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Milwaukee County Board Of Supervisors
Milwaukee County Courthouse
901 North 9th Street, RM 201
Milwaukee, WI 53233

Dear County Supervisors,

I am writing on behalf of the board and staff of the Fondy Food Center (FFC), and our Milwaukee Winter Farmers Market customers, vendors, and partners - to share our desire for our market to remain in the Mitchell Park Domes Conservancy's Annex and to make the case that it both benefits the people of Milwaukee County while co-existing with the intended use of the space for catered events. Let us continue our partnership – because we both [“value and embrace the diversity of our community and the social interaction that occurs within our green spaces.”](#) My intention is that this letter will complement the report that the “Interim Director, Department of Parks, Recreation, and Culture, regarding the status of the Winter Farmers Market at the Domes Annex”, will be presenting to the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors' Parks Committee on Tuesday, May 15th.

First let me share some of what makes the Milwaukee Winter Farmers Market (MWFM) something so special for Wisconsin...

The MWFM Improves the Local Economy:

- We estimate that the MWFM generates more than \$1,000,000 per season for our 79 farmers and local food vendors.
- The economic impacts extend beyond the MWFM; 25% of our customers reported patronizing other neighborhood businesses after attending the market.
- And, as I'm sure you're aware, FFC provided \$13,200 in rental income to Milwaukee County this past season, which included use of the Annex space on Saturdays from 7am-2pm, an assigned Domes staff member during market, access to tables and chairs, onsite storage, parking lots that were staffed with Park Rangers, and amenities such as trash and snow removal included.

The MWFM Improves Healthy Food Access:

- Agricultural vendors gather every Saturday offering high quality fruit, vegetables, meat, eggs, poultry and dairy products. Local food vendors also bring a wide variety of freshly baked goods, jams, cider, honey, maple syrup, sauces and soups, as well as prepared foods.

- Throughout the entirety of the winter season, more than a dozen farmers offer fresh produce at the market, having utilized innovative season extension, indoor growing methods, and storage techniques.
- The MWFM makes fresh, locally-grown and produced food available year-round; along with the Fondy Farmers Market and the Fondy Market at Schlitz Park, FFC offers markets every single month of the year.
- Part of the MWFM's mission has always been to provide equitable access to wholesome food, which is why it offered a SNAP/EBT program at the market from the beginning. Wisconsinites with FoodShare benefits can use their QUEST card to purchase food at the market. This past season FFC implemented a nutrition incentive program at the winter market, doubling SNAP benefits for produce year-round.
- Almost \$8,000 in SNAP federal nutrition benefits and incentives were redeemed at the MWFM this past season, to over 100 low-income families and individuals. One of our customers told us, "The double dollars benefit was a huge benefit to my family. As a single parent...it was a huge help in keeping my children fed and supplied with healthy fruits and vegetables."

The MWFM Can Co-exist with Intended Future Uses of the Domes Annex:

The MWFM has always been free and open to the people of Milwaukee and beyond. It is considered Southeast Wisconsin's premier farmers market – an event that gathers together an average of 1,784 people weekly – 41,040 this past season. Visiting the MWFM at the Domes Annex has become a meaningful part of people's lives. I think that is a wonderful use of Milwaukee County's amazing public park gathering spaces! Along with community partners who regularly have a presence at the MWFM, such as Froedtert and the Medical College of Wisconsin, Friends of the Domes, Gerald L Ignace Indian Health Center, Sixteenth Street Community Clinic, Journey House, Victory Garden Initiative, and so on, we are providing an important public service.

I believe that the area of concern is whether there can be both catered events on Friday and Saturday evenings along with a Saturday morning market. If there is another area of concern, I would appreciate an opportunity to address it. From our perspective there are ways that both the FFC and the Milwaukee County Parks can hold successful events in the same space. In past seasons we rented the Annex space from 7am-2pm on Saturdays. When there were no conflicting events, we were allowed access on Friday afternoons for an hour to set up vendor stalls. We adjust our set-up whenever there is an event on Friday nights, and have also accommodated quick take-down on days that there's a Saturday event. With good communication we can ensure the space is ready for all to use in a timely fashion.

Looking to the Future

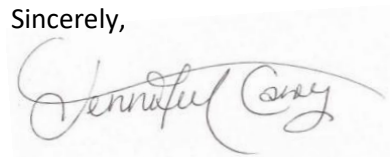
Season 10 of the Milwaukee Winter Farmers Market is quickly approaching, and we would like to continue our partnership with the Domes – a beautiful, sunny venue appreciated by vendors and customers alike, and the only space we've found that fulfills the MWFM criteria. After being told our

future access would be denied, FFC's Venue Search committee began researching over 70 alternatives. None of them have been shown to meet our needs.

We urge our County leaders to make the decision, at whatever level needed, to allow us continued access to the space to host the Milwaukee Winter Farmers Market. If the aforementioned co-existence concerns are not the reason for denied access, then I would like to request a clear explanation.

Finally, on a more personal note, the top three reasons I share with people when asked why I moved to Milwaukee more than a decade ago, I cite the rivers and lake, the farmers markets, and the treasure that is our park system. Let's ensure the parks remain a vibrant part of the community – by working in partnership to improve healthy food access, our local economy, and public gathering spaces.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennifer Casey". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Jennifer Casey
Executive Director
Fondy Food Center

CC: County Executive Abele
Interim Director Smith
Director Whaley-Smith

*Nine years ago, the Wisconsin Apple Growers Association sponsored the initial development of the **Milwaukee Winter Farmers Market**. The seeds they generously planted have blossomed into a well-attended, highly regarded farmers market that runs from November through April. The MWFM became a program of the Fondy Food Center in 2015. The **Fondy Food Center** brings healthy food and economic opportunity to Greater Milwaukee by operating local farmers markets throughout the year; providing access to land, resources and support to small-scale farmers; and building a better food system to improve food security & food justice in our community. The Fondy Food Center realizes its mission through its projects: Fondy Farmers Market, Fondy Market at Schlitz Park, Milwaukee Winter Farmers Market, Milwaukee Farmers Market Connection, and the Fondy Farm Project.*

To learn more, visit www.fondymarket.org or call 414-562-2282.