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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JUNE 17, 2021
TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:
Receipt of an Update on Torpedo Factory Art Center Vibrancy Implementation and Engagement.

ISSUE: Discussion of the Vibrancy and Sustainability Implementation and Engagement strategy for the Torpedo Factory Art Center.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council receive an update on the next steps for implementation of the Torpedo Factory Vibrancy Plan and stakeholder engagement.

BACKGROUND: On February 20, 2021, City Council received the proposed Action Plan for Vibrancy and Sustainability at Torpedo Factory Art Center (Attachment) and held a public hearing. The Action Plan included three interconnected Core Strategic Directions (CSDs) to guide the Art Center's action steps. The CSDs are:

- Re-establish the Art Center's Identity for a 21st Century Audience.
- Curate the Building, with a Focus on the First Floor, for Improved Visitor Experience and Artist/Studio

Program.

- Establish Policies and Procedures that Identify the Art Center as a High Performing Organization and Rebuild the Art Center’s Role as a Leader in the Country.

Following the public hearing, Council directed staff to develop and implement a stakeholder engagement plan. Since February, staff has been developing a strategy for implementing the Vibrancy and Sustainability Plan.

Implementing the Action Plan consists of elements in three specific areas: Ongoing Operations, Facility and Space Planning, and Exploring Opportunities for Private Partnerships. The target audiences for each area, while overlapping, include different stakeholders. The outreach and engagement strategies need to be considered independently to ensure the appropriate groups are included.

Ongoing operations consists of elements from the Action Plan such as curating the first floor, diversifying revenue, lease/sublease management, re-jurying, updating operating hours, programming, marketing, private rentals, and daily facility management. These elements will be led by Office of the Arts staff with support from other City departments.

Facility and Space Planning consists of the rooftop assessment, space study development, evaluation of the waterfront entrance, and on-going facility maintenance. These elements will be led by General Services with support from the Office of the Arts and other City departments.

Exploring opportunities for private partnerships will involve the evaluation of alternative, non-arts uses within the facility. This subject will be facilitated by the Assistant City Manager for Public Private Partnerships with support from Office of the Arts, General Services, AEDP, and other City departments.

DISCUSSION:

Outreach and Engagement

Staff in the Office of the Arts have been consulting with the artists in the Torpedo Factory to determine the most effective methods to communicate and engage with them as the Plan recommendations are implemented. Staff recently conducted a survey of current Art Center artists/leaseholders to determine preferences for receiving information and providing feedback. For receiving information, the preference noted by the leaseholders who participated in the survey is to continue with the various email newsletters from staff. Many of the respondents indicated a preference for responding to surveys as a way of collecting opinions from the artists for specific questions. Staff is continuing to use these methods regularly as a means of sharing and receiving specific forms of communication.

While the survey responses indicated slightly less interest in meetings with staff to discuss upcoming changes, surveys and newsletters alone are not sufficient methods for engaging stakeholders on topics where collaboration is more effective. Examples of such topics are hours of operations, studio hours and other operational rules and procedures. In these cases, surveys will be conducted to get a broad look at artist opinions and provide a forum for written comments to be included. Staff will then convene group meetings with artists who express interest. These meetings will provide opportunity to jointly review the survey results and comments provided and develop recommendations that can be shared back with the artists.

As outlined in the Action Plan, the process for jurying/re-jurying will be managed by staff (non-voting) through an open and transparent process throughout to ensure that the quality of art is the highest standard as reviewed through a “blind” review while equity/diversity, the artists’ ability to interact with the public, and ensuring

opportunities for artists at all stages of their career are also built into the overall process. All artists in the building will be subject to rejurying on a staggered basis (with the exception of original founding members of the Art Center who will not be subject to rejurying). In addition to providing information and convening group discussions, Staff will work closely with the artists as they are selected for rejurying to ensure they receive support through the process.

Staff believes that collaboration with the artists is important to bringing further positive change to the Art Center. Staff will facilitate these efforts to ensure that discussions are productive, and all parties are working toward the goals of the Core Strategic Directions outlined in the Action Plan.

The intent of the Action Plan is to transform the Art Center from an inward-looking space serving the tenants, to a more outward looking organization serving the broader community. To that end, in addition to engaging with current Art Center artists/leaseholders, staff will engage with the community and other stakeholders throughout the implementation of the Action Plan.

Opportunities for larger stakeholder and community engagement include in-person and virtual meetings, email newsletters, website (both City and Torpedo Factory), and outreach and engagement to City commissions (including but not limited to the Arts Commission, Archaeology Commission, Park & Recreation Commission and Waterfront Commission), civic groups, and arts organizations.

Engagement and outreach associated with the physical space in the Art Center will begin with sharing the scope of work and timelines with stakeholders as the studies are getting underway. More interactive engagement will occur after initial feasibility studies have been completed, and before recommendations for use of space are developed. In addition to the artists and tenants (include the Art League and the Office of Historic Alexandria/Archaeology), local and regional arts organizations and artists, local business and civic associations, and potential business interests. Details of these engagement efforts will be further developed as the studies are completed and opportunities are identified.

Implementation Timeline

Ongoing Operations: Staff has begun reaching out to the artists through surveys and will begin convening small group discussions regarding the operating procedures in July and August. Staff will begin communicating with the artists regarding rejurying in the fall.

Facility and Space Planning: Staff is finalizing a scope of work for the building assessments to include the feasibility of utilizing the building roof and enhancing the waterfront entrance. Preliminary recommendations are anticipated in the fall. Based on the recommendations from these assessments, additional work may be identified, and costs for potential future budgets will be identified for consideration in the FY 2023 CIP.

Exploring Public-Private Partnerships: Beginning this summer, staff will develop an RFP for consultant services to assist with financial modeling and business case development to support consideration of future private partnerships within the Art Center. These consultants are anticipated to be on board in the spring of 2022 and will use the building assessment reports and private industry outreach to develop potential business cases for consideration. These business cases may include varying options for including private partners in the Art Center, including use of the roof if feasible.

FISCAL IMPACT: The Approved CIP includes \$845,000 in FY 2022 for minor renovations to the first and third floors, a structural and feasibility assessment for use of the roof and entrance improvements, and development of a space evaluation. This funding is sufficient to fund many of the first-year implementation

elements discussed in this memo. It does not include yet the major to-be-determined funding that will be needed to upgrade existing Torpedo Factory building systems which have exceeded (or will soon exceed) expected useful life. In addition, if it is decided to make major changes to the building such as adding rooftop facilities or indoor space, the costs will be significantly higher. The nature of any public-private partnership could reduce to some degree the need for the City to fund some of the future capital outlays.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. February 20, 2021 Docket Memo regarding Action Plan for Vibrancy & Sustainability at Torpedo Factory Art Center
2. Presentation

STAFF:

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