

To: Community and Corporate Services Committee – September 18, 2007
Re: Governance Models, Burlington Performing Arts Centre

Good evening Madame Chair & Members of the Committee,

We are here tonight to recommend that Council employ an independent board of directors as the governance model for the proposed Burlington Performing Arts Centre.

Performing Arts Burlington carried out an extensive study and review of several identified governance models. Only two were determined worthy of serious consideration: Oversight by Council, or by an independent board.

Our review concluded that there are numerous advantages to the IB model.

This model involves the incorporation of a not-for-profit corporation, governed by a board of directors drawn from the community and representing the backgrounds, skills, and constituencies necessary and relevant to discharge their responsibilities.

The IB mode, in our view, is superior in many respects.

Finances

Third party fundraising would be stronger under an IB. Development and implementation of a progressive business plan, consistent with a clear strategic direction, can be expected under the guidance of an IB. These elements are important to ensure greater sustainability.

And while the municipal government may enjoy a greater ability to absorb financial risk, by means of its access to tax revenue, reserves or borrowed funds, the support available through these resources can be provided to the facility under either governance model.

Programming

Programming for the BPAC may be seen as encompassing two broadly framed areas: Access by local performers and performing groups to the Centre, and the artistic expression comprising impresario or touring programs.

Fair access to local renters can be assured by the establishment of governing principles for the operation of the Centre. An independent board will be better positioned to consider and promote a more liberal and progressive mix of artistic direction among programming booked by the Centre.

Administration & Operation

The City has an infrastructure of soft support services that could be made available to the BPAC under either model. This is another example of how a not-for-profit corporation can connect with the City by means of a contractual relationship.

An IB model provides an opportunity to assemble a board with the skills, knowledge and experience necessary to provide effective oversight of a live theatre operation. Marketing, financial management, business management, fundraising – all represented within a focused, committed board will ensure success.

Burlington has a history of citizen participation and a strong talent base of proven leaders in community service. Involvement in this way deepens a sense of attachment, leading to ongoing support over the long term from these people and those they influence.

Accountability and transparency may at first blush seem to be greater with Council providing oversight. However, with the proper guiding principles and structure within the not-for-profit organization, these features can be an integral part of the IB as well.

As a result, we recommend instituting an independent board within a newly-formed not-for-profit corporation to provide oversight to the BPAC. Council should establish clear governing principles and guidelines to set parameters for the constating documents and policies to govern the operation of the Centre. These plans should begin as soon as possible. The board members should be drawn from the community, bringing together a variety of backgrounds necessary to ensure the success of the Centre.

We are pleased to see that staff also support this model, and we encourage you to accept this recommendation, and institute plans at the earliest opportunity.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Tymstra
President, Board of Directors
Performing Arts Burlington