

MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM

To: Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Marcelle Polednik, PhD
Donna and Donald Baumgartner Director

Date: June 6, 2024

Re: Amendment 22

Executive Summary

The Milwaukee Art Museum remains grateful to the County for its financial support, which is an essential part of our annual budget that we rely upon to serve Milwaukee County residents. County funding makes it possible for the Museum to continue to reach broader, more diverse audiences and make Milwaukee Art Museum's collections, programs, and education resources more accessible to our expansive community. Like our peers across the sector and the County at large, the Museum is grappling with the increased cost of doing business in the current economy, compromising our ability to advance our mission-driven strategic plan with the level of financial resources that has traditionally been sufficient to realize our goals.

What's Going Well

The Milwaukee Art Museum is committed to our Strategic Direction and four key pillars that have guided our continued growth as an institution. Our Strategic Direction guides and strengthens our ability to reach diverse audiences and engage all communities of Milwaukee County in new and compelling ways. These pillars include a holistic, institution-wide focus on:

1. Art Relevant to our Community
2. Robust Community Programming
3. Expansive Hospitality
4. Impact Aligned with Financial Strength and Discipline

Year over year, we are experiencing growth in our attendance and membership levels along with the number of school tour participants. We are proud to present works of art to the public through our permanent collection, robust schedule of exhibitions, public programs, community outreach initiatives, and educational offerings.

The Museum engages a broad cross-section of our diverse community both on-site at the Museum and in neighborhoods across the region. Free days and Family Sundays invite thousands of County residents, who do not typically visit the Museum due to financial constraints or broader familial responsibilities, to come for specialized programming.

And a familiar sight at festivals and local neighborhood events across the city and county is the Milwaukee Art Museum’s Mobile Art Studio sponsored by Kohl’s, which helps to inspire creativity and a love for art and art-making in children of all ages.

The Milwaukee Art Museum’s commitment to serving as a vital educational resource for schoolchildren across the county continues to be a central part of our mission – inspiring creativity and opening doors to new perspectives for thousands of schoolchildren on hundreds of visits to the Museum each year. In addition to children 12 and under being free, the Museum is proud to make admission free for all K-12 schoolteachers across the region, making the many splendors of a visit to the Milwaukee Art Museum accessible to more than 1,500 of our front line educators last year.

Challenges We Face

All of the Museum’s cultural, educational, and inspirational offerings are made possible by our commitment to marshalling the necessary financial resources and deploying them in the most prudent way to achieve significant impact across the city, county, and state.

As the Museum, and all of us, continue to rebound from the uncertainty and unpredictability of the last several years, we are seeing how vital a role we play in the social fabric of Milwaukee. But to deliver on our mission for the benefit of all of Milwaukee County, the Museum continues to grapple with increased costs of doing business. From utilities costs to maintenance repairs, staff expenses to technology improvements, the percentage of the Museum’s budget that is earmarked for essential services continues to grow.

Here is a snapshot of where we were in 2019 and where we are today:

	2019	2024
Attendance	250,000	200,000
Memberships	20,000	16,000
School tours	56,000	28,000
Staff	240 (185 Full-time Equivalent)	180 (140 Full-time Equivalent)

Attendance and memberships are still lagging by 20% while our school tour groups are only 50% of where they were five years ago. Although we are building back, the recovery is slower than anticipated. Our staffing levels are 25% lower as we work to maintain a disciplined approach to our spending.

Institution’s Outlook and Impact of County Agreement

As we look to the future, we need to ensure that we have a sustainable financial model. With rising costs, we are seeking ways to increase our revenue streams. One way is by growing our endowment. This approach will take many years to prove itself as a successful method to creating long-standing financial strength.

In the meantime, we depend on the support from the County to achieve the objectives of our community-based mission and have a positive impact on the lives of Milwaukee County residents in the decade ahead.