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## 42 Year Private-Public Partnership Dissolves: Tacoma Arts Live Exits as Venue Manager for City of Tacoma

**TACOMA, WASH.** — Tacoma Arts Live announced today that the organization will no longer continue as the performing arts venues manager for the Pantages Theater, Rialto Theater, and Theater on the Square. On behalf of the City of Tacoma, Tacoma Arts Live has managed the venues for 42 years in a private-public partnership. The news arrives after the City of Tacoma published a [Request for Proposal](#) (RFP) (reference Specification No. PF21-0466F) in April 2021 for management of performing arts venues. The existing agreement between the City of Tacoma and Tacoma Arts Live will expire on June 30, 2021. Tacoma Arts Live's Box Office and administrative offices remain in operation and will be relocated to Tacoma Armory later this summer.

Tacoma Arts Live will not experience any changes in its delivery of world-class artistry and educational programs and services. The community can look forward to a post-pandemic reemergence in September that will launch a season of diverse performances and special events in the Pantages Theater, Rialto Theater, Theater on the Square, as well as other local venues. Only the scope of work as venue manager of the City-owned theaters will dissolve with the expiration of the current management contract. Tacoma Arts Live is energized by the future, that includes events hosted at the City theaters and at the historic Tacoma Armory, which will become Tacoma Arts Live's featured venue for special events and community cultivation.

David Fischer, Tacoma Arts Live's Executive Director said, "Our relationship with the City of Tacoma has been eroding for at least four years. While at the same time, we have never received any critical feedback from the City about our performance as venue managers. The City Manager and Director of Tacoma Venues & Events have made a radical shift in philosophy and partnering. This appears to be a conscious and repeating strategy for the City staff. In conversation with community philanthropists and non-profit leaders, many noted that a pattern has emerged – the City wants more control and less responsibility or investment. The irony of this philosophy is that in all our 42 years, we rarely made a profit from our management contract and more often lost money."

Per the existing venue management contract, both City of Tacoma and Tacoma Arts Live were stipulated to meet and renegotiate annual terms for renewal in Fall 2019. Tacoma Arts Live initially reached out to begin this conversation following the completion of the renovation of the historic Pantages Theater in September 2019 and were met with silence, then conflicting messages, and finally ultimatums from the City. The deadline for terms to be renewed was March 30, 2020, and only then did the City respond to notify Tacoma Arts Live that there would not be a contract renewal. Instead the City would initiate the RFP process. For clarification, Tacoma Arts Live contacted the Tacoma City Council and discovered that most Council members were unaware of the City staff's decision to issue this RFP.

For several months, Tacoma Arts Live has evaluated this difficult decision. Since 1979, the non-profit arts organization has worked on behalf of the City of Tacoma taxpayers and South Sound residents to secure more than \$30 million in non-municipal funding for the treasured community venues. The RFP, under the direction of Tacoma's City Manager Elizabeth Pauli and Director of Venues & Events Kim Bedier, demanded radical changes. This approach did not allow for a sustainable business model for Tacoma Arts Live.

Understanding the City of Tacoma's budget challenges during the pandemic, Tacoma Arts Live accepted an 80% reduction in net payments for 18 months, among the most severe cuts in the City's budget. The City of Tacoma staff zeroed out all contractual payments to Tacoma Arts Live in June 2020. Tacoma Arts Live

attempted to communicate and negotiate over six months, but only with Council advocacy did any adjustment come.

On behalf of our community and out of respect for the past 42 years of partnership, Council members requested that City of Tacoma staff negotiate with Tacoma Arts Live for a continued venue management agreement. City staff claimed the RFP process would not legally allow such negotiations. However, the extreme authoritative declarations published in the RFP raised a red flag for Tacoma Arts Live's Board of Trustees and executive leadership team. The RFP specifically states the City could take any action, even amending or canceling the RFP.

Since the application deadline has passed, three for-profit corporations have responded to the RFP, none from Tacoma. City staff has begun the review process. The next step will be for the Tacoma City Council to approve or decline the recommended venue manager and contract City staff negotiates.

"As we look to the future, we remain deeply concerned for the cultural vitality of Tacoma because the RFP respondents are all for-profit corporations, not based in Tacoma. We have concerns that the focus of these venue managers will be to increase profits by increasing box office fees, rental rates, and blocking local users for nationally based corporations. All of this will potentially erode diversity, community engagement, and access," said Fischer.

Tacoma Arts Live has expressed to the Tacoma City Council concerns that Tacoma's beloved theaters aren't just buildings, but are cherished venues that should enrich and engage our community through thoughtful management and inclusive programs that also reflect the City's diversity and values. In a recent independent assessment, Tacoma Arts Live was praised for the organization's practices in venue management, programming, and education - all through the lens of access, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Tacoma Arts Live is committed to serving the South Sound community.

Tacoma Arts Live is a dynamic cultural organization dedicated to nurturing common ground throughout the South Sound community. The 501(c)(3) non-profit arts organization provides a mix of live and virtual performances, lectures, and more; plus, award-winning, nationally recognized access and education programs that impact civic engagement and whole-child development through the arts.

Learn more about Tacoma Arts Live's decision at [TacomaArtsLive.org/updates](https://TacomaArtsLive.org/updates).

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Tacoma Arts Live's vision is for a South Sound community that honors all cultures and enjoys shared prosperity and mission is to energize the community through live performance. Founded in 1979, Tacoma Arts Live is a non-profit arts organization recognized nationally for leadership in presenting world-class performing artists, providing one of the largest arts access & education programs in Washington State, and leading the preservation of Tacoma's historic theaters. Learn more at [TacomaArtsLive.org](https://TacomaArtsLive.org)