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**ARTS**

**Madison arts budget at stake in 2009 budget battle**

David Medaris on Tuesday 11/11/2008 1:23 pm, (1) [Comment](#), (4) Recommendations

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When the [Madison Common Council](#) convenes in Room 201 of the City-County Building at 5:30 this evening for public hearings on the 2009 Capital and Operating budgets, supporters and opponents are expected to weigh in on more than 70 budget amendments. There's plenty at stake, including Henry Vilas Zoo improvements, neighborhood traffic management, pedestrian improvements, funding cuts for the Central Park project and a handful of proposals to delay several major streets projects for one year.

Karin Wolf is worried that Amendment 26 may be overlooked by local partisans of the arts. Sponsored by Aids. Libby Monson, Thuy Pham-Remmele, Jed Sanborn and Michael Schumacher, this amendment would strip \$112,000 in funding for the Municipal Arts Fund from the 2009 Capital Budget. Wolf, who serves as administrator for the Madison Arts Program, says this would eliminate the budget for the city's public art initiatives, including maintenance of the city's existing public art, as well as its Blink temporary public-art program and its efforts to develop a municipal cultural arts plan.

"This is an opportunity to express to our elected officials how much we value the arts in Madison," says Wolf, who urged local arts partisans in an email appeal over the weekend to register in opposition to Amendment 26 at tonight's meeting, to speak out against it and to urge their alderpersons to vote it down.

"There is a lot of support on the council for the arts," she adds. "I'm fairly confident that Madison elects pro-arts people." But that does not mean arts supporters do not have to be vigilant. Wolf herself describes herself as blind-sided by the amendment.

In tough economic times, the arts -- along with a broad range of social-service, health and education programs -- are among the most vulnerable items in budgets at all levels of government. This despite the fact that the arts usually account for some small fraction of one percent of a government budget.

Wolf suggests that arts programs such as Madison's pay dividends that multiply through the community and have an impact on both quality of life and the economy. She cites a study published two months ago by D. Garth Taylor, a partner in the Urban Institute's Arts and Culture Indicators Project, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation. The [report](#), titled "Magnetizing Neighborhoods through Amateur Arts Performance," found "a significant correlation" between arts activities and the health and stability of neighborhoods, and argues that space for the arts should be included in any comprehensive considerations regarding community development.

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Wolf also notes that Amendment 26 comes at an ironic time. In ceremonies scheduled for the White House this Friday, representatives from the *Simpson Street Free Press* will receive one of 15 Coming Up Taller Awards presented each year to community-based youth programs across the U.S. The paper's focus on youth participation in the arts was a significant factor in its selection, according to *Simpson Street Free Press* community relations director Bronna Lehmann in a letter of gratitude to the commission for its support.

"I think having the city withdraw even this modest, this token amount of funding would send a negative message to the local arts community and the national arts community," adds Wolf, who is concerned that the passage of Amendment 26 could signal a shift in community values.

She understands that people are always looking to trim fat from government budgets. The arts, in Wolf's view are lean.

Tag Evers, the local concert promoter, agrees. In an eloquent [commentary](#) today, he describes specific examples of how the arts can create value that manifests in a ripple effect on the local economy. He goes on to explain how a vibrant arts scene is essential to attracting and retaining top-notch talent for local employers, and concludes: "Divesting in the arts is to invest in failure."



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### Comments (1)

From [Harris Lemberg](#) on 11/12/08 at 6:26 am

It's sad that we have to make these cuts to art funding but we are facing the worst economic times since the great depression. We have to make some hard choices. No one will die from these cuts. I'm not happy about it but I'm afraid these cuts are the right thing to do.

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