



Testimony of Alive Downtowns Philip Morris, CEO Proctors

Alive Downtowns!, an organization representing thirteen upstate cities, is requesting \$20 million to support their respective performing arts centers as economic engines for their downtowns.

Alive Downtowns! members are Bardavon 1896 Opera House (Poughkeepsie), Clemens Center (Elmira), Palace Performing Arts Center (Albany), Proctors Collaborative (Schenectady, Albany, Saratoga), The Reg Lenna Center for the Arts (Jamestown), Rochester Broadway Theatre League's Auditorium Theatre (Rochester), Shea's Performing Arts Center (Buffalo), The Smith Center for the Arts (Geneva), Stanley Theatre (Utica), State Theatre of Ithaca, Syracuse Area Landmark Theatre, Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, and Ulster Performing Arts Center (Kingston).

What is powerful here is that whether you are a patron of one or more of these arts centers or not, within your regions you know them. You know that they define the economic heart of their cities and even the facilities you don't know, you can fully imagine how they impact restaurants, bars, tourism and downtown marketing.

Together these facilities employ over 1,000 people and have a direct economic impact over \$350 million dollars per year. Depending on the formula used, the indirect impact could be double that figure.

It would be a truism for each of these centers, "As goes (just fill in the arts center's name) so goes (full in the city's name)!"

We impact sales tax revenue, increase neighboring property tax values, and are key parts of the “sales pitches” of our development officials.

Our facilities are more than economics, however. We have built extensive education programs, many with our urban schools and most ties to what we have on our stages.

We have leveraged our beautiful 100-year-old theatres into whole block renovations rather than whole block tear downs as most of us were the last theatres standing in the 1970s and 80s, others already demolished for urban renewal projects that never met expectations. We symbolized a local responsibility for our downtowns which fed the ambition of hundreds of entrepreneurs to invest near us as we inspired the urban comeback so critically needed.

We have done this without ever having the critical core funding for operations that 100 year old facilities all need. We have scraped by for the last 30 years. Often the state has been tremendously supportive of our capital/construction projects, but, as you know and as the COVID-19 shutdown made eminently clear, capital support does not pay the bills.

None of us receive significant support from the New York State Council on the Arts as their funding is both artistically aimed and project based. There is not support for utilities, insurance or staffing. Yet, many of the projects NYSCA supports ask to use our stages and ancillary spaces. We always say yes and usually at significant discounts.

In essence, we have become essential to our communities and to the live-ability of our upstate cities at a time that they continue to be challenged.

\$20 million acknowledges that we are as important as our hospitals, colleges, and schools. We are the third leg of what makes upstate cities viable. This request is modest and over time will provide the foundation for amazing new ventures in our communities.

Thank you.

Alive Downtowns! is an affiliate corporation to the Upstate Theater Coalition for a Fairgame, established eight years ago in response to the establishment of casinos in the eastern and southern tiers of the state. More information about Alive Downtowns! can be found at: afairgame.net.