

Your Questions, Our Commitment Q&A

October 29, 2024

FAQ

Question #1: Contract Overview

What does contract termination with the City mean for BOPA and all that BOPA has managed and produced with this change (facilities, events, programs, grants, arts council designation, etc.)?

Andrew potentially gives a high-level overview of the contract and reinforces that BOPA is a 501(C)(3) and will continue and can exist absent a contract from the City. With a termination of the current contract, BOPA would no longer produce events for the City or the Farmer's Market. That means Artscape, Book Festival, Fourth of July, and NYE Fireworks, as well as the MLK Jr. Day parade will find a new home after January 2025. There is a document that was made public that notes a plan to transition BOPA to the City back in 2023 where the Farmer's Market would get folded into the City's public market system, however, we cannot say for sure what the City has planned at this time. We still serve as the arts council for the City of Baltimore, and it stands to remain that way at least until FY26 which is the earliest a process to potentially move that designation could happen. Removing that designation there is a process that must take place for that to happen.

Question #2: Contract Overview

Is there anything that can be done to avoid contract termination?

The City will present the proposal to terminate BOPA's contract before the BOE on November 6th. The BOE is made up of the Mayor, the Comptroller, the City Solicitor, the Director of Public Works, and the City Council President. Two of these positions are mayoral appointees. We are not sure if there is much that can be done at this point. We just have to wait on the outcome of the vote.

Question #3: 90 Day Transition Period

Can the City's request timeframe of 90 days be extended as part of the negotiation and communication process as BOPA is in the midst of transformation?

This would be and was part of the recommendation and plan laid out prior to receiving the letter. I think many have expressed a similar concern, so we are hoping for the best.

Question #4: Finances

The issues have been ongoing for 5 years. Where's your sustainability strategy? How can you do the work and balance your budget?

While a sustainability plan generally focuses on the long-term health and viability of an organization, a short-term plan is necessary to address immediate goals and challenges. At the start of her tenure, Rachel acknowledged the need for a clear sustainability plan. In the 8 months since then, several committees have been working collectively to develop strategies around funding, community engagement, transparency, governance, and operational efficiency that would roll into one comprehensive strategy. With the announcement of the City's cancellation of the contract, our focus has shifted to short-term planning, which means we must ensure our budget and priorities align with stabilizing the organization.

At the time of the City's announcement of the contract termination, BOPA faced a short-term cash flow issue, not a budget issue. What has continued for several years and causes cashflow issues, is that the contractual services BOPA delivers do not align with the payment schedule. The interim board and current BOPA leadership identified this as a challenge and slated this as a priority area for discussion when the next round of city contract negotiations came. For BOPA to effectively rebalance the current budget, we must get a better understanding of commitments and transition expectations from the city.

Question #5: Finances

Can BOPA attract significant sponsors beyond City government to fill the gap?

Prior to COVID, BOPA raised significant funds from private sponsors and donors. During the first year of the pandemic nonprofits in general saw heightened contributions, but after that initial year many nonprofits nationally reported declines in donations due to economic pressure and uncertainties.

We have full confidence that based on all that the City of Baltimore has to offer, and the artists that we proudly support, we will attract sponsorship on par with and even exceeding levels seen in the past. But we have work to do. If BOPA can fully execute the interim board's recommendations while attracting a balanced mix of corporate and art community stakeholders who share in the vision of fully realized arts promotion, not only will BOPA attract sponsors who generate the funds beyond City funding, they will become a model of how arts organizations can become an integral part of a thriving and robust cityscape. To do this, one of our focuses is to maintain the state arts council designation.

Question #6: Finances

What are the steps you are taking to address the issues that led to BOPA losing its contract with the city? How will your mission change? What will you be able to do to really support artists when you are still needing to stabilize yourself?

BOPA's leadership and the interim board have been making progress for the past eight months to address longstanding systemic issues and improve transparency, funding structures, and governance. The direction is to continue working to address the gaps and challenges head-on.

BOPA's mission has been to serve as Baltimore's arts council and support the arts community by organizing cultural activities, advocating for the arts, and promoting Baltimore's cultural assets. We are pushing to continue to serve as Baltimore's arts council. Although the city is looking to bring some events and property management in-house, this would now allow for BOPA to focus on supporting the curation of artist in support of larger scale events, while also creating capacity to manage smaller scale arts and culture community engagement and convene stakeholders for arts advocacy.

Question #7: Artist Voice

Is there a future where artists of Baltimore will have a better say on how BOPA will be run? Will we have a larger voice?

Over the next several weeks we will launch a set of small group meetings focused on the three strategic pillars outlined during the Q&A:

- 1. Development of a city-wide creative agenda to grow the cultural economy,*
- 2. Support of the Arts community through grantmaking & advocacy,*
- 3. and Promoting Baltimore as a destination for arts tourism to residents and visitors.*

These intimate conversations will work to refine the specifics of what a better version of this organization might look like, to develop a new strategic plan, timeline, key performance indicators, and a first-year plan of work.

Question #8: Events

Outside of events like Artscape, what does this change mean for the individual artist community? What are the biggest changes we will see/feel, especially when it comes to funding?

It is our hope that individual artists are not impacted. What we want most is a smooth transition for all. The largest change is that BOPA will no longer manage every aspect of some of these beloved events and facilities. We hear from individual artists and small arts organizations in Baltimore that funding provided by BOPA is integral to their existence. It is BOPA's mission to support creatives at all stages of their careers and arts organizations of all sizes, and we are concerned that without

knowledge of a cohesive plan and such a *small window proposed for transition that the individual artists and small organizations will be the ones that are hurt the most.*

Question #9: Programs & Grants

What programs will you continue to steward?

This organization will continue to serve as a grant giving organization. There are many programs and funding sources allotted to the organization that are not connected with the city contract. For example:

- *The Janet & Walter Sondheim Art Prize is an endowment to the organization. **Applications are now open.***
- *Municipal Art Society of Baltimore (MASB) Travel Prize,*
- *Business of Arts workshops,*
- *Maryland regional Scholastic Art & Writing Awards,*
- *Open Studio Tour,*
- *Art @Work and other mural projects,*
- *Free Fall Baltimore,*
- *It is possible that exhibitions such as Emerge, Peak Artists Series, and B24, etc. will just need to find new exhibition locations,*
- *Programming around fashion in general as well as sustainable fashion will continue.*

We may no longer run the Creative Baltimore Fund, which is an annual allocation by the City that BOPA manages, however, it is currently open so artists can still apply for this fiscal year and feel comfortable doing so.

Question #10: Facilities & Farmers' Market

What is the specific plan for the Bromo Seltzer Arts Tower and Studio 33 Art Center, their resident artists, and Farmers' Market vendors?

This is a question that we have as well. With the termination of the contract, those properties stand to go back to the City to manage and program. Transferring the ownership and day-to-day management of these facilities is a complicated process and we are concerned about the expectation to carry out that transition responsibly in a 90-day period. It is our hope to be able to work with the City to outline a plan that allows more time for a properly executed transition.

Question #11: Transition Period/Roadmap

Has there been any immediate planning for the first months after the 20th of January cutoff for BOPA events? What are you doing to work with the city over the next 90 days. Can you give us an update on the transition so far? If there's a roadmap for the transition between BOPA and the mayor's office, can you update us on that?

The initiation of the transition plan lies with the City. We reached out to request a meeting to begin discussing this process and have not yet confirmed a date and time with the mayor's office. We honestly wish that we had more to share with you regarding this as we share in many of the creative community's concerns. We have also been very clear in our stance that a 90-day transition period is too short. We will keep the community updated on any developments in the coming weeks.

Question #12: Public Art Commission

Currently BOPA hosts and staff's the mayor appointed Public Art Commission. When BOPA's contract with the City ends, will the relationship with the PAC continue? What role or oversight does BOPA intend to have in the managing the City's public art collection or administering past Gifts of Public Art where BOPA held and managed the maintenance funds (i.e., William Donald Schaefer and Brooks Robinson monuments)?

The Public Art Commission is a citizen review board appointed by the mayor for which BOPA provides administrative support. Those duties could be absorbed by the mayor's office or transferred elsewhere – that decision would lie with City Hall. However, our overall approach is to continue carrying on the tasks we always have been and in a timely manner until it is no longer our official responsibility. The call for new public art commissioners just closed on October 30th. These commissioners serve a four-year term concurrent with the mayor. The nine-member body has 6 vacancies to fill. New commissioners will be sworn in in January.

Question #13: The Baltimore Film Office

What is the future of the Film Office?

Under the current contract, the Film Office is managed and paid for by the Baltimore Office of Promotion & the Arts. Our assumption at this point is that this responsibility would be returned to the city.

Question #14: The Baltimore Film Office

How are you paying moneys still outstanding, i.e. to organizations who were asked to provide support for Artscape and haven't been paid yet. What should we expect and when should we expect it?

That should not be the case. Please direct questions regarding outstanding invoices to financedepartment@promotionandarts.org, making sure to include the name of the organization, any invoice number, and amount owed.

Question #15: The Baltimore World Trade Center - Top of the World

What is the status of improvements to Top of the World gallery

The short answer is that we have a plan for those improvements, however, we may have to wait a bit to see how this all pans out.

Question #16: Board Membership

What exactly qualifies you to be a board member or chair in these organizations?

The Interim board is looking to bring on people that are passionate about the arts in Baltimore, people that have experience in any role in support of the arts, in various areas of expertise. Anyone who may work in an adjacent field to the arts or the roles and responsibilities necessary for a board please feel free to apply

Question #17: Need

What do you need from US to best help you succeed in this next chapter? How can we help?

- **Community Conversations:** In the coming weeks, we will hold a series of community conversations focused on gathering input around the three strategic pillars identified by BOPA leadership for moving the organization forward. Please consider attending.
- **Permanent Board Members:** We are currently seeking permanent members for our board. More information [here](#).
- **Public Arts Commission:** The Public Arts commission is seeking new members.
- **Sponsorship or Philanthropic Interest:** As a 501c3 nonprofit we rely heavily on sponsorship, grants, and fundraising. If you are interested, please reach out to Development@promotionandarts.org
- **Board of Estimates Nov 6th:** The city will present a proposal to cancel its contract with BOPA on Tuesday at 9:00am. If you are interested in submitting a statement of opposition, you can do so [here](#). The deadline is noon Monday, November 5th.