



MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM

April 15, 2015

Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors  
Milwaukee County Courthouse  
901 N. 9 St., Room 201  
Milwaukee, WI 53233

Dear Supervisors,

I am writing to ask for your support of a resolution allowing the Milwaukee Art Museum 90 days to examine the possible acquisition of the O'Donnell Park and Garage property. On or before the end of this examination period, the Milwaukee Art Museum will either declare its desire to pursue an acquisition of the property or declare that it no longer has an interest in the property. Our goal, and one we share with many in the community, is to develop a plan for the future of the O'Donnell property that meets the needs of all who depend on it for public access to the lakefront, recreation, and preservation.

The Board of Trustees of the Milwaukee Art Museum is grateful for the longstanding partnership with Milwaukee County. The recent historic agreements reached with the County paved the way for the Museum's significant partnership investment with the County and War Memorial in restoring and repairing the County owned older buildings of the Museum and the War Memorial. The Museum's major renovations are now underway and, when completed in November 2015, promise to transform the Art Museum experience for generations to come. We therefore look upon the O'Donnell property as a logical key component to providing sustainable access, and a world class museum experience for the next generations of visitors.

The Board of Trustees of the Art Museum believes it is in a unique position to acquire the O'Donnell property now that the Northwestern Mutual offer to purchase it is off the table. We supported Northwestern Mutual's efforts to acquire O'Donnell given its stellar reputation in the community, closest neighbor location, and assurances that adequate public parking would remain available.

Public parking directly across from the Art Museum is essential for future access to the Museum and other lakefront attractions. 60% of the Museum's Visitors park in O'Donnell garage. The Museum's acclaimed Calatrava addition was positioned in its current location because of its direct access to O'Donnell parking and the Wisconsin Ave view shed and approach. The Museum invested \$135 million in that expansion including several million dollars in constructing the Reiman pedestrian bridge guaranteeing public access to the Museum from downtown and the O'Donnell garage.

Crossing the Reiman bridge overlooking the Museum's Cudahy gardens and fountains provides one of the most spectacular cultural and natural vistas anywhere in America. For this reason, the Museum also retains a public easement in perpetuity from the bridge to Wisconsin Ave.

As demands for public parking increase along the lakefront in the years ahead, we believe protecting this parking asset is even more critical to the Museum's long term viability. Though it is premature to define the specifics of an offer or its structure, the Museum's primary goals include long term preservation of parking, public access to the lakefront, accommodation of Betty Brinn Children's Museum which holds a long term lease, preservation of the park lands, and programmatic links to the lakefront, the museums, and the proposed new Gateway project.

While the Museum recognizes that acquisition of the O'Donnell property will be challenging, and at some risk to the Museum, we believe protecting this asset for the long term is the right thing to do. Replacement of parking structures is enormously expensive. Losing parking is even more expensive if the desirability of visiting the museums, parks, lakefront and downtown amenities diminishes in the years ahead for lack of public access and accommodation. Recent editorials and opinion pieces, including those from parks advocates, have spoken in support of the Museum undertaking this investigation. Many in the community see the relevance and the necessity of the Museum's stewardship of the O'Donnell property, and our potential to do for O'Donnell what it has recently done in assuming more responsibility for the older buildings of the Museum.

We understand that, should the Art Museum choose to not pursue the O'Donnell property opportunity, further County Board action may be taken including an RFP or maintaining status quo. We hope you will support the measure coming before you on April 23 granting the exclusive opportunity for the Milwaukee Art Museum to examine the O'Donnell property and develop a plan that makes sense for all stakeholders.

Sincerely,



Kenneth C. Krei  
President  
Board of Trustees



Daniel T. Keegan  
Director