

February 13, 2017

Dear Mayor Manheimer and Commission Chair Newman:

On behalf of the Civic Center Commission, I would like to request your respective government's financial support for capital renovations to the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium in your respective 2017-18 budgets. As you know, the Civic Center Commission is appointed by both Asheville City Council and the Buncombe County Commissioners and we take great pride in serving the US Cellular Center and its anchor venues, the Explore Asheville.com Arena and the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium. Both spaces have a long and successful history of serving the region with unique entertainment and meeting experiences.

In 2012, the City, County, Tourism Development Authority (TDA) and the private sector were key players in securing \$12 million in combined funding to complete major renovations to the Arena. Since that time, the facility has become much more competitive in attracting signature events such as the Southern Conference Basketball Tournament, major multi-day conferences (e.g. the Society of Human Resource Professionals), sold out concerts, trade shows, all the while continuing to serve the local community by hosting civic gatherings such as school graduations. A just completed study by Western Carolina University, "The Economic and Fiscal Impact of the US Cellular Center Asheville on the Local Economy" concludes that events at the US Cellular Center have an annual estimated \$42 million impact to our Community!

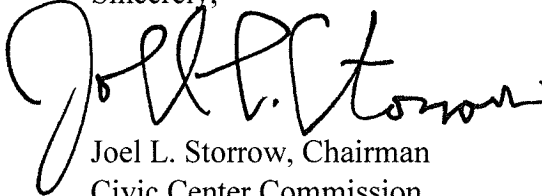
My colleagues and I believe it is now time to turn attention from the Arena to the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium (TWA). I think you will agree that the TWA has played an important role as an economic driver since it opened in 1940. However, the building now lacks modern patron amenities, back of house conveniences for performing acts, and basic upgrades to meet current industry standards. While there have been significant discussions about a new private performing arts center to complement or even replace the TWA for at least 10 years, no meaningful progress has been made. It is therefore both timely and appropriate to invest in a TWA renovation project. We do applaud the City for commissioning a structural and acoustic study of the TWA in 2015, which concluded that the building could be renovated successfully from a structural standpoint and meet modern standards for both amplified and un-amplified sound events.

We strongly believe the successful public/private financing model for the Arena renovations can be replicated for the TWA. However, the first step in achieving this goal must be a demonstrated commitment by our government partners, the City and County. Your support will send a strong signal to other stakeholders that contributing to a TWA renovation project is a worthy civic and philanthropic endeavor. In essence, your commitment will be seen as the necessary catalyst to leverage additional dollars through the TDA and private sector, as well as garner the support of the public at large. Note also that this action would be consistent with the City and County's strategic plans regarding regional cooperation in the interest of economic development.

Accordingly, at its February 7, 2017 meeting, the Civic Center Commission unanimously voted to request that the Asheville City Council and Buncombe County Commission each appropriate \$800,000 annually over the next five years to a combined and dedicated renovation escrow/reserve

account, for the sole purpose of renovations to the TWA. We further request that this appropriation begin in the upcoming 2017-18 budget year, and would be pleased to attend future meetings of your respective bodies to answer any questions you may have. If both the City and County commit to this level of funding, \$8 million will be available by F.Y. 2021-22 to leverage additional TDA and private monies.

In conclusion, a strong public commitment to renovating the historic TWA will set the tone for additional financial support to complete the investment necessary to propel the US Cellular Center as a regional economic driver and civic contributor to our Community! Thank you for your earnest consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Joel L. Storrow, Chairman
Civic Center Commission

Cc: Asheville City Council
Buncombe County Commissioners
Civic Center Commission