



Kriss Worthington

Councilmember, City of Berkeley District 7

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ACTION CALENDAR

April 24, 2007

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Kriss Worthington

Subject: City Support for the Aurora Theatre Company

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Berkeley City Council refer the forgiveness and/or delayed payment plan for the Aurora Theater Loan to the budget process.

BACKGROUND:

The Aurora Theatre Company is a phenomenally successful theatre group. Consistent with the City's commitment as a high priority to enhance the arts district, the City now has the opportunity to help the Aurora Theatre Company to grow to the next level.

The theatre is preparing to initiate a capital campaign to accommodate the significant demand for their productions. Over recent years, the shortage of support stage for Aurora's programming needs has become an acute problem. They now have an opportunity to expand into an inexpensive, adjacent space on a long-term basis. This will allow them to add the staff they need to free performance space for extending runs of popular plays in addition to enhancing the educational program and allowing for other daytime uses. The City has previously supported the Aurora Theater with a loan, which is payable in installments of \$99,000 for three years in a row. The City's forgiveness of \$99,000 for this next fiscal year would provide a lead gift that would make a significant start to their capital campaign.

A paying audience of over 25,000 attends Aurora annually. Their free programs bring an additional 2,000 people to the downtown every year. Customers eat at our restaurants and support our downtown businesses. The Theatre Company attracts people from San Francisco, Marin and counties other than Alameda and Contra Costa who would otherwise not come to Berkeley. Despite just 150 seats, the productions are critically acclaimed and attract national recognition. Aurora's education department serves over 750 students – high school, community college, university, and adult learners from thirty educational institutions. They are also planning to develop a course in conjunction with neighboring Berkeley City College that weaves the 2007-2008 season into their English/Theatre classes so that students can attend shows and have hands-on contact with the artistic process. Aurora also employs a higher percentage of union actors than other Bay Area theaters and operate under an Equity Contract, an actors'/stage managers' union, and use local theatre artists and actors.

The Theatre provides low-income seniors free Sunday matinee admission for each production. They also offer affordable rates for low-income artists and youth. In addition, the Aurora Theatre Company offers its space to community functions when scheduling allows, including a benefit for Hurricane Katrina survivors.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

\$99,000 for one fiscal year

CONTACT PERSON:

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