

Performing Arts Burlington

Presentation to Future Focus Team Members, May 17/2007

Thank you for the opportunity for input into the development of the new strategic plan for Burlington. As the relatively new kid on the block, we hope you will find our input valuable. We look forward to working with the city and its partners for the continuing successful and cohesive growth of our community.

Performing Arts Burlington (PAB) is an arts service organization representing and serving the performing arts community. We provide opportunities for Burlington citizens to participate in and explore theatre, music, dance, film and multi-media. How do we do this? Through programming and partnerships, PAB is a valued and knowledgeable arts resource and referral service, promoting cultural programs and activities; hosting capacity building workshops and supporting the development and successful operation of Burlington's Performing Arts Centre project.

In the beginning, PAB's focus was to harmonize the many disparate voices within the City regarding the need for community performing space. PAB articulated the needs of the community and coordinated the necessary grassroots support for a performing arts centre. The city is moving forward with the PAC, the largest capital project the city has ever had. We applaud this initiative and support you. PAB continues to show leadership and acts in an advisory consulting capacity with respect to the design and equipping of the Performing Arts Centre through our Performing Arts Centre Advisory Committee. The Committee has recently provided city staff with a detailed report with respect to the Architectural RFP Recommendations. The Committee consists of members who hold staff positions at performing arts centres in other communities and professionals who have experience working on the build of facilities such Theatre Aquarius, the Rose Theatre and Toronto's new opera house. We are pleased to be able to provide this level of support to the Performing Arts Centre project, as we undertake a range of other community-building initiatives which I will detail a bit later on.

You have asked us to talk about top priorities for Council, and to indicate what is required for Burlington to become the best city in Canada. It will be no surprise to you to hear that we consider culture to be a key element in Burlington's successful growth and development. You yourselves have recognized this in last year's adoption of a 10-Year Cultural Strategy for the City of Burlington, which envisions increased cultural vibrancy for Burlington, and sets out goals for the achievement of that vision. In addition, on page 22, under the goal statement of "vibrant" the City's Future Focus 6 states, and I quote, "Burlington will enhance its arts and cultural opportunities and experiences . . . and will be known for its excellent visual and performing arts". We look to you to renew and strengthen this commitment in the new strategic plan.

Increased cultural vibrancy will transform Burlington from one of the best cities in Canada to the best city in Canada. How?

By providing the citizens of Burlington with better access to cultural resources and the opportunities for personal development. Arts and cultural initiatives that encourage public learning for all ages also encourage life-long learning and subsequent quality of life.

By creating positive economic impact resulting from additional capacity to attract creative and innovative people and businesses to Burlington. Studies show that creative industries such as those in Burlington, attract creative people, who continue to look for interests during their non-working hours that stimulate their creativity.

By strengthening our cultural sector, so that Burlington becomes known outside its own borders as a centre for diverse and excellent cultural activities, increasing tourism, economic growth and awareness of Burlington's business and personal opportunities

By fostering a stronger sense of community, healthy lifestyles, increasing quality of life, and enhancing community pride and identity

75% of Canadians believe that the arts are important to their quality of life. A recent IPSO Reed study found 83% of Burlington residents considered themselves generally supportive of the arts, while 27% considered themselves very supportive. Burlington is rich in cultural resources with 519 businesses, associations, groups, and individuals with a direct connection to culture. There are 292 businesses in Burlington that are directly involved in aspects of culture, including graphic design and marketing firms, talent agencies, web and television content producers, publishers and scenic design companies. Add to this the number of residents who currently spend their cultural dollars and time in other communities who can be encouraged to invest in their own community.

Performing Arts Burlington strives to foster the development of this dynamic cultural environment. Our consultations with performing arts groups and individual performers over the last three years clearly identified their struggle to build strong administrations, both artistic and managerial, that allow sustainability and growth. As a result, PAB's programs and initiatives have been designed to help groups and artists encourage audience growth, improve performing practices, broaden skills and expertise and to strengthen the network of local cultural contributors. It is absolutely essential that PAB continues its role as a source of professional expertise.

PAB also develops partnership opportunities between business and performing arts. In our upcoming *Downtown Dining* event, we are partnering with 20 restaurants and employing many musicians, yes these musicians will be paid, which will bring over 600 people to the downtown core on a Sunday afternoon. PAB also increases the profile of the arts and its members. On January 25th of next year, we are producing a local performance event, entitled French Quarter Festival, at Royal Botanical Gardens, staging a minimum of 8 musical acts on three stages. We continue to explore opportunities to partner on a range of cultural activities.

Performing Arts Burlington, as an arts network, is the most comprehensive resource for local arts information in the City of Burlington. We collect and display information on the arts, performers and arts & culture events; we provide user friendly access to information; we serve as a resource and referral service. We promote members' activities through a number of initiatives and partnerships including:

Weekly e-mail newsletter with over 600 recipients and growing weekly

Burlington on Stage Arts and Entertainment newsletter– a quarterly publication of members' events, performances, workshops, meetings and festivals with a distribution of just over 1,000 copies.

PAB website event listings, links, upcoming events, and performer contact information

Arts Update of performances and events on WAVE 94.7 FM radio and monthly in SNAP Burlington

Display centre for member information at our office located on Locust Street

Distribution of members' flyers in our mailings referrals to the general public and other organizations through the Members' Directory

We have been instrumental in fostering, developing, supporting and championing a vibrant, dynamic performing arts community in the City of Burlington and beyond. Together, PAB and the City of Burlington have made the Performing Arts Centre an achievable goal. Our Board, as part of our strategic planning process, is committed to broadening the scope of Performing Arts Burlington to include partners in arts and culture – visual arts, literary arts, media arts – a new Arts Burlington Network. As the Cultural Strategy indicates, the cultural community currently lacks coordinated, strategic leadership that is driven by the cultural community and represents all of its many facets. Our belief is that a well-led and cohesive cultural community, in partnership with the City of Burlington, can realize the scope of the Cultural Strategy and enhance Burlington's cultural vibrancy. As part of your strategic planning process, I urge you to build on the City's commitment to culture. By evolving and creating the Arts Burlington Network, we will continue our support for the City's efforts and will work with you to make Burlington a more culturally vibrant community.

Beyond that, we dare say that a successful and vibrant community as a whole is a partnership of all the interests, facets and sectors that create an inviting, stimulating, thriving and healthy environment in which to live and work. Is it a far stretch for Performing Arts Burlington, as an expanded Arts Network, to consider the possibility perhaps, of connecting the performing and visual arts, culture, heritage and tourism and the economic sector in a team Burlington approach?

A well balanced, healthy, successful Burlington depends on attention to all segments of our environment – transit and transportation, economic development, fiscal

responsibility, greenspace, air and water quality, and managed growth. We know that this Council agrees with all of these as priorities and will develop the most beneficial strategic plans to address them. We look to you to include arts and culture too. Cultural growth affects and is affected by all these pillars. It is a pillar of its own. And so in closing, let me tell you what we think are the top 5 priorities that Council should focus on over the next 4 years.

A full and focused implementation of the Cultural Strategy.

The completion of the Performing Arts Centre to a high standard of technical excellence and utility is essential.

Once built, the Performing Arts Centre must have an effective governance and management structure that strikes the right balance between entrepreneurial approaches, community engagement, and accountability.

The establishment of a coordinated leadership mechanism for the cultural community is essential. As I mentioned, PAB is currently finalizing a strategic plan that will identify our role in the Burlington arts network.

And finally, we believe that Council needs to take the lead in communicating the importance of culture in fostering a sense of community in Burlington, and transforming Burlington into the best city in Canada.

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to have input in to your strategic planning process.

Respectfully submitted,

Deb Tymstra
President, Board of Directors
Performing Arts Burlington