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Mayor's Year of Housing: City of Milwaukee launches next phase of Public Artist in Residence Program with Milwaukee Fire Department to address safe housing

Request for Proposals for PAIR artist services, Request for Qualifications to fill PAIR Liaison position due March 16, 2026

MILWAUKEE - The City of Milwaukee's Public Artist in Residence (PAIR) pilot program, the city's first-ever municipal interdepartmental residency, is launching its next phase in partnership with the Milwaukee Fire Department (MFD). The initiative aims to invest in Milwaukee's cultural producers by leveraging the knowledge, practices, and creative toolkits of local artists to build a stronger, safer community for all residences.

PAIR originated as an initiative of the Milwaukee Arts Board's (MAB) Public Art Subcommittee (PAS) with the first residency occurring between 2022-2024. PAIR presents an opportunity for collaboration, embedding an Artist in City departments to strategize, propose and implement public art as creative solutions to complex civic challenges.

For this next iteration, MFD has been selected as the host department. An artist and a PAIR liaison will be working with MFD and Milwaukee residents to address safe housing, a foundational issue impacting all Milwaukeeans and all City departments.

As housing stock continues to age and the national housing market experiences strain, residents at the lower end of the economic spectrum face disproportionate challenges. Many are left with limited access to safe, well-maintained housing options. Older single-family, two-family, and multi-family properties often present elevated fire and mortality risks, along with additional health and social concerns.

In alignment with Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson's designation of 2026 as the "Year of Housing," the residency will utilize the visibility of MFD's fire stations and vehicles to highlight the fundamental human right to affordable housing and safe,

survivable housing. MFD is uniquely positioned as anchors in every neighborhood and centrally immersed in every one of the many diverse communities in Milwaukee.

“The next phase of the Public Artist in Residence program reflects safe, stable housing as the foundation for strong neighborhoods and a thriving city,” **Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson** said. “By partnering with the Milwaukee Fire Department, we are approaching housing safety in a way that is creative, community-centered, and proactive. This collaboration recognizes that preventing tragedy and strengthening housing conditions requires visibility and innovation, and this initiative brings all of this together for the benefit of Milwaukee residents”

“Safe housing is a matter of dignity, equity, and public safety. Through the Public Artist in Residence program, we recognize that artists are essential civic partners,” **District 6 Alderwoman and Chair of Milwaukee Arts Board Milele A. Coggs** said. “We are opening new pathways to engage residents, raising awareness to this critical issue, and addressing the real conditions impacting Milwaukee families. This initiative will ensure every Milwaukeean has access to safe and stable housing.”

“The Milwaukee Fire Department is deeply committed to reducing injury and death from fire. We believe that the very best fire rescue is the one that we do not need to make – that is to say, if we can prevent a fire from happening, that is the real win,” **Milwaukee Fire Chief Aaron Lipski** said. “Further, if a fire does occur, if proper smoke detection and alarms allow for occupants to self-evacuate, that is the real win. Because we reside on the very margin of success and failure over and over and over again, we are uniquely positioned to draw attention to the issue of safe and survivable housing.”

The intended outcome of the residency is for the artist and host department to assess community needs and develop or improve programs and initiatives through creative problem-solving. The nature of the collaboration will evolve based on the interests of the selected artist and the department’s needs. The program also creates opportunities for cross-sector networking and offers a collaborative, generative space to explore new models for artist residencies forced on social impact.

The first three months of the residency will focus on introductions, immersion, and learning. As the artist and PAIR liaison learn about city processes, and city employees learn about the artist’s approach to problem solving, those experiences will be shared with the public for transparency and engagement.

The Department of City Development has issued a Request for Proposals ([RFP](#)) for artist services for the PAIR program and a Request for Qualifications ([RFQ](#)) to fill the PAIR Liaison position, which are both due March 16, 2026 by 11 a.m. CST.

More information on the RFP and RFQ can be found at milwaukee.gov/DCD/Projects/RFPs.

For more information on the PAIR program, visit milwaukee.gov/PAIR.