



Member Motion

City Council

Notice of Motion

MM31.33	ACTION			Ward: All
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Protecting and Preserving Independent Live Performance Venues and Drag Bars - by Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor Joe Cressy

** Notice of this Motion has been given.*

** This Motion is subject to referral to the Executive Committee. A two-thirds vote is required to waive referral.*

Recommendations

Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor Joe Cressy, recommends that:

1. City Council request the City Manager and the Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer, to explore the feasibility of expanding the Creative Co-Location Facilities Property Tax Subclass to include independent live performance venues, such as drag bars and small independent theatre and report back in the fourth quarter of 2021.

2. City Council request the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture and the Toronto Arts Council to convene a roundtable to consult with local stakeholders and community leaders on how the City of Toronto can further support independent live performance venues including drag bars, and report back in the first quarter of 2022, including but not limited to:

- a. Aki Studio Theatre;
- b. The Assembly Theatre;
- c. Red Sand Castle Theatre;
- d. Crews and Tangos;
- e. Buddies in Bad Times Theatre;
- f. Woody's and Sailors;
- g. Glad Day Book Store;
- h. Space Space Revolution; and
- i. Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts.

3. City Council request the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, in consultation with the Toronto Arts Council to explore expanding granting opportunities and granting reform to emerging artists, including the experience required to apply for operational funding and to report back to the Executive Committee in fourth quarter of 2021.

4. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, in collaboration with the Toronto Arts Council, and in consultation with independent live performance venue operators and artist stakeholders, to develop an appropriate pilot strategy for the purpose of providing support and referrals to relevant services, and informing and educating artists and cultural workers on opportunities for financial literacy and grants, and to report back to the first quarter of 2022.

5. City Council request the Provincial or Federal Governments to urgently consider creating new or expanding existing programs to support live performance venues, including drag bars through grants and other COVID-emergency relief funding to preserve the arts.

Summary

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Toronto's independent live performance venues, including independent theatre spaces as well as drag bars, have been long-suffering. Now through the uncertainty of the pandemic, it is impossible to financially plan for the future. With exorbitant commercial rents, and the unpredictable nature of the pandemic, and the pressures of development in the downtown core it is impossible for small performance venues to survive.

These live performances venues include drag bars, community cultural hubs, and safe performance spaces for the LGBTQ2S+ community. Drag performers are a critical component of queer culture, and their performance venues often double as bars, cafes, restaurants, and even book stores.

Independent "indie" theatre and other performance spaces are unconventional, ideal for experimenting, performing, and challenging the status quo of what might otherwise be considered "mainstream" livestream entertainment.

Since the pandemic, we have seen more and more independent live performance venues shutter, most recently being the Lower Ossington Theatre. These "indie" venues are the home of young performers just starting out, but also provide opportunities where creative storytellers can elevate marginalized voices, telling stories otherwise left unsaid.

These businesses are unique as they're often operated by arts workers, many who are already employed in the gig economy or doing other low-wage work. As we have all seen, the gig economy workers have been most precariously employed through each stage of the pandemic. These individuals are creative thinkers and cultural producers. They document and interpret contemporary thought, values, and social commentaries and give language and meaning to our collective cultural tapestry. Additionally, many have also fallen through the cracks not adequately covered by the Federal and Provincial COVID-emergency financial support, in the form of rent and wage subsidies.

As the City of Toronto looks to recover from the global pandemic, we would be remiss to neglect these important cultural spaces. In order to protect our cultural identity and purposes, City Council must take urgent action to support cultural hubs and live performance venues for artists, performers storytellers and others alike.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM31.33