



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY MANAGER

2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 302 Arlington, VA 22201  
TEL 703.228.3120 FAX 703.228.3295 [www.arlingtonva.us](http://www.arlingtonva.us)

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Member of the Arlington County Board

FROM: Ron Carlee, County Manager

DATE: August 13, 2007

SUBJECT: Needs Assessment for a Cultural Center at Court House Plaza

Attached is a consultant report on a needs assessment conducted to assess the viability of a new performing arts facility as part of a future Court House Square project. The needs assessment was done by Webb Management Services to answer the question: can the market support new performing arts facilities, and if so, what is the right facility concept? The consultant looked at audience capacity, current and planned facilities use, potential cultural center users and programs, and the benefits of and impact on the Arlington community.

The consultant concluded that there is sufficient market to support the development of a new cultural center as part of the last phase of Court House Plaza or at another location. This means, if we build it, they will come. It does not mean that there is sufficient market demand to pay for a facility. The projected annual operating subsidy for a facility is at least \$1,200,000 plus 100% capital subsidy. The capital cost of developing a new cultural center is estimated to be in the area of \$ 40 million. There is currently no capacity to support the operating subsidy or the capital subsidy to make such a facility happen. The benefit of the report is knowledge of what type of facility could be successful if an opportunity presented itself through a creative private partnership or if other substantial private or grant funding sources were to become available.

Since 1990, the County has continued to experience growth in arts organizations, programs, and audience participation. The prospect of a cultural center at Court House Square is only one of the facility needs that we are pursuing. In addition to the new Signature Theatre which recently opened, we are preparing to renovate a warehouse on Four Mile Run to accommodate Washington Shakespeare Company as a replacement for the Clark Street Playhouse.

We are assisting Classika Theatre with securing leased space in Shirlington. In addition, a new black box theatre is planned as part of a development project in Virginia Square. These initiatives and efforts represent a significant investment of County resources in enhancing performing arts facilities in the community.

In addition to facility needs, County staff and the Arts Commission are concerned about a number of other issues that affect the continued growth and development of the arts. The current arts support policy was adopted by the County Board in 1990 as a mechanism for growing, improving and diversifying the arts. The adopted policy has been successful, and today, Arlington is fortunate to support numerous high quality arts organizations and artists that are reflective of our population and that serve the needs and interests of our community. However, much has changed in the arts scene in Arlington and Arlington's evolution as a more urban community with extremely high real estate values has implications for arts development. As a result, the County's policy for arts support and services should be examined. We need to undertake a review of how we currently support the arts and determine if we are using current resources in the most cost effective ways. It would be erroneous, however, to undertake such a review with an assumption on the part of anyone that we have capacity to substantially increase resources going to the arts.

We will be consulting with the arts community about how we approach such a review without unrealistically raising expectations. We will at the same time release the consultant report to arts advocates and other community members who have requested the report or who would be interested in it.

Attachment