

Lucy Sexton

New Yorkers for Culture & Arts

Brownsville Arts Center

Land Use hearing

Feb 29, 2024

My name is Lucy Sexton and I am with the cultural advocacy coalition New Yorkers for Culture & Arts. We have a membership of more than 400 artists and cultural organizations from across the five boroughs. Our mission is to work toward a future where every New Yorker has access to the community strengthening power of culture.

I am here to endorse the plans for this proposed project which would include an invaluable and desperately needed Brownsville Arts Center.

A groundbreaking study of NYC done in 2017 showed that neighborhoods with robust cultural centers had better outcomes in mental health, education, aging, public safety, youth impacted by the criminal justice system, and community well being.

Children who regularly engage in the arts do better in school, and have a data proven improvement in their chances to graduate high school and attend college. Elders who can gather to dance and tell stories together live longer healthier lives.

When the community has a place to connect with each other, to play music together, mental health improves and the community is stronger, more connected, and safer.

Brownsville and East New York have been historically and criminally disinvested in on all fronts, and that includes arts and culture. The city, state, and private philanthropy have stated their desire to improve equity in their funding practices---which

have failed eastern Brooklyn for decades. Building a home, a physical space, for local culture and arts to grow is an urgently needed step in the struggle to make those commitments to equitable funding a reality. These chances are rare and I implore the committee to move forward with this critically needed investment in the people of Brownsville and eastern Brooklyn.

I will end by saying that I grew up in Fr Greene and Park Slope in the 60s and 70s, where I took dance classes as a toddler dance training in my public high school, and more. My family's lifelong friends, the Robinsons, grew up and still live in Btownsville, where they had access to none of that growing up and even today they must travel to take their kids and grandkids to classes, shows, or even a movie. We were and still are a tale of two cities in NY. It is rooted in racism, it handicaps communities and lives, and it must change. Now.

**City Council Land Use Committee
Support for the Brownsville Arts Center**

TO: The Honorable Council Member Rafael Salamanca Jr., Chair, City Council Land Use Committee
FROM: Cheryl Todmann, The Stars of New York Dance **DATE:** Thursday, February 22, 2024

Dear Council Member Salamanca,

I appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony to the City Council Land Use Committee on behalf of The Stars of New York Dance and the arts organizations that we partner with to express the urgent need for rehearsal and performance space in East Brooklyn.

As a resident and business leader in this vibrant community, I have witnessed the incredible talent, artistry and creativity within our neighborhoods. However, without proper facilities to rehearse, perform and exhibit our work—and showcase the talents of those we serve—many aspiring artists and arts organizations are unable to reach their full potential.

For the past 14 years, The Stars of New York Dance has partnered with local dance organizations in Brooklyn to fulfill our mission to provide children with free dance education and training, give artists and choreographers a platform to showcase their work, and present events and programs that create new audiences for dance. Our difficulty with securing available, accessible, appropriate and affordable spaces to practice and present—our “space crisis”—is one of the greatest challenges we and our partner arts organizations face.

The demand for space in Brooklyn has skyrocketed over the past decade, and the supply of spaces is not able to meet the demand. Of the reputable rehearsal and performance spaces in Brooklyn, the majority of them are located downtown and outside our East Brooklyn neighborhoods where we live, work, create art and build community. Additionally, we regularly compete with our partner organizations and other performing arts companies for the same rehearsal and performance spaces. For many small and BIOPIC arts organizations with small budgets, the rental spaces and venue costs are out of reach.

The result is that we settle for alternative spaces to rehearse and present art that are not conducive to dancers and performers, pose greater risk of injury, and are not attractive or adequately-equipped facilities for audiences.

The consequences are far-reaching. Due to the lack of local rehearsal and performance space, East Brooklyn artists and arts organizations face constant displacement, as well as missed opportunities to showcase their work and contribute to the cultural and economic development within their own communities.

The answer is to build the Brownsville Arts Center. Developing a 25,000 square foot cultural center with a state-of-the-art, 150-seat black-box theater will serve as homebase for many East Brooklyn arts organizations, and as a hub for arts and culture (dance, music, film) and public meeting space for the residents of the community.

Having a dedicated space for community rehearsals and performances would not only provide a platform for local artists to showcase their work and create new audiences for the arts locally, but it would also foster creativity, collaboration, and a sense of community pride in East Brooklyn. By investing in such a space, the City Council would be investing in the cultural, artistic and economic development of East Brooklyn; and in its residents who are worthy of wonderful arts center like those that exist in other communities in Brooklyn.

I urge you to consider the importance of supporting the arts in East Brooklyn and to prioritize the development of the Brownsville Arts Center. Together, we can build a space where creativity comes to life, our community's talent shines, and local arts organizations and the East Brooklyn economy thrives.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Todmann
Founder & Executive Producer
The Stars of New York Dance

November 28, 2023

To whom it may concern:

We, the undersigned residents of East Brooklyn and the members of New York's creative community, join forces with a shared objective — to wholeheartedly endorse and express our enthusiastic support for the Brownsville Arts Center [BAC].

As residents, business owners, artists, musicians, dancers, filmmakers, nonprofit organizations supporting the arts, and more, we have witnessed first-hand the integral role arts and cultural play in shaping the fabric of a community. Increasing access to affordable arts education, cultural programming, and studio space, dance studios, media labs, performance space, and exhibition space, like those at the BAC, will provide a vital place for creative expression and community empowerment.

Our collective voice serves as a testament to our shared values and commitment to advocating for the establishment of new cultural facilities like the Brownsville Arts Center, that will ensure quality cultural programming and creative opportunities are accessible and affordable to all, regardless of zip code, age, race, color, national origin, or income.

Unfortunately, despite New York State's extraordinary cultural assets and significant public and private investments, not all New Yorkers have equal access to the transformative benefits of arts and culture. Certain communities continue to receive more cultural funding and public resources than others and these inequities often skew along the lines of race and income. Nowhere is this more apparent than here in Brownsville and the surrounding East Brooklyn communities. The Brownsville Arts Center represents a pivotal step towards rectifying this imbalance and improving access for the long under-resourced and under-represented residents, students, artists, audiences, and cultural workers of East Brooklyn.

We, as a group, represent a broad spectrum of interests and disciplines ranging from visual arts to performing arts, literary pursuits to heritage preservation, and much more. Our diversity mirrors the rich mosaic of New York's cultural identity, and our unity underscores the significance of the cause we are advocating for.

We strongly support the creation of the Brownsville Arts Center and its mission to help foster a thriving cultural sector that is affordable and accessible to all.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned

Brian Adamczyk, Brooklyn Music School
Godwin Adams
Beth Allen, Downtown Brooklyn Arts Alliance
La'Shawn Allen-Muhammad, Central Brooklyn Economic Development Corporation
Gerard Allison, Youth Design Center
Jaala Alston
Alexis Aquino, Brownsville Community Culinary Center
Ragnhild Ragz Bruland, Flex Dance Program Inc.
Natalie Capers, Central Brooklyn Economic Development Corporation
Emma Cookson, Brooklyn Arts Council
Jonathan Delva, Brownsville Community Justice Center
Essie Duggan
Angus Fischer, Innovative Resilience East Brooklyn Village Inc.
Ana Frink, Youth Design Center
Wilfredo Florentino, Rooted Theater Company
Peta-Gaye Keane, Brownsville Community Justice Center
Jilian Gersten, Brooklyn Org.
Felice Graham
Catherine Green-Johnson, ARTs East New York
Rasu Jilani, Brooklyn Arts Council
Alex Johnson
Javon Johnson, Empowering Youth Towards Excellence Inc
Kwesi Johnson, Brownsville Community Justice Center
Kevin Joseph, Purelements An Evolution in Dance
Manuel Larino, Brownsville Community Justice Center
Ivi Lewis, Youth Design Center, Inc.
Quardean Lewis-Allen, Youth Design Center, Inc.
Tyrone Love
Jabari Nedd
Camille Newman, Womens Business Center LDCENY
Sainabou Njai, African Peach Arts Coalition Inc.
Anita Pierce, Eleven3seven5
Shawnese Powdar
Raynah Robinson
Lucy Sexton, New Yorkers for Culture & Arts
Adrianna Sweeney
Alexis Takahashi, Brownsville Community Justice Center
Cheryl Todmann, The Stars of New York Dance
Mallory Thatch, Brownsville Community Justice Center
Larry Weekes, Fulton Art Fair, Inc.
Shawn Wharton-Scott
Shaneka Willimas

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: KATHERINE GRAY

Address: 88 PINE STREET, NY, NY 10005

I represent: GILBANE DEVELOPMENT CO. (JV DEVELOPER)

Address: 88 PINE ST. NYC 10005

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/29/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Serin Choi

Address: 88 Pine Street, NY, NY 10005

I represent: Gilbane Development Co.

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 151617

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/29/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aleena Farishda

Address: 100 Gold St - NYC HPD

I represent: HPD

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 2015, 16, 17 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/29/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Arund Siddhant

Address: 100 Gold

I represent: FIPD

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Catherine Green-Johnson

Address: Holland Rd

I represent: Catherine Mkt.

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: GUARDEAN LEWIS ALLEN

Address: NEW LOB AVE

I represent: YOUTH DESIGN CENTER

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Musiki Glover

Address: 61 Thatford Ave

I represent: Self my community Brownsville

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/29/21

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kofi Williams

Address: Macdonough Street

I represent: Asase Yaa Cultural Arts Foundation

Address: 86 Hanson Place suite 204 Brooklyn NY 11217

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/29/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Hallah Saleh

Address: 100 Gold St

I represent: HPD

Address: 100 Gold St

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/29/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kevin Joseph

Address: [Redacted] B'klyn NY 11207

I represent: Purelements An Evolution in Dance

Address: 1958 Fulton St. 11233

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms