

CITY OF BURNABY

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL

HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR
AND COUNCILLORS

RE: #49/2000 BURNABY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA GRANT REQUEST

RECOMMENDATION:

1. THAT this grant request be denied.

REPORT

Council, at its 'Open' meeting held on 2000 October 30, received a report from the Executive Committee of Council recommending that a request for a grant to assist with the formation and development of the Burnaby Symphony Orchestra be denied. Council referred the report back to the Executive Committee in order to have representatives of the Burnaby Symphony Orchestra appear as a delegation and explain their plan.

The Executive Committee, at its meeting held on 2000 November 20, met with representatives of the Burnaby Symphony Orchestra to review their request for a \$20,000 grant. Subsequently, the Committee, at its meeting held on 2000 December 04, requested that staff prepare a report regarding the long term viability of the Burnaby Symphony Orchestra.

The Executive Committee, at its meeting held on 2001 February 12, received the staff report (Attachment 1) and then confirmed its previous decision recommending that this grant request be denied. In addition, the Committee requested that the Burnaby Symphony Society be encouraged to seek funding from community groups, corporate sponsors and revenue-generating activities to finance the marketing, consultation and feasibility study phases of development.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor N.M. Volkow,
Chair

Councillor D.R. Corrigan,
Member

Councillor C. Redman,
Member

CC: -CITY MANAGER -DIRECTOR FINANCE
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CITY OF BURNABY
INTER-OFFICE COMMUNICATION

2001 February 07

TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL

FROM: DIRECTOR PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURAL SERVICES

SUBJECT: BURNABY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA FUNDING REQUEST

RECOMMENDATION:

1. THAT this report be received for information purposes.

REPORT

At its meeting of 2000 October 30, Council received a report from the Executive Committee of Council which recommended that a grant request from the Burnaby Symphony Orchestra be denied. This recommendation was made based on a review of the Orchestra Business Plan. Council referred the report back to the Executive Committee of Council in order to have representatives of the Burnaby Symphony Orchestra appear as a delegation and explain their plan.

The Executive Committee met with the Burnaby Symphony Orchestra representative on 2000 November 20, and at its meeting of 2000 December 04 asked that staff prepare a report regarding the long term viability of the Burnaby Symphony Orchestra.

BACKGROUND:

In Spring 2000, Mr. Leonard Camplin, most recently Music Director and Conductor of the Okanagan Symphony Orchestra, approached the Burnaby Arts Council and City of Burnaby staff regarding help in establishing a symphony orchestra in Burnaby. Mr Camplin, now a Burnaby resident, made presentations to Burnaby Parks Recreation and Culture Commission and to Council about the concept. The Commission and the Burnaby Arts Council assisted Mr. Camplin to hold a community meeting on 2000 June 15 at the Shadbolt Centre for the Arts, the purpose being to test local interest in the concept. At the meeting, an interim board of directors was created from interested volunteers who later established a non-profit society, the Burnaby Symphony Society.

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The group intends to establish an independent professional symphony orchestra in Burnaby and offer a series of concerts throughout the year at available facilities. The business plan speaks to recruiting the interest and support of key corporate sponsors, to seek government and foundation grants and solicit individual contributions. It calls for the creation of a marketing plan and resources to launch this initial campaign, to assemble finances and then to offer a modest series of public concerts at the outset. Building on success and through increased exposure, the BSO hope to develop roots in the community, become a key arts attraction, an educational resource and be sustainable.

OBSERVATIONS AND EVALUATIONS:

At a meeting with Mr. Camplin on 2000 April 18, staff noted that the feasibility of such an orchestra needed serious review and asked what steps were in place to fully research and test the feasibility and viability of a local orchestra. While Burnaby is a large city, it is a community within a larger metropolitan area and therefore consideration of the existing services and potential markets is critical. It was noted that the region already was home to the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra (VSO), Vancouver Youth Symphony Orchestra, Pacific Baroque Orchestra, Vancouver Philharmonic Orchestra, CBC Orchestra, Fraser Valley Symphony, Richmond Orchestra, Canada West Chamber Orchestra, West Coast Symphony, North Shore Symphonia, Surrey Youth Orchestra, and New Westminster Orchestra.

Some of these organizations are professional but the majority are non-professional community orchestras. Each one fulfills a local need, with the community orchestras providing performing opportunities for emerging professionals, advanced students and some core musicians. These groups can also serve a "feeder" function for some who advance to higher levels of achievement. The professional groups are few in number because of the significant costs involved and the limited ability of the region to support more than a few.

Federal and provincial grant resources is limited in British Columbia and municipal support is highly variable. It is important that groups do not compete for the same market or for the same corporate support base as this will dilute the effectiveness of each group.

In the case of the BSO, it is evident that immediately surrounding Burnaby are several professional and community symphony orchestras performing public concerts in many venues, with variable frequency. Some admission fees for Vancouver Symphony Orchestra concerts exceed \$40 at the Orpheum whereas the New Westminster Orchestra asks for donations only at its four concerts each year at Massey Theatre. This illustrates the reality of the situation where communities have larger indoor concert facilities but very different markets and drawing power.

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Burnaby does not have a large indoor public concert facility. Its residents live within a short distance of other concert venues in neighboring cities. A free-admission VSO concert occurs annually at Deer Lake Park attracting over 8,000 residents and visitors, with the City contributing about \$25,000 each year. On average, about 9% of the VSO subscribers, donors and ticket buyers are Burnaby residents. These factors are relevant to the current BSO initiative in that they reveal a challenge with a lack of local public facilities large enough to generate significant revenue, a variety of current symphony offerings within a few minutes drive of Burnaby, a sponsored symphony concert held annually in a central Burnaby park which captures and serves a significant local audience currently, and that many regular symphony enthusiasts are consistent supporters of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. The City of Burnaby also contributes annually approximately \$23,000 to the G.V.R.D. Cultural Grant Program. The annual grant available to region serving arts and cultural groups total approximately \$235,000 annually. Therefore, since the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra is an eligible recipient, Burnaby currently supports symphonies through this program as well.

While it may be argued that there still is room for a unique orchestra with a distinctive flavor in Burnaby, this has not yet been clearly articulated by the BSO representatives. Further, its feasibility has not been evaluated nor has the enterprise been tested in a pilot project or introductory concert series.

The BSO has received a \$1,000 contribution from the Burnaby Clef Society but has secured no other revenue to date. Therefore, the group does not meet the eligibility requirements for City funding under the terms of reference for the Executive Committee of Council grants program wherein the general policy and guidelines for cultural grants in section A.ii) require applicants to be "*established cultural organizations which also receive substantial revenue from other sources*". This is a new organization with no established diverse financial base, and as such may be deemed ineligible for City support. The applicant is also seeking start up funds "...to gauge community reception for a Burnaby Symphony Orchestra and to create an organization that is gift and donation ready..." as is stated in their initial 2000 September request for \$35,000. The request is for the City alone to finance a marketing and feasibility investigation up front. This type of request is unprecedented and outside the scope of the City's grant program.

CONCLUSION:

Notwithstanding the apparent unique nature of the concept and the expression of community interest in the Burnaby Symphony Orchestra proposal to date, it is not clear that the concept is feasible and the group is new and has no evidence of a diverse and substantial funding base.

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It is therefore recommended that no financial support from the City be provided at this time, and that the group be advised to seek funding from community groups, corporate sponsors and revenue-generating activities to finance the marketing, consultation and feasibility study phases of development. If successful, these efforts will provide evidence of community interest and yield information to consider establishing an orchestra and annual concert program.

As well, the City's modest community group grants do not cover deficit financing or on-going operations. Therefore, annual operating support for what could be an annual operating budget of between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000 or more would not be forthcoming from the City under current grant program guidelines.

It is important for the community to continue to pursue valued concepts for cultural activity in Burnaby and the BSO is encouraged to seek support from individuals, groups and businesses for the first phases of research and development as outlined in their business plan.



KATE FRIARS

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