

July 2024

Dear Mayor Ballantyne,

We, the undersigned, are deeply concerned about the impact that the City-led Armory Master Planning Process is having on the larger Somerville community, specifically the potential loss of The Center for Arts at the Armory (CAA). CAA is a Somerville institution, having earned its place in the hearts of this community for almost two decades. From star-studded concerts to Strummerville Ukulele Club, the Somerville Winter Farmers Market, weddings and b'nei mitzvahs, CAA has brought the historic Armory to life throughout its tenure as the anchor non-profit arts organization, enriching the lives of thousands of Somerville residents, artists, and cultural workers. CAA creates economic opportunities in the creative economy, for small businesses, and within Somerville's hospitality and business sectors.

Under the current leadership team of Co-Directors, Jess White and Stephanie Scherpf, and its Board of Directors, CAA shines and meets the needs of the community it serves. In the past five years, CAA has offered more opportunity and availability to local artists and cultural workers, has built stronger programming and created jobs and opportunities for Somerville. CAA has worked hard to meet the needs of its non-arts partners who rely on CAA to provide space and services for meetings, galas, food distribution, blood drives, City voting, and many other uses. The commitment of CAA is unwavering.

After three years of a City-led Armory Master Planning Process, the Center for Arts at the Armory collected data, providing integral public input related to the future of the Armory in the absence of such data or input facilitated by the City of Somerville or its hired Consultant Firm. In September 2023, CAA delivered a petition signed by 1,175 people that was neither acknowledged nor acted upon by your administration. Nearly a year later, four more City-led "Community Meetings" failed to produce consensus, data, or clear outcomes. CAA has gathered over 200 responses in a survey circulated in June 2024. Some of the key data points are provided on the attached.

We, the undersigned, believe that CAA has been reasonably patient with the City of Somerville over the past three years. We understand that CAA leadership must take action given the untenable nature of running Somerville's largest arts organization amidst the instability that the City has created. This instability is compounded by not having a lease, by bearing the brunt of a mismanaged building, including the City-led Warming Center, and by enduring the twists and turns of a poorly led Armory Master Plan process that has involved retracted leases and plans, public hostility by City officials, and an overall lack of transparency and support. The absence of stability, forthright answers and assurances from the City have created a negative environment for optimal programming, fundraising, financial performance, contractual agreements, staff retention and more. Furthermore, the community has expressed its feelings of disempowerment as a result of not being heard, despite CAA's best efforts in representing our interests to you and your administration.

We, the undersigned, urge you to meet the following requests of the leadership at the Center for Arts at the Armory (CAA):

- Enter into a minimum 1 year renewable lease agreement with CAA by no later than October 1, 2024
- Release a clearly laid-out plan for a tenant-led governance model for the Armory building by no later than October 1, 2024

If the requests above are not met by October 1, 2024, CAA has informed us that they will continue their process of transitioning their assets, staff and programming out of the Performance Hall, Café and B5 Room. This will be a devastating loss for Somerville with significant consequences.

We urge you to take immediate action to course-correct the Armory Master Plan process. The loss of Arts at the Armory would be disastrous for the entire city of Somerville, and especially the Ward 5 neighborhood, in terms of diminished property value, quality of life and community resources.

Thank you for your consideration.

Hathalee Higgs, CAA Board Chair  
Neil Berman, CAA Board Member  
Ruth Faris, CAA Board Member  
Ivan Abarca, CAA Board Member  
Amanda Klein, CAA Board Member  
Stephanie Scherpf, CAA Co-Director / CEO  
Jess White, CAA Co-Director / CEO  
Jennifer McSweeney, Acoustic Strings of New England (current Armory tenant)  
Gloria Mindock, Editor and Publisher, Cervena Barva Press (former Armory tenant)  
Lynn Gervens, Executive Director, Mudflat  
Deborah Mason, Founder and Artistic Director, Deborah Mason Performing Arts Center  
Joe Lynch, Somerville Media Center, Producer Member  
Susan Berstler, Director, Nave Gallery  
Debbie Musnikow, Owner, Play Union  
Todd Sargent, VDA  
Damon Lehrer, Founder, Boston Figurative Arts Center.  
Valentine Talland and Nagesh Mahanthappa, Philanthropists, Movement Arts Creation Studio  
Denise Provost  
Mary Cassesso  
David Gibbs, Executive Director, Community Action Agency of Somerville  
Doug Kress  
Alex Pirie, Somerville Community Development Corporation  
Matthew Caughey, Executive Director, Elizabeth Peabody House

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July 1, 2024

Dear Mayor Ballantyne,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing on a matter of significant importance to the arts and creative sector of Somerville and of particular interest to the board, staff, volunteers and members of the Somerville Museum. It has come to my attention that the Center for Arts at the Armory has been approached by other organizations regarding their possible relocation to other venues that will allow them the stability that they cannot find here. I know specifically that the administration of CAA is very frustrated by the lack of a rental contract. I sincerely hope that your administration will work with the CAA to avoid their relocation. The CAA is producing fantastic events that Somerville should be very proud to be hosting and it is bringing in talent and audiences that help to enrich the area in many ways.

As President of the Board of Trustees of the Somerville Museum, I sincerely hope that you will make the issue of the CAA contract a high priority and resolve it soon. The Museum is not in competition with the Armory, but rather the two are complementary. The Museum's building is small and intimate, whereas the Armory's is larger, more spacious, and even able to support aerial events (!). We often reach out to the Armory as a space to use for concerts and events related to our programming, that we are unable to host in our building. For example, we are currently working with the Armory to host our concert of Nepalese music as part of the programming associated with our upcoming exhibition, *The Art of the Festival, Celebrating the Rain God of the Kathmandu Valley*. This concert and the exhibition are designed to speak to the Nepalese community in Somerville and introduce those who are unfamiliar with Nepalese culture to its richness and depth. This is how we weave together the disparate identities of the people of Somerville into a whole fabric of creativity and joy. We know that you and your administration strongly support this work. With this in mind, I ask you to work with the CAA and resolve their issues as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barbara Mangum", written in a cursive style.

Barbara Mangum  
President of the Board

cc. Stephanie Scherpf  
Greg Jenkins



Gloria Mindock, Editor & Publisher  
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[editor@cervenabarvapress.com](mailto:editor@cervenabarvapress.com)  
617/764-2229

Dear Mayor Katjana Ballantyne:

I was a tenant at the Armory for almost nine years. I left in December, 2021. I left because I wanted to do some different things. It was a difficult decision. Even though I am no longer there, I care about the building and the arts. I have lived here since 1984 and have contributed to the arts in Somerville such as co-founding a theatre company, editing a magazine, performing, and now publishing books from writers all over the world (which also includes many local writers) since 2005. I was Poet Laureate of Somerville in 2017 and 2018 which was such an honor.

I am in full support of Arts for the Armory. They bring in wonderful programs to the Armory and much diversity. I have to say since the city took over the Armory, it has been a mess. I cannot believe no decisions have been made. There is no excuse for this. I also do not approve of the way the Arts for the Armory is treated. I have been to some of the meetings and left feeling very disappointed.

I expected more from the City. You took over a beautiful building and could have made it into an amazing arts center with great tenants.

Please listen to the artists. It is us who make this city so strong in the arts. No other city has what we have. You are losing many artists because of the high prices of rent here.

Why is Arts for the Armory being treated like they are when they bring in programs which offer the community what they are looking for? I am amazed at what they have brought to our community. The "politics" is ruining what could be an incredible space. If you lose the Arts for the Armory, no one else is going to do what they do.

Finally, please do not look at this letter as an attack. That is not my purpose. My letter comes out of concern for the artists and the community. Please stand with the Arts for the Armory.

I am a well-respected publisher/artist in this community so I hope you take this letter seriously.

With respect,  
Gloria Mindock, Editor & Publisher  
Červená Barva Press