Dear Mayor and Council,

I would like to share a quick summary of HST's story (Home School Talents).  Twenty five years ago, we started a theater class with less that 25 students.  With the mentoring of many wonderful Rockville residents and employees, including Eileen McGuckian, John Moser, Betty Wisda, Kathleen Moran, Lou Dronenberg, and a long line of F. Scott Fitzgerald Theater managers, HST has grown to become a non-profit that stages six spring productions annually at the FSF theater.  To date, we have produced 95 shows, bringing the joy of theater to tens of thousands of audience members.

HST wishes to extend our thanks to the City of Rockville for it's strong commitment to supporting the arts. The FSF Theater, along with the entire Civic Center Park, is truly one of Rockville's hidden gems.  It is always a joy to introduce this treasure to our new families and their many guests who attend our shows. Additionally, HST has hosted  a Prom for home school students at the Glenview Mansion for 17 years and at least two of our alumni have used this venue for their wedding reception. I have nothing but the highest praise for all of the Civic Center and FSF Theater staff.  They exemplify the City's commitment to outstanding customer service.

While HST could never adequately show our appreciation for the City's role in HST's success, we are hoping that we can assist with the current Covid-19 challenge of re-starting the economy. The arts have a long history of helping people get past their anxieties. One example of this happened in 1884 when the public was fearful of the newly opened Brooklyn Bridge.  After a panic-driven pedestrian stampede on the bridge resulted in 12 deaths, P.T.Barnum paraded 21 elephants and 14 camels across the bridge to prove it's safety. Of course, Covid-19's death toll is much higher and the anxiety it is causing is far greater. However, at some point, the public will need to be shown that, with proper precautions, group events can be safely held without spreading the virus.

HST would love to be the group that starts this healing process. Our three weeks of April bookings in the FSF theater have been shifted to two weeks in May.  While May is probably too soon to bring in an audience, HST would like to use the theater to film our productions. (Due to high demand for this outstanding theater, there are no feasible options for staging our six productions later in the calendar.)  Although this is not a perfect solution, it would save our 25th Season from being completely cancelled, provide some revenue for the theater, and give the City a reliable partner to prove that safety precautions can be effective.

HST has a strong reputation for being disciplined and well-organized. We have amazing families who will implement every safety precaution we put in place.  While a full safety plan would be determined by the FSF Theater staff, obvious components would be social distancing and masks for everyone (apart from the short time that a scene is actually filmed).  HST would also maintain strict washing and disinfecting procedures and have all parents sign a waiver.

I recognize that this request is unusual and may seem self-absorbed considering the more serious challenges that Covid-19 is creating.  However, I would not be doing my due diligence if I did not ask.  I truly believe HST can film safely in the FSF theater, but we will graciously accept whatever decision is made by the City. Our gratitude for Rockville's years of support will not be tainted, even if our 25th Anniversary shows never get staged in the FSF Theater.

Thank you for taking the time to read this email and consider our request.

Blessings,

Marilyn Mullan

HST Executive Director