

BOPA'S COMMITMENT TO THE ARTS COMMUNITY

TO OUR PARTNERS & STAKEHOLDERS:

As an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and the designated arts council for the City of Baltimore, the Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts (BOPA) remains deeply committed to the artists, cultural institutions, and creative community of Baltimore. Despite the City's decision to terminate its contract with us, BOPA's mission to support and elevate the arts will continue to guide our work. We want to be transparent with you, our valued stakeholders, about the steps we have taken to ensure the organization's stability and future success. We also want to be clear about the concern we hold for how the decision to terminate the contract, without a clear plan of how to manage a 90-day transition, places our organization and the arts community at extreme risk.

HOW WE GOT HERE

In March 2024, the organization's new CEO and interim board inclusive of representatives from the Mayor's Office was charged with identifying and understanding the existing challenges as well as creating a strategic path forward to ensure the stability and sustainability of BOPA. As part of that, the organization hired an outside accounting firm to review the financials dating back to 2019. We have always maintained transparency with the City. Throughout that process, both the board, which includes designees of the Mayor's Office, and the organization's designated City representative were involved in discussions regarding our cash position and long-term financial management strategy. And when preliminary financial details were disclosed to the press absent full context, leading to misinformation and confusion for many, we expanded those conversations to include additional senior members of the Mayor's administration.

Members of our Executive Committee met with the Mayor's Office and left with the understanding that the City no longer desired to continue its relationship with BOPA in its current form, largely due to public discussions surrounding our finances. We acknowledged that some elements of the City contract placed a strain on stabilizing the organization and we agreed a transition of services would be necessary. However, we explained that our cash position could be resolved if the City released payments aligned with the timing of our expenses, noting that the current quarterly payment structure was a contributing factor. We proceeded to work in good faith that a collaborative outcome might be achieved.

WEDNESDAY'S EVENTS

At Wednesday's board meeting, we presented a balanced cash flow through the end of the contract term, reflecting a proper payment cycle for services and resolving past due receipts. We expected a smooth transition of responsibilities and held out optimism of engaging in negotiations around what a new relationship with the City might look like.

We are concerned by the timing of the City’s notification just hours after our board approved a responsible path forward, a path that was approved by the Mayor’s representatives on our board. This reduces what could have been a productive and responsible 8-month transition to 90-days – without any indication of a plan on how to maintain the services provided by BOPA – places the arts community at significant risk and impacts the Interim Board’s ability to support a healthy transition in their volunteer capacity. This is concerning for our arts ecosystem.

THE FUTURE & OUR COMMITMENT

That said, we believe there remains a vital need for an independent arts organization, separate from City Hall, that can champion Baltimore’s creative community. We are well-positioned to play that role, and we are dedicated to ensuring that Baltimore’s arts ecosystem thrives with the support of an organization focused solely on advancing arts and culture in the city.

Over the last several months, we have identified new opportunities for growth and sustainability. We are optimistic about the road ahead and are committed to reimagining how we best serve the arts community moving forward.

We have advocated for our artists and stakeholders, and continue to do so, ensuring that Baltimore remains a thriving hub for creativity and cultural expression. We are grateful for your continued support and partnership as we work together to secure a bright future for the arts in Baltimore.

We share your concerns about the absence of a clear plan accompanying the City’s letter of termination and your uncertainty around the future of our current arts programming, facilities, exhibitions, and potential loss of necessary institutional knowledge. We also share in your concerns around the future of the State’s arts council designation. As we continue to advocate for the arts, we remain hopeful that an independent arts organization can safeguard the future of Baltimore’s cultural landscape.

In creativity,
Interim Board Executive Committee
Andrew Chaveas
Lady Brion
Angela Wells-Sims
April Lewis