

Convening of Arts Organizations Notes
April 27, 2012, 4 pm
Museum of Glass

In attendance:

Troy Christensen – Volunteer Moderator, Pierce County
Naomi Strom-Avila – City of Tacoma
Amy McBride – City of Tacoma
Susan Warner – Museum of Glass
Kit Evans – Hilltop Artists
Sarah Idstrom – Tacoma Arts Commission
Dane Meyer – Tacoma Arts Commission
Don Lacky – Tacoma Arts Commission
Mike Sweney – Tacoma Arts Commission
Andy Buelow – Tacoma Symphony Orchestra
Traci Kelly – Tacoma Arts Commission
Philip Cowan – Grand Cinema
Tom Cashman – Foss Waterway Seaport
Tanya Andrews – Children’s Museum of Tacoma
David Fischer – Broadway Center
Zach Powers – Tacoma Arts Commission
Cindy Renander – Second City Chamber Series
Jan Brazzell – Tacoma Arts Commission
Jon Rake – Tacoma Musical Playhouse
Marty Campbell – City Council
Lauren Walker – City Council
Jennifer Kilmer – Washington State History Museum
Mark Gerth – Washington State Arts Alliance
Sherrana Kildun - Greater Tacoma Community Foundation
Mark Reutlinger – Tacoma Concert Band

There were three goals identified in advance for this meeting:

1. Debrief and air concerns re: the admissions tax and its circumstances
2. Work together to re-invigorate our vision for the arts into the next decade and beyond
3. Identify long term sustainable funding for the arts in Tacoma (or at least figure next steps)

Discussion (names attributed when known):

We tried our best to capture comments but didn’t get them all. We also didn’t always capture who said what, but we tried to capture the comments in order. We are happy to include any comments or summaries from others as well. Feel free to e-mail us back with any information/comments.

1. Belief that the tax is fair because people are being taxed for a service that is provided. The Blue Mouse collects the tax.
2. The City has invested in the arts in the past, but that investment would disappear with the ticket tax. There is anger that the City’s investment is not honored.
3. It is hypocritical to need/benefit from City services and not be willing to pay a tax to support the services.

4. There is anger that the Arts Commission would support a ticket tax that would only charge some arts organizations.
5. It isn't realistic that everyone is going to agree upon an arts tax. The group should look at how the arts were being asked to take a hit in a down economy.
6. Arts organizations have been trying to work with the funding community, who is looking for earned income. The ticket tax would have had a negative impact on earned income.
7. It is unknown if the ticket tax option is fully off the table for consideration.
8. Taxing non-profits is a breach of a social contract.
9. The arts community has been given a brief respite on the issue. We need to do everything within our power to protect the arts. It was the Arts Commission's job to protect the arts organizations and it felt like the Arts Commission didn't protect them.
10. The ticket tax is a philosophical issue.
11. Every arts organization is fragile; there is no room to "stub toes".
12. Susan Warner – The threat to the Museum of Glass was more than just the tax. The issue threatened contributed revenue, most of which comes from Seattle. Two high level donors said they will not invest in the Museum if the City does not value them. The arts are an economic engine. Arts organizations do give back to the community through the economic impact of tourism dollars. Without the Museum, there would be 200,000 less people coming to Tacoma. It is shortsighted of the City to undermine one of the few economic engines in Tacoma.
13. Investment could generate more income, need to show return on investment.
14. City Council chose to tax hospitals but not non-profits.
15. Advocacy for the arts has been successful; the arts have a huge voice in Tacoma.
16. Everyone is threatened by the City's budget crisis but we need to work in partnership – as part of a community.
17. Jennifer Kilmer - The situation was a "Sophie's Choice". She doesn't blame the Arts Commission for what happened. It was wrong to present this in a binary way; there were many choices that could have been made. There are multitudes of investments cities make all the time in all kinds of areas. We need a public info campaign, one that shows what the ABSENCE of investment would look like i.e. no WSHS arches, no MOG cone...
18. The arts community needs to come together.
19. Philip Cowan – Was surprised by the Arts Commission's discussion of the ticket tax. He wanted to have been at the table earlier before the Arts Commission came up with their position. There is confusion over how the Arts Commission came to their decision to support the tax. Was the Arts Commission under threat by the City to make the decision?
20. Sarah Idstrom – We need to look at where to go from here. What can we learn from other places that have faced similar situations? There are creative ways to solve this budget issue.
21. David Fischer – It is difficult to work as a community when we are under fire. It is important not to hold blame and to move forward from here. The arts are a solution to the City. How can we improve the solution? How can we increase our contributions?
22. Andy Buelow – Wants to remain respectful. We need to work toward a unified voice. "The minute we decide it is inevitable, it probably will be."
23. Kit Evans – Is excited to move on after this de-brief and listening to others. When did City Council know about the possible tax? Why wasn't the Arts Commission informed? Were groups involved in discussion with City Council before anything officially came out?
24. In the future, everyone needs to be at the table before major decisions are made.
25. Marty Campbell – The arts field in Tacoma has changed drastically since the 1990's. The tax issue came up in December 2011. Some arts organizations talked to two City Council members about using tax revenue for marketing. As discussion about the tax unfolded, he became afraid

of where the cuts were going, on top of what cuts had already been made to the City's Arts Program. He saw the revised tax ordinance as a way to help shore up the Arts Commission's programming in the City's budget. Initially the Arts Commission turned down the tax, saying "no thanks, but if the tax is going to go through anyway, then money should be set aside from it to shore up the Arts Program." It was a Sophie's Choice that had to be made and was a very hard decision. It is a huge step forward in having the ticket tax discussion with City Council as many of them were unaware of the cuts already made to the City's Arts Program. Many City Council members varied on the issues all the way through to the end; it caused a lot of heartburn.

26. Troy Christensen – Themes that have developed from the conversation thus far:
 - a. There still needs to be some deeper conversations about what happened in relation to the ticket tax
 - b. There needs to be more discussion about how conversations take place in the future and who is involved in those conversations
 - c. We need to figure out how to move closely together from here on forward
27. Tanya Andrews – At the last PC ACES meeting there was discussion of broadening the scope of who is involved in those meetings. It could possibly serve as a place to have more dialogue between the Arts Commission and PC ACES.
28. Mark Gerth – The Washington State Arts Alliance (WSAA) has monthly meetings in Tacoma and those meetings could be a platform for continued conversations.
29. Kit Evans – PC ACES and WSAA could be two good platforms for continued conversations. PC ACES meetings would need to be open to more people for it to be valid for this purpose.
30. Traci Kelly – Arts Commission meetings are open to the public. They can be a venue for open discussion.
31. Jan Brazzell – Arts Commission meetings might not have the standard agenda room that makes sense for further conversations like this one.
32. Troy Christensen – Some further conversations need to be had; some as a small group and some as a full group.
33. Susan Warner – Should we convene a small group to look at funding?
34. Kit Evans – It is necessary to have the Arts Commission around. We need to look at what sustainable funding would look like.
35. A task force was gathered to research long-term sustainable funding options. This group must report back to the whole group about options and discussions along the way.
36. The task force includes: Mark Gerth, Kit Evans, Amy McBride, David Fischer, and Zach Powers. Possible addition of Sarah Idstrom, if she agrees.
37. Amy McBride - There needs to be some broader conversations as well that include others in the community.
38. Andy Buelow – PC ACES started as a small group of arts organizations that convened to discuss ways to get through the recession. The Greater Tacoma Community Foundation helped with some funding to develop the group. The group is currently under discussion about whether to open it up to more people. WSAA might be a good platform for discussions with a defined agenda, which will give people more of an impetus to attend.
39. The next convening of arts organizations will be at the WSAA meeting in May. An invitation to the meeting will be sent to everyone who was on the invitation list to this convening, as well as other organizations and artists that the City funds.

Addendum to notes

40. On May 4th, Neil Birnbaum requested to be added to the task force to research long-term sustainable funding options.