

From: Tim Lennon <[REDACTED]>  
Subject: Re: A Possible New Acting Director at ARTS  
Date: September 15, 2021 at 6:45:30 PM PDT  
To: "Gonzalez, Lorena" <Lorena.Gonzalez@seattle.gov>, "Morales, Tammy" <Tammy.Morales@seattle.gov>, "Sawant, Kshama" <Kshama.Sawant@seattle.gov>, "Herbold, Lisa" <Lisa.Herbold@seattle.gov>, "Juarez, Debora" <Debora.Juarez@seattle.gov>, "Lewis, Andrew" <Andrew.Lewis@seattle.gov>, "Pedersen, Alex" <Alex.Pedersen@seattle.gov>

**CAUTION: External Email**

Dear Council President and Council Members of the Community Economic Development Committee ,

I'm writing to ask you to hold off on approving the appointment of a new Acting Director of the Office of Arts & Culture. If I had known Mayor Durkan was considering doing this I would have addressed this letter to her, but my understanding is that she already made this decision, announced it to the staff at ARTS and the Seattle Arts Commission last week, and sent this matter to you for approval.

The Office of Arts & Culture is the primary partner to and champion for our sector in city government. Now more than ever our sector needs that partner agency and its leadership to be stable, to advance current initiatives that are making a big difference for our communities without interruption or distraction, and to be working full time in partnership with our culture workers and businesses to address the once in a century crisis we're now in the middle of.

This has been the hardest year and half our sector has ever seen. Beyond the life-and-death realities we all face with COVID itself, the relentless uncertainty we've faced every day since this pandemic began has taken a major toll on us. The last thing our sector needs right now is more uncertainty, and now we're being told that we could be facing not one but possible two changes in leadership at ARTS in the next few months with a new Acting Director for now and a new Mayoral administration replacing them with a permanent pick as soon as early next year. Any changes in leadership will result in time lost to transition and our sector literally cannot afford to wait until two new people get up to speed.

In my position as Executive Director of LANGSTON, I managed the Seattle Artists Relief Fund. That community-driven effort made our organization the largest single funder of individual artists in the state of Washington last year. The Office of Arts and Culture was a great partner in our work there, and has been a great partner in all we do thanks to the forward-thinking public-private-partnership that birthed our organization. As we negotiate our next contract with the city I want to make sure that all parties are in alignment on the role of community-designed and -led cultural work as a means to advance community wellbeing. As Interim President of the Cultural Space Agency's

governing Council, and as a Community Advisory Group member on OPCD's Strategic Investment Fund I have worked with ARTS staff and leadership for months to get these game-changing new tools for community wealth-building and anti-displacement work funded and up and running. I have heard nothing from Mayor Durkan on how installing a new Acting Director right now will safeguard any of our gains or further any of those goals in the short or long term.

Lastly, it's come to my attention that Mayor Durkan has put forward the plan of appointing someone *part-time* for this position which is, frankly, both insulting and extremely troublesome. Seattle's cultural sector was the first to shut down due to the pandemic and many of us have yet to even partially reopen or find work. The challenges of affordability, equitable access to resources, and the volatility of public and philanthropic support our sector was facing even before the pandemic made working in our industries increasingly tenuous. The last year and half of pandemic closures and cancellations only accelerated the impact of those trends. My fellow culture workers have put in impossibly long hours to find creative ways to keep our workers employed, to get our doors open again, to keep creating, and to keep meeting our communities' cultural, spiritual *and* material needs. We need a director at ARTS who will work full-time alongside our artists and culture workers to ensure this essential work doesn't just keep struggling along, but is elevated to adequately meet the needs of our whole city. Part-time just ain't gonna cut it. Our hundreds of businesses and thousands of culture workers contribute so much to this city twenty-four-seven. Appointing a part-time temporary hire to lead the agency that interfaces with and supports all of us is an insult.

I want to be clear that my opposition is not to the candidate selected but rather to the total apparent lack of consultation with our sector, the utter lack of an articulated strategy for ARTS which necessitates this leadership change 4 months before the end of this administration, and the decision to make this a part-time position when our sector is in the middle of the worst crisis it's seen since the Depression. This lack of communication with or consideration of the sector is not setting up anyone up for success--neither a potential Acting Director, the staff they're to lead, nor the constituencies that need a trusted partner in the City.

ARTS has been a steady and reliable partner throughout the pandemic. It would be helpful for that stability to continue at minimum through the inauguration of the next administration. When the previous director left, community was assured that we'd be involved in a deliberate and intentional process to identify the best candidates for the job who could best meet the myriad challenges we face. Now the Mayor is acting suddenly and unilaterally, without community input, just months before the end of her term. She is well within her rights to do so, but our sector deserves to know what the Mayor's plan is, how it will make our lives and work better, and how installing a new hire now fits into that plan. And pandemic or not we deserve a full-time director.

The status quo with ARTS isn't perfect but it's working, and it's currently contributing to

a number of big wins for our sector and for the city as a whole. I'm asking for your help to keep things working until we can all work together to ensure the next permanent, full-time Director of the Office is brought in in the right way and we're all set up for success.

Thank you for your time and service,

Tim

Tim Lennon, Executive Director

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