



February 23, 2010

To The Honorable Mayor Rawlings-Blake:

I recently served on the Baltimore Development Corporation's [BDC] Senator Theatre RFP advisory panel, along with other community leaders, as the sole representative of the Friends of The Senator [FOTS] group. I approached my duties on the RFP panel with optimism, determined to represent the interests and concerns of the FOTS and help identify an optimal future for Baltimore's beloved Senator Theatre.

The Senator is a revered Baltimore City landmark and a celebrated State of Maryland historic showplace. It is also a renowned historic monument on the National Register of Historic Places and a source of pride among Senator enthusiasts and preservation groups nationwide, as well as a source of concern regarding its uncertain future.

I have invested considerable time and resources to research the complex issues involved with The Senator's status as an endangered national historic landmark, and its future redevelopment and preservation potential based on successful models across the nation. My research was very encouraging, and I looked forward with enthusiasm and good faith to help produce an informed representative assessment of the two RFPs.

Madam Mayor, I applaud your intention to bring a new level of transparency and integrity to Baltimore City government practices, including the BDC. You have more support than you may imagine in that regard. In that light, I feel it is my responsibility to inform you and the public that based on my in-depth discussions with film exhibition professionals and historic theatre redevelopment experts, the alarming manner in which the BDC is conducting the Senator Theatre RFP selection process is procedurally flawed, and it must be rectified.

The process lacks the expertise and crucial transparency required for a high-profile civic redevelopment project that to date has required the investment of over a million dollars in taxpayer funds. It must become more objective and transparent as soon as possible. The Senator RFPs need objective scrutiny by industry experts to advise the panel and the BDC board, if the results, which they expect you to bless in announcing the new ownership and future direction of the Senator Theatre, are to have any validity. At this point, the RFP process is a shambles.

A key issue is the BDC's refusal to allow a qualified historic theatre redevelopment consultant and a film exhibition expert to actively assist the citizen panel and the BDC in the professional evaluation of the two RFPs under consideration.

The Senator's transition to new ownership and operation has many aspects to consider, including mercurial film industry dynamics, historic theatre preservation concerns and tax credit issues, evolution in programming models, deriving maximum economic benefits for the community, and models for non-profit structure and fundraising for historic theatres. It is vitally important to bring on board objective industry experts with successful track records from consulting on and managing similar projects nationwide. The industry experts have the professional experience required in managing the transition of an historic motion picture theatre like The Senator from its outmoded, single-screen first-run business model to a restored, thriving entertainment venue that delivers the maximum economic and cultural benefits to the community in perpetuity.

The Senator's former owner, Tom Kiefaber, previously brought industry expert John Lind of Venuetech, Inc. from California to Baltimore as a consultant to meet with the extended community, and his knowledge and insights regarding The Senator's future non-profit incarnation were invaluable. Mr. Lind is an accomplished historic theatre redevelopment professional who has the high level of experience and an impressive portfolio of success that would greatly assist the BDC's mandate to identify an optimal outcome for the Senator RFP process. The FOTS believe that John Lind is an ideal candidate, although he is certainly not the only option available.

The BDC must reach out to include objective industry experts like Mr. Lind. These experts have developed a set of established procedures over the years, through many successful historic theatre redevelopment projects nationwide, to ensure that the final RFP recommendation submitted to you has been determined in the most credible and informed manner possible. So far, the BDC representatives have simply insisted on keeping the Senator RFP process shrouded in secrecy. In light of your recent reassurances to the citizens of Baltimore that your administration will lift Baltimore's City Hall above and beyond its widely sullied reputation, I hope you will agree that this odd and provocative stance by the BDC is simply unacceptable, and that it warrants your thoughtful intervention.

Until qualified historic theatre redevelopment professionals are allowed into the mix in earnest, I cannot in good conscience participate further in the BDC's tainted Senator Theatre RFP evaluation process. After careful consideration of the circumstances, I have resigned from the Senator RFP panel in protest and informed the BDC of my position in writing on behalf of the Friends of the Senator group, who support my actions on their behalf.

Thank you for your kind attention to this matter. I trust that you and your staff will assess the seriousness of this situation and agree with the FOTS group and others regarding the wisdom of encouraging the BDC leadership to open up the process and fulfill their mandate and responsibility to engage expert industry professionals in the Senator RFP evaluation process. This potentially damaging controversy will otherwise continue to escalate and potentially undermine the professional credibility of all concerned.

Sincerely,

Laura Perkins
Friends of The Senator