



**BAYVIEW
OPERA HOUSE**
Ruth Williams
Memorial Theatre

September 26, 2012

Superior Court of California, County of San Francisco
Civic Center Courthouse
400 McAllister Street, Room 008
San Francisco, CA 94102
(415) 551-3605

To Whom It May Concern:

Bayview Opera House, Inc. (BVOH) appreciates this opportunity to respond to the Civil Grand Jury investigation regarding the San Francisco Arts Commission, specifically, the findings regarding the city-owned cultural centers.

Founded in 1989 to manage programs from its historic 1888 Ruth Williams Memorial Theatre, BVOH is a 501(c)(3) organization with a mission to serve as the focal point for Art and Culture in the Bayview Hunters Point community by providing accessible diverse, and high-quality arts education, cultural programs and community events in a safe environment. The values that underpin the pursuit of our mission include high standards of excellence in arts education and programming, fostering a sense of community, and cultivating relationships that are respectful, inspirational and inclusive.

Plagued by unemployment, poverty, disinvestment, contamination and few opportunities, residents in Bayview Hunters Point are confronted by one of the highest homicide rates in the Bay Area, underscoring the need for safe havens such as BVOH. Our D2D Program targets residents aged 3-19 in one of the most violent and economically challenged neighborhoods in San Francisco.

We feel that the San Francisco Arts Commission is exemplary in its support of access to art for underserved communities such as the Bayview community that we serve. The secure funding base and provision of a building is essential for what we do and provides a valuable stable home base from which to expand both funding sources and services.

With best regards,

Barbara Ockel
Executive Director

1968
San Francisco Landmark #8
2011
National Register of
Historic Places
Governor's Award for
Historic Preservation

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Bayview Opera House (BVOH) Response to the 2011-12 San Francisco Civil Grand Jury - Cultural Centers Findings:

F22: The cultural centers are a primary responsibility of the Arts Commission under the Charter.

Agree. The SFAC owns the physical buildings and are the primary funder of the cultural center, and therefore their functioning falls under the responsibility of the Arts Commission.

F23: SFAC has not given the support and maintenance of the Cultural Centers the priority the Charter requires.

Disagree. While it is true that building maintenance and upgrades have not always been what would have been ideal, the situation is continuously improving and past deficiencies not necessarily the fault of the Arts Commission. The Bayview Opera House experienced a major façade upgrade in 2007, followed by support for major interior upgrades in 2010 that were financed through a grant awarded to our organization, but that would not have been possible without intense collaboration and cooperation by the SFAC. The project culminated in the donation of a historic preservation easement to SF Architectural Heritage, a non-profit dedicated to the preservation of historic resources, in March 2011. The nomination to the National Register was paid for by a grant from the city's Historic Preservation Fund that the BVOH applied for, and Arts Commission staff actively supported our application for this funding. The exemplary cooperation between different city departments that was necessary for both the easement and the nomination to go through was made possible only through the tireless efforts of the San Francisco Arts Commission's staff and commissioners.

Furthermore, I personally witnessed an impassioned plea by Jill Manton from the SF Arts Commission to the city's Capital Commission for additional funding to maintain the cultural centers for fiscal year 2011-2012, which was rejected, except for the funding that BVOH was allocated. They then took action to work with other entities in addition to the city to successfully secure more funding for the current fiscal year. They have secured additional funding from the Public Utilities Commission for BVOH upgrades, in addition to more successful lobbying for city funds, particularly the Department on Disability.

F24: SFAC has not addressed the long-term funding, stability and safety needs of the Cultural Centers.

Disagree. The cultural centers are all run by independent non-profits that should be capable of addressing their own long-term funding needs. Most non-profits are not in the position to be provided annually with large amount of unrestricted funding as well as a free building space. While as our landlord they should watch over the safety and adequacy of their buildings and help with securing funds to address those needs, it should not be their responsibility alone. That said, the Arts Commission should be, and I believe, is planning to do more to educate their contracted non-profits in fundraising,

leadership and organizational development and set a certain standard that organizations must meet in order to maintain the privileges afforded to them.

Recommendations:

R15: SFAC hold public hearings and develop an action plan about the Cultural Centers and their short and long term funding (for programs and facility maintenance), facility, and safety needs to develop an action plan to secure the Cultural Centers.

Disagree. SFAC already has a system of committees and review procedures in place that ensure adequate review. Public hearings, more often than not, serve merely as a way for a few individuals to amplify their (mostly critical) voices and make it seem that theirs is a majority opinion. Such meetings are often combative in tone, and do not produce a constructive outcome. Furthermore, the centers needs are quite different in nature, dependent on their surrounding communities, and it is much more productive to hold local meetings where residents are likely to participate.

Bayview Opera House, Inc. (BVOH) agrees with the following SFAC statement:

“The SFAC’s CAEG monthly committee meetings provide publicly noticed meetings that follow all Sunshine requirements where all legislated reporting requirements, financial audits, Controller’s audits and California Cultural Data Project reports are reviewed on the committee level and submitted for review to the full Commission. The committee also reviews fundraising plans and facility and life safety requirements for each of the Centers. Members of the public are welcome to attend and provide public comment.

The Cultural Centers house independent not-for-profit organizations that are responsible for the day-to-day operations and programs of the building. As required in the legislation, the Centers must hold six community support board meetings. Therefore, the issues raised in this recommendation would be better addressed site by site as each neighborhood and facility has distinct constituents. In addition, it is not appropriate for the City to hold community meetings that may impact an independent not-for-profit. The SFAC strategic plan will address the creation of a long term capital plan which will include the life safety system needs of the facilities.”

R16: SFAC enter long-term leases with their Cultural Center operators.

Agree. Long-term leases would be helpful in demonstrating stability of the organization to outside funding sources. Guidelines for benchmarks that cultural centers must fulfill to qualify were sent to center directors in January 2011. These guidelines are helpful in preparing for eventual long-term leases. It seems reasonable to us that certain criteria of stability and successful operation should be met before long-term leases are awarded.