



June 27th, 2024

CAVT Museums  
1801 N Prospect Ave  
2220 N Terrace Ave  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Milwaukee County Staff and Supervisors,

The CAVT (Charles Allis/Villa Terrace) Board and staff provide management of the Charles Allis Art Museum and the Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum. We are writing to provide information to be included in a report by the County Economic Development Division that ostensibly compares the variety of agreements and performance of such agreements by entities affiliated with cultural facilities owned by Milwaukee County. The current CAVT governing entity was formed when the museum were divested from the Milwaukee County War Memorial in 2012. There is no written agreement between CAVT and Milwaukee County.

We strongly believe that Milwaukee County's investment in its museums should be on par with the support that was provided to the County's other cultural institutions. The Charles Allis is now under threat of being divested from County support, without the County's provision of funds for the remediation of deferred maintenance. We believe that the museums will survive and thrive if such an investment is made. This letter provides details of how CAVT has supported and grown these Milwaukee County museums.

#### The Charles Allis Art Museum

Since 1945, non-profit volunteers, later joined by staff, have programmed the Charles Allis Art Museums to educate, delight, and challenge audiences to understand the history of our region's most illustrious industrial and cultural leaders, how their work fueled changes in our community, and supported generations of businesses and families.

The Charles Allis Museum has been witness to dramatic changes around it, including new high rises, multi-family structures, the rebirth of Brady Street, Farewell, and North Avenue commercial districts, and today, a new gold rush to erect high rises along the shore of Lake Michigan.

The Charles Allis staff organizes exhibitions in response to Sarah Ball Allis's County-owned Collection, exhibitions that confront our country-wide legacies of segregation and gender discrimination, host community meetings, and serve as a polling place during elections. The staff's reach into the community fulfills the County's mental wellness and equity goals. Educational opportunities have particular meaning in historic buildings -- they show our past and allow students to dream about how they will shape the future of their home. In addition to programs, the staff of the Charles Allis Museum have protected, preserved, and interpreted the art collection left by Sarah Ball Allis to the citizens of Milwaukee County via the City of Milwaukee.

#### The Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum

The Villa Terrace is a former private home that welcomes exhibitions, educational programs, yoga, chess clubs, school visits, weddings, and field trips from visitors of all ages. The Villa Terrace became a decorative arts museum in 1966 when it was donated to the Milwaukee Arts Center, today, the Milwaukee Art Museum. It functions as a de facto County Park with its elegant design that spreads from the top of the hill down towards Lake Michigan.

The building and grounds are a dream for all who visit: who doesn't wish they could live on the sunny Italian Adriatic coastline with never-ending sunlight and palm trees swaying in the breeze when faced with the reality of Wisconsin's winters? Because of the Villa Terrace's beauty and neighborhood, Villa Terrace is much-loved by its neighbors and visitors and is a popular rental destination in Milwaukee.



## Charles Allis • Villa Terrace ART MUSEUMS

### Attendance

The Museums welcomed 23,000 guests in 2022, and 28,000 in 2024. CAVT projects over 35,000 guests in 2024, as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Villa Terrace. In CAVT's most recent survey, the museums have found that at the Villa Terrace:

- 49% of guests live in Milwaukee County
- 22% live outside of Milwaukee County, in Wisconsin
- 27% of museum guests live out of state

With current programming increases, and the success of weekly and monthly programs, CAVT projects that there has been an increase of nearly 13% of individuals from Milwaukee County. This increase to an estimated 62% of guests has been driven through hyperlocal programming and focus on CAVT's alignment with Milwaukee County initiatives.

The Charles Allis sees guests from Milwaukee County, and globally with the following attendance:

- 52% of guests are from Milwaukee County
- 22% live outside of Milwaukee County, in Wisconsin
- 21% of guests reported being from out-of-state
- Nearly 2% are international visitors

The Charles Allis also projects a 3-5% increase in guests from Milwaukee County, accounting for education programming increasing local attendance in 2024.

### Current Programs

In our post-COVID-19 world, arts and cultural organizations have been called upon to serve the public to support racial equity, the social justice movement, and building community and connection. CAVT museums increased public attendance from 2022 to 2023 by over 41%. This success was followed by:

- 23% increase in program attendance from 2022 to 2023
- Alignment with REBT, diversifying contractors and attendees by nearly 400%
- Mental health initiatives include sold-out yoga, breathwork, tai-chi, and "work from home"
- Expansion of Arts@1801 to include four MPS high schools
- 100 programs for the Villa Terrace's 100th year in 2024

### Support

We estimate that volunteers who have supported both facilities – today the Charles Allis Villa Terrace Board, the Friends of Villa Terrace Board, and a former Friends of Charles Allis Board – have raised approximately three dollars to one dollar contributed by the County for the management, stewardship, interpretation, conservation, and protection of the County's two historic house museums. The typical multiplier for non-profit dollars is that for every dollar a museum raises, it generates nearly \$2 in value for its community. The economic impact of the Villa Terrace and its event rentals conservatively reaches over \$1.2 million annually. These numbers prove how generations of Milwaukee residents have supported the two institutions.

The resources provided by the County to the two museums are dwarfed by the resources of time, talent, and funds it has secured for the museums' general management and its exhibitions, educational programs, collection conservation, and community engagement. The biggest threat to the CAVT Museums is the deferred maintenance of both the Charles Allis and Villa Terrace Art Museums. At the time of this letter, Milwaukee County has released a Request for Information, allowing for private and public interests to submit proposals for the use of the properties. This, with the deferred maintenance, are the largest threat to two beloved cultural institutions.



## Charles Allis • Villa Terrace ART MUSEUMS

CAVT has supported the Museums with approximately \$5.7 million dollars of operational funds since 2014 to support the two County-owned facilities; this number does not include staffing, exhibition, or programmatic fees. This includes the replacement of a water main at the Villa Terrace, ongoing maintenance, elevator repairs, restoration efforts, and much more. The current VFA report, issued in 2024, estimates the cost of deferred maintenance at each museum is now nearly \$6 million. CAVT has earned and raised over \$12 million dollars since 2012.

The Charles Allis Art Museum was donated to the City of Milwaukee with a \$45,000 gift, to be invested and used by the City of Milwaukee to maintain the museum and its collection. If these funds had been invested well by the City of Milwaukee, and later Milwaukee County, these funds would be worth over \$3.47 million dollars. Today this endowment is estimated to be \$240,000 and is held by Milwaukee County. No part of these endowment funds have been provided to CAVT to support the Charles Allis Art Museum.

### Five-Year Forecast:

In the next 5 years, CAVT projects the following revenue and expense:

- Year // Expense // Revenue
- 2024 // \$1,021,772 // \$1,115,953
- 2025 // \$1,087,450 // \$1,135,928
- 2026 // \$1,117,900 // \$1,282,303
- 2027 // \$1,157,300 // \$1,353,803
- 2028 // \$1,208,900 // \$1,443,803

Budget linked here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/14lqKHlIWw5S697j90LqLO7RCf5bcPCXj/view?usp=sharing>

This five-year forecast excludes any expenses for the remediation of buildings due to the deferred maintenance by Milwaukee County. Additionally, the projections are created assuming CAVT continues to manage both the Charles Allis and the Villa Terrace Art Museums under its current structure.

It is crucial to understand as Milwaukee County supervisors that the Charles Allis/Villa Terrace Board and its supporting Friends organization have been strong, reliable volunteer stewards of these public taxpayer-supported museums. CAVT has aligned its programming, art exhibitions, and outreach with Milwaukee County's goals of ending racism and improving the mental health of Milwaukee County citizens. This alignment and dedication to our role in Milwaukee County, as well as our strong stewardship, operational excellence, and dedication to art as a powerful tool to improve the lives of our community, must be fully acknowledged in all future actions taken by the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors. The steadfast support of Milwaukee County initiatives demonstrates how incredibly powerful a tool the museums are in tackling the initiatives laid out as priorities by the Milwaukee County Executive.

CAVT respectfully requests an understanding of the positive work we have done and the contributions we have made to the cultural life of Milwaukee County. Based on our past stewardship of successful caretaking of these two beautiful Milwaukee County historical gems, we ask that Milwaukee County approach our two cultural institutions with the same care and consideration it took when entering into agreements with its other cultural caretakers, remediating deferred maintenance as an integral part of its thoughtful separation or layered approaches to fulfilling the County's strategic vision of defunding cultural institutions. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "JAW", is written over the "Respectfully submitted," text.

Jaymee Harvey Willems, Executive Director

CAVT Museums Inc. Board of Directors

Executive Committee: [Claudia Egan](#), Marquayla Ellison, James Stearns  
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