

## Performing Arts Burlington Presentation

To: Community and Corporate Services Committee - April 17, 2007

Re: City of Burlington's 10-Year Financial Parking Strategy.

Good evening Madame Chair & Members of the Committee,

My name is Pam Eddenden and I am the Executive Director of Performing Arts Burlington at 492 Locust Street. Performing Arts Burlington is a local arts service organization representing 38 theatre, music and dance companies, 90 businesses and community organizations and over 250 performers and arts patrons. PAB appreciates the opportunity to comment on the City of Burlington's 10-Year Financial Parking Strategy.

After consultation with our membership, I am here to speak against extending the hours of paid parking into the evening and in support of the continuation of free-to-user parking in the evenings.

It is clear that requiring people to pay a new toll for visiting the downtown during the evenings will pose challenges to the success of current cultural activities (such as the Burlington Jazz and Blues Festival, Driftwood Theatre's Shakespeare in the Park) and the future success of the Performing Arts Centre (PAC). 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. I have no doubt that my business colleagues will be voicing their concerns to you as well. (Or my business colleagues have voiced their concerns this evening as well)

Performing Arts Burlington knows the challenges of attracting audiences first hand. As part of its programming, PAB hosts development workshops for performers and performing arts organizations. We held a 2-day workshop last year, called Changing Spaces, where groups had an opportunity to learn more about how to best position themselves to succeed in a professional venue such as the BPAC. One of the biggest challenges groups face as renters of a 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. Moving the audience from a box office where there are no surcharges, to a box office that has ticket surcharges – CIF (Capital Improvement Fund), ticket handling charge, Box Office System Surcharge – all of which will exist at the PAC. Moving the audience from a venue where the parking is free to one where payment is required adds new barriers to success.

Some might say the audience will come to the PAC because we have a new, state of the art facility and interesting programming. More likely, attendance will have to be built.

As an audience patron, the more hurdles I have to jump through, the less likely I am to come downtown, to come to arts & cultural activities and come to the business that are also offering cultural activities.

It's not enough that customers be satisfied – satisfied customers are still open to the competition. Commitment and loyalty are needed to ensure repeat customers. For the downtown to turn its visitors into habitual visitors, their expectations must be regularly exceeded. Only then will the core become truly economically strong. Continued investment in the downtown on the City's part, in the form of free-to-user parking in the evenings, is both essential and a strong sign of your commitment. Charging visitors to park downtown between 6:00 and 9:00 is inconsistent with Council's strategy to build a vibrant downtown business core- the walkable downtown that you wanted when work on downtown began many years ago.

Look to the neighbouring municipalities that Burlington's Downtown competes with – for residents, for tourists, for shoppers. Look to the east and you will find Oakville's model. The Oakville Performing Arts Centre operates 267 nights a year with 2 adjacent surface lots and meters that are free as of 5 pm. Look to Oakville with its vibrant, economically strong downtown and where parking on all surface lots and meters is free as of 6 pm. Now look west to Hamilton with a Downtown core that is not vibrant and where one must pay to park in the evenings. Hamilton Place, Art Gallery of Hamilton, the Convention Centre and Library all face downtown paid parking as an ongoing challenge and a proven deterrent to visitors. Which model do you prefer for Burlington?

There have been years of work to develop the downtown as an attraction and some success has been achieved but it would be easy to lose it with the wrong strategic decisions. Please do not put up barriers. I urge you to join Performing Arts Burlington in opposing paid parking in the evening.

We look forward to working collaboratively with the City, downtown businesses, Tourism Burlington and the Downtown Business Association to create economic strength and cultural vibrancy.

Respectfully submitted,

Pam Eddenden  
Executive Director  
Performing Arts Burlington