

AMAC Meeting Minutes for Sept 9, 2020 on Zoom from 5:30-7:00 p.m.

In attendance: Carol Patterson, Kelly Lawrence, Josh Birnbaum, Chelsa Morahan, Jeff Risner, Scott Winland, Andrew Chiki, Beth Braun

Guests: Sam Witmer

I. Call to order and legislative updates: Andrew Chiki and Jeff Risner

CARES funds were received by the city. Money has to be spent on something directly related to COVID-19. Council is investigating as to whether those funds could be used for personnel. They are first earmarked for city utilities for people who can't pay. It has also been used for sanitary supplies (sanitizer, masks). If people are having financial difficulty, there's a program with HAPCAP for people who can't pay their rent (1st round) and city utilities (2nd round).

II. Minutes from Aug 12, 2020 for approval and communications: Josh Birnbaum

We had a heap of letters involving ARTS/West. Josh will include those with the minutes.

Within the ARTS/West discussion, can we add the names of the visitors who spoke, their frustration, and their offers to help? Yes, Josh will add this and resubmit for approval.

III. Guests: Sam Witmer, OU School of Music Artists of Color Fund

Ohio University School of Music has a newly formed Committee on Diversity, Civility, and Global Citizenship. Part of the mission of this Committee is to establish an OU School of Music Artists of Color Fund, with an initial fundraising goal of \$5000. They want to make fundamental and sustainable change for the music community. It could be used for: guest artists, commissioning piece of work from a black woman, purchase musical scores for library so marginalized artist repertoire would be more standard, and scholarships and financial awards for students of color.

They are thinking about a concert with pieces by composers of color — virtually. This could also be an educational opportunity to discuss historical context and could then be integrated into curriculum. Another avenue: artists of color arts festival in Athens, for other mediums as well as music.

The committee is looking to make it sustainable and a part of curriculum. Maureen Wagner at ARTS for Ohio would be a great resource. Will they be looking at intersectionality to include LGBTQ and others? Yes, absolutely. They recognize that it feels like it is the cultural moment to fight anti-blackness.

Another suggestion: get in touch with the new Vibrancy Theater (a student theater) to partner with them, that way it can span theater, dance, and fine arts.

Could there be an outside concert on the green? With social distancing?

Music program at Hocking has people wanting to work on projects. They have studios and cameras to film. Space at the Union possibly could be investigated. Sam will follow up with Scott Winland.

Professor Roger Braun in music is constantly programming music by persons of other cultures and countries and is deeply committed to this. The campus involvement center, along with the College of Fine Arts performing arts series, could be a good opportunity to provide things for people to do.

IV. Ongoing Issues and projects: Josh Birnbaum

A. ARTS/West + State Guidelines for Performance Arts

City council, administration, and AMAC have received letters from the public. Council has not discussed it formally. It is a matter of personnel and finance within administration.

As of Aug. 25th, there now is a state guideline for performances, which is something to work with. Carol has talked to the mayor about getting wi-fi up and running at ARTS/West. It would open the door for additional things to happen. CARES Act money could come into play for this to support the neighborhood and those with connection issues. City officials are working on this.

Pro Music Chamber Orchestra has been doing concerts outside and drive-in concerts and have been selling them out (Janet Chen is the executive director). They are making the most of this troubled situation. Westside of Athens would be a good location with lots of space and parking.

Finally, AMAC would like to move toward getting a 501(c)(3) for ARTS/West specifically. The mayor is supportive of the idea. We could appoint an adjunct committee of about 5 people with one AMAC member, Chelsa Morahan. The five citizens would have some kind of expertise in this area to get things moving. It would take a minimum of 6 months to get it sorted out. Friends of the Library has a similar model with its "Friends of the Library" non-profit. Toledo has done this as well and they have one of the biggest budgets in the state.

Kelee Riesbeck is talking to her dean about the legalities about her working with a 501(c)(3). The first part is getting it up and running. There shouldn't be any legal issues there. They could come about later when it involves fundraising.

We need to respond to see the facility thrive. The administration has read the

letters, and it's clear the community cares about ARTS/West as an integral part of that community. Many have offered their help and expertise. AMAC appreciates it very much and will be working actively on this endeavor.

B. Art Outside the Box: Kelly Lawrence and Ann Judy.

Consideration of using \$3,000 of AMAC funds combined with \$2,000 from Mayor's enhancement fund in order to pay the selected works.

Ann is in charge of working with the artists who were accepted. The mayor asked if AMAC would consider if we utilize the \$3000 from the canceled Athens Community Arts and Music Festival. If we agree, he will come up with the other \$2000 to pay the artists.

MOTION TO RECOMMEND THE MOVING OF FUNDS TO COMPLETE PROJECT: **PASSED**

C. Update of AMAC Policies: Chelsa Peterson Morahan

Chelsa is still working through updating AMAC policies and is about halfway through.

D. Comprehensive Plan 2040: Carol Patterson

The Athens Comprehensive Plan is In a final stage of preparation. It is still accessible online. Three recommendations that are most timely and important to AMAC:

1. An official arts calendar.
2. Funding for the public art.
3. Heritage square: uptown includes Armory, Zion Church and History Center. Armory is not making progress but in the long-term the plan is for arts usage.

Another idea: histories of communities could be exemplified through murals, sculptures, etc.

V. Announcements and other business.

A. Potential Mural for E. State Street

Buzz Call drives State street a lot and looks at the blank panels of the building in front of the community center and think that it cries out for murals. We don't know what future plans the city has for the buildings. Buzz could make some donation towards it. He liked the idea of a unity theme: Athens Unified. He didn't propose an RFP, but he thought it could be appropriate for school kids.

How to do it with kids during COVID times? Protected, separated, supervised? They could do one panel at a time so not so many people would have to be there. Possibly similar how ARTS/West was done: sketched on by an artist, then the children came and filled it in.

Could be a low-cost project and it could take a while to get up and running. Could we have an adjunct committee to investigate? Carol will talk to Buzz and the mayor to see if it's feasible to do.

MOTION TO FORM AN ADJUNCT COMMITTEE: **PASSED**

VI. Adjournment

Next meeting: Oct. 14, 2020 from 5:30-7 p.m. on Zoom

From: Berry Dilley <brrydlly@gmail.com>
Subject: ArtsWest and the Community Center
Date: September 3, 2020 at 5:50:19 PM EDT
To: amac@ci.athens.oh.us, Steve Patterson <spatterson@ci.athens.oh.us>, tmoore@ci.athens.oh.us, Chris Knisely <cknisely@athenscitycouncil.com>, Athens City Council <dwalker@ci.athens.oh.us>, sgrace@athenscitycouncil.com, Peter Kotses <pkotses@athenscitycouncil.com>, bclodfelter@athenscitycouncil.com, Arian Smedley <asmedley@athenscitycouncil.com>, jrisner@athenscitycouncil.com, Sam Crowl <scrowl@athenscitycouncil.com>, cfahl@athenscitycouncil.com
Resent-From: <amac@ci.athens.oh.us>

I don't think many of you were around when movement was afoot to build a rec center for Athens. This action was motivated by the loss of Grosvenor facilities to the community when the university built its fancy exercise facility (which wouldn't be accessible to the community as Grosvenor had been). I sat on that planning committee, representing that aspect of recreation that is more artistic and social and less athletic. And at one meeting someone said that if we changed the name from a recreation center to a community center we would get more votes when it was put on the ballot.

I spoke up and said that if the name were changed, that meant that the concept would also change. And a number of folks in the community expressed their thoughts, ideas and wishes.

The design, shown to the community in 3-D, did include an amphitheater and I don't remember what else, but it did combine aspects of exercise and artistic recreation. So the issue was voted on and approved. After the effort received approval, the design changed. Something about not having enough \$\$\$ or something. And what the city wound up with is a rec center with the ability to turn the third gym into multi-purpose rooms, much closer to the original intent - surprise, surprise. The drivers of this enterprise never really intended to make the rec center a real community center, welcoming to all, a city "living room" if you will.

I was the person in the committee representing what I conceived of as a welcoming, socially active space where there could be concerts, plays, and arts activities such as painting, ceramics, etc. as well as areas for sports and exercise. Yes, I realize that this was a big dream, but..... And there were many in the community that supported this dream. What we got was not a surprise but surely a let down. The current rec center has an industrial aesthetic, surely not warm and welcoming.

Several years later, we got ArtsWest. On the other side of town. Not a new building although over the years it has been improved very nicely. And still it isn't

a Community Center, a place where members of the community can come together, hang out, meet friends, take classes, play sports, see a play, etc. We have divided up the community into the jocks and the artistic folks. And the jocks, apparently, are getting the larger share of funding.

I am telling you all of this because of the reaction to the closing of ArtsWest. Yes, I understand it is temporary, but the GYM isn't closed. And the programming through ArtsWest can also serve the community, even during these difficult times. Especially during these times.

Do the jocks have to win and the rest of us lose???? Berry

PS: A friend reminded me of the airplane hangar that provided a performance space pre community center and was torn down with the promise that the so-called Community Center would have one, which of course it never did and never has. The acoustics in the multi-purpose rooms are ridiculous. I've attended events in these multi-purpose rooms which are not terribly pleasant spaces at best, but hardly appropriate for a wedding party or concert. In fact the acoustics are terrible.

While I'm at it, When the community center was built, a space was created for the United Seniors there. It, too, is not a warm welcoming space; in fact very few of our older citizens use that space as far as I know. I know I don't. The space United Citizens used to occupy on Fern Street wasn't ideal surely, was old and had used furniture -- but it was comfortable and really active. The older citizens of Athens do need a place to gather, not just to get lunch or advice (or use the gym), but to just gather. This is especially needed as we have lost the center of Athens (which used to have department stores, a hardware store, a men's shop and a women's shop) to the university and its students.

From: debra spangler <mamaspang@gmail.com>
Subject: Letter in support of Arts West
Date: August 24, 2020 at 5:03:47 PM EDT
To: Chris Knisely <cknisely@athenscitycouncil.com>, Debbie Walker <dwalker@ci.athens.oh.us>, sgrace@athenscitycouncil.com, Peter Kotses <pkotses@athenscitycouncil.com>, bclodfelter@athenscitycouncil.com, asmedley@athenscitycouncil.com, J Risner <jrisner@athenscitycouncil.com>, Sam Crowl <scrowl@athenscitycouncil.com>, Christine Fahl <cfahl@athenscitycouncil.com>, Steve Patterson <spatterson@ci.athens.oh.us>, Terri Moore <tmoore@ci.athens.oh.us>, carol patterson <cpatte1@columbus.rr.com>, amac@ci.athens.oh.us
Resent-From: <amac@ci.athens.oh.us>

Athens City Council, Athens Municipal Arts Commission, Mayor Patterson and Director Moore,

I am writing to express my distress at hearing that Arts West has fired its one employee, artist and arts administrator Emily Beveridge, and shut its doors just as we are moving into the fall and seeking possible safe alternatives to being together outside. Our need to connect and create grows deeper as the pandemic continues, and for our collective mental and emotional health I would hope that maintaining a versatile and vibrant space to nurture the arts would be of importance to this community.

Arts West is a treasure. Our family moved here thirteen years ago; let me tell you how centrally Arts West has featured in our lives. My children have participated in summer theater camps, monthly music clubs (featuring local musicians and an open mic

opportunity), and (reluctantly) piano recitals at Arts West. My oldest showed their first painting in an art show there at age seven, and has performed fiddle on that stage, and participated in the PRISM teen program, making art and friendships. We have attended contra dances, art shows, puppet shows, traveling music performances, theater performances (does anyone remember Emily Prince as Jiminy Cricket?). I have taken years of Bando martial arts there, and several art workshops. I have met my neighbors at West Side community meetings, and listened to political candidates at an Indivisible forum. I have sung on that stage with Calliope Feminist Choir since 2014, and led my first concert there as director in 2019. I have led the Athens Justice Choir at fundraisers in that space.

My favorite years at Arts West, though, were the ones where my husband and I led 12 children in a weekly “Athens Homeschool Marching Choir”. As community members, we were welcome to rent the space to hold a class, and for several years we met with other homeschooling families and marched, sang, danced, and played on that stage.

To the present: I understand that budgets are shrinking in this economy. I understand that cuts

need to be made. I would like to suggest that this time calls for a creativity and networking ability that an arts administrator and artist such as Emily Beveridge is well-suited for. As the director of a choir that has had to go online or die, I have had to do some of this reimagining for our community. It does not look the same, but we have maintained a connection where creativity is alive. I have every reason to believe that Emily and Arts West would be able to do the same. Emily has years of relationships that she has built in her position, and this is the time when the creative collective is relying on those ties to help us stay afloat. The Arts West space itself would be a great option for recording performances or classes for the community. Hosting online material, while new for some of us, is proving to be a tangible way to stay connected, and individual artists can greatly benefit from the representation and support of an art center. The upstairs sanctuary space offers an opportunity for small, safe, and well-distanced activities. Arts West is a place to connect, online and in person, and we need that more now than ever, to tend to our community's mental, emotional and physical well-being.

I understand that this closing of Arts West is proposed as a temporary measure, but it alarms me that the one employee who has been living and breathing Arts

West for years will not be involved in any budgetary decisions or program planning during this uncertain time. Emily maintains relationships with dozens of artists and arts organizations, and those relationships are a part of the strength of this community hub.

On a 5-week road trip across the country last summer, our family passed through many small towns, and nowhere was I able to find an art center that was accessible to the public and as vitally used as Arts West. Gyms, yes. Dance studios, maybe. Rarely a theater. Where else can you emerge from a bando class, wind your way past a life drawing class, hearing the bells from the belly-dancing class, and make your way upstairs to a poetry reading?

Please reconsider the plans you have made concerning this beloved physical and virtual space and only source of arts programming in our community, and reinstate Emily Beveridge as its steward.

In gratitude,

Debra Spangler

From: Heather Cantino <heather.cantino@gmail.com>
Subject: More re Arts West and EB layoff
Date: August 24, 2020 at 4:34:49 PM EDT
To: Chris Knisely <cknisely@athenscitycouncil.com>, Debbie Walker <dwalker@ci.athens.oh.us>, Sarah Grace <sgrace@athenscitycouncil.com>, Peter Kotses <pkotses@athenscitycouncil.com>, Beth Clodfelter <bclodfelter@athenscitycouncil.com>, asmedley@athenscitycouncil.com, Jeff Risner <jrisner@athenscitycouncil.com>, Sam Crowl <scrowl@athenscitycouncil.com>, Chris Fahl <cfahl@athenscitycouncil.com>, Steve Patterson <spatterson@ci.athens.oh.us>, Terry Moore <tmoore@ci.athens.oh.us>, amac@ci.athens.oh.us
Resent-From: <amac@ci.athens.oh.us>

Dear City leaders,

I wrote to some of you last week when I first learned about the Arts West closure and temporary layoff of Emily Beveridge. I have since learned more about the situation and watched the AMAC and Rec Advisory Board meetings. I now reach out to all of you (again), appealing for creative problem-solving that will restore the only arts staff person to her job during this crucial fall period. It is also crucial that City leaders correct some misinformation being shared in your meetings.

I'd like to comment on misleading statements made by some members of the two bodies referenced above. Alan Swank, along with at least two others, suggested in these meetings that the upstairs at Arts West must be closed because it is "a performance space," as if that's its only use! In fact, the upstairs is a large versatile space that would lend itself well to socially distanced arts activities. If the Rec Center can be open for its heavy breathing activities, why can't Arts West be open under similar restrictions for social distancing for activities largely of lighter exertion? In addition to classes, socially distanced meetings and even performances adapted to Covid era restrictions, why can't Arts West continue to host art exhibits, with Covid adaptations similar to the Dairy Barn's reservation system, as well?

I also take issue with the prioritization of rec activities to be maintained but the characterization of "learning activities" as the essential use of Arts West for the fall and arts activities there this fall as of no importance (Terry Moore statement). I would argue that arts programming at Arts West during Covid is essential, especially in the fall months as outdoor spaces become less adequate, and social isolation becomes more acute. Hobbling arts programming during Covid will deprive the community of crucial physical, mental, emotional, and social health resources, which are no less important than "learning activities" or rec activities being maintained at the Community Center.

It is also crucial that Emily Beveridge be able to staff the space and be part of fall and 2021 planning and budgeting to take place in November, during her furlough

as it stands now. There is no way that Arts West can begin 2021 on a strong footing if its program specialist has been on furlough through the crucial months leading up to the new year.

I'm sure that there is a lot of hidden support in the community that only needs to be tapped to find *solutions and funding support* with donations for Arts West (through the membership program or other means). I am also sure that many people who would donate are not even aware yet of this dire situation or certainly its details (which took me two tedious hours to uncover, complete with barking dogs and other distracting noises from unmuted AMAC members). I also implore the City to reach out, using all channels available, to alert and activate the wider community, including regular users of Arts West, Arts West members (I have received nothing from the City about this situation, though the decision was made almost a month ago), and all community arts organizations (Calliope Feminist Choir, an annual user of Arts West from 2007 until the pandemic had also not received notice).

Finally, I include my original letter, which did not go out to quite all of you last week:

I am writing as an individual user of Arts West. I am very concerned about the recently announced decisions to lay off Emily Beveridge and to close Arts West for the rest of the year. This will be a blow to many people, few of whom know about the situation at this point, I imagine. It will also be a huge blot on Athens' claim to being a forward-thinking, inclusive, and vibrant community.

Athens must do better! It must maintain some level of staffing, programming, and community access to Arts West during the pandemic. Arts West programming is needed more than ever in these hard and confusing times. Having been painstakingly nurtured to become a vibrant arts center—after years of no arts center at all and then a minimal budget for much of its existence—Arts West is the core of Athens for many of us. As a patron, I have appreciated the wide diversity of activities and participants. As a member of Calliope Feminist Choir, I have treasured performing on the ArtsWest stage each year (pre-Covid) since 2007 and working with Arts West staff, always supportive, engaged, and professional. Arts West has only recently become a beautiful as well as enriching and welcoming venue. Its spaciousness and the range and number of spaces make it perfectly suited to pandemic-era adaptation, since social distancing is possible in so many of its spaces (with occupancy limits modified accordingly).

This breaking of the City's commitment to the arts and Arts West is shocking, especially after the many years of arts advocates' struggles to get a venue and adequate funding to lift up the arts, too long shortchanged by the City. Athens' current Comprehensive Plan and the 2012 Athens County Arts and Economic Impact report, as well as the 2040 Athens City Comprehensive Plan draft, all

provide extensive documentation on the importance of the arts to our City and county. Athens needs to do better than this for all of us

I hope this decision will be reversed and effective problem-solving with all interested parties be implemented speedily.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this alarming situation.

Heather Cantino

33 Cable Lane, Athens

heather.cantino@gmail.com

From: Peggy Gish <peggygish@gmail.com>
Subject: Arts West staffing and refunding
Date: September 1, 2020 at 6:49:54 PM EDT
To: amac@ci.athens.oh.us
Resent-From: <amac@ci.athens.oh.us>

Dear members of AMAC,

I was dismayed when I learned that Emily Beveridge was laid off and would not be able to maintain the many programs that are important for our community. Emily is the only Arts program specialist, and eliminating her position would deprive the community of important mental, physical, emotional, and social resources and activities that are especially important during this time of Covid.

Creative programs and activities planned for Arts West include starting a Southeast Ohio musical lending library, offering internet "Hot Spot" space, a virtual ceramics class (a retail value \$8000 kiln equipment package was in the process of being secured via donation), Pleinair painting (outdoor landscape painting classes), PEA Pods (Physical Activity Art Pods) in partnership with Children & Families Program Specialist at the Community Center, PRISM LBGTQ+ Youth Arts Program, remote recordings of musical artists for WOUB, Vibrance Theater Group livestream, Lost Flamingo livestream, Monthly gallery shows (Hocking College Art Department and OU Printmaking were confirmed), Plant Swap Benefit (revenue opportunity), "Silver Lining Moments," and "Spoken and Heard." Wow! that's a lot that the community would lose.

And even if she were reinstated in January, she would have lost the period of time in the fall needed for the 2021 planning and budgeting, which happens in November. This

is why it is why a continuous employment is important.

I understand that the spaces at Arts West are versatile, and would allow for small and social distanced groups to be a part of programs there.

I urge you to relook at the decision, and do what you can to see that Emily Beveridge is reinstated to her position as program specialist, and that it be done now, to maintain continuity and so she can be part of the planning and budgeting for the coming year.

Sincerely,
Peggy Gish
Athens, OH

From: plock@aol.com
Subject: closing of Arts West
Date: September 3, 2020 at 3:46:17 PM EDT
To: "amac@ci.athens.oh.us" <amac@ci.athens.oh.us>
Resent-From: <amac@ci.athens.oh.us>
Reply-To: plock@aol.com

To whomever it may concern:

I am alarmed by the closing of Arts West in Athens, Ohio, because arts programming and access to Arts West is terribly important during Covid - especially in the fall months, as outdoor spaces become less adequate and social isolation becomes more acute.

And it is important that Emily Beveridge be able to staff the space, since she was the only staffperson left after earlier Covid layoffs, and she needs to be part of fall amnd 20-21 planning and 2021 budgeting, which happens in November.

Arts West spaces are very versatile, and the upstairs space especially lends itself to social distancing (at least three Athens Municipal Arts Commissioners/Arts Parks and Rec advisory board members claimed in their August meetings that the upstairs space is just a performance space and Alan Swank made the analogy to Fur Peace canceling its fall performances as a rationale for closing Arts West!)

It is hobbling arts programming by laying off the only Arts program specialist during Covid will deprive the community of crucial physical, mental, emotional, and social health resources, which are no less important than the "learning activities" [sic] Terri Moore prioritizes for implementation at Arts West in the fall (without Emily of course), as if arts are not learning activities and are less critical to our community during Covid.

From: "S. Stark" <blueheronhummer@gmail.com>

Subject: Official comment: Arts West is essential infrastructure, esp during COVID

Date: September 2, 2020 at 1:12:39 PM EDT

To: <amac@ci.athens.oh.us>, <spatterson@ci.athens.oh.us>, <tmoore@ci.athens.oh.us>, <cknisely@athenscitycouncil.com>, <dwalker@ci.athens.oh.us>, <sgrace@athenscitycouncil.com>, <pkotses@athenscitycouncil.com>, <bclodfelter@athenscitycouncil.com>, <asmedley@athenscitycouncil.com>, <jrisner@athenscitycouncil.com>

Resent-From: <amac@ci.athens.oh.us>

Good day,

I am writing to you to express my dismay at the closing of Arts West during this pandemic. I am a health care worker, and have become sensitized to the psychological and emotional distress that so many are experiencing now, due to their feeling isolated and afraid.

If our intention is truly to support the health and safety of our populace, supporting the mental and emotional well-being of people is paramount. As one who has conducted research into immunity and the factors that support robust health in humans, I can tell you that mental-emotional well-being is the first guard of our immune system; and that chronic fear is deadly.

Instead of closing down and cutting off avenues of creativity and uplifting experiences, for both children and adults of all ages, an intelligent policy would design systems for collaborative, creative, fun, inspiring engagement—within the parameters of reasonable caution. And trying to pretend that a screen is a viable substitute for

physical proximity, although in nearly ubiquitous vogue currently, is foolish.

I know we are in a time of uncertainty and feeling blind about the best ways to navigate this pandemic. I believe that the isolation, chronic fear and its stress, and lack of freedom of mobility and self-determination, are inherently more dangerous than the virus. I am continuing to monitor the current research of medical professionals, as well as considering past epidemics. Among those I respect, there is the question: If this is our best plan, what will happen when the next significant virus appears? (As it will.) Would it not be more prudent to be putting our attention and resources into improving the overall health of the population, rather than recommending simply masks and isolation; and trying to continue a lifestyle in which cancer is killing over 1500 a day in the US?

Rather than launching into that long discussion, I will close by saying that it is critical to the quality of life of our locale that proven places of healthy creativity, renewal, inspiration, and community immersion be supported. It is critical to the healthy and balanced development of children; it is critical to the sense of purpose and belonging of our community members.

The upper floor of Arts West has proven itself as a multi-use space that is large enough to accommodate physical distancing. It is an invaluable space at this time.

Emily Beveridge has proven herself as the best steward and director of the space. She needs to be part of fall and 2021 planning and 2021 budgeting.

In summary, hobbling arts programming by laying off the only Arts program specialist during COVID deprives our community of crucial physical, mental, emotional and social health resources. Such activities are certainly no less important than the "learning activities" that Terri Moore prioritizes for implementation at Arts West in the fall. In fact, in the long term health and quality of life of our community, they are more important.

Please support the reopening of Arts West for arts related use, and re-employ Emily Beveridge as its program specialist.

Thank you for your considerate attention. I hope to hear some good news from you.

Sincerely,

Shelley Stark

From: Susan Righi <sprighi@gmail.com>
Subject: Arts West
Date: September 3, 2020 at 8:33:21 PM EDT
To: amac@ci.athens.oh.us, Steve Patterson <spatterson@ci.athens.oh.us>, Terri Moore <tmoore@ci.athens.oh.us>, Chris Knisely <cknisely@athenscitycouncil.com>
Resent-From: <amac@ci.athens.oh.us>

Greetings all,

In this difficult time of pandemic, economic crisis, social unrest (you might even say collapse of social order), the importance of the arts as an expression of our humanity can't be stressed enough. It is a way to give voice to our hopes, fears, aspirations, and care for each other.

I understand that the decision has been made to temporarily close Arts West and lay off it's only remaining employee, the program specialist. I strongly object to this decision. I've been a patron and often a member (some years I've forgotten to re-up) of Arts West since it opened and have deeply appreciated the art and program offerings there.

The space at Arts West is amenable to being able to provide the physical distancing people need to stay safe during Covid, especially in the fall months, as outdoor spaces become less adequate, and social isolation becomes more acute.

Emily, the Program Specialist, should retain her full time position so she can develop increased online content and offerings and work on developing safe offerings for indoor space (obviously with masks and distance) for the cold months.

I trust you will reverse the hasty and ill-advised decision made by Parks and Recreation (as I understand it) and keep Arts West operational during the pandemic. The people of the city and the area depend on it!

Thank you.
Susan Righi
New Marshfield