



ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA
THE ARLINGTON COMMISSION FOR THE ARTS
1100 NORTH GLEBE ROAD, #1500
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA 22201
(703) 228-0808 • FAX (703) 228-0805



November 17, 2017

Mr. Mark Schwartz, Manager
Arlington County Government
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 302
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: Cultural Facilities in Arlington

Dear Mr. Schwartz:

On behalf of the Arlington Commission for the Arts, we are writing to comment on the County's October 27, 2017 new article entitled "Thinking Outside the Box." While we have previously expressed our opposition to eliminating the Black Box theater development in Virginia Square in a letter to the County Board dated August 18, 2017, we understand the County's reasoning for its decision to abandon that particular project at this time. We are, however, concerned by the implications of a news story advocating for a strategic shift away from future investment in dedicated arts and culture facilities. We fully support pop-up exhibits, performances, and the creative use of temporary spaces for cultural programming, all of which have the potential to greatly enrich our community. But we believe that this creative use of found spaces should complement, rather than replace, viable, attractive, professional-grade, dependable arts-focused spaces that can properly showcase the dozens of wonderful arts and culture organizations that (for now) call Arlington home.

To that end, we want to align our concerns with those expressed by County Board members Jay Fiset and Katie Cristol during the County Manager's October 24, 2017, presentation. Both Mr. Fiset and Ms. Cristol reflected on the need to formalize the Cultural Affairs Division's (CAD) arrangements with Arlington Public Schools through a Memorandum of Understanding or another similar vehicle. Doing so would help to codify the "rules" for the school principals who play a decision-making role in the use of facilities. As we expressed in our August 18 letter, however, even more effective sharing of spaces with public schools should not be viewed as a permanent substitute for dedicated cultural facilities. As such, we fully support Ms. Cristol's comments highlighting the need for future investments in dedicated cultural facilities through, for example, directing funds previously earmarked for the Black Box theatre to development of a facility elsewhere in the County. Like Ms. Cristol, we too have heard strong concerns from many Arlington arts organizations and artists about operational problems created by the need to scramble for suitable performance and gallery spaces in temporary and/or ill-suited venues, as well as those groups and artists' struggle to collaborate with a school system that appropriately prioritizes student needs.

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We note further that you acknowledged during your October 24 presentation that further work is required to ensure that some identified facilities gaps are filled - particularly, supporting performances and rehearsals for Arlington's music and dance groups.

As we continue to disseminate *Enriching Lives: Arlington Arts and Culture Strategy*, our recently-adopted strategic plan, the Commission is reaching out to many other community and civic groups regarding ways to maximize the civic value of arts and culture in Arlington. In addition, the Arts Commission, working with Cultural Affairs Division staff, has formed a Cultural Facilities Task Force that includes members of the Economic Development Commission and the broader community. This Task Force is charged with formulating a vision and framework that will help guide Arlington's future investment in and management of cultural facilities and will engage the community through an inclusive, deliberative, public process. We look forward to presenting the outcomes of the Task Force's work to the County Board in Spring 2018.

Arlington is renowned as the home for first-class parks, recreational centers, libraries, school facilities, public transit, and other important public infrastructure that benefits and enhances our community. We hope that Arlington can likewise one day proudly boast of first-class cultural facilities as well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Zeeman". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Jeff Zeeman
Chair, Arlington Commission for the Arts

Cc: The Honorable Jay Fiset, Chair, Arlington County Board
The Honorable Katie Cristol, Vice Chair, Arlington County Board
The Honorable John Vihstadt, Arlington County Board
The Honorable Libby Garvey, Arlington County Board
The Honorable Christian Dorsey, Arlington County Board