

Responses from Stephanie Scherpf, Arts at the Armory Co-Director/CEO to Worksheet Prompts 1-3 Distributed at City-led Armory Master Plan Community Meeting on May 15, 2024

None of the City-led Armory Master Plan “Community Meetings” in this 4 part series were community meetings, least so this last one. The people who participated in this meeting were given overly dense materials with highly subjective and incorrect statements, and farcical and far-fetched ideas posited as “pathways” written in small print that we were expected to read and digest while listening to a powerpoint presentation that was rushed through, in negative tones, while we were instructed to “put pens down” after short intervals and told to save questions until the end. The feedback heard from people participating in the online portion of the meeting was that it was even more difficult to hear, understand and participate.

We were given a worksheet that had three parts. Unfortunately I am unable to complete any of the worksheet but I will provide this feedback. The first part of the worksheet asks me to: “looking at the vision, write down 3 things that were presented which resonate with you.” The “Draft Vision” for the Armory from March 26, 2024 has 10 bullet points that are not written in a cohesive or logical manner. A few of those bullets resonate with me as characteristics of the Armory that have existed since it reopened as an arts, cultural and community center in 2008. The rest of the statements are simply wrong or misstated.

The second part of the worksheet asks us to rank 5 “Wish List Items”: 1) Transparent, equitable and goal oriented 2) Independent and objective body 3) Ability to manage short-term uses alongside long-term rentals 4) Preserve Low Cost Space for Art 5) Financial Flexibility & Access to Diverse Resources. I am sorry that I cannot rank five very important characteristics of any governing body for the Armory building in 1-5 order. I hold some of these characteristics of equal importance.

The third part of the worksheet is the most dense and confusing, and took up the most time to explain (and create influence for) during the meeting. We were asked to share our preferences for which pathway (creating a new non-profit organization, a quasi-municipal trust, or a city department) matches up with the above 5 wish list statements, which were subsequently broken up into 4-6 further bullets and visually represented by a complex chart that contains 59 boxes, each containing highly subjective statements written with a pro-government lens. All of the said pathways would be controlled and created by the City. None of the pathways are options that have been endorsed by the large majority of the community. While I also like to dream and work toward creating a new, more just world, the Quasi-Municipal Trust is not part of our current reality and would be a project idea to pursue over the course of a generation or more. Due to all of the above, I unfortunately cannot complete the exercise. You have feigned a community process by creating biased, predetermined outcomes guised as “what you heard the community wants” and controlling the rules of the game.

Where do we go from here? At the meeting, I shared further ideas on governance that I had discussed with my colleagues, Board and other Armory tenants, and the thought to break governance down further into capital governance, management governance, and artistic governance. The majority of voices at the May 15th meeting were in favor of Arts at the Armory being involved in governance overall. Questions remain about who would be responsible for capital governance.

There were interesting ideas that managed to surface during the May 15th meeting despite the repressive tone. Most people didn't introduce themselves, and weren't asked to do so, so I don't know the name of the person who suggested a type of governance by the tenants. I have always thought of that as an expedient, practical and empowering way to govern the building. New Atlantic Development has set up these types of governance structures in some relevant projects in Greater Boston like Brookside Artist Studios. Within that body, perhaps the City would also hypothetically have some seats on the governance board. Speaking of New Atlantic Development, that would be the logical, independent body to create the governance structure bylaws, write the RFPs, and take this process forward, in my opinion. I have expressed this idea before.