



Subject: Support of Sec. 15-48. Exception for consumption of alcohol

From: Dr. Joshua Medeiros, Superintendent of Parks, Recreation, Youth & Community Services and Arianna Therriault, Arts & Culture Supervisor

To: City Councilman Sebastian Panioto, Chair, Ordinance Committee

CC: Mayor Jeff Caggiano and the Bristol City Council

Date Issued: 12/21/2023

The City of Bristol Department of Parks, Recreation, Youth & Community Services (BPRYCS) submits the following memorandum of support for the proposed amendments to the code of ordinances pertaining to offense and miscellaneous provision **Sec. 15-48. Exception** for consumption of alcohol at city sponsored and permitted events held in conjunction with the Rockwell Theater at the Bristol Arts and Innovation Magnet School (BAIMS).

A Brief History of the Rockwell Theater

For the past 15 years, Bristol residents have advocated for the preservation of the historic theater within the Memorial Boulevard School as a major asset for the revitalization of downtown Bristol. Over the years these efforts took on the form of multiple outreach groups and formal committees such as the Mayor's Task Force for Memorial Boulevard School and the Rockwell Theater Taskforce. In 2021, the hard work of hundreds of individuals came to fruition with the opening of BAIMS, home of the newly renovated Rockwell Theater.

It's important to remember this project was a substantial partnership among the City, Board of Education and the vocal taxpayers that wanted the building saved to preserve this historic theater. The vision is to leverage the theater as both an opportunity to diversify and enhance educational offering through the BOE, as well as an catalyst to boost economic development in downtown Bristol. Collectively, we can all work together to ensure both will happen.

The Importance of Investing in Arts and Culture

In September 2023, the BPRYCS Department launched a new entertainment series called Downtown Live at the Rockwell Theater which is managed by the department's part-time Arts and Culture Supervisor and supported by volunteers from the City Arts and Culture Commission. The mission of Downtown Live at the Rockwell Theater is to provide a wide spectrum of arts and culture entertainment that not only promotes Bristol as a great place to live, work and play but stimulates the economy and boosts economic development downtown. The arts and culture sector is a \$151.7 billion dollar industry that yields tremendous returns to communities that successfully invest in them. For example, the City of New Haven's arts and culture sector generated \$143.4 million in economic activity in 2022 which resulted in 2,402 jobs, provided \$112.8 million in person income to

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residents, and generated \$34.2 million in tax revenue to local, state and federal governments (Arts & Economic Prosperity Report, 2023). The report indicates that consumers paid \$30.01 per person, per event, beyond the cost of admission; meaning discretionary funds on merchandise and concessions. These dollars represent vital income for local merchants and a value-add with which few industries can compete (Arts & Economic Prosperity Report, 2023). A vibrant arts and culture program keeps local residents, and their discretionary dollars, in the community and it strengthens the visitor economy which is vital income for local businesses. People attending shows at the theater often make an outing out of it which may include dining in a local restaurant, paying for parking/transportation, enjoying drink/dessert after the show, and returning home to pay for child or pet care. All of which stimulates the local economy.

The Business Case: Revenues and User Experience

With the exception of the supervisor's part-time wage, the BPRYCS Downtown Live at the Rockwell Theater program operates 100% out of a revolving account which means all associated expenses for the series is covered through user fees, sponsorships/donations and sale of concessions. It is widely understood in the industry that theater revenues heavily depend on the sale of concessions, particularly alcohol, which allows venues to keep ticket costs affordable for consumers. Bristol resident Frank Tavera, Chief Executive Officer of the Palace Theater in Waterbury, notes "when the Palace Theater has a sold out show they expect to sell a minimum of \$13,050 in alcohol sales in a single night with some night's exceeding over \$100,000 in concession revenues."

Select performers and larger named acts have already indicated that they will not perform at the Rockwell Theater (and other venues) that do not sell alcohol, creating another barrier for the success of Downtown Live at the Rockwell Theater.

There are also rental opportunities for both the theater and gallery and having an alcohol/catering component will be critical for the success of these rentals. This may include renting space for weddings, parties and high-end art shows. The theater was designed and built to accommodate alcoholic concessions with specific build outs on each floor including a rolling bar cart that is sitting unutilized. Prohibiting alcohol will inhibit the Rockwell Theater from being a viable venue for many prospective users.

While the sale of alcohol is essential to the business model for the community theater, the introduction of alcohol also enhances the overall customer experience by creating a more relaxed and social atmosphere. There has been resounding feedback from patrons, both in person and via post-show surveys, that they would support the sale of alcoholic concessions.

The Safe Administration of Alcohol

The safe administration of alcohol remains a top priority for BPRYCS and as such will be administered by licensed bartenders, with proper indemnification insurance and in compliance with policies established by both the City and the Board of Education (BOE). It's our understanding that these insurance requirements are satisfactory with legal counsel for both the City and BOE. Approval of this ordinance change will allow us to work with our colleagues at the BOE who are standing ready to develop safe guards and assurances that will protect students while providing a service to the customers. This may include partnering with local businesses and breweries to

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administer alcohol, transferring the liability from the City to an experienced 3rd party vendor/permittee. This would also open up the potential for private-public partnerships with local businesses such as Main Street Pint and Plate and Monterrey, for example. The vendors would then be responsible for removing the alcohol from the premises following a production to ensure students did not gain access.

BPRYCS has already proven this model can work for the city when you look at Muzzy Field and the sale of alcohol during family friendly Bristol Blues Baseball events, on BAIMS field through the Mum Festival and with private rentals at Perry Spinelli Pavilion. Sale of alcohol at community theaters is the norm, not the exception. In fact, of comparably sized theaters, the Rockwell Theater is the only theater in the region that does not serve alcohol.

Closing- Vote “Yes” to Support the Ordinance Change

We believe that when you consider the business model of operating a community theater program, the customer experience, and the overall economic impact to the city; the decision to approve this ordinance change should be a “no brainer.” A negative vote will substantially hinder the theater’s ability to generate revenue and provide a self-sustaining model for the community which could result in an impact to the taxpayers via the General Fund, or result in the elimination of a community theater program altogether.

In closing, please consider that when you invest in the arts and culture, *you are investing in an industry that strengthens your economy and builds more livable communities.* **Please vote yes to support this ordinance change to allow us to continue to grow the arts and culture sector here in the City of Bristol.**

Sincerely,



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