

From: [Burns, Anne M](#)
To: [Schlepp, Victoria](#)
Cc: [Hubbard, Haley](#)
Subject: FW: a proposal re. the Harold Way Plaza project
Date: Thursday, April 16, 2015 11:58:43 AM
Attachments: [ymtc_logo_150.png](#)
[BERKELEY PLAZA PROPOSAL_final8.PDF](#)

From: Jennifer Boesing [mailto:jenniferboesing@gmail.com]
Sent: Monday, April 13, 2015 11:56 AM
To: Burns, Anne M
Subject: a proposal re. the Harold Way Plaza project

Dear Design Review Board Members-

Attached please find a proposal that the directors of several Berkeley arts organizations made to the City Council on the subject of Community Benefits, specifically addressed to the Harold Way project. As the ED of YMTC, I respectfully submit this proposal for your consideration and request that the Design Review Board ask the Harold Way developer to seriously consider our proposal by doing a plan that shows how the currently proposed Landmark Theater space would physically accommodate such a proposal whether now or in the future. The community benefit discussion is still being had by the Zoning Adjustments Board and City Council. Approving the proposed design of the exclusively Landmark Theater Plan now would shut down other options from discussion. If the Landmark Theater concept should falter due to market forces or other reasons, then the space in the Harold Way building which is now designed as exclusive space for Landmark Cinemas needs to have a back-up plan that will work now and in the future.

If our plan is not put forth as a community benefit from the Harold Way Project, we respectfully request that the need for a theater of this size and rough dimensions outline in our attached proposal should be considered by the City as a potential community benefit from downtown development. We want to point out that it is extremely difficult to locate a code-compliant 400 seat fully equipped live performance house, which is ideally located in a downtown. We have toured every available theater space in Berkeley. We formerly performed in the Julia Morgan Theater which is now the exclusive home of Berkeley Playhouse and no longer available to community arts groups. We have toured older Berkeley movie houses and tried and were unsuccessful at converting the Oaks theater. We met with the UC Theater which cannot accommodate us because they only book shows by the night while we book shows for a few weeks a time as part of a season. We book theaters as we can in Oakland and El Cerrito for our shows now who do not make us a priority. YMTC currently has no theater for our fall season show. West Edge Opera recently leased the atrium in the Ed Roberts Campus because they could not rent a theater space, and is spending their next season entirely in Oakland, in site-specific, non-traditional, venues. We need help from our civic leaders if we are to continue to produce high quality shows with the support of our Berkeley based audiences, families, musicians, performances, and funders. This is why we have focused on the Harold Way opportunity as it seems the best, most realistic opportunity for a live performance house for the next many years.

We understand the plans for Harold Way to show a nearly 25,000 square foot fully completed

multi-plex cinema space with completed projection, sound, restaurant, restroom, lighting, heating, air conditioning, seating, and assembly occupancy construction standards. Our proposal suggests an alternative use of ½ of this space.

We suggest that the Design Review Board ask the developer to show a design where 12,000 square feet be designed as a multi-purpose community theater space. We spoke with local architect Donn Logan, who worked with us to redesign the Oaks Theater as a multi-use performance space, and he thought that the footprint of the Harold Way building should comfortably house a 12,000 square foot 400 seat community arts/performance space that can accommodate orchestras, dance, musical theater and a variety of arts and other events. We believe that the Zoning Adjustments Board and City Council should see this plan and understand that there can be a back-up plan to the Landmark Theater space that will fit in the Harold Way building whether it is ultimately required of Harold Way or not.

The 12,000 square foot multi-purpose theater space should be dedicated to the City day one. The City would own it as a condominium within the larger building and decide who gets to operate in it. The City could lease it to cinemas (even to Landmark Cinemas) or to a non-profit locally based operator. Then the City controls now and forever who gets to operate in this brand new facility.

Our particular proposed use of this 12,000 multi-purpose theater space is detailed in the attached proposal. Whether the City ultimately moves ahead with our proposal or something else, the design of the building should leave open alternatives for the consideration of the city and the community. Ensuring that our proposal or something like it will physically fit in the building is something that you can require at the Design Review Board so that if a theater space of some kind is the major community benefit from the Harold Way project, that facility can adapt to changes in tenants and markets and the times so that it can always benefit the community and can never be taken away. Therefore, we respectfully ask that the Design Review Board require the developer to analyze an alternative to the exclusive 25,000 square foot Landmark Theater space use of the Harold Way building by preparing a plan for a 12,000 square foot multi-use theater designed to accommodate movies and live performances with 400 seats, stage, lighting, sound, and all the amenities proposed for Landmark Cinemas in a smaller footprint. This space would be designed to be ultimately owned by the City as a condominium. Analyzing this opportunity now will give the community the alternative to consider such a proposal either with the project approval, or as a back-up plan in the future if Landmark Cinemas should for some reason be unable to operate the cinema as desired so that the Berkeley community will have a community benefit from this development that is not linked to the success or failure of a single specific tenant.

Thanks-you for your consideration.

-Jennifer Boesing



Jennifer Boesing
Producing Artistic Director
510-409-1197
jennifer@ymtcberkeley.org

PROPOSAL FOR A PERFORMING ARTS CENTER IN HAROLD WAY PLAZA

A performing arts center in the heart of the downtown district would thrive and create a lasting gift to the people of Berkeley. As the Artistic Directors of deep-rooted and thriving Berkeley based performing arts companies, we know how much our community loves to both go to and be in live performances. We represent many disciplines, including theater, music and dance. We serve audiences from all of the Bay Area, we educate young people, and we bring thousands of people to our performances every year. But as much as our community loves what we do, we do not have an adequate, affordable space in Berkeley for our resident companies to perform.

Our proposal is for the construction of a 400 seat performing arts center on the lower floor of the Harold Way project. In addition to the theater, there would be space for a several state of the art movie theaters, which could be run by Landmark films, or another independent operator. The City would own the performing arts venue and lease it to a non-profit, which would be responsible for the running of the performing arts venue. There would be two separate but compatible entities within the space, one for running the movie theaters and one for running the performing arts venue. The two would share restrooms and lobby space but would otherwise be independent operators.

A common organizational model for performing arts venues such as we are proposing is for a consortium of representatives from each of the anchor tenant arts organizations to form a non-profit to operate the venue. The board of this non-profit would hire a small staff who would be responsible for day-to-day operations, including booking and running the live theater venue.

The anchor tenants would be the Resident Companies of the center— companies that have longer term rental periods and would be committed to a minimum number of weeks every year. These groups are professionally managed, are fiscally stable and have been in the community for between ten and thirty years. These groups all routinely sign leases to rent space at competitive rates for performance spaces outside of Berkeley, and between those currently committed, would fill up close to half the calendar year.

The groups expressing interest in Anchor Tenancy include:

- Youth Musical Theater Company
- West Edge Opera
- Berkeley Ballet

The groups who have expressed interest in shorter-term rentals include:

- Destiny Arts
- Young People's Symphony Orchestra
- Shawl-Anderson Dance Center
- Berkeley Community Chorus and Orchestra
- Prometheus Orchestra
- Danse Lumiere
- Awesöme Orchestra Collective
- Lyz Luke, Undercover Presents

All of these groups produce sell-out shows to thousands of theater goers throughout the year, draw a captive audience that represent the loyal followers of the company as well as family, classmates, grandparents, and neighbors of the performers who come from a wide range of Berkeley and Bay Area families with diverse artistic interests and backgrounds. These audiences all in one place would bring together Berkeley's diverse cultures throughout the year to celebrate the arts, our local youth, and generate community ties that unite generations and neighbors.

Additionally, we anticipate that the space could be used for speaker series and spoken word events, and these kinds of events would add to the diversity of the audiences coming to Downtown Berkeley.

Assuming the city owns the space and rents it to the non-profit at cost, we anticipate the yearly operating budget would be approximately \$250,000 per year. Based on rentals comparable to similar theaters in the surrounding environs, we believe we would be able to meet this budget from rental of the facility to those organizations who have already expressed interest, and the Berkeley Performing Arts Center would be fiscally self-sufficient.

Every one of us believes in the City of Berkeley's commitment, expressed in the downtown plan, to make Downtown Berkeley a home for arts and education. We applaud it. And we are asking the City Council to live up to this commitment. The Berkeley Plaza Development presents an opportunity to create a Berkeley Performing Arts Center, and we are asking the City Council to seize that opportunity.

- Jennifer Boesing, Producing Artistic Director, Youth Musical Theater Company
- Mark Streshinsky, General Director, West Edge Opera
- Ilona McHugh, Artistic Director, Berkeley Ballet