



August 15, 2025

Dear Erica,

I'm pleased to share an update on the Charles Allis Art Museum's progress toward the goals. Over the past three months, we have made meaningful advances in governance, leadership, fundraising, planning, and community engagement—strategically positioning the museum for long-term sustainability.

We remain on track to meet the remaining deliverables in the County's August 31 benchmarks, with clear, measurable progress in board development, leadership, fundraising, and public engagement. Our board and incoming Interim Executive Director are committed to maintaining this momentum as we prepare for property acquisition by year's end and secure the museum's future for generations to come.

Executive Leadership

We have selected Dr. W. Warner "Bill" Wood as Interim Executive Director, with onboarding expected to begin in the coming week as we finalize his contract. Dr. Wood brings over 25 years of museum leadership, academic teaching, and community engagement experience. His track record includes directing and revitalizing the Museum of Culture & Environment at Central Washington University and the Centennial Museum & Chihuahuan Desert Gardens at the University of Texas at El Paso.

Currently on sabbatical from his role as Associate Professor of Anthropology and Coordinator of the Museum Studies Graduate Certificate at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, Dr. Wood is recognized nationally for his expertise in strategic planning, collections stewardship, and inclusive, community-driven programming. He views this as a pivotal moment for the Charles Allis Art Museum and is committed to steering the organization toward both financial stability and cultural relevance.

Board Composition

Since May, our Board has grown from 5 to 9 active members, exceeding the County's minimum requirement of 8 by the August 31 deadline.

In July, we welcomed:

- **Carl Mueller** – Founder and Board Chairman of Mueller Communications, Inc., with decades of leadership advising government and civic leaders and preserving Milwaukee's cultural assets.

- **Kevin S. Smith** – Assistant Professor of Economics at Beloit College, with expertise in healthcare, finance, and public policy for artists.
- **Troy Giles** – Experienced nonprofit leader with expertise in governance, compliance, and historic preservation.
- **Thomas Frenn** – (previously a CAVT Officer) Long-time Milwaukee attorney specializing in nonprofit and business law, serving as Treasurer & Legal Counsel.

These members join **Marquayla Ellison (Chair)**, **Michael West (VC)**, **Claudia Egan (Secretary)**, **Andrea Taxman**, and **Thomas Haslett**. We are actively vetting several additional candidates, including prospects with backgrounds in fundraising, art appraisal, banking, communications, and museum leadership. We also look forward to working with the County Executive and Chairwoman to fill their board appointments as outlined in our bylaws.

Fundraising Progress

Our \$100,000 year-end goal is already 59% achieved with \$59,000 secured. This includes a \$10,000 award from the Herzfeld Foundation, individual contributions, and other commitments.

Key actions taken:

- Planning for a fall fundraising event in November 2025 to raise visibility and attract new donors.

Governance, Planning & Partnerships

- **Governance Framework** – Strengthened board governance practices, including a group agreement, conflict-of-interest documentation, role clarity, and committee structure.
- **Business & Strategic Planning** – Partnering with BizStarts and a local business coach to revise our 3-year business and strategic plan, including financial projections, earned revenue growth strategies, and a grant calendar.
- **Consultant Engagement** – Engaged consultants to complete a landscape assessment of operations and funding, design a fundraising plan, and create a strategic marketing and communications plan.
- **Partnership Development** – In discussions with the Chipstone Foundation to provide transitional support that could enhance planning and programming during this critical period.

Rentals Reactivation

We are excited to share that the Charles Allis Art Museum has reactivated its private rentals program after completing a thorough review of our pricing and structure to ensure competitive, sustainable, and mission-aligned offerings. This process has positioned us to once again host weddings, celebrations, and other special events that generate vital earned revenue for the museum while welcoming new audiences into our historic space.

We are especially pleased to be finalizing one of our first new bookings—a wedding for a couple with deep ties to the Allis-Chalmers legacy, as the groom's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather all worked for the company. This personal connection underscores the museum's unique role in preserving and sharing Milwaukee's cultural and industrial heritage, while also providing a memorable setting for meaningful life events.

In support of our reactivated rental program, we have renewed our liquor license and are in the process of hiring dedicated event services staff to ensure exceptional guest experiences and operational support.

With our refreshed rental program, expanded service capacity, and enhanced amenities, we look forward to increasing community use of the museum, growing earned income, and strengthening our role as both a cultural and social gathering place.

Public Programming & Community Engagement

- *Human Condition: A Study of the Body* – Upcoming community exhibition exploring the human body and its emotions. **Opening Reception: Thursday, September 4, 6–8 PM**, with remarks from our collections & operations manager, Jade Hess, Board Chair Marquayla Ellison, and our new Interim ED.
- Continued delivery of *Arts@1801* with Rufus King High School, expanding to more schools for Fall 2025.
- Ongoing exhibitions, including *Bird Body* and *Waves and Wings: Masterpieces in Motion*, drawing steady attendance.
- **Doors Open Milwaukee** – We are excited to once again participate on **Saturday, September 27, and Sunday, September 28, 2025, 12–5 PM**, welcoming visitors to explore the museum during this citywide celebration of 150+ historic and cultural sites.
- Hosting of community events that keep the museum accessible and relevant, paired with consistent public hours.

Sincerely,

Marquayla Ellison
Board Chair
CAVT Museums, Inc.