

# BALTIMORE OFFICE OF PROMOTION & THE ARTS

BOPA SUPPORTS AND PROMOTES ARTS AND CULTURE FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL PEOPLE IN BALTIMORE. WE SERVE AS THE CITY'S ARTS COUNCIL AND FILM OFFICE; OUR GOAL IS TO ELEVATE BALTIMORE AS A DESTINATION FOR CREATIVITY AND CULTURE NATIONWIDE.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

Emerge Baltimore Exhibition  
Zach Wade  
Bromo Seltzer Arts Tower



## **OPENING STATEMENT: CEO, Donna Drew Sawyer**

Good morning Chairman Costello and esteemed council members -

I appreciate this additional opportunity to come before you and to clarify and highlight what I believe are some essential facts and additional context, following our discussion on June 2nd. I very much appreciate the presence of BOPA's Board Chair, Brian Lyles, who wanted to be here and is also available for any questions.

An area that I don't feel I sufficiently addressed was BOPA's relationship with the City and its evolution from a function within the Office of the Mayor to a charitable 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation with an independent board. Prior to this development, BOPA was a separately managed division of the City of Baltimore Development Corporation.

But **effective on May 28, 2004, when it was established in its current legal structure, BOPA's charter included as one of its express purposes "to serve as a designated organization for the City to provide arts services "under contract with the Mayor and City Council."** Moreover, in its original agreement with the City, it is clearly stipulated that **"Nothing in the provisions of this Agreement shall be deemed in any way to create between the City and BOPA,**

**any relationship or partnership, joint venture, association or joint or integrated employer status."**

As such - BOPA, while receiving a significant portion of its budget from the City, functions as an independent service provider to the City.

Our mandate **as a service provider to the residents of Baltimore is to serve as the City's arts and culture office, overseeing the City of Baltimore's Arts Council, Film Office, and producer of city-wide events including administering Arts Education, Community, and Organization Project Grants and the City's Creative Baltimore Fund.** Additionally, I am privileged to be invited to participate as a member of the Mayor's cabinet and to collaborate with the members and leaders of his Administration.

I don't feel it necessary to reiterate the points I made in my opening remarks of June 2nd, however I do want to emphasize that **it is our mandate, mission and shared commitment to elevate the arts in Baltimore and invest in our city's creative community, and importantly to serve as your partner and provider in bringing quality, inclusive and impactful artistic and cultural programming within reach of every resident of our great City.**



Mural Project  
Ernest Shaw Jr.  
New Broadway East

Throughout these difficult two years during COVID, BOPA has worked to ensure that the creative community was sustained and continued to thrive in the face of shuttered venues, cancelled commissions and reduced access to audiences.

BOPA immediately pivoted to provide support to the creative community in the form of direct financial support. In March of 2020 BOPA used our funding to provide the initial seed money for the Baltimore Artist Emergency Relief fund. **We collaborated with a coalition of foundations, individuals, and other arts organizations to raise more than \$160,000 in funding to provide grants to creatives throughout Baltimore City before federal stimulus checks and unemployment support were made available.** These funds provided food, rent, medical care, or work supplies – whatever their immediate needs were. BOPA staff took on the task of collecting the requests and distributing \$500 individual grants to over 320 local artists.

Though we could not produce a physical version of Artscape, we used the virtual environment to amplify and continue our support for Baltimore’s creatives. **BOPA launched an online portal, Artscape Artists’ Market, that was free to all artists and provided 75 creatives the opportunity to sell their work – even though we were all in quarantine. We produced online exhibitions including presenting 11 emerging artists in the B2020 Virtual Exhibition.**

We produced weekly artist talks and performances in a Virtual Artist Café

that gave Baltimore artists access to world-wide audiences. We also produced Free Fall Baltimore and Open Studios tours as video content - still providing \$45,000 in grants to arts organizations and local artists. We presented Society’s Cage, a massive experiential outdoor public art installation that safely educated visitors about the Black American experience.

**BOPA launched I’m Creative and I Count to help boost census participation in Baltimore through a targeted campaign reaching nearly 73,000 in the creative community to urge them to participate in the National census.**

When restrictions began to ease in 2021 we added a series of pop-up outdoor exhibitions to give the creative community the opportunity to engage with audiences. We added five murals to the more than 250 murals we have helped communities create across Baltimore. Despite COVID restrictions, working with Youth Works through Art@Work, we were able to safely provide ten Baltimore City youths the opportunity to plan and paint a mural in their communities.

**Each year, as you know, we produce the Sondheim Art Prize, giving 244 artists the opportunity to earn semifinalists, finalists and grand prizes and have their work hang in one of our prestigious arts institutions.**

Through our Scholastic Art and Writing awards program - that BOPA brought to Baltimore in 2019 - **we provide over 3000 students annually with the opportunity to share their work with our community, as well as compete on a national level.**



Gogos  
The Baltimore  
Farmers' Market

Virtual programming such as the Business of Arts engaged dozens of creative professionals at all stages of their career with professional development that included financial literacy and branding education, as well as mini-grants and networking opportunities. **Today, BOPA is administering \$500,000 of American Rescue Plan Act funds for the City of Baltimore for artists in mostly underserved areas of the city.**

Throughout the pandemic and beyond, even though BOPA's revenue decreased **45% from Fiscal year 2020 due to the lack of festivals, we continued to work diligently to ensure that Baltimore's creative community is supported and continues to thrive post-pandemic, and they have.** We could not have achieved those results without the support we received from Baltimore City and we cannot continue this work without the City's generous support. The funding that you approve, the support from funders like BGE, Whiting Turner, T. Rowe Price, the Maryland State Arts Council, M&T Bank, Mercy Hospital, Morgan State University, Loyola, the France-Merrick Foundation, the Meyerhoff Family Charities, and others – more than I have time to name here – enables us to keep up the essential work of ensuring the viability of Baltimore's creative community.

Another area that you highlighted during my last appearance before you was the need for robust and regular collaboration - certainly with our key stakeholders, the leaders of other cultural and artistic organizations, neighborhood associations, and

especially with you, the members of the City Council.

I assure you that indeed, we have been reaching out continually with our community partners and will continue to do so in a spirit of true collaboration and to ensure that you are also at the center of our conversations.

And as I indicated during our June 2nd discussion, we provide bi-weekly overview reports of our activities and engagements to the Office of the Mayor. And as you noted we can do a better job of interacting with you and updating each of you on our work with your constituents and in fulfillment of our mandate to be a service provider to the City of Baltimore. Last week we sent the bi-weekly overview to all members of the City Council as well as Chief Administrative Officer Chris Shorter, and Deputy Mayor Ted Carter. If there is anyone else in City government you would recommend we share information with concerning BOPA's accomplishments on a regular basis, we are happy to add them to the list of recipients. We will make no assumptions going forward about the flow of information but will engage in a robust process to share our plans, our concerns, our challenges, and **our ambitions as we work to extend the reach and impact of BOPA for the benefit and enrichment of ALL Baltimoreans.**

I would like to say a further word about Artscape and the discussion to extend its footprint -- something that has been underway even before the onset of Covid disrupted the regular presentation of Artscape. **In fact, as far back as 2013, BOPA expanded up north Charles, to the Station North arts and entertainment district.**



Artist Video Shoot  
Lauren R. Lyde  
Home Studio



I want to make clear that no decisions have been made about future iterations of this cherished community arts festival, as we continue to consider how best to extend the economic impact of Artscape. **Throughout 2022, we have engaged partners to gather input on the return of Artscape in 2023.** In February we met with **Allison Burr Livingstone of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Councilman Robert Stokes** and you, **Councilman Eric Costello**. In March we met with the **Maryland State Arts Council, Laurie Schwartz of Waterfront Partnership,** and **Shelonda Stokes of Downtown Partnership**. April meetings were with **Sheri Parks, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives at MICA; Chris Ryer, the Director of Planning for Baltimore City; Ellen Janes, Central Baltimore Partnerships,** and the **Station North Arts and Entertainment District; City Council President Nick Mosby,** and **Jonathon Schwartz of the Lyric** and **President Schmoke of the University of Baltimore**. In May we met with **Robbin Lee of Baltimore Homecoming, Kirby Fowler of the Baltimore Zoo** and again with **Al Hutchinson of Visit Baltimore** and his team, **Ellen Janes** and **Jack Danna of Central Baltimore Partnership** and, **Sandra Gibson of the Maryland Film Festival and the Parkway Theater**. And throughout the year we have met with Jayson Williams, President of Mayson-Dixon Companies, to assist us with outreach and strategic direction.

We are also in discussion with several potential funders **including the Maryland State Arts Council,**

**Guinness Brewery, Kaiser Permanente, Play Airlines, Truist Bank, McCormick & Company, T-Mobile, Verizon, Pepsico, CareFirst, BlueCross BlueShield, and several others.** And just yesterday, Bill Whitaker from 60 Minutes was in town exploring a story on BOPA and Artscape 2023. But again, no decisions have been made and we are in the process of defining options for Mayor Scott's review that address many of the expressed desires of artists, community and cultural leaders and neighbors of Bolton Hill, Mount Royal and Station North. BOPA plans to continue engaging partners and community members - and, yes, you - throughout the summer to ensure that our programming and plans truly reflect the needs of artists and creatives in Baltimore.

Another area that you addressed in our last conversation was the organizational changes that have been implemented at BOPA with the aim of putting artists first and to ensure the level of engagement of all communities of Baltimore that I know you also desire. Although COVID required making difficult personnel decisions, we have also been working to make the organization more efficient, responsive and strategic.

This required looking at essential competencies and expertise that we need and making changes within the organization to deliver the types of high-quality experiences that Baltimore citizens desire and have every reason to expect. I trust that you share this aim and support our efforts to create a truly professional organization that is not only a responsible steward of the tax dollars you apportion to BOPA, but which optimizes every opportunity to broaden our reach and impact.



The Baltimore  
Farmers' Market  
B-Side

Our robust schedule of curated exhibitions contributes to that impact through “Emerge Baltimore” a new exhibition series at the Bromo Seltzer Arts Tower provides up-and-coming Baltimore artists with their first exhibitions. We feature artists who have honed and perfected their art practice right here in Baltimore at our “Gallery in the Sky” exhibitions at the World Trade Center. Ernest Shaw and Lauren Lyde are two notable local creatives who we should all be proud of and celebrate.

Over this past weekend, we kicked off the **first B-Side, a monthly extension of the Farmers' Market hours to expand BOPA's ability to provide opportunities and visibility to different kinds of artists while creating an event that brings people together.** I also want to emphasize that during the pandemic, the Farmers' Market served as an essential food source and helped many vendors stay afloat.

At the same time, the **Farmers' Market has also served as a feeder for entrepreneurs to launch businesses that ultimately become brick and mortar stores, contributing to Baltimore's economy.** A few examples include Ekiben, The Mount Royal Soap Company and the Urban Oyster.

And then of course, as you know, BOPA also manages historic facilities that serve as community arts centers and beacons of cultural tourism: Bromo Seltzer Arts Tower, School33 Art Center, and Top of the World Observation Level. Each of these venues currently feature visual art installed by resident creatives.

Finally, Mr. Chairman and Council

Members, I would be remiss in my responsibilities of leading BOPA if I did not make a plea to you, following comments during our last discussion about potentially withholding funding for the coming year.

We can agree - and I know we do - on many things. And we can also disagree on some things. But what we must all agree on is that **BOPA is vital to the cultural and artistic fabric of our great City. Our work has social, civic and economic impact that far outweighs the city's expenditure. In our efforts to enrich even more communities - particularly those in underserved neighborhoods - with quality, engaging, inspiring and inclusive programming, your support, and the funding you provide is essential.** Not only do we depend on it. Our artistic beneficiaries depend on it; our young people depend on it; neighborhoods, corporate partners and their employees depend on it; our countless visitors from surrounding counties and further afar depend on it. To deprive BOPA of funding is to deprive our many essential stakeholders - your constituents - of transformative experiences and a reduction in the quality of life that we aspire to make possible.

On behalf of **our Board and our dedicated employees, we pledge to be your partner in what is not only a worthy effort but an essential one - to extend possibilities and potential for current and future generations of Baltimoreans through the shared experience of community art and culture.** Thank you for your support.



Studio Visit  
Lee Nowell-Wilson  
School 33

## THE BUZZ:

- “Thank you! I really needed this! seriously cried tears of joy! Thank you so much!” -**Shaylah Mickens (founder, Soulful Symmetry and Black Girl Speaks)**
- “I’d like to thank The Baltimore Office of Promotion and The Arts for the \$500.00 relief fund! It is greatly appreciated during this time of global emergency.” -**Gregory Thompkins (musician)**
- “Thank you to all of the staff at BOPA for creating the Baltimore Artist Emergency Relief Fund. As a practicing artist for 25 years (15 in Baltimore) and a teaching artist for the last 10, it felt good to get support from the arts sector in this strange time. As I wrote to Devin Shacklett when I received my award letter, ‘in a sea of resources and possibilities, one YES can be very resonant!’” -**Theresa Columbus (performing & teaching artist)**
- “I want to say thank you to you and BOPA for extending this help during the current crisis. I am incredibly grateful and humbled.” -**Vivian Tanga (painter)**
- “A huge thanks for this assistance. I will be able to cover some very important bills with these funds.” -**Deborah Bilezikian (musician)**
- “This grant made a huge positive impact on my stress level. As a self-employed artist/entrepreneur this period of COVID-19 has been very tough. This grant allowed me to pay three monthly bills. Invaluable!” -**Anonymous**
- “This grant came at a point when I had lost some of my biggest freelance projects due to event cancellations, the amount of other work I had available was switching every week, and I didn’t how long it would take to make enough to cover my necessary expenses. This grant covered my share of rent for one month during my most uncertain period during the pandemic.” -**Anonymous**
- “Receiving this grant was a confirming experience that the City of Baltimore values the contribution artists make to this Metropolitan region. Much Thanks! This program is greatly appreciated!” -**Anonymous**
- “This helped so much, and I wish more artists could access this kind of assistance outside of COVID-19.” -**Anonymous**



Studio Visit  
Alisa Brock  
School 33

# CONTACT:

## Donna Drew Sawyer

dsawyer@promotionandarts.org

Main Number: 410 756-8632

Direct: 443-263-4303



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