



## Community Center for the Performing Arts

### **Testimony from Deborah Maher, Executive Director**

**To:** The House Committee on Economic Development and Small Business

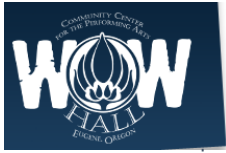
**Jan. 31, 2023**

**Good Afternoon** Chair Bynum, Vice Chair Morgan, Vice Chair Nguyen, and Committee Members. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you about the importance of House Bill 2459.

**My name is Deborah Maher**, and I am here as a board member of the Independent Venue Coalition and as the Executive Director of the Community Center for the Performing Arts otherwise known as the WOW Hall in Eugene/Springfield. The WOW Hall is an all-ages nonprofit membership historic venue. It was built in 1932 and has served as a community gathering place for 90 years. In 1975 it became a membership-owned building and now we have no mortgage.

#### **Current State of the WOW Hall**

Despite having no mortgage and a volunteer core group of people to keep the WOW Hall going we were on the brink of closing due to the pandemic. Thanks to COVID relief funding we were able to make some basic improvements like a necessary air filtration system needed to open again, some improvements to our aging sound system, and hire limited part-time staff to keep us going while volunteers provided additional support.



## Community Center for the Performing Arts

### **The Power of Understanding the Linkage Between Community Economic Development and the Performing Arts**

I came to this position as the Executive Director after a **long career in community economic development and small business consulting and coaching** including NeighborWorks America (formerly Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation), Baltimore City Development Corporation, and as an Exec. Director of a Community Economic Development Council.

This gives me a **unique understanding** of just how important performing arts venues are as economic anchors that generate community wealth. I have worked with small towns in Oregon and communities and Cities throughout the country.

They all have **one thing in common**; they all want vital, economically thriving communities that foster a sense of connection and belonging. We, humans, are social beings and we have come to this appreciation after being isolated from each other during the pandemic. Not only did we suffer individually, but **our performance venues suffered greatly** too. We are overjoyed to be out and about again, but **recovery is taking time**.

We all are **grateful for the financial support** that we have received to get us operating again. but **more is needed to get us to sustainability**. I invite you to think about our request as **stages of investment capital**.



## Community Center for the Performing Arts

First-stage funding has supported our “**turnaround**” and now we are seeking second-stage funding as an investment to support our “**growth**” mode and propel us forward.

We are all creative and resourceful community leaders working to generate more earned income, but **we still have cancelations and lower ticket sales than in pre-pandemic times** and this continues to result in losses. The additional funding, we are seeking would **augment our efforts and move us toward our sustainability goal.**

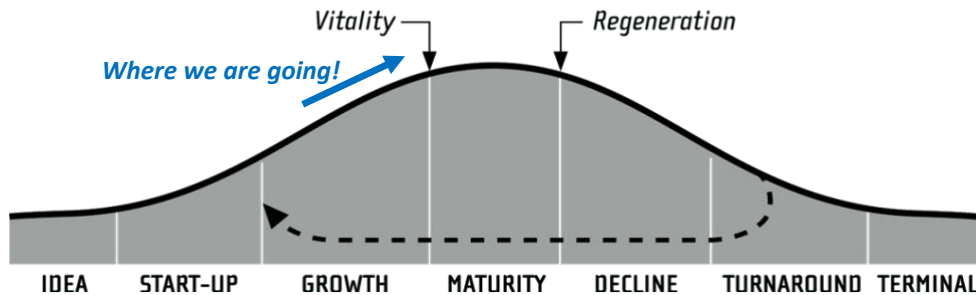
If the WOW Hall were to receive an **additional investment, we could improve community engagement, offer more diverse programming, and increase wages for our staff.** We are committed to culturally diverse programming that appeals to wide-ranging community members.

**We were able to a part-time Community Voices Coordinator** who will work with me and our team to lead community efforts and to co-design new programming together with community leaders in addition to our live performances. Additional funding would enable the WOW Hall to do even more as a community cultural anchor.

People are starting to see us differently and are beginning to feel the change we are generating in the community, and they want in! So here is the picture of where we have been and where we are going.



## Organizational Lifecycle



**The ROI can be measured by:**

- **A multiplier:** for every dollar spent on tickets; 12 dollars is spent on surrounding businesses (translates to local jobs in restaurants, bars, hotels, transportation, and shopping)
- **Job creation** for those working in our venues.
- **New career opportunities;** many have launched new careers in the music industry because they volunteered at the WOW Hall. For example; one board member is now a professor at the Berklee School of Music after responding to an ad that read “low pay and long hours”... he said that was the job for him
- **Increased community engagement** and sense of place

Our venues are an essential part of building our statewide “**comeback economy**”. This means moving forward in new ways with more outreach, inclusion, more diverse programming, and creating a greater sense of belonging. **We are a key part of the community ecosystem, and all of our communities are a vital part of the overall statewide ecosystem of regeneration.**



## Community Center for the Performing Arts

This is an interconnected state-wide effort from Elgin to East Portland to Astoria with **roughly half of the proposed funds being allocated to rural Oregon**, not just population centers.

Partnerships are transformative. When we work **TOGETHER** in partnership with small businesses, local and State governments, community leaders, and residents, our synergies renew our vitality. No one sector can do it alone but when we combine our strengths **magic happens!**

### Partnerships = Transformation

