

**Presentation to Community & Corporate Services – October 9, 2007**

**Downtown Paid Parking 6-9 p.m. Monday – Saturday**

Good evening Madame Chair and members of the committee,

Performing Arts Burlington is here to register our comments related to the issue of Downtown Paid Parking between 6:00 and 9:00 pm Monday to Saturday with respect to the following:

1. the inequity of access for users of City-owned facilities;
2. challenges to audience development and the long-term sustainability of the Burlington Performing Arts Centre;
3. impact on current performing arts businesses and performances in the Downtown.

Performing Arts Burlington has a membership of 380 companies, businesses and audience patrons. Our strategic directions include:

- Increasing capacity and sustainability of the arts sector
- Raising interest, awareness and participation in the arts amongst residents and tourists
- Supporting the development of a community performing arts centre in Burlington, and
- Representing and speaking for the performing arts community at all levels.

You have received a written submission as background to this delegation outlining the data compiled from three PAB surveys on this issue. Briefly:

Survey #1 - sent to 129 theatre administrations Canada-wide through the Community Cultural Impresarios - the performing arts presenters' network. The chart you received outlines parking facilities at 9 theatres that were chosen for their comparable theatre size to the proposed BPAC and comparable population to Burlington.

Survey #2 - was sent to 66 Performing Arts Organization and Individual Performer Members asking about current parking logistics and the potential impact of paid parking 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Survey #3 – was an Information Flyer about the implementation of paid evening parking sent to our 92 business owners/ managers.

After this extensive consultation with our membership and theatre administrations at other performing arts centres, **Performing Arts Burlington does not support the implementation of evening parking fees for the following reasons:**

Firstly - PAB believes, as Council does, that downtown is the best place for the PAC because downtown is a place of consequence to people living in Burlington. However, user groups, volunteers and audience who come to the BPAC should not be penalized for the Theatre's location. If paid evening parking is implemented it sets up an **inequity of access for the community when the choice is made to use leisure time to utilize the Centre**. A family who uses a local arena for their leisure pursuits does so with no parking cost. And when they go to the library, there is no need to pay a parking tax. But when they will come to a class or performance, or to volunteer at the Performing Arts Centre, they will. Tax payers should have equal access to programs and services for their chosen leisure and education. If the theatre had been build at Appleby and Dundas, we would not be having this discussion. It is discrimination based on geography and places an extra burden on access. This practice of penalizing culture-based leisure is also inconsistent with Strategic Action 1.2 as outlined in City of Burlington's Strategic Plan 2007 – 2010 Future Focus Seven that states "Ensure city services, programs and facilities are available to all members of the community."

Secondly, as indicated in our presentation in April, one of the biggest challenges community groups face as renters of the performing arts centre is moving the audience from, for example, a 100-seat space with a low ticket price to a PAC where the ticket price may average \$30 and up in order to secure enough revenue to pay the rental fee. Moving the audience from a box office where there are no surcharges, to a box office that has ticket surcharges – Capital Improvement Fund, ticket handling charge, Box Office System Surcharge – all of which will necessarily exist at the PAC. Moving the audience from a venue where the parking is free to one where payment is required adds additional

barriers to success. PAB is working with the community through our Arts Development Program **to build capacity** so that companies can offer a higher quality product and use the new Performing Arts Centre without running deficits.

The paid evening parking initiative will **impact audience development, community volunteer involvement and the long-term sustainability of the Burlington Performing Arts Centre.**

**Is it common practise to have free-to-user evening parking at Performing Arts Centres?** Yes. If I was an audience member living in Mississauga, I would not pay to park at the Mississauga Living Arts Centre. If I was a performer living in Oakville, I would not pay to park for evening performances at The Oakville Centre for the Performing Arts. If I was a volunteer living in Richmond Hill, I would not pay when working at the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts.

**Paid parking is a significant barrier to ticket sales** (which make up 40-50% of revenues, on average) **and community participation.** The BPAC will be in:

1. Competition with hotels and convention centres with free parking lots for convention and meeting rentals;
2. Competition with the high schools and churches, which also rent space to community performance groups and can offer large, free parking lots;
3. Competition for audiences with many other forms of entertainment;

Evening parking may generate \$27,000 per year from the theatre's adjacent garage, but will it reduce the annual ticket revenue of the PAC by more than it earns? Gail Anderson, Manager of Customer Services, Living Arts Centre, Mississauga comments *"It has been a successful marketing message to promote the fact we offer free parking. It is by far the most positive comment we continue to hear feedback on. Our current position is that if our City Council implements paid street parking we will continue to offer free parking at the Living Arts Centre."*

Lastly, requiring people to pay a new toll for visiting the downtown during the evenings will pose challenges to the success of current cultural activities, including the festivals and events that feature theatre, music and dance. And of course cultural activity takes place in non-cultural venues too – musicians perform in our downtown restaurants, authors read in our downtown bookstore, and film is presented at the cinema.

In closing, **Performing Arts Burlington supports the Burlington Downtown Business Association’s recommendation to fully investigate alternative sources of financing/alternative delivery models for parking.** If you extend the new tax of paid evening parking, the Theatre will not have equal access that Burlington users of arenas, recreation centres and libraries enjoy; the impact to the crucial first 5 years of audience development at the PAC will be significant; and current cultural activities will be challenged.

Respectfully submitted,

Pam Eddenden  
Executive Director  
Performing Arts Burlington