



Hillsboro arts leaders divided over plan to create arts endowment

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The former Hillsboro Trinity Lutheran Church was transformed into the Walters Cultural Arts Center in 2003 with help from the Hillsboro Community Foundation. The City Council last week approved a plan for the city parks department to work with the foundation to set up an endowment to spur arts funding.

HILLSBORO -- A city plan to create an arts endowment has drawn polarizing opinions from Hillsboro's growing arts scene.

Supporters say the endowment is the only way to sustain arts funding in Hillsboro. They say legacy giving -- when someone bequeaths money to an endowment -- inspires more annual giving. But some local arts leaders worry that the endowment isn't well planned and will lure donors away from more immediate, direct giving to arts groups.

This spring, the **Hillsboro Community Foundation**, working with the **Hillsboro Arts & Culture Council**, will have a

chance to prove detractors wrong. The City Council last week gave the parks department permission to work with the nonprofit foundation to create the endowment.

The parks department, which runs the city's arts and culture programs, will pay up to \$50,000 annually for the next three years to the foundation, which plans to use the money to hire someone to work 24 hours a week creating and advertising endowments. The foundation will chip in money for other expenses.

This year, that means working with the Hillsboro Arts & Culture Council to launch the arts endowment. In the future, that staff person could help create endowments for other parks and recreation needs, as well as schools and nonprofits.

Hillsboro grew by 30.5 percent in the past decade, faster than any other Portland-area city. As the city grows, it needs to establish sustainable funding for the arts, residents said 12 years ago when creating the

Hillsboro's 2020 Vision and Action Plan.

Two years ago, city staff started brainstorming ways to create a permanent pot of money for arts. They considered setting up a nonprofit foundation to create a public arts program, said Cristina Caravaca, Hillsboro's cultural arts program manager. As the group discussed potential board members, she realized most of them already served on the Hillsboro Community Foundation board. Forming a new, competing foundation didn't make sense, she said.

The Hillsboro Community Foundation was formed 25 years ago to promote charitable giving in the city. It has helped fund the **Jackson Bottom Wetlands**, **Noble Woods Park** and the **Walters Cultural Arts Center**. The foundation has not managed endowments, but the board spent last year talking about how to expand for its next 25 years.

"It was an awesome organization, but it had kind of reached its peak," Caravaca said. "It needed to re-create itself. They wanted to bring in fresh people, fresh ideas."

At a City Council work session in December, the foundation's Dick Stenson, the parks department's Corinne Bloomfield and the arts and culture council's Lynn Scheller stressed that the partnership would change philanthropy across the city.

Detractors, however, say the partners are naive.

At the work session, Scheller said her group would work with the foundation to raise between \$2 million and \$5 million for the endowment by 2020. But the **Hillsboro Schools Foundation's** endowment, after 10 years, has only \$250,000. And **Bag&Baggage** -- the city's popular seven-year-old theater troupe -- earns only about \$30,000 a year in donations, said Artistic Director Scott Palmer.

The foundation hasn't yet done an asset scan -- a survey to see what Hillsboro residents' capacity and interest for giving is -- and that worries Palmer. "It just doesn't feel to me like they've done their homework," he said.

The endowment program will focus on legacy giving. In meetings over the past six months, arts leaders have worried that the endowment might take money donors otherwise would give to arts groups now.

In the work session, council members echoed those fears. Councilor Steve Callaway said he's excited for the endowment, but added, "The key for me ... is to broaden the givers and not just rob Peter to pay Paul. That to me is a key strategy for this person as they come on board."

The arts and culture council, which will distribute money from the endowment, hasn't detailed how the money would be spent once the endowment is active. Options include increasing yearly grants to local arts and culture organizations, holding more professional development programs for the arts community and

paying for a public art program in Hillsboro.

Caravaca said she wants to give more money to arts groups, not take away from them.

"It doesn't serve me one little bit if I am competing with the people I turn around and give grants to," she said, adding that people who leave donations in their wills are likely to start giving more yearly as well. "You are going to increase your annual giving because you want to see (the arts) thrive and be robust."

-- **Casey Parks**

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