

January 12, 2022

RE: Distillery Historic District evictions of tenant artists and organizations

Dear Mayor Tory,

We are writing this letter collectively from CARFAC Ontario, the Association for Opera in Canada, and the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts (TAPA). As arts service organizations we represent over 500 artists and 100 professional theatre, dance and opera organizations.

The Distillery Historic District opened in 2003, and according to their official website is "...widely regarded as Canada's premier arts, culture and entertainment destination". The contract between the Distillery District and private sector partner ARTSCAPE has turned out to be a huge success for the Distillery District over the years, attracting the general public to the area that became well-known as an artist's hub for both the performing and visual arts sectors, including musical theatre, opera and dance.

After nearly two decades, the lease agreement between Artscape and the Distillery District is ending, and the artists have been told that their office and studio space leases will NOT be renewed. At this time of pandemic, artists are more vulnerable than ever. This is a dangerous time to be searching for new office/studio space. It is appalling that there is absolutely no protection for the arts workers and organizations who have contributed so much to the success of the Distillery Historic District. More specifically the artists have been asked to vacate their spaces six months in advance of the lease expiry date. We are curious if the city can play a role with Artscape about honouring the original date?

We are very concerned not only for the organizations that are being impacted, but also about the ripple effect to independent artists and residencies who work with these companies, and will also be negatively affected. This is a huge loss for the arts & culture sector in Toronto. In this time of space scarcity for arts organizations it must be pointed out that the Ernest Balmer Studio in the Distillery was and is a vital professional space with a riser system, tech grid and sprung dance floor. In addition, both spaces operated by Dancemakers (studio and performance spaces) will also be lost. The significant financial investment into equipping these spaces was supported by all levels of government, in addition to the Trillium Foundation.

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We must support these local artists so they can continue to innovate and grow our local economy. In the recent *11<sup>th</sup> Annual Arts Day at the City* TAPA asked for a new Culture Plan that will include:

- Creation and preservation of arts space including designating arts infrastructure as a component of development charges levied by the City on building developers

As well we noted that:

- Nearly one in five artists have been renocted, and 75% of artists or arts workers have thought about leaving Toronto

The arts and culture sector contributes \$6.3 billion towards Toronto GDP, and we know that arts and culture brings health and well-being to neighbourhoods throughout the city. And yet there is a lack of priority in funding and maintaining viable art spaces, studios and venues.

We urge you to support the motion 'MAKING SPACE TO SAVE THE ARTS IN TORONTO' put forward by Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam and seconded by Councillor Joe Cressy originally on December 15, 2021 at city council., and has now been postponed until February 2, 2022.

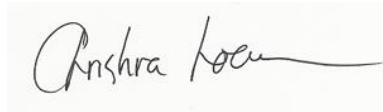
In closing, we strongly encourage the city to facilitate a review that will result in recommendations for council to consider to help to prevent similar unfortunate and tragic events from ever reoccurring in the future. We hope that the city will take a leadership role in convening funders of cultural spaces to consider new policies that protect investments in cultural space and pursue policy changes to protect individual artists, arts workers and arts organizations in the future.

Sincerely,

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CC: Councillors Ford, Holyday, Grimes, Perks, Nunziata, Pasternak, Perruzza, Colle, Bailao, Cressy, Layton, Matlow, Wong-Tam, Fletcher, Robinson, Minnan-Wong, Carroll, Filiion, Bradford, Crawford, Thompson, Mantas, Lai, Ainslie, McKelvie

Patrick Tobin, Director, Arts and Culture Services Economic Development and Culture Division  
Sally Han, Manager Culture Partnerships

Kelly Straughan, TAPA Board President, Executive Director Workman Arts  
Gerard Roxburgh, National Ballet of Canada  
Andrea Donaldson, Nightwood Theatre  
Gloria Mok, Nightswimming  
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