

Breaking news from Friends of Delray

February 7, 2013

The future of Delray's Arts Garage is up for a vote.

The City Commission will vote next Tuesday to sell the space on the ground floor of the Old School Square Parking Garage now occupied by the Arts Garage to one of two bidders. One proposal will force the Arts Garage to leave for a new location at the end of its current lease and the other will give the cultural organization a favorable 10 year lease to keep it in place.

Background The Arts Garage was founded by the City to bring an arts complex to Pineapple Grove on N.E. 2nd Avenue. Using City-owned space on the ground floor of the parking garage, the Arts Garage quickly became a success. It now features jazz, Latin and classical music, theater, painting and children's activities. Performances are packed many nights of the week, often with standing room only. The audience comes from Delray and from across South Florida, with many coming from Miami for dinner on the Avenue and a performance. The economic impact of the roughly 2,000 thousand attendees per month is significant to Delray and supports a great many local jobs. Recently the Arts Garage was given two awards and \$50,000 by the prestigious Knight Foundation in Miami for its outstanding contribution to the arts.

Bidders The City has decided to sell the space, and it now has 2 offers to consider. The offers are identical - \$2,500,000 for all the space on the ground floor plus use of 40 parking spaces.

One bidder is the law firm of Kanner and Pinaluga, Accident Attorneys. The firm works on a contingency basis, and the firm's website urges potential clients to contact them "if you or a loved one has been injured in a slip and fall accident... or has been the victim of a dog bite". It is our understanding that much of the space would be used for a phone bank to make and receive calls from potential accident clients. The area which is now alive at night will suddenly be dark if this sale is approved. A sale to the law firm will force the Arts Garage to leave the space in 24 months at the end of its current lease. The CRA has proposed a more remote site next to the railroad tracks, but it is dark, difficult to find and has insufficient parking. It lacks visibility, intimacy or easy access to Atlantic Avenue. We believe the move would reduce attendance and badly harm the programming that the Arts Garage could offer.

The second bidder is the real estate firm of Schmier and Feurring, which is headed by Robert Schmier a long-time member of the Board of Directors of the Arts Garage and Delray resident. This firm will offer the Arts Garage a new 10 year lease on the existing space at favorable rates, assuring its presence on Pineapple Grove Way for a long time. It will also mean that patrons will continue to come to Delray for other shopping and dining, and will keep Pineapple Grove busy at night.

The Commission Next Tuesday the Commission will choose one of these identical purchase offers. You may be scratching your head, thinking this is a simple choice: if the bids are identical, why not accept the one that guarantees that the successful Arts Garage stays in place?

Ah, but this is Delray, and the Commission is unpredictable. We have criticized many previous votes (Waste Management, Fire Tax, Beach contracts). We believe the Kanner and Pinaluga law firm has tried to curry favor. But the Commission will have the opportunity this time to vote to protect a valuable City asset, one that brings happiness, prestige and business to Delray. We are hopeful our elected representatives will do the right thing.

Our recommendation The success of this vibrant cultural destination, which is due in large part to its location, is now in the hands of our City Commission. We urge you to contact the Commissioners who have the power to keep the Arts Garage in place. Ask them to put the interest of the public before the interest of a politically connected law firm by supporting the Schmier and Feurring offer. Here are their email addresses:

carney@mydelraybeach.com

jacquet@mydelraybeach.com

Morrison@mydelraybeach.com

agray@mydelraybeach.com

frankel@mydelraybeach.com

Also, please consider attending the City Commission meeting next Tuesday at City Hall at 6:00 PM to support the Arts Garage.

Your input on matters such as the Fire Tax, which was defeated last winter, made the difference. You have the opportunity to make another difference now.

Thanks for your interest in Friends of Delray.

www.FriendsOfDelray.com