educational, business, and community events.
- Providing uses and activities for areas that may be repurposed such as indoor play areas, outdoor fountains, and other entertainment uses.

*Existing Site Plan of Mitchell Park & the Horticultural Conservatory*







## Part I. History of the Conservatory & Its Operations

### A. Life Cycle of the Mitchell Park Conservatory

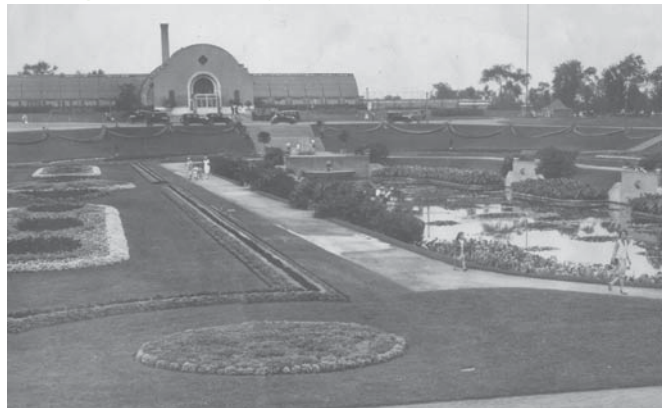
The Mitchell Park Conservatory has been one of Milwaukee's original cultural assets since its structure's first construction at the end of the 19th century. As a place of tranquility and respite, the Conservatory has provided generations of Milwaukeeans with the privilege of benefiting from a green oasis in the heart of the city's dense urban neighborhoods. Mitchell Park and the Conservatory have been jewels in the County's emerald necklace for over a century. And again – as it has before, the Conservatory is at a point in its life cycle when the Domes, its structure and home, have deteriorated. This is not the first time the Milwaukee community has faced this harsh reality.

Built in 1898 on property once owned by the famed Mitchell family, the original Victorian glass conservatory sat on 30 acres in the present location of the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory – the Domes. The conservatory was preceded by the construction of a stone fountain, pavilion, and small boathouse at the Mitchell Park Pond in 1891. In 1904, the Sunken Gardens were constructed with a water mirror, fountains, and formal outdoor gardens.

In 1955, the original Victorian conservatory had deteriorated to such an extent that it was no longer structurally sound and was determined to be impractical to repair. It was razed to make room for the three conoidal-shaped Domes designed by Donald L. Grieb, the winner of a design competition. Over the course of four years between 1964 and 1967, the Floral, Tropical, and Desert Domes were constructed for a total capital investment of \$4.5 million. To avoid the issuance of municipal debt and the cost of bonding, Milwaukee County financed the construction of the Domes through yearly appropriations. The unique conoidal design of the Domes made it the only conservatory of its kind in the world.

By the 1990s, the Domes were showing their age. In 1994, the Sunken Gardens and adjacent formal gardens were removed due to budget constraints and

*The original Conservatory and Sunken Gardens*



*Photo Credit: Milwaukee County Parks Department*

lack of staffing. Thirty years of deferred maintenance and water leakage had begun to cause deterioration to the concrete and aluminum glazing system. For all of the glory and beauty of the Domes, the modernist construction of the facility did not permit easy access to conduct regular maintenance, nor did it allow for potential expansion to offer additional programs and events. In response to the growing concern, a master plan was completed by Engberg Anderson Architects in 2000. The project team considered Mitchell Park and the Conservatory as a cohesive and interrelated environment that could both positively impact the surrounding neighborhood and create a regional attraction for all residents. Components of the Master Plan included:

- Critical Maintenance Projects
- Scheduled Maintenance Projects
- Required Facility Upgrade Projects
- Planned Additional Program Area Projects
- Planned Revenue Enhancement Projects
- Planned Functionality Enhancement Projects
- Planned Aesthetic Enhancement Projects

*Original Victorian Conservatory, 1937*



*Demolition of Victorian Conservatory, 1956*



*Domes under Construction, 1963*



*Construction Complete on the Domes, 1967*

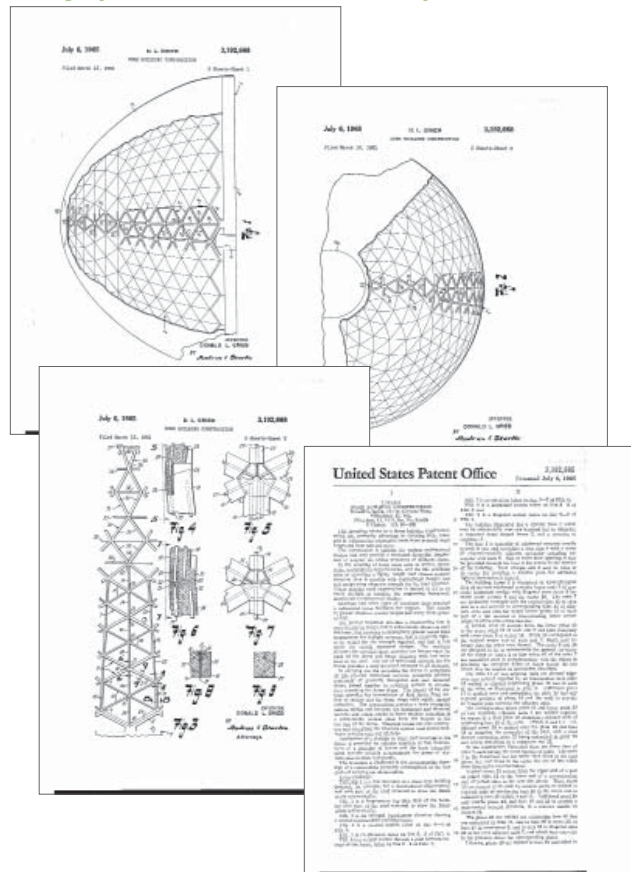


*Photo Credit: Milwaukee County*



Despite the Master Plan's quality and widespread support in the community, it was never implemented; and, although almost 20 years have elapsed since its completion, many of the underlying findings remain valid even though many of the organizational and programmatic needs have changed. The Domes entered the new century operating as it had previously without a strategic plan and operational goals. The decrease in public appeal for the Conservatory and increase in structural problems resulted in a significant attendance slump through the 2000s. Recognizing the need for structural maintenance and enhancement of the existing exhibits, a capital fundraising campaign was launched in 2005 culminating in the installation of the current LED lighting system in 2008. Expansion of programming offerings and the events schedule maximized the facility's space, but also quickly pushed it to operating at its physical capacity.

*Excerpts from Donald L. Grieb's Patent for the Domes*

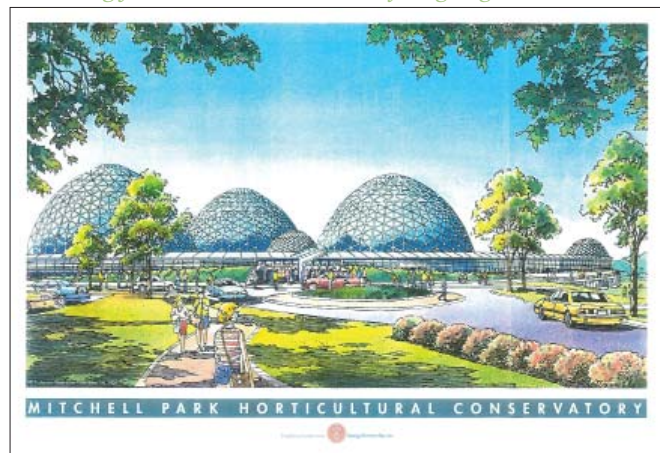


*Credit: Donald L. Grieb*

In 2013, the Zoo Interchange Project required the demolition of Milwaukee County's greenhouses off of Watertown Plank Road in Wauwatosa. The greenhouses served the County's Horticultural Department for Parks by providing a year-round environment in which to grow plants and supply them to the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory and the Boerner Botanical Gardens. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation funded a functional replacement of the greenhouses and relocated them to Mitchell Park, immediately adjacent to the Domes, at a cost of \$12 million.

*Rendering from 2000 Master Plan by Engberg Anderson*

When the Domes turned 50 years old in 2015, the facility's structural condition had worsened with continued water infiltration and spalling concrete – and a subsequent increase in the incidents of falling concrete. Additionally, the Domes' limited physical space and energy inefficiencies created a financially unsustainable operations and maintenance outlook. Milwaukee County initiated a long-range planning process for the future of the facility. Following the installation of protective mesh netting—a short-term, five-year solution—each of the Domes re-opened by year's end with the full events schedule resuming for 2017.



*Photo Credit: Engberg Anderson*

*Grotto and lake at Mitchell Park*



*Crowd gathered for live music, circa 1917*



*Dancing Pavilion*



*Photo Credit: Milwaukee County Parks Department*

## **B. Operations: Finances, Events, Attendance, & Donations**

Using existing space and capacity, Domes' staff, Milwaukee County, and Friends of the Domes volunteers have cooperated to make facility enhancements and expand program offerings and events. Their efforts have generated attention in the community and have yielded a noticeable improvement in operations and events with increases in attendance over the last five years. The newly-constructed Annex significantly enhanced the facility's ability to host large groups of people, especially for school groups and large events. Before the temporary closure of the Domes in January 2016, a full list of events and special events were planned with historical trends indicating a continued resurgence. With all three Domes now re-opened, the 2017 events schedule is expected to be full.

### ***Finances***

Despite the growth in attendance and excitement surrounding new Domes events, expenses continue to exceed revenues at the facility. Much of the continued operating deficit can largely be attributed to the layout and condition of the Domes themselves. Limitations of the structure that inhibit revenue growth include:

- Physical layout of the facility that prohibits private events while the conservatory is open to the public, simultaneous events, and a larger events calendar – including special events, school field trips, and floral shows; and,
- Inefficient heating, cooling, and watering systems that incur additional operating and maintenance expenses.



*Dancing Pavilion on a busy summer evening*



*Photo Credit: Milwaukee County Parks Department*

*The newly-constructed Domes, 1967*



Finances: Expenses & Revenues

Year	Expense	Revenue	Surplus (Deficit)
2010	\$1,451,121	\$755,007	(\$696,114)
2011	\$2,924,546	\$1,621,928	(\$1,302,619)
2012	\$1,437,219	\$819,800	(\$617,419)
2013	\$1,611,806	\$810,482	(\$801,324)
2014*	\$2,048,939	\$744,550	(\$1,304,389)
2015	\$1,504,986	\$1,018,676	(\$486,310)
2016 YTD*	\$1,013,425	\$153,174	(\$860,251)
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$11,992,043</b>	<b>\$5,923,617</b>	<b>(\$6,068,427)</b>

*\*One or more Domes closed during year.*

Finances: Private Event & Catering Revenue

Year	Attendance	Chair Set-Up	Light Show	8% of Food Sales*	8% of Bar Sales	Room Rental	Notes
2013	8,630	\$5,950.00	\$9,800.00	\$17,579.62	\$13,822.07	\$95,913.50	16 free light shows totaling \$4,800
2014	6,716	\$4,900.00	\$4,500.00	\$15,081.48	\$11,776.62	\$70,756.00	4 free light shows totaling \$1,200
2015	5,600	\$1,050.00	\$1,200.00	\$13,211.85	\$10,644.42	\$76,108.99	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,946</b>	<b>\$11,900.00</b>	<b>\$15,500.00</b>	<b>\$45,872.95</b>	<b>\$36,243.11</b>	<b>\$242,778.49</b>	

*\*Percent of food and bar sales per Zilli Hospitality's catering contract.*



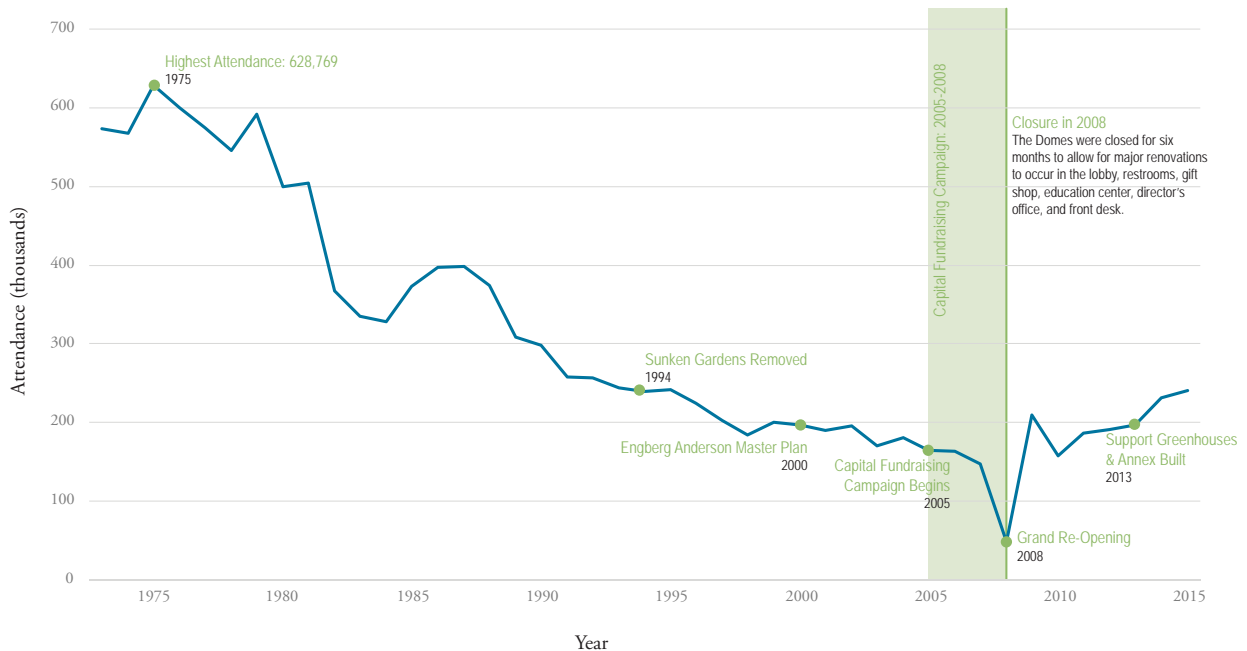
## Annual Attendance

The expansion of programs and special events between 2011 and 2015 saw a 29 percent increase in attendance for both general admission and special events. Domes staff support three types of events: Floral Shows, Music Under Glass, and Special Events. The 2016 event schedule was expected to see five Floral Shows and nine Music Under Glass Concerts; there were to be 23 Special Events. As each of the Domes reopened following the installation of protective netting, the events schedule resumed. The Winter Farmers' Market continued throughout the closures, as it is now hosted in the Annex.

Attendance at the Domes: 1990-2015

Year	Attendance
1990	298,510
1995	241,245
2000	197,285
2005	164,738
2010	157,402
2011	186,177
2012	190,883
2013	197,230
2014	231,019
2015	240,179

Annual Attendance at the Domes: 1973-2015





### *Programming: Special Events*

- Ethnic Festivals (Polish, German, Irish, Turkish, Chinese)
- Plant Shows (Orchid Show, Bonsai Show, Ikebana)
- All-Scale Train Exhibit
- Gardens & Gears Steampunk Day
- Very Fairy Princess Day
- Cupcake Fest
- Jewelry at the Domes
- Urban Garage Sale
- Tori Gate Festival
- Holistic Health Fair
- Green Living Festival
- Pollinator Week
- Music Under Glass Winter Concerts
- Milwaukee Winter Farmers' Market

### *Programming: Horticulture*

- Manage \$3.2 million plant collection
- Seasonal exhibits
- Cultural exhibits
- Manage CITES (Convention of the International Treaty for Endangered Species) Plant Collection
- Greenhouse Show Dome material
- Boerner Botanical Gardens material
- Orchid collection
- Design and install floral shows
- Maintain conservatory inventory
- Research best industry standards
- Maintain national plant register
- Education – horticulture

### *Friends of the Domes Support*

The Friends of the Domes (FoD) have been and continue to be important contributors to the Domes and a reason for the facility's success. FoD volunteers are on-site daily, and have provided thousands of volunteer hours to organize events, staff the gift shop and events, and guide visitors through the Domes. Between 2004 and 2015, the FoD contributed over \$900,000 in donations to sponsor facility renovations and upgrades, purchase educational materials, and fund animal health care costs. Donations that funded notable projects include: the digital welcome sign at the Domes' entrance, the etched glass doors for each Dome, and lobby furniture.

### *Programming: Park Artist*

- Show prop design and installation
- Develop show themes
- Mural painting
- Graphic artist and fabricator
- Marketing and promotional material
- Public relations - media
- Curator of prop inventory
- Program LED light shows in Floral and Show Domes

### *Programming: Interpretive Education*

- Develop / Conduct Tours – Guided
- Classes – hands-on experiences
- Align School / Class Curriculum
- Develop Workshops
- Self-guided Materials
- Community Camps and Outreach
- Develop Weekly Storytime
- Audio Tours and Scavenger Hunts
- Interpretive Signage
- Volunteer Orientation and Training
- Create Exhibits and Programs
- Resource Library Curator
- Park / Complex Historical Archives

### *Friends of the Domes Events*

- Art in the Green
- Ghosts Under Glass
- Restaurants Under Glass
- New Year's Family Celebration
- Mystery Chef's Table
- Hearts Under Glass (Valentines)



### C. Interim Closures of the Domes

Since 2013, County staff and engineers have been monitoring the concrete structure of the Domes for any spalling concrete. Between August 2013 and January 2016, one or more of the Domes has been closed for a total of 836 days. These days do not reflect the restrictions of limited access due to glass replacement that has also occurred. Closure of the Domes negatively impacts attendance and revenue generation, thus distorting the finances and attendance numbers. These distortions make it difficult to conduct historical trend analyses and make predictions about future operations.

Closure of the Domes: 2013-2016

Dome	Dates Closed	# of Days
Tropical	08/22/2013 - 02/08/2014	171
	02/06/2016 - 09/26/2016	231
Desert	02/09/2014 - 03/14/2014	34
	01/28/2016 - 02/02/2016	6
Show	02/06/2016 - 10/29/2016	269
	07/28/2014 - 09/06/2014	41
	02/06/2016 - 04/29/2016	84
<b>Total</b>		<b>836</b>

In January 2016, the Domes were closed to ensure public safety. In an effort to preserve the growing conditions for the plants and re-open the Domes to the general public, a wire mesh netting was installed to catch falling pieces of concrete. The protective netting is not a long-term repair that will correct the longstanding issues of the Domes; but rather, it will serve as a short-term solution to allow the Domes to be reopened and provide stakeholders with the time needed to find a long-term solution.

Specialty lift used to maintain the Domes



Photo Credit: GRAEF



*Programs and events at the Domes*



*Photo Credit: Friends of the Domes*

*Installation of the Wire Mesh Netting in the Show Dome, spring 2016*



*Photo Credit: JSOnline.com*







## Part II. Lessons Learned from Case Studies

Upon initiation of the project, GRAEF began researching peer facilities in the United States and abroad to collect comparable information and establish a baseline of data that was used to build case studies. The case study research was meant to supplement the existing data project partners had previously collected about the Domes and inform future efforts, specifically as they related to operations and maintenance, programming, and revenue generation. GRAEF began the research and then partnered with American Design Inc. Architectural Services and Prism Technical Management & Marketing Services, LLC to complete the research.

### Key Takeaways

The case study research produced key takeaways and, in some instances, best management practices for conservatories that included indoor and outdoor features and a myriad of programming options. These takeaways were categorized within the Facility Framework and highlight successful facility features.

Key Takeaways from Case Study Research: Successful Facility Features

Programming & Operations	Revenue, Finance, & Management	Social & Economic Impact	Structure & Functionality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Larger operations: staff, programming, other revenue sources (cafés, special events, etc.)</li> <li>▪ Leverage assets and personnel through public-private partnerships to achieve operational efficiencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Most operated by private non-profits with admission fees and revenue that are much higher than at the Domes, likely in part because of the more extensive inside and outside gardens</li> <li>▪ Full-time development staff to conduct annual giving and capital campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Higher "critical mass" of integrated programming activities, facilities, and a broad spectrum of revenue sources</li> <li>▪ Operate neighborhood engagement and educational programs for children and adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Integrated with botanical gardens or other outdoor parks with one admission to view all</li> <li>▪ Promote their historic structures in marketing campaigns to drive attendance and attract new funding sources</li> </ul>



## Facility Framework

The effort was initially approached with a broader perspective to collect a vast array of information and data that would inform the process in its entirety, regardless of the stakeholder group. This approach yielded a large volume of information that was then synthesized into the following Facility Framework:

A	<b>Programming &amp; Operations of the Facility</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Monetary value of the plant collection</li> <li>• Staff size (including volunteers, if data was available)</li> <li>• Exhibits, shows, and educational programming</li> </ul>
B	<b>Revenue, Finance, &amp; Management Characteristics of the Facility</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expenses and revenue (capital, maintenance, and operating)</li> <li>• Donors and philanthropic giving (i.e., annual giving, capital campaigns, corporate sponsorship)</li> <li>• Admission fees</li> <li>• Operational control and ownership of the facilities</li> <li>• Site control of the land</li> </ul>
C	<b>Social &amp; Economic Impact of the Operations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facility as a part of the community's identity</li> <li>• Community engagement and involvement</li> <li>• Architectural value</li> <li>• Tourism impact</li> <li>• Economic benefits (direct, indirect, induced, if data was available)</li> </ul>
D	<b>Structure &amp; Functionality of the Conservatory Structures</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historic value of the structures</li> <li>• Type of structures</li> <li>• Functionality and spatial organization</li> <li>• Size (square feet)</li> <li>• Cost (construction, if in recent past)</li> <li>• Integration of uses (e.g., adjacent botanical gardens or other attractions)</li> </ul>

## Peer Conservatories

Following initial research, the list of peer conservatories was culled to focus the work and research on specific facilities that were either siblings to the Domes – in terms of community context or character – or operated with best management practices that are widely respected by the conservatory community. The list of peer conservatories include:

- Missouri Botanical Garden (St. Louis, MO)
- Phipps Conservatory (Pittsburgh, PA)
- Lucile Halsell Conservatory (San Antonio, TX)
- Garfield Park Conservatory (Chicago, IL)
- Garfield Park Conservatory (Indianapolis, IN)





*Missouri Botanical Garden's Geodesic Dome*  
Photo Credit: RainHarvestMO.com

### Missouri Botanical Garden (St. Louis, MO)

The Missouri Botanical Garden was the vision of Henry Shaw, an immigrant businessman that brought the Gardens to life in the early 1850s. Shaw's Garden, as it was named by locals, was to be more than a pleasure garden. Shaw envisioned the gardens as a place of tranquility and learning to be shared by the community. He engaged talented designers, respected botanists, and researchers during the early development of the facility. The modern Missouri Botanical Garden encompasses 79 acres in central St. Louis and provides an oasis for residents. In addition to the myriad of attractions at its urban site, the Missouri Botanical Garden also operates

two satellite facilities: the Butterfly House in Chesterfield, MO, and the Shaw Nature Reserve in Gray Summit, MO. Each of the facilities provides complementary and wholly unique experiences to one another.



*Phipps Conservatory at Dusk* Photo Credit: Phipps.Conservatory.org

### Phipps Conservatory & Botanical Gardens (Pittsburgh, PA)

The Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens were founded by steel magnate Henry Phipps as a gift to the City of Pittsburgh in 1893. Its purpose was to inform and entertain the citizens of the city. At the height of the American Industrial Revolution, the Phipps stood as a sanctuary for steel workers to escape the smog produced by local factories. Today, the gardens maintain formal gardens inside the 13-room conservatory. The elaborate glass and metal work of the existing conservatory provides an illustrative example of the Victorian greenhouse architecture of the period. Phipps covers approximately 9.5 acres within the 440-acre historic Schenley Park,

Pittsburgh's urban municipal refuge. Phipps is well-known and highly regarded as one of the "greenest" and most sustainable conservatories operating in the United States with multiple buildings achieving certifications with the Living Building Challenge (LBC), Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), Sustainable SITES Initiative, and the WELL Building Standard.



*Lucile Halsell Conservatory* Photo Credit: [Dreamweek.org](http://Dreamweek.org)

### **Lucile Halsell Conservatory (San Antonio, TX)**

The San Antonio Botanical Garden encompasses 33 acres in the City of San Antonio, Texas, lying immediately west of the U.S. Army Fort Sam Houston in the City-owned Mahncke Park. The park land was donated by the Brackenridge Water Works Company at the turn of the 20th century. The Garden was the vision of two local women in the 1940s that culminated in the presentation of a master plan in the 1960s and the subsequent development of the Garden funded by a voter-authorized bond issue. The Garden officially opened in May 1980 operated by a public-private partnership between the City of San Antonio and The San Antonio Botanical Garden Society, Inc. This partnership has achieved notable major

capital improvements that have made the Garden a valuable and compelling attraction in the city; the most recent of which is the GROW capital campaign to fund an eight-acre expansion to include new features: a Garden Gateway, Welcome & Discovery Complex, Culinary Garden and Outdoor Kitchen, and Family Adventure Garden. The Lucille Halsell Conservatory sits within the Garden as an interrelated attraction that complements the outdoor gardens and educational features. The Conservatory's features include displays of world plants in various pavilions and specialty rooms with orchids and tropical species, succulents, palms and ferns, and a waterlily pond.



*Garfield Park Conservatory* Photo Credit: [LifeinBloomChicago.com](http://LifeinBloomChicago.com)

### **Garfield Park Conservatory (Chicago, IL)**

The Chicago Garfield Park Conservatory includes 3.5 acres of conservatory display and propagation space with an additional 12 acres of surrounding outdoor garden space. This facility is part of the larger Garfield Park and integrated into the Chicago Park District. The conservatory was constructed in 1906-7 following the demolition of three smaller greenhouses in 1905. The facility opened to the public in 1908. The facility is owned and operated by the Chicago Park District in partnership with the Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance. The Chicago Park District manages all horticultural and facility operations, while the Garfield Park Conservatory

Alliance, a non-profit housed in the Conservatory, provides the fund development efforts and programming: the events, activities, workshops, and programs. The Garfield Park Conservatory replaced three existing glasshouses in the West Park system. At the time of construction, it was the largest greenhouse in the world. Major efforts to note are a significant restoration in 1994; the formation of the Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance in 1995; and, extensive repairs to the exterior glass in 2012-2014 following a hailstorm in 2011 (\$15.6 million investment). The conservatory is funded through the General Fund of the Chicago Park District, in addition to funding through the Garfield Conservatory Alliance provided by individual donors and members, earned revenue from the gift shop and plant sales, and grants from foundations, corporations and other governmental sources.







*Garfield Park Conservatory and Sunken Gardens*  
*Photo Credit: Indianapolis-Indiana.FunCityFinder.com*

### **Garfield Park Conservatory & Sunken Gardens (Indianapolis, IN)**

The Garfield Park Conservatory is a 10,000-square-foot facility located on the eastern side of the larger 128-acre Garfield Park. The park is a regional city park and is the oldest city park on the National Register of Historic Places in Indianapolis. The Sunken Gardens and many of the park features were designed by George Edward Kessler as part of his larger Park and Boulevard Plan for the city. The original conservatory building was built in 1915; and, the facility was later replaced in 1954 with a new structure designed by a local Indianapolis architecture firm. The facility was most recently renovated in 1997. The Sunken Gardens are three acres in size and were dedicated

in 1916. The gardens showcase musical fountains with colored lights and synchronized music. The fountains have undergone multiple renovations since completed. The Park also includes a pagoda, the Garfield Park Arts Center, the MacAllister Center for the Performing Arts, the Burrello Family Center and Aquatic Center, memorials, and additional common park amenities.



## Characteristics of the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory & Peer Conservatories

	Programming & Operations	Revenue, Finance, & Management	Social & Economic Impact	Structure & Functionality
Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory (Milwaukee, WI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Attendance: 200-300K</li> <li>▪ Educational programming with field trips, guided tours, and self-guided tours</li> <li>▪ Music Under Glass concerts</li> <li>▪ Themed floral shows: trains, seasonal</li> <li>▪ Themed special events: ethnic celebrations, Valentine's Day, holidays</li> <li>▪ Winter Farmer's Market</li> <li>▪ Wedding ceremonies</li> <li>▪ +/-10 conservatory staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Expenses: \$1.5M</li> <li>▪ Revenue: \$1M</li> <li>▪ \$3.2M plant value</li> <li>▪ County owned and operated with support from Friends of the Domes (FoD) support group</li> <li>▪ FoD donations of +\$900K between 2004-2015</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Historic recognition</li> <li>▪ Located within Mitchell Park</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 3 "unique" (conoidal) domes built in 1960s</li> <li>▪ 46K sf plants; +/-100K sf of support space</li> <li>▪ 7 state-of-the-art, support greenhouses built in 2013</li> <li>▪ Community icon</li> </ul>
Missouri Botanical Garden (St. Louis, MO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Attendance: 1,045,969 (2016)</li> <li>▪ Teacher development</li> <li>▪ Therapeutic horticulture</li> <li>▪ Master gardeners</li> <li>▪ Community gardening</li> <li>▪ Center for Conservation &amp; Sustainable Development</li> <li>▪ Cafés</li> <li>▪ 435 staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Expenses: \$43M</li> <li>▪ Revenue: \$45M</li> <li>▪ Net Revenue: \$2.6M</li> <li>▪ Zoo &amp; Museum District provide tax-based revenue</li> <li>▪ Corporate sponsors with naming rights</li> <li>▪ Donations: \$8M</li> <li>▪ Not-for-profit trust</li> <li>▪ Independent of local government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Historical structures</li> <li>▪ Community outreach and education</li> <li>▪ Benefits from larger tax district</li> <li>▪ Public-private partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Geodesic dome built in 1960</li> <li>▪ 23,000 sf; 79 acres</li> <li>▪ 380,000 sf of exhibitions, research, and offices</li> <li>▪ Victorian District &amp; Grove House from 1849</li> <li>▪ Founded in 1859</li> <li>▪ National Historic Landmark</li> <li>▪ National Register of Historic Places</li> </ul>
Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens (Pittsburgh, PA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Monthly programming and specialty shows</li> <li>▪ Art collections, certificate classes, seasonal camps, internships</li> <li>▪ Teacher Advisory Committee</li> <li>▪ Homegrown healthy food initiative</li> <li>▪ Phipps Research Institute for Biophilia and Science Engagement</li> <li>▪ Café</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Expenses: \$9.5M</li> <li>▪ Revenue: \$10.1M</li> <li>▪ Net Revenue: \$642,000</li> <li>▪ Grants &amp; donations: \$6.5M</li> <li>▪ Program revenues: \$2.3M</li> <li>▪ Non-profit organization manages ongoing operations</li> <li>▪ Park, facility, &amp; collections owned by City</li> <li>▪ 199 staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Historical, classic conservatory structure</li> <li>▪ Neighborhood outreach and involvement</li> <li>▪ Ongoing research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Original Victorian-style conservatory built in 1893 (43,500 sf)</li> <li>▪ Additional 229,000 sf: Welcome Center, Production Greenhouse, Tropical Conservatory, Lecture Hall, &amp; special education spaces</li> <li>▪ Founded in 1893</li> <li>▪ National Register of Historic Places; local historic designation</li> </ul>
Lucile Halsell Conservatory (San Antonio, TX)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Attendance: 130,000 (2016)</li> <li>▪ Exhibitions and special programming</li> <li>▪ Classes: flower arranging, photography, rainwater harvesting, waterwise gardening</li> <li>▪ Children's Vegetable Garden Program, Nature Camp, Animal Botanical Classes</li> <li>▪ WaterSaver Garden and Lane</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Expenses: \$1.2M</li> <li>▪ Revenue: \$5.1M</li> <li>▪ Net Revenue: \$3.4M</li> <li>▪ Program Revenues: \$769,000</li> <li>▪ Non-profit organization manages ongoing operations</li> <li>▪ 31 staff, 1,000 volunteers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Linkages to larger botanical gardens</li> <li>▪ Unique architecture</li> <li>▪ Sustainability initiatives</li> <li>▪ Large volunteer base</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conservatory located within San Antonio Botanical Garden</li> <li>▪ Opened in 1988</li> <li>▪ 39 acres</li> <li>▪ Features five rooms and pavilions with 40,000 sf of space</li> <li>▪ Additional facilities supplemented by Daniel J. Sullivan Carriage House (dated to 1896)</li> </ul>



	Programming & Operations	Revenue, Finance, & Management	Social & Economic Impact	Structure & Functionality
Garfield Park Conservatory (Chicago, IL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendance: 203,857 (2016) Permanent exhibit "Sugar from the Sun" (2008)</li> <li>Free youth programming on weekdays</li> <li>Special art exhibits</li> <li>Volunteer program</li> <li>Adult programs: beekeeping, composting, lecture series</li> <li>Member nights</li> <li>Holiday flower show and concerts</li> <li>Wednesday evening programming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expenses: \$2.8M (Chicago Park District for personnel) &amp; \$1.2M (non-profit)</li> <li>Revenue: \$2.8M (Chicago Park District) &amp; \$1.2M (non-profit)</li> <li>Net Revenue: breakeven</li> <li>Program Revenues: \$973,528</li> <li>Non-profit organization manages ongoing operations</li> <li>30 staff + 3 shared with Lincoln Park Conservatory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Linkages to larger Garfield Park &amp; surrounding neighborhoods</li> <li>Unique architecture</li> <li>Benefits from larger Parks taxing district</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conservatory located within Garfield Park</li> <li>Opened in 1908</li> <li>3.5 acres indoor, 12 acres outdoor</li> <li>Features 8 display houses, 11 propagating houses, 3 meeting rooms, 1 gift shop</li> <li>Conservatory and Park on the National Register of Historic Places</li> </ul>
Garfield Park Conservatory (Indianapolis, IN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendance: ~36,000 (2016)</li> <li>Tours</li> <li>Field Trips</li> <li>Saturday Storytime</li> <li>Morning Meditation</li> <li>Holiday programming</li> <li>Wedding rentals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expenses: \$444,043</li> <li>Revenue: \$86,540 (2016)</li> <li>Net Revenue: (\$357,503) (2016)</li> <li>Ownership and management by City of Indianapolis and the Parks and</li> <li>Nonprofit friends group raised \$240,000 for entire park in 2016 (\$10,000-\$12,000 for the Conservatory)</li> <li>6 staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Linkages to sunken gardens and surrounding Garfield Park</li> <li>Unique architecture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Founded in 1916</li> <li>Structure from 1955</li> <li>10,000 sf</li> <li>Park on the National Register of Historic Places</li> </ul>







## Part III. Reimagining the Conservatory

### A. GRAEF's Scope of Work & Involvement

Milwaukee County retained GRAEF to support needed community engagement efforts following the closure of the Domes in January 2016. GRAEF's role evolved to act as a facilitator of conversations, a data and information analyst, and an advocate for neighborhood development. The original intent was to advance a three-phase work program: Phase I – Stakeholder Discussions, Civic Engagement, & Resulting Recommendations (February 2016 – July 2016); Phase II – Continued Civic Engagement Process and Narrowing of Options (August 2016 – present); and, Phase III – Feasibility Analysis and Design Competition (upcoming in 2017).

Efforts began in spring 2016 with stakeholder meetings and a public open house. A stakeholder group was convened by the Milwaukee County Executive in March 2016 and included ten agencies representing multiple interests to begin community engagement: Clarke Square Neighborhood Initiative, Forest County Potawatomi, Milwaukee County Parks, NEWaukee, the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory, the Friends of the Domes, Milwaukee County Budget, Engineering, and Executive staff, and VISIT Milwaukee. The initial meetings included presentations from Milwaukee County staff and GRAEF planning staff discussing the current physical and fiscal condition of the Domes with the intent of eliciting feedback.

As GRAEF's Planning & Urban Design Group conducted community engagement efforts, GRAEF structural engineers were engaged in a parallel study of the Domes to update the 2008 *"Show Dome Façade Study and Lower Level Façade Study."* The purpose of this effort was to update the original cost estimates to examine the costs of repair options for rehabilitation of each Dome and provide estimates for renovating the floor plan to meet current code requirements. Estimated costs for new facilities of the same size were given as a comparison to the those for renovating the Domes. The updated report, entitled *"Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory – 2016 Update on Costs and Options for Domes,"* was released in December 2016 and is available on Milwaukee County's website. In March 2016, the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors authorized the creation of the Mitchell Park Conservatory (the Domes) Task Force.

## B. Recommended Long-Term Planning Goals & Facility Options

The future of the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory should be decided within a long-range planning process that considers the entirety of the park as an asset and defines the way in which multiple features and attractions can be integrated. The process should embody the following four goals.

**1** Find a solution that expands earned revenue through programs, events, and associated activities.

**2** Develop an organizational and financial structure that enhances both earned and contributed revenue, expands program and staff capacity, and ensures public accountability.

**3** Create a combined facility that serves as a valued, community-wide cultural asset.

**4** Clearly address the strengths and limitations of the facility, including its historic value.

Changes to the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory can best be developed and modified through an à la carte selection of desired facility features. The choices presented below are neither mutually exclusive, nor collectively exhaustive. Within each option, there are additional choices regarding facility features.

The consideration of many facility options is a fundamental component of a fair and objective feasibility analysis for the future of the Conservatory. The spectrum of options frames the discussion and ensures that detailed considerations are presented, analyzed, and debated. The options presented below range from some that are more hypothetical and broad to those which are quite specific and have been discussed in more detail. In addition, there has been considerable discussion of the precise differences among options that use the words “rehabilitate,” “renovate,” “restore,” “reconstruct,” “preserve,” “revitalize,” “rebuild,” and “repair.” For the purpose of this report, the word “rehabilitate” will be used to refer to this overall set of concepts that refer to physical interventions of the Domes structure. Additional details, including costs, structural considerations, and some program considerations, can be found in the other reports regarding the Conservatory available on Milwaukee County’s website.

Options for the Conservatory include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Extensively rehabilitate all three Domes to prolong their structural integrity for the longer term, subject to the availability of substantial capital resources.
- Extensively rehabilitate only one Dome to prolong its structural integrity, thus requiring fewer capital resources in the short term, and then work to accumulate the capital resources needed for rehabilitation of one or both of the other Domes at a later date.



- Rehabilitate all three Domes with fewer resources that will still prolong their structural integrity on an interim basis (approximately 5-10 years), while actively fundraising to fund their extensive rehabilitation for the longer term.
- Along with any of the above options, repurpose one or more of the Domes for a use other than a conservatory which could help generate funds and serve a significant community purpose.
- Along with any of the above options, construct a new conservatory in Mitchell Park subject to revised programming, while rehabilitating one, two, or three Domes for different community purposes at a later date when resources are available.
- Construct a new conservatory in Mitchell Park and remove the three Domes.
- In conjunction with any of the above options, design and construct outdoor park features consistent with the goals of the neighborhood and the Conservatory.
- Remove the three Domes and move the Conservatory to another location in Milwaukee County.
- Repurpose the three Domes and move the Conservatory to another location in Milwaukee County.
- Remove the three Domes without replacement and make investments in other Milwaukee County needs.

Each of these options will lead to multiple sub-options. Among the theoretical range of sub-options, there are detailed choices regarding activities that already occur at the Conservatory, activities identified in the case study research, and activities desired by the community. Potential activities include:

- Offering a variety of food service options, including a café, restaurant, and commercial kitchen for caterers.
- Enlarging classroom and education space to accommodate field trips, run themed camps, and teach adult enrichment courses.
- Enhancing research facilities to host scientists, curate an endangered plant collection, and operate a conservation program.
- Enlarging special events space with high quality acoustics and audio-visual equipment to host multiple groups simultaneously, including weddings, corporate events, and other social, educational, business, and community events.
- Providing uses and activities for areas that may be repurposed such as indoor play areas, outdoor fountains, and other entertainment uses.

## C. Facility Design & Operations

The legacies of Mitchell Park and the Conservatory have been, since their inception, as anchors of the Near South Side along the southern rim of the Menomonee Valley. Sited within the dense urban core of single family residences and close to National Avenue, both the park and conservatory are positioned to continue and be further leveraged as local and regional assets.

Currently, the operations of Mitchell Park and the Conservatory proceed independently – in essence, a tale of two parks. Historically, the Park and Conservatory were fully integrated with the reflecting pool, gardens, dancing pavilion, and other amenities. As budget constraints curtailed the outdoor garden features, a void grew between activities within the Conservatory and the community's use of the Park. To counteract this imbalance, local neighborhood organizations and community groups have capitalized on opportunities to restrengthen the connection through investment and coordinated programming between the Park and Conservatory. These investments have created amenities, including the pedestrian bridge connecting Mitchell Park to Three Bridges Park and the Hank Aaron State Trail in the Menomonee Valley, investment partnerships in the Journey House Packers Stadium, and neighborhood programs and events held



in the park by Journey House and the Clarke Square Neighborhood Initiative. Opportunities for greater connection to the surrounding neighborhoods and assets of Layton Boulevard West Neighbors, Silver City, Clarke Square, and the Menomonee Valley are desired to maximize the amenities and leverage additional connections and investments for local and regional benefit.

The planning process will craft a vision for the Conservatory and Park that capitalizes on its strengths and fulfills its social mission with continued community engagement. The future vision can be conceived within a Facility Framework that balances operations and management with social and environmental impact.

### *Four Action Steps for the Facility Framework*

#### **A** Programming, Operations, & Mission

The Conservatory and the accompanying gardens and facilities in the Park should seek to continue (and expand) attracting and engaging with a diverse audience by presenting a myriad of displays representing worldwide botanical features, hosting and sponsoring events and rentals, and offering educational programming for more diverse groups of visitors. These continued and growing activities can serve the larger mission of the facility as a destination for botanical education and research. The reach of the Conservatory can be broadened to ensure that local residents, corporate sponsors, tourists, and horticultural researchers can convene together in a world-class, sustainable facility.

- *Permanent and Rotating Displays* – Like a museum, the internal and outdoor displays in the Conservatory and the Park should reflect the permanent collection of the facility including rotating displays that highlight a specific season or theme. The Show Dome currently serves as the rotating display; and, the Conservatory had this for a time with the Sunken Gardens. The facility currently retains a permanent collection in the Tropical and Desert Domes. The displays, permanent and rotating, could be expanded and enhanced to facilitate more regular regional visits to the facility.
- *Recurring and Special Events* – Much like what the Conservatory does so well today, events must be a cornerstone of the program for the future facility. The diversity of current programming with respect to education, themes, music, and culture is on par with what is represented in the best management practices. This should continue and grow in the future with more marketing. Spatially, the facility is at its maximum capacity for facilitating additional programming – public and private.
- *Education* – Educational programming is a key avenue through which the Conservatory can engage with a diverse group of visitors to attract them to the Conservatory. Popular programming options include sponsoring educational curricula for elementary and middle school students with financial support to fund busing, internships for high school and college students, science research, art classes including drawing and watercolors, health and wellness including yoga, pilates, and meditation, urban agriculture, apiculture, certification programs and continuing education credits, and coordination with Master Gardeners' programs.





## B Revenue, Finance, & Management

A core component of the facility's ability to fulfill its mission will be to successfully break even each fiscal year or operate with a surplus that can be used to fund additional investments and programs for the facility. The structure, function, and programming of the facility should be such that it no longer operates at a deficit and becomes financially self-sustaining.

- *Earned Revenue* – A diverse and robust series of revenue streams should be developed to ensure the facility can remain resilient in the face of changing economic pressures. Special attention should be given to admission fees (including special rates for local and low-income visitors), memberships, user fees for special events and programming, facility rental fees, catering, and the potential for a restaurant or concession stand.
- *Fundraising: Capital Campaign and Annual Giving* – A facility of the size and scope of that which is being proposed will require a full-time, professional development staff to cultivate additional funding sources from philanthropic entities. These staffers will be solely dedicated to fundraising and will champion public-private partnerships and corporate sponsorships.
- *Private, Not-for-Profit Management Structure* – Many successful conservatories in the United States operate with a private, not-for-profit management structure with an executive director or president and CEO with oversight from a board of directors. In some cases, a hybrid organizational structure can be found that includes both a public agency overseeing some aspects of the cultural facility while a private not-for-profit operates other parts of the facility. The effectiveness of such hybrids depends largely on finding the right separation of responsibilities and authority.

## C Social & Economic Impact

A core goal of the Conservatory should be to broadly and substantively impact the community at varying scales: immediate neighborhood, city of Milwaukee, the region, and tourists and researchers. The Conservatory should capitalize on its urban location and the proximity of high-density residential neighborhoods in the immediate vicinity to act as a community anchor and help build local capacity.

- Ensure the neighborhood is represented throughout all phases and their voice is heard as future options are envisioned. This can potentially be achieved through Journey House, the Clarke Square Neighborhood Initiative, Layton Boulevard West Neighbors, Silver City, and Menomonee Valley Partners.
- The Conservatory and Park should be fully integrated with the neighborhood through programming and offerings that appeal to the residents. The Quality of Life Plan for the Clarke Square Neighborhood identified urban agriculture, athletics, and health and wellness as key community desires that residents wish to see enhanced. Some of this has already been implemented in the park by Journey House with the Packers Stadium.
- A renovated facility can induce ancillary development in the neighborhood. If this potential growth, redevelopment, and revitalization is considered within community desires, it could simultaneously and equitably improve the economic and social well-being of the residents and the city.



## D Structure & Functionality

The structures and facilities must have the physical capacity to allow the Conservatory to fulfill its mission. The structure is beholden to the Conservatory with its primary purpose to provide a building or outdoor space in which the plant collection can be displayed, events and education programming can be hosted, and sufficient revenues can be generated to support operations. At present, the Domes do not adequately support the mission of the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory.

- As Wisconsin has a temperate climate, the Conservatory's mission and programming must be, at a minimum, accommodated within its indoor facilities. The layout and physical area of the structures must allow for the hosting of events and educational activities. At this time, large events can only be held when the Conservatory is closed to the public; revenue potential would be significantly increased if facilities within the Conservatory could be rented for private events while the Conservatory itself remained open to the public. The successful conservatories studied for the case studies include space for offices, classrooms, a café or restaurant, catering kitchen, expanded retail space, a research library, and research laboratories.
- The indoor facilities must complement the outdoor garden features by allowing the events schedule and facility programming to be expanded into Mitchell Park. The two spaces should complement one another and offer multiple venues for visitors and residents to enjoy the spaces.



## Part IV. Community Conversation



### A. Recommended Process

GRAEF developed a multi-pronged civic engagement process to engage multiple stakeholder groups at larger public events, in focus group discussions, and through County-facilitated discussions. The intent was to develop an array of engagement strategies to reach a diverse set of opinions, especially those who may otherwise be left out of the process.

#### *Focus Groups*

Focus group discussions offered stakeholders an opportunity to discuss the challenges facing the Domes and their potential solutions in a smaller setting. This allowed for in-depth conversation and a robust question-and-answer style learning process. The focus groups produced oral and written feedback.

*Listening session held on April 30, 2016  
at the Show Dome Opening*



*Photo Credit: GRAEF*

#### *Community Open Houses & Hearings*

Large community open houses allowed neighborhood residents, park enthusiasts, and frequent visitors to the Domes to have the opportunity to speak with County staff, GRAEF planners, and other concerned residents. Presentation boards were prepared to present detailed information with staff available to answer questions and receive feedback. Attendees were welcome to leave written feedback using the available comment cards.

The Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors held a public hearing on February 24, 2016 at the Domes to provide the public with an opportunity to comment on the facility's then-recent closure. This event took place before the GRAEF's contract for public participation began.



### *Meeting in a Box Presentation*

The Meeting in a Box approach to civic engagement was developed as a way to expand efforts and empower County staff and other stakeholders with the information and tools necessary to inform constituents and gather additional feedback. The materials included PowerPoint presentations, presentation boards, and print materials. These materials are available for use and may be adjusted for future phases of engagement.

## **B. Recommended Groups to Engage - Continuing the Conversation**

As the Domes are a valued community asset with certain operational and programmatic challenges—specifically as they relate to revenue and expenses, significant consideration was given to a list of community groups that should be engaged throughout the process. This list is not exhaustive, but it is a starting point for further consideration and outreach. The intent of the effort was to create a list with the depth and breadth required to equitably and strategically represent community voices. Once these groups have been engaged, a facility program and organizational recommendation can be developed in more detail as part of the County's next set of proposed actions, including the selection of a team for project initiation and implementation. Groups to consider include:

### *Adjacent Neighborhood Groups*

Surrounding neighborhood and civic groups should be engaged for opportunities to further integrate the Park and Conservatory with the community, and leverage additional opportunities to integrate and streamline ongoing efforts in this area of the city. Furthermore, neighborhood participation can leverage greater accessibility to the Park, and more importantly the Conservatory, which has been seen as a point of disconnection to the neighboring residents.

- Clarke Square Neighborhood Initiative
- Layton Boulevard West Neighbors
- Menomonee Valley Partners
- Silver City District (National Avenue businesses)
- Sixteenth Street Community Health Centers
- Southside Organizing Committee
- 27th Street Business Improvement District (BID)
- Walker's Point Youth & Family Center
- West Side Partners

### *General Community & Civic Groups*

Similar to the participation of adjacent neighborhood groups, connecting with community and civic groups and representatives in the greater region will gather input regarding the regional impact of the Park and Conservatory. Furthermore, this will be the basis for a diversity of ideas and opinions.

- Neighborhood Leadership Institute
- Neighborhoods funded by:
  - Greater Milwaukee Foundation
  - Zilber Family Foundation
  - Northwestern Mutual Foundation
- NEWaukee



- Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
- City of Milwaukee Common Council Members
- State Representatives

### *Commerce & Tourism*

These commerce and tourism groups should be engaged to provide insight into the larger business community to leverage greater regional accessibility, marketing, fundraising, and tourism opportunities that can benefit the Conservatory and Park. Further, these groups can provide assistance with measuring the social and economic impact of the facility.

- African American Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Milwaukee Committee
- Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce
- Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce
- Potawatomi Casino
- Public Policy Forum
- Rotary Club
- VISIT Milwaukee

### *Education & Youth*

Education is a significant objective of the Conservatory, and its current programming is at capacity in the existing facility. Further visioning and exploring opportunities for the expansion of educational programming through partnerships and future facility changes will be crucial. Additionally, scientific research partnership opportunities can be explored with institutions of higher learning.

- Journey House
- Milwaukee Public Schools
- Urban Ecology Center
- Green Schools Consortium of Milwaukee
- Youth, teachers, and parents
- Regional schools and school boards
- Local colleges and universities

### *Health*

Opportunities for collaboration, partnership, and potentially funding sponsorship from local health care institutions should be explored. Partnerships could include programming for patients to receive relief through visiting the facility and attending programs. Additionally, scientific research partnerships can be explored (in addition to local universities).

- Aurora Health Care
- Froedtert & the Medical College of Wisconsin



- Rogers Memorial Hospital
- Sixteenth Street Community Health Centers
- Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare

### *Historic Preservation*

During the initiation of the planning process, the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory was included on the 2016 “America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places List” compiled by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The consideration of the historic cultural value of the structure and surrounding grounds is a critical aspect of the long-range planning process and the future of the Conservatory. Ongoing conversations with the following groups will ensure that historic preservation is considered as options are weighed.

- Historic Milwaukee, Inc.
- Milwaukee County Historical Society
- Milwaukee Preservation Alliance
- Wisconsin Historical Society

Issues related to historic preservation that should be addressed include:

- Ongoing fundraising for preservation efforts;
- Relation to state and national programs, criteria, and regulatory decisions; and,
- Consideration of both buildings and landscapes.

### *Park & Horticultural Groups*

The future of the Park, Conservatory, and opportunities associated with them must be further explored. There are many stakeholder groups in the Milwaukee area that hold a stake in the future vision of the Conservatory, and will invest time and funding into its programs and operations. These groups will be key in bringing innovative ideas to expand the potential for exhibits, sustainability, research, programs, and events.

- Friends of the Domes
- Milwaukee Area Technical College (Horticulture Program)
- UW-Extension Master Gardeners
- Preserve Our Parks
- Park People
- Rotary Club Environment & Ecology Committee

### **C. Engagement to Date**

Between March 2016 and December 2016, GRAEF supported four events to engage neighborhood stakeholders, the Friends of the Domes organization, and the broader Milwaukee community. In addition, GRAEF partnered with Milwaukee County to host

*Listening session held on April 30, 2016 at the Domes*



*Photo Credit: GRAEF*



an electronic survey to gather feedback on an ongoing basis that allowed respondents to be anonymous. The four engagement events included:

- Open House at the Show Dome Opening – April 30, 2016
- Meetings with Friends of the Domes – May 14 and June 12, 2016
- Public Discussion at the NEWaukee Night Market – September 14, 2016

### *Open House at the Show Dome Opening*

An open house and feedback session was conducted during the Show Dome Opening (after the netting had been successfully installed in the first dome) on April 30, 2016. Fifty six attendees provided written survey feedback. Participants were prompted to select all options that interested them as the planning process for the future of the facility unfolds.

#### **Option Preferences**

- 40 out of 56 respondents expressed interest in a repair option for the Domes (71%)
- 44 out of 56 respondents expressed interest in a the “Build New” option for the conservatory (79%)
- 5 out of the 56 respondents express interest in the “Other” option (7%)

#### **Summary of Feedback**

- Repair the Domes
- Consider a new form
- Ensure that the facility (current or new) is self-sustaining
- Maintain the facility in Mitchell Park
- Diversify operations and management of the facility
- Restore the sunken gardens
- Consider the National Historic Register

### *Meetings with the Friends of the Domes*

The members of the Friends of the Domes represent a diverse array of opinions regarding the future of the conservatory. Dominant themes of discussion and feedback included the transformation of the facility from purely horticultural uses to a prominent educational and social venue. Increased opportunity to leverage events, revenue, education, partnerships, and increased environmental sustainability was indicated from members’ discussions.

#### **Summary of Feedback**

- Build a maintainable and energy efficient facility
- Expand support spaces – classrooms (for horticultural and nutritional health classes), gift shop, café/ restaurant/bar, offices, meeting spaces, research space
- Maintain the facility in Mitchell Park
- Repair and retrofit the facility to be more energy efficient
- Save the original structures to be repurposed
- Maintain a high profile structure to attract visitors
- Increase parking



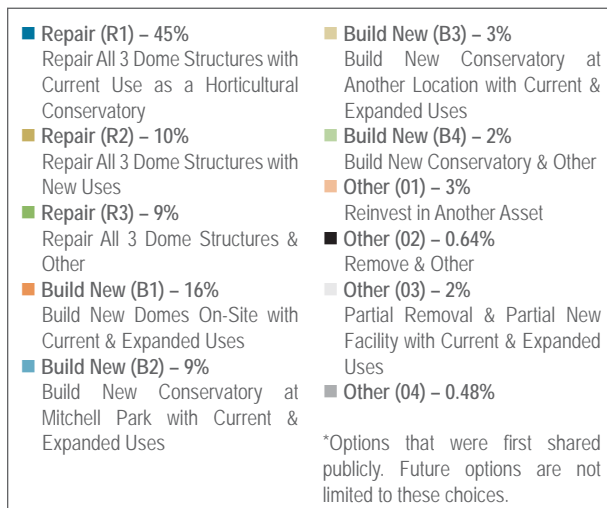
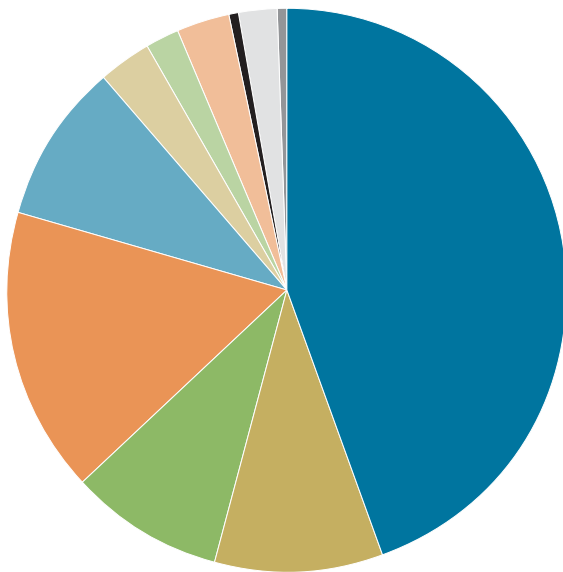
## Online Survey

Following the first three public engagement events, Milwaukee County developed an electronic survey modeled on GRAEF's paper survey used for the Open House at the Show Dome Opening. The survey was deployed in summer 2016 and was designed to be continuously available throughout the engagement process to provide new stakeholders and participants with the opportunity to provide their feedback. As of November 2016, 434 respondents had participated with the following results:

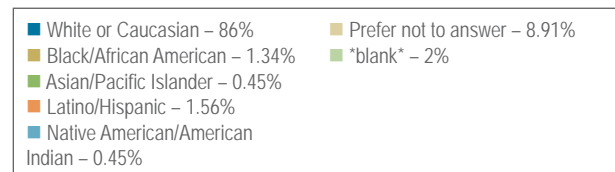
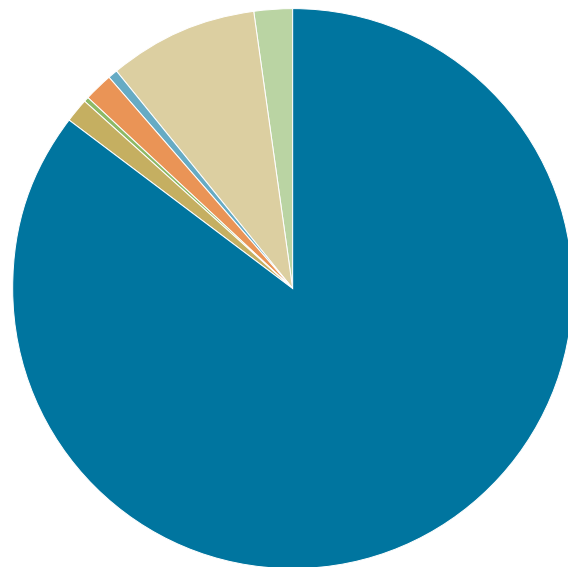
Online Survey Respondents (through Nov. 2016)

Location	# of Respondents	% of Total
Milwaukee County	407	94%
Other Wisconsin	21	5%
Other U.S.	6	1%

Domes Survey Results (as of 11/2016)

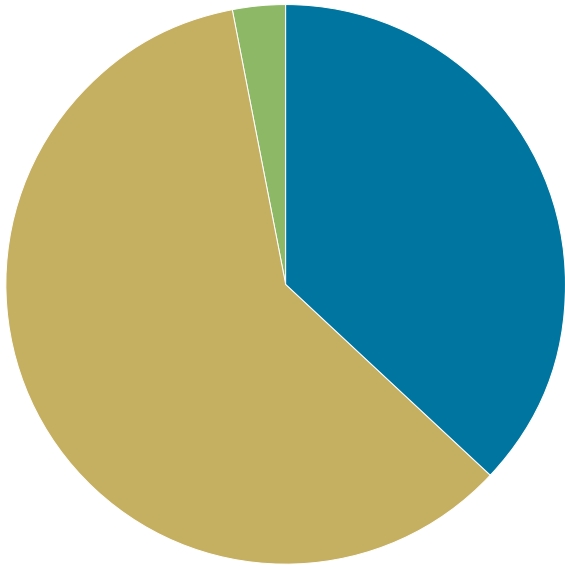


Ethnicity

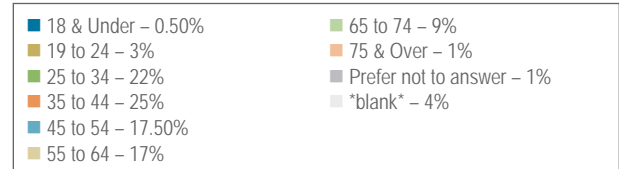
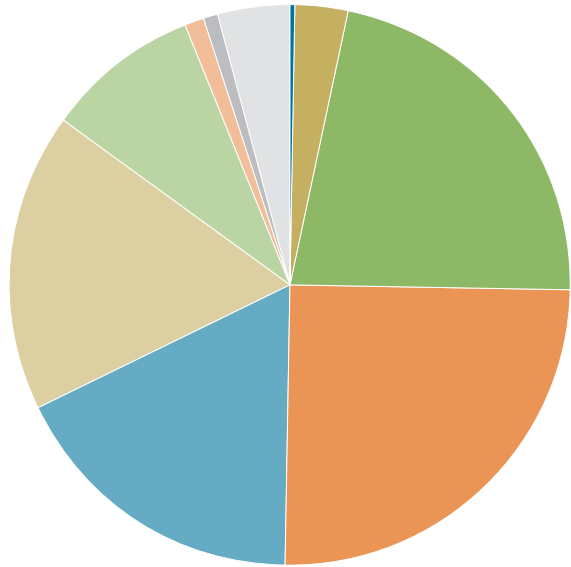




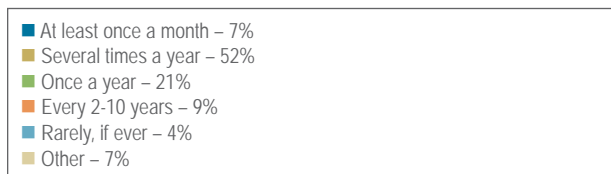
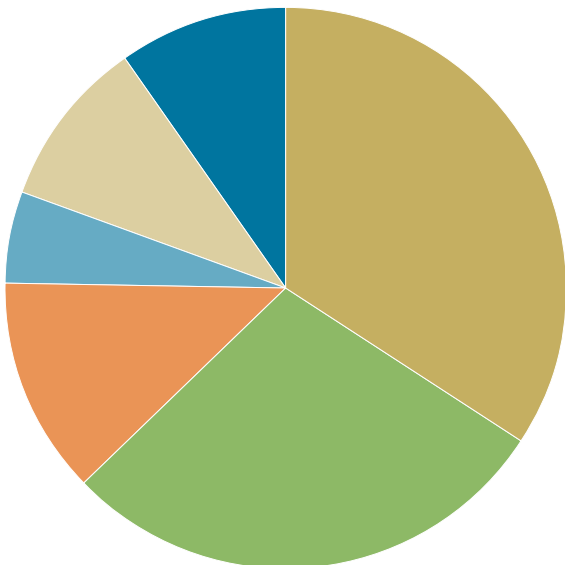
*Gender*



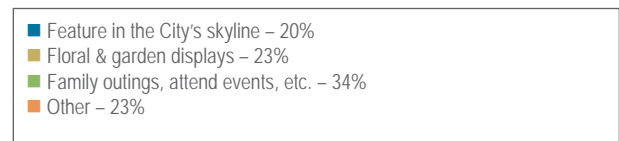
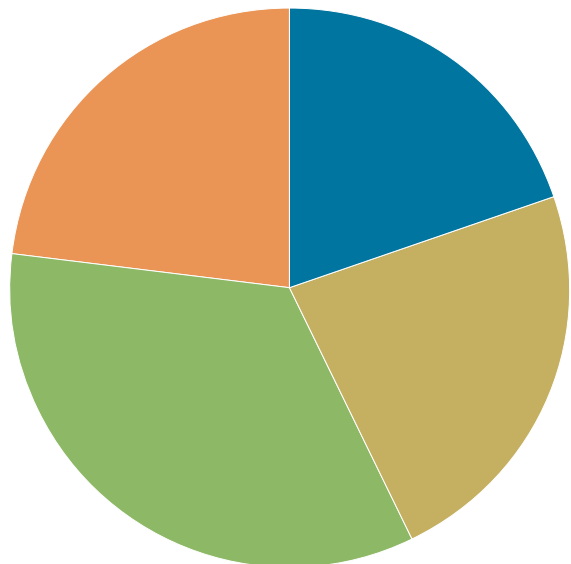
*Age*



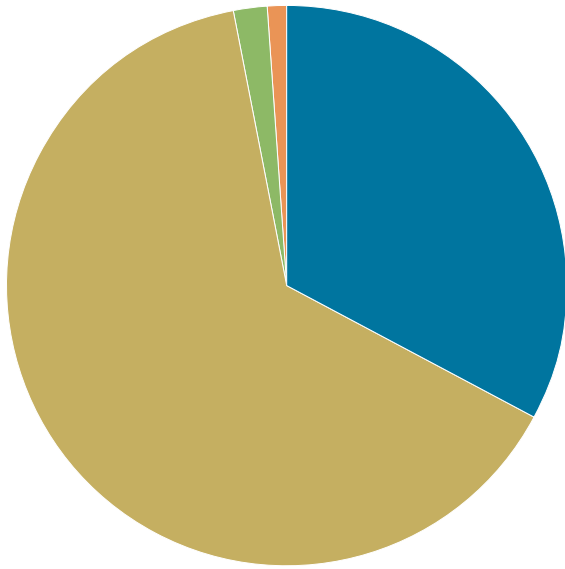
*How often do you visit?*



*What do the Domes mean to you?*

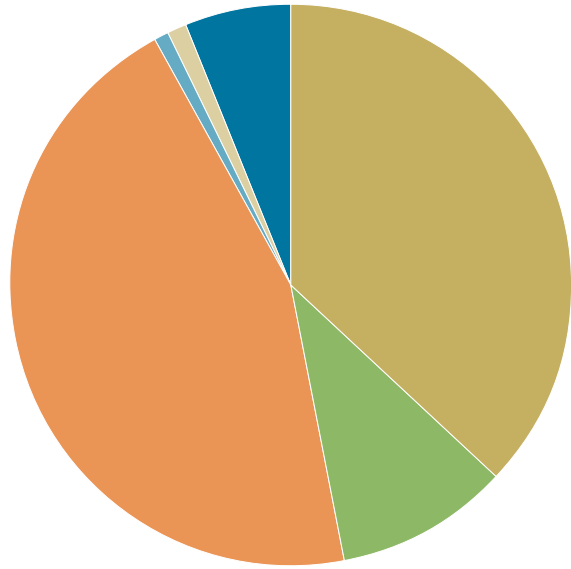


*Do you visit the rest of the park?*



- Yes – 33%
- No – 64%
- I only visit Mitchell Park – 2%
- I never visit either – 1%

*Favorite plant display*



- Show Dome – 6%
- Tropical Dome – 37%
- Arid/Desert Dome – 10%
- All – 45%
- None – 1%
- I don't visit them – 1%



## D. Task Force Facilitation

In August 2016, the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors appointed 11 community leaders to the Milwaukee County Task Force on The Mitchell Park Conservatory. The purpose of the Task Force was stated as follows:

*The Conservatory Task Force through a community engagement process will evaluate long-term options for the future status of the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory (aka the "Domes") and associated uses, activities, costs, and benefits and will recommend a course of action to the Milwaukee County Executive and County Board. This process will include a broad range of opinions from individuals and groups, as well as expert analyses of conditions, constraints, and opportunities. A three-phase work program will be established to achieve this goal that includes exploring a wide range of possible options, choosing a direction, and developing a comprehensive, long-term plan.*

The Task Force operates under the following parameters:

- Seek a wide range of community input: horticultural, neighborhood, preservation, civic, philanthropic groups as well as individual citizens.
- Operate with no preconceived outcome.
- Provide a recommended draft vision and associated strategic plan.
- Recognize that the County has a narrow window of up to five years to adopt, fund and implement a plan.

In October 2016, the Domes Task Force convened to kick-off the long-range planning effort. The Domes Task Force to-date has focused the meetings on their role, review of existing physical and operational conditions of the facility, the Domes' historic status, community outreach efforts to-date, overview of Milwaukee County finances and potential funding scenarios, the 2016 *Update on Costs and Options for the Domes* by GRAEF, review of case study research, the establishment of a framework for the long-term planning strategy for the Task Force moving forward, and review of the request for proposals (RFP) for a *"Future Path and Feasibility Study,"* released in February 2017.

*Domes Task Force Meeting*



*Photo Credit: Fox 6*





## Part V. Actions & Next Steps

As the Task Force prepares to complete upcoming phases by conducting the final round of civic engagement and understanding the feasibility of options for the Domes, Milwaukee County and project stakeholders will begin the final phase to decide if and how to rehabilitate the Domes with the possibility of constructing new facilities to enhance capacity. These decisions will require thoughtful and complex discussions, deliberations, and arguments. Based on initial feedback, a successful outcome of this project will retain and enhance a conservatory and botanical garden in Mitchell Park as a key cultural asset and component of the neighborhood fabric. We recommend that the facility be leveraged as a vehicle for neighborhood regeneration and become a focal point for social activity.

### *Completing Upcoming Phases: Role of the Task Force*

The Task Force plays a critical leadership role as it analyzes the information and data collected from information gathering, option/alternative development, and listens to the community during the series of civic engagement events. The members of the Task Force are a cross-section of the community and will provide insight and perspective as to how their stakeholder groups react during the process. The success of the process is incumbent upon the active engagement of each Task Force member through their attendance and participation at scheduled meetings and public engagement events.

Specifically, to fulfill their responsibilities, Task Force members should:

- A. Conduct the final round of civic engagement using updated “Meeting in a Box” materials developed previously by Milwaukee County and GRAEF. Speak to members of the general public, key user groups, and support groups.
- B. Based on technical reports, presentations, and public input, recommend next steps for each part of the proposed Facility Framework:
  - Structure and Functionality of the Conservatory Structures
  - Programming and Operations of the Facility
  - Revenue, Finance, and Management Characteristics of the Facility
  - Social and Economic Impact of the Operations

## *Framework Analysis, Option Selection, & Innovative Design for the Facility*

The long-term plan for the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory will rely upon a feasibility analysis that dictates how stakeholders will respond to the program statement for a rehabilitated and enhanced facility. The following four categories organize an action agenda that should be pursued to conduct the feasibility analysis and develop a long-term plan.

### **1** Programming & Operations of the Facility

- Staff
  - Meet with current Conservatory and Parks staff and identify key issues.
  - Meet with Friends of the Domes and obtain their input regarding future programs, events, and staff expansion.
  - Review and use the 2000 Master Plan by Engberg Anderson as a basis for expanding programming and events.
  - Based on feedback from existing staff, identify options and costs for increased staff development.
  - To the extent possible, organize such issues in a SWOT format.
- Analyze the existing attendance data with special attention to conclusions regarding the geographic distribution of attendees based on both data and staff observations.
- Meet with other organizations to determine the types of programs and events that would appeal to community groups, corporations, local businesses, health and educational institutions, and related groups.
- Compare the types of events the Conservatory has added over the last decade to the events offered by comparable facilities. This should include different types of fee structures, seasonal events, and demographic groups.
- Identify feasible options for outdoor events (non-competitive with Boerner Botanical Garden) that can increase attendance during warm weather.
- Identify local organizations in the educational, health, and medical fields who could sponsor joint programs and activities.
- Diagram options whereby key program components might be located on the site (indoors and outdoors).
- Review other recent plans from the Milwaukee County Parks Department, local community groups, City of Milwaukee Neighborhood Plans, and other relevant studies. Summarize key findings as they relate to the Conservatory program needs and goals.
- Prepare recommendations for programming and events, along with estimated costs for additional staff and revenue generation for new fee-based programs.
- Prepare first drafts of site and facility program elements for use in architectural selection.



## 2

### Revenue, Finance, & Management Characteristics of the Facility

- Revenue
  - Evaluate options for the organization and management of activities to maximize earned revenue including staff needs and net funding expectations.
  - Summarize ways in which new earned revenue can appeal to donor activities and needs.
  - Summarize existing market issues based on available data and discussions with local leaders and the business community.
  - Prepare a detailed statement of operation and revenues including key options for net revenue growth related to rentals, food service, and gifts.
  - Analyze options and paybacks for rentals, food service, gifts, and partnering for private sector activities.
  
- Donors & Fundraising
  - Meet with key community leaders in one-on-one confidential interviews to assess the potential for private sector fundraising including phasing, first-target donations, and the organizational structure for funding, staffing, and related items with regard to both program and physical changes to the Domes (including reconstruction).
  - Identify the local potential for leadership of a fundraising campaign.
  - Include estimates of fundraising and the potential for using funds for the reconstruction of the Domes and the timing/phasing that might be feasible.
  - Suggest potential matching grant programs that would combine public sector and private sector commitments.
  - Identify appropriate donors, including the types of individuals, corporations and business groups, whose philanthropic activities would dovetail well with the Conservatory, Mitchell Park, and new/existing structures.
  - Identify local organizations in the health and medical fields who could sponsor key programs and activities.
  
- Management & Public/Private Financing
  - Evaluate different options for financing the variety of programs and capital needs.
  - Evaluate options for integrating both public management of facilities and programs under the auspices of the County as well as a newly formed not-for-profit private sector organization.
  - To the extent feasible, identify how both public and private entities should oversee and manage key facilities, events, investments, operations, and programs.
  
- Prepare recommendations for revenue, donations, and ongoing financial management

### 3 Social and Economic Impact of the Operations

- Prepare an analysis of potential tourism impacts and discuss this with local tourism agencies with regard to neighborhood, regional, statewide, and national impacts. This should include the potential for hotel and restaurant use.
- Consider transit issues related to attendance and access to events and programs.
- Analyze links for social and economic activity to surrounding areas and groups, including Journey House, Clarke Square Neighborhood Initiative, Menomonee Valley Partners, Potawatomi facilities and operations, Urban Ecology Center, Layton Boulevard West Neighbors, Silver City businesses, Near West Side Partners, and others.
- Show how site changes and interventions might help more effectively integrate the existing and/or new facility within the surrounding areas.
- Evaluate options for linking the facility improvements to private sector development in the areas surrounding the site and the potential for additional revenue and support from such private sector investments (e.g., Tax Incremental Financing).
- Meet with staff from the agencies and private sector organizations whose missions and goals dovetail with the long-term plan for the Conservatory.
- Prepare recommendations improving the social and economic impact of the facility and site.





## 4 Structure and Spatial Functionality of the Conservatory

- Develop a feasible phasing plan.
  - Propose a project with a front-end low capital budget (under \$10 million).
  - Identify and propose key front-end program components focused on earned revenue and items attractive to potential donors.
  - Identify and propose key subsequent phases focused on expansion and education.
  - Identify and propose easy-to-expand subsequent phases for plants and exhibits.
- Evaluate long-term maintenance and operation costs and life-cycle management.
- Develop and propose options for branding and image.
  - Identify and propose how reconstruction of one Dome can serve as a cost-effective, long-term continued icon for the facility.
  - Identify and propose how a new icon could be developed for a new facility.
- Identify the key issues, demands, and opportunities regarding circulation and access.
  - Locate options for indoor and outdoor parking that are cost effective.
  - Propose options for offering both free parking and paid parking depending on the nature of the activity, season, and time of day.
  - Identify key needs for bicycle and pedestrian use.
- Diagram the key locations and site organization for the structure(s) and how they fit within components of the site and neighborhood.
- Conduct a preliminary high-level “due diligence” analysis of the site based on readily available data, emphasizing opportunities and constraints for both facility and site strategies.
- Illustrate how the recommendations of the previous elements of the plan can be incorporated into the current or future structure and site. Prioritize investments that will help achieve a reasonable front-end cost.
- Host an innovative design process in which architects are invited to respond to the program statement developed during the feasibility analysis and propose an enhanced facility.

