

### Oversight - Cultural Plan - Next Steps

My name is Sheila Lewandowski, Founder and Director of The Chocolate Factory Theater, a nonprofit award-winning performing arts venue in Long Island City, Queens. I thank you, Chairman Van Bramer and the Committee for this opportunity to submit testimony on the Cultural Plan for NYC and next steps.

Building a Cultural Plan will never be perfect nor should it be. To best represent the diverse arts and cultures of this city, the plan must embrace all of that uniqueness and that is incredibly difficult.

I write in support of the efforts to gather input from all throughout the City to date. A suggestion...

Is it possible for there to be a short presentation at least once at every Community Board in NYC with an opportunity for input? I have attended some of the planning meetings for the Cultural Plan and what I see are mostly people knowingly already engaged in arts and culture. In my thinking the development of a Cultural Plan offers an opportunity to educate all people of NYC on how they interact with Arts & Culture in the daily lives. There is also an incredible opportunity to hear from people not directly involved with Arts & Culture who are directly involved with community engagement about the importance of Culture in and on their local communities; and to help lessen any misperception that Arts & Culture is elitist.

I also write to continue to share my belief in the need for NYC to have a comprehensive Cultural Plan. I am concerned about the possible loss of funding for the arts nationally and that impact on our City and the Nation. I am concerned about the decrease in funding for the arts as people give less to the arts and more to causes that seem to directly work for human rights and health care and immigrants rights. We cannot sacrifice our souls in our fight against terror. We must support the arts even more so as to let all people of NYC know that culture matters. When this plan is finalized we must as a city celebrate it and send a message to the State, Country and the World that Arts & Culture matter for everyone.

As the Council considers its budget priorities, please remember that Arts & Culture citywide are necessary and we are taking a financial hit right now and maybe more during the next 3 plus years. We are sanctuaries for freedom of expression and speech. We support and share the ideas of all cultures, but to do this we need money to pay artists, to throw parades, to present concerts, plays, dances, after-school programs, senior citizen acting and movement events, and more.

So, I close with, please keep supporting the work of the Department of Cultural Affairs to complete the Cultural Plan and please find a way to increase funding for the arts citywide.

Respectfully submitted,  
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