

**SINCE
1935**



**MILWAUKEE CO.
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Dear Milwaukee County Committee on Parks and Culture,

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The Milwaukee County Historical Society is proud to be a service provider to the County in its role as the third-party repository for Milwaukee County records as well as a County cultural organization. MCHS hopes to maintain and build on that relationship in order to serve the members of the community that the County and MCHS both represent.

Five-Year Fiscal Outlook

The five-year fiscal outlook for the Milwaukee County Historical Society is solid. The organization is operating in the black, has a decent endowment, and has established the building maintenance reserve fund required by the County lease. That said, there are some potential headwinds. These include rising costs for materials, rent (off-site storage), and salaries. In addition, the gradual transition to predominantly digital records could include expenses related to storage and accessibility. Event rental income is a significant source of revenue for MCHS, and it has been seen that the number of bookings can vary dramatically year-to-year. Finally, unforeseen maintenance costs could have a negative fiscal effect.

Successes

MCHS has experienced some staff turnover in the last year but is now fully staffed with a strong team. This allows the organization to carry out its mission to its utmost ability. For example, this year the MCHS education team visited almost 200 classrooms and saw over 6,000 students through the Hands on History program. In addition, nearly 1,000 more students visited MCHS and Trimborn Farm on field trips

MCHS general programs for adults and children have tripled in number over the last two years and have expanded the reach of MCHS outside its walls and historic sites. Meanwhile, the research library continues to offer outstanding service to researchers and community members and the museum division installed temporary and traveling exhibits the explored climate, housing, and food justice.

Looking forward, MCHS is working to diversify its collections, and therefore its programs and exhibits, to better represent the community it serves. A major initiative is a robust oral history project and exhibit that will document the immigrant experience in Milwaukee and explore notions of citizenship as part of the celebration of the semiquincentennial of the United States.

Finally, MCHS continues to maintain its operations and care for the MCHS headquarters and three historic sites.



Challenges

An immediate challenge for MCHS is the potential First Amendment Zone in Pere Marquette Park. There is fear that there could be damage to the building, potential damage or theft of the collections, and disruptions to service. MCHS is working with several parties to mitigate the risk, but it is of real concern.

While as noted above, MCHS continues to care for its buildings and historic sites, these also pose ongoing challenges. The continued management of Trimborn Farm is taxing for staff and capital projects threaten to require extensive resources from both the County and MCHS. In addition, the MCHS building will need a water recharge system at some point in the future as well as work to mitigate occasional minor flooding in the basement.

MCHS's off-site storage is inadequate, and the organization is working to address this through finding a new location. The hope is that MCHS can use some of its ARPA funds and perhaps work with the County to find a building that is climate controlled, watertight, and allows for increased storage capacity for historically important County records. The goal of the organization is that this current challenge will become a success in the next five years.

Similarly, the increase in digital records created by the County means that MCHS must prepare for a time when it will have to be able to make historically important digital records available to the public. While this presents challenges both financially and from a digital infrastructure perspective, this is also an opportunity to increase access and ultimately turn the process into a success.

Finally, MCHS must always be prepared for the potential challenge of reduced revenue, whether that be through fewer event rental bookings, decreased fundraising, or other disruptions to income streams. This is something MCHS takes seriously and therefore is very careful to manage its finances accordingly.

County Relationship

The relationship between MCHS and the County has been on solid footing the last few years. The ongoing increase in funding granted in fiscal year 2023, was essential and has given MCHS the opportunity to improve its service to the County and community members. The turnover of County staff has occasionally proven challenging, but generally the working relationship has remained amicable and for the most part productive.

MCHS looks forward to working with the County on improving offsite storage capabilities so that the County can save VRC costs, create and maintain access to historical digital records, and find a mutually beneficial solution for Trimborn Farm. The ongoing relationship between MCHS and the County allows the organization to fulfill its mission and offer the best service to County residents possible.