

Performing Arts Facilities Assessment Public Comments

1.

Form inserted: 7/13/2017 9:16:23 AM

First Name: Ann

Last Name: Teixeira

Organization: New England Philharmonic

Email: [REDACTED]

Street Address: 151 Tremont Street, #19R

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Zip: 02111

Comments: I do not see any reference to spaces for symphony orchestras, generally around 70 - 80 musicians, in the discussion of spaces for rehearsing and for performing. The large stages referenced are for dance companies, and some of those possibly can accommodate the needs of orchestras. It is important that the needs of orchestras be assessed and addressed specifically to ensure they are not overlooked in this initiative. At present, the New England Philharmonic rehearses in a church hall with atrocious acoustics and inadequate lighting for the musicians to read their scores. And the NEP performs at Tsai Performance Center at Boston University. The stage is adequate for the orchestra, but inadequate when a program includes a choral group singing with the orchestra, often Chorus pro Musica or one of the Boston Children's Chorus' sub-choirs. Further, the acoustics in the Tsai are less than ideal, the restroom facilities are entirely inadequate and inconvenient, and we are unable to host receptions that offer any alcohol, such as a glass of wine - which limits our audience and donor development opportunities.

2.

Form inserted: 7/24/2017 9:59:25 AM

First Name: Joe

Last Name: Spaulding

Organization: Boch Center

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Comments: As the Performing Arts Facility Assessment (PACA) report outlines, there are many artists and smaller arts organizations in need of space as well as larger venues with space availability, but the two are misaligned. After reviewing the report findings more closely, we feel strongly that creative investments in our “current supply” to meet the unmet demand, rather than a focus on building new performance spaces, is the most valuable short-term strategy that benefits the local arts ecosystem as a whole. At the Wang Theatre, we have ample and diverse spaces that we are eager to make available to other artists and organizations. For example, Boston Theater Company now has office space in the Wang Theatre and has used the rehearsal room for rehearsals and performances. We know that the Wang Theatre Grand Lobby and other spaces like the lower lobby and rehearsal rooms can be used for pop-up performances. We’ve even preliminarily explored using the Wang Theatre stage for black box performances and/or sectioning off part of the theatre to transform the 3,500+ seat venue into approximately 800 seats with a full size orchestra pit and stage compatible for ballet and opera during off-peak times throughout the year. The historic Shubert Theatre also offers endless possibilities. Of course, using any space requires staffing, security, and facilities maintenance and updates, and there are costs associated for any venue who opens up their doors to outside organizations. For this reason, I have been calling for the City of Boston to establish a dedicated revenue source that can help fund in part and financially support making our existing cultural spaces both affordable and accessible to smaller arts organizations and artists. This would in turn expand arts offerings within the community. We remain open to help contribute funds as well. Financial support, creative repurposing, and a shared city-wide commitment to Boston’s artistic past, present, and future are essential components to a successful and meaningful solution to our collective challenges. I urge the City to focus their efforts on establishing a dedicated revenue source that addresses some of these short-term issues as the building of new venues could take years. Many cities have found that a dedicated revenue source supporting the arts has resulted in significant economic benefits for the local economy. We absolutely want to be an involved partner in working with the City and the arts and cultural community in identifying meaningful solutions, and look forward to exploring how to leverage existing Boch Center spaces in creative new ways that benefit all.

3.

Form inserted: 7/27/2017 11:01:27 AM

First Name: Matt

Last Name: McArthur
Organization: The Record Co.
Email: [REDACTED]

Street Address: 407 Dudley St. #5
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Comments: A much anticipated report, thank you! Grateful to live in a city that is trying to solve critical cultural problems like the creative community's ability to access physical space. Two comments: 1) On the small format side of things the issue continues to be economy of scale. Small format performance spaces are rarely able to sustain standalone operations in Boston's current real estate climate. In the local for-profit community this may be best evidenced by The Middle East in Cambridge, which, in order to sustain itself has created a cluster of mixed food and entertainment uses...a "complex" under a singular operator. In the non-profit context our (The Record Co.'s) ongoing planning for small format all-ages music performance venues is suggesting that the financial model only works when the smaller performance spaces are subsidized by other co-located uses. In our case we'll likely use arts-focused co-working and other fee-for-service space amenities to help offset the losses that our small performance spaces will need to endure in perpetuity. Similar would be the concept of co-locating a number of flexible small-format performance and arts uses in a single large format development. In that scenario the operator would solicit all of the mid sized organizations as tenants and the scale of the development would allow for lower end user prices overall. One barrier to this approach is the decreasing availability of large format space in the city in general. However, in our opinion, the primary barrier to that type of development at this time is also my second comment... 2) Boston lacks experienced cultural space operators. We've got some incredible artists and programmers but we don't have a strong supply of organizations that exist explicitly for the purpose of developing and operating cultural space. As the assessment indicates, for most organizations that control their own space the operation of such space is a "necessary evil", not their core mission. We need to create fertile ground for mission-based operators and fund/encourage the formation of those operators. Relying on for-profit developers to understand and meet the needs of the cultural community through the current Ch. 91 process or similar is not sustainable without intermediate operators who speak the language of real estate developers AND community level artists/programmers and who can actually shape those agreements to the best interests of the community. Thank you again and looking forward to seeing the final assessment. -Matt McArthur and The Record Co.

Form inserted: 8/1/2017 12:06:39 PM

First Name: Jonathan

Last Name: Miller

Organization:

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Street Address: 503 Main Street, Unit 6

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Comments: As an individual who has negotiated and managed leases and licenses for rehearsal and performance spaces as both a user and provider for four decades, I applaud the TDC's thorough assessment of Boston's performing arts facilities, and deeply appreciate the recognition of the dilemma's facing both the various users and providers, as well as the overall issue of needing more. For the report study participants identified three basic criteria: appropriateness of space, price, and location. These are excellent criteria, and TDC has used them to well. However in considering solutions I believe a fourth criteria is central – time. Later in the report TDC mentions that usage patterns change in the summer, but the issues are more complex. In terms of performance in addition to the summer doldrums, performances need to cater to audiences, so only certain kinds of work will actively seek to occur between Thanksgiving and the New Year. Nobody wants to open on Easter week, and most try to avoid important openings on the Jewish High Holidays. Public School vacations in February can be an issue for some kinds of performances. To this list we add other annual events such as Patriots' Day, and in recent years, the Super Bowl, the World Series, the NBA finals, and the Stanley Cup. Not all weeks are equally valuable or even useful. For that matter, days of the week for performance are also not equal. Audiences prefer the weekends. Whereas the larger producers can use pricing and other inducements to manage a full weekly schedule, most smaller groups perform one weekend or two. The space providers typically reflect this in their rental rates. Rehearsal space presents its own temporal challenges. Almost all performances require more rehearsal than performance time, and only a handful of artists rehearse full time. Those companies that rehearse regularly five or six days a week, six or more hours a day typically have their own dedicated rehearsal spaces, that, as the study notes, are only occasionally available for other rehearsing groups. I believe the vast majority of Boston's performers hold down other jobs. Thus scheduling rehearsals challenges the stage manager or concert producer, even if they didn't have to worry about where. The pressure and competition to find evening and weekend space is enormous. Ultimately I concur that we need more rehearsal and performance spaces of various sizes, and that we need to think creatively about how to fund their operation. As we move forward, however, given the timing of most rehearsals, and the density of our city, I think we need to really think through what spaces are vacant most evenings

and convertible into reasonable rehearsal spaces. Building an independent rehearsal facility that will be empty much of the time, and oversubscribed the rest will create more problems than it solves and is quite impractical. Just as the city has begun to leverage the use of school facilities for other community activities, can performing artists fit into that mix? Can the City work with developers to build or renovate the cafeteria or lobby or other open space for a major company with a sprung floor and easily moveable tables and chairs? Should we ask the legislature to provide tax breaks for nine-to-five businesses that provide rehearsal space, and/or provide limited liability to them for allowing use of their spaces? Jonathan Miller [REDACTED]

5.

Form inserted: 8/4/2017 9:05:45 AM

First Name: David
Last Name: Friedler
Organization:
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Street Address: 65 Wachusett St., #2
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Comments: One key conclusion of the report is that there is this ongoing need: "Developing funding mechanisms that aggregate and focus existing and potential news sources of support. To effectively support the system, these funds could provide ongoing support, increasing access to spaces and helping to maintain them." It appears unrealistic to depend on foundation grants, individual philanthropy or developers to supply the ongoing revenue necessary to sustain the arts in Boston. According to the report the existing city and state funding resources are inadequate to create and maintain performance and rehearsal space. I would add that funding for the creation and display of art around the city in public spaces is would add to the city's cultural presence. In Philadelphia the city takes 1% of its tax revenue to devote exclusively to the arts. This is visible in part in sculptures and murals around the city. Boston does not have a city tax. There are other opportunities for tax revenue at this time including a tax on high sugar soft drinks which a number of cities around the country have implemented as a public health benefit. Cost shifting or reallocation of such new revenue could free up funding exclusively for the arts in Boston. I would like to see more public sector initiative and innovation in finding ways to create a revenue stream earmarked exclusively for the arts. The need for this revenue is clear from the report. The city needs to look to itself for the solution.

6.

Form inserted: 8/7/2017 10:11:34 AM

First Name: Joey

Last Name: Frangieh

Organization: Boston Theater Company

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Address Line 2: BTC at the Wang Theatre

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Zip: 02116

Comments: In 2016, two Boston-based arts organizations were united by a new work and some specific common goals: to honor and remember those lost in the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing, to celebrate the real-life heroes from that infamous day, and to reinforce that even in the direst of circumstances we will always choose love. Through the world premiere production of *Finish Line: A Documentary Play About the 2013 Boston Marathon*, Boston Theater Company--a young, fringe, grassroots non-profit --somehow found its way into the heart of one of one of the nation's leading nonprofit performing arts institutions: The Boch Center. Before this fateful partnership, when Boston Theater Company took on the project, we were simultaneously energized and overwhelmed. *Finish Line's* world premiere was set to occur in a fifty-seat conference room downtown, but the rent for this small space consumed half of our budget. Money was just one of many obstacles we encountered along the way. Despite these hurdles we were committed to our goal and forged ahead. A weight was lifted the night that I received a call from the Boch Center. They had heard about *Finish Line* and wanted to know more. What started as interest soon turned into a table read of the preliminary script, and, soon after, Boch Center's Joe Spaulding put the idea of collaboration on the table. The ensuing partnership elevated our production in a way I had never imagined. Our capacity to reach audience members soon grew from hundreds to thousands. This increased visibility led to a partnership with NBC Boston, and we were soon getting our play and message out to tens of thousands of viewers. On top of all of this, thanks to the generosity of the Boch Center, we were able to support and showcase many of Boston's finest actors, designers, and stage managers throughout the process. In fact, we set a precedent this past theatrical season for featuring more Boston-based artists in a single production than any other theatrical production to of its size. While *Finish Line* brought our two organizations together, our combined mission to create innovative work for the Boston theatre community has kept us together. After the closing of *Finish Line*, Boch Center continued to help us out by giving us an office space equipped with internet, printing and mail capabilities--all valuable resources previously unaffordable to a small

company like ours. Additionally, Boch Center lets us use their performance and rehearsal spaces when they are available. Being able to access these spaces gives us the ability to hold auditions, meetings, and workshops while saving a great deal of money. All of the money saved is reinvested in our most valuable commodity: our artists. We are proud to say that in under one year we doubled the stipends of our actors, designers, technicians, and support staff. Furthermore, we were able to expand our educational programming and reach more than 4,000 students in and around New England. We now have the resources and building blocks in place to begin workshoping another new piece, Move Your Face, a silent movement piece focused on themes of female empowerment. As physical space is the single biggest limiting factor in the growth of small to midsize companies here in Boston, the resources Boch Center provides us with strengthen and legitimize our operation by allowing us to operate as a fully functional nonprofit. If other large organizations provided half of what the Boch Center has given to BTC, the quality of the Boston based art produced and the lives of the Boston based artists producing it would improve exponentially. It is hard to believe that until very recently, Boston Theater Company was run out of a living room. We were a handful of young, passionate, artists limited in resources but fueled by an unwavering desire to stay artistically active and relevant. With Boch Center's open hearts and doors, our dreams were able to become a reality. Our ongoing partnership is living proof of the potential that lies within the Boston arts community as is. Boston Theater Company is what it is today because the Boch Center believes in supporting the Boston arts community at large. If those with resources follow suit and reach out to those with room to grow, and those with room to grow keep generating new, innovative work, there is no end in sight to what we, as a community will be able to produce.

7.

Form inserted: 8/11/2017 3:01:37 PM

First Name: Esther

Last Name: Nelson

Organization: Boston Lyric Opera

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Comments: Boston Planning & Development Agency One City Hall Square Boston, MA 02201
Re: Comment on Performing Arts Facilities Assessment Thank you for the opportunity to be part of the Cultural Facility Assessment, and the opportunity to comment on its resulting study. The

Assessment lays out key issues facing non-profit arts organizations of all sizes in Boston and recognizes the inherent misalignment of needs and resources of the environment in which we work. It's clear that solving the problems outlined in the study will require forward-thinking and creative leadership, more collaboration and flexibility within the arts community, and cooperation among the cultural, political and real estate sectors. In its Imagine Boston 2030 planning process, the City recognizes the critical importance of the Creative Economy. One of the tenets to achieving the 2030 vision is to support arts, culture, and creative life, to increase the number of creative industry jobs in Boston and to support the City's overall vitality. By solving the space problems that hamper arts organizations' abilities to grow, we can maximize the economic potential of the arts and contribute to the city's cultural vibrancy. Similarly, the Boston Creates Cultural Plan outlines goals for a sustainable arts ecosystem, to attract and retain artists, and to offer equitable resources so that all cultural institutions, old and new, have the opportunity to thrive. Boston is in an exciting period of growth and diversification. We are a city filled with respect for our past and an eagerness to shape the future. The brownstones of the Back Bay and Beacon Hill anchor Boston to its history while gleaming new towers in revitalized neighborhoods like Downtown Crossing and the Seaport District allow us to grow and create our future. The arts should be a part of this unique moment. As Boston experiences an unprecedented level of growth and new development, we should contemplate what role a 21st century performing arts space could play at this pivotal juncture. With vision and imagination – and by recognizing that the needs of tomorrow's cultural consumers cannot fully be addressed in the spaces of the past – we can build something that's a model for the country and a lasting legacy for Boston in 2030, and beyond. Like many non-profit performing arts organizations here, Boston Lyric Opera has rehearsal and performance space requirements that cannot be met in the current configuration of existing theaters and assorted cultural locations. We know that the future of our art does not lie in the creation of a "palace for opera." Instead, the performance space of the future will thrive as an efficient, sustainable, accessible, and technologically advanced public space, that is able to support the full range of opera, theater, dance, music, and the visual arts. The Facility Assessment categorized BLO's current nomadic status as putting the company at risk. But in fact, our ticket sales and overall financial standing are strong. What's at risk is the potential for a vibrant arts community. Boston is growing. Millennials are choosing to work and raise families here. Empty-nesters are flocking here. A new performing arts space – one that truly makes a statement about our city, harnesses the latest technologies and efficiencies, and responds to Boston's unprecedented growth – must be a part of our commitment to the arts and their role in our economy and vibrancy. Let's not allow Boston's future citizens to look back at this moment as a missed opportunity to take bold, visionary leadership in developing a future-focused place for the arts to grow and thrive. Sincerely, Esther Nelson Stanford Calderwood General & Artistic Director, BLO