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May 24, 2013

Mayor Bob Bratina
City Council
City of Hamilton
Hamilton, Ontario

Dear Mayor Bratina and Councillors:

The creator of the post-war Arts Council in England was economist John Maynard Keynes who firmly believed that in a recession, governments should stimulate the economy. He was also one of the first to understand the "use value" of the arts. At that time, funding of culture was not based on economic grounds but on a rational argument centered on the fight for civilization. I bring this forward because it is evident that the economic importance of culture has become even more apparent over the past few decades. Creative industries in all manifestations are a proven route to economic renewal and recent evidence also indicates that they help ensure a healthy, creative and vibrant community. Art in all its manifestations whether music, film, visual art, or theatre, improves longevity, physical and mental health and provides creative and intellectual capital that inspires our children to become innovators of the future.

I am a resident of Hamilton and although I have worked in other cities including Winnipeg, Victoria, St. Catharines and Hamilton, it is this City that I have chosen to live and for good reason. The cultural growth here has made it a desirable place to live. Being a cultural worker as well, I am fully aware of the precarious position that cultural organizations face at this difficult economic time. It has become apparent that previous funding models are not working to maximum effect in keeping our cultural community as healthy as we would like.

Arts funding is an investment that has measurable economic impact. Municipal investments provide the catalyst as well as leverage for further funding from federal and provincial programs as well as private sector support. I have been made aware of a new model for best funding practice proposed in Hamilton. The successful revitalization of the City (admirably already begun by the City of Hamilton) lies partially in the hands of the cultural community. For example, one only has to look at the very important role in the recent developments in the downtown core through impact from the AGH, James St. North art crawls, artist studios, festivals, etc. to witness substantial growth and community engagement over the past decade. All this has attracted newcomers to the City as Hamilton becomes more and more a cultural and business destination.

The new system proposed allows for equality of funding and provides a strong system base that could determine the best return on investment for every dollar spent in the community. The new model allows for consistency that supports artists in all disciplines and stages of their career, and supports major art organizations in the City. It strengthens an already diverse, strong, intellectual critical cultural sector. All combined results in an impactful Hamilton.

This is just one more opportunity for the City of Hamilton to set an example for other cities in developing a model for future funding of the arts. Culture is a social language that we really cannot live without.

Respectfully yours,

Shirley Madill