

May 2016

## Vision for the Torpedo Factory Art Center

### *A Thriving Center for Art & Creativity on Alexandria's New Waterfront*

#### *By Community Members for the Future of the Torpedo Factory*

One of Alexandria's most beloved icons -- The Torpedo Factory Art Center -- is at a critical juncture with an opportunity to embrace the future and become a dynamic contributor to the economic and cultural life of Alexandria for generations to come.

The 76,000 sq. ft. Center serves as the front door to the City and the Waterfront. Its location is within the heart of the approved Waterfront Plan. Its location, plus annual investment of approximately \$1 to \$3 million a year in subsidized rent from the City -- sets up a tremendous opportunity and a responsibility to leverage the greatest benefit from this extraordinary cultural asset.

We, *Community Members for the Future of the Torpedo Factory*, believe the Torpedo Factory can have a new lease on life. We are so named because we believe that it is the future that matters most. We therefore have developed this vision and four-pillar plan **for a thriving Center for art and creativity on Alexandria's new waterfront** -- one that activates our waterfront, strengthens our community and enhances our economy.

#### **VISION**

Our vision for the Torpedo Factory -- is for a thriving Center for art and creativity on Alexandria's new waterfront -- one that activates our waterfront, strengthens our community and enhances our economy by being a:

1. a buzzed-about Center known nationally for advanced creative practice and exciting new work -- with artist studios, changing public art, leading edge gallery exhibits, art incubator spaces, maker spaces, and performing arts -- a vital mix contributing to the energy and vitality of the Torpedo Factory and waterfront;
2. an inclusive place that presents a wide range of art from resident artists as well as regional, national and international artists from diverse and culturally rich backgrounds;
3. welcoming, inspiring, fun, stimulating, beautiful, and immersive;
4. an active and positive force in the community;
5. the creative heartbeat of the new waterfront for all the arts; and
6. an important economic driver.

## FOUR-PILLAR PLAN

Following from the recent independent report – the Cultural Planning Group’s Business Analysis & Recommendations (January 31, 2016) commissioned by the Torpedo Factory Board – Community Members for the Future of the Torpedo Factory has adopted the following four-pillar plan:

- 1. Independent Board** –Per the recommendation from the Cultural Planning Group study endorsed by the Alexandria Commission for the Arts, we support a transition to a fully **independent nonprofit board of directors to oversee and operate the Torpedo Factory Art Center with a unified vision, authority and purpose.** Alexandria’s major arts organizations are structured in this way, from the Del Ray Artisans to the Alexandria Symphony. **A transition task force** - of not less than five and not more than seven people - is best suited to lead the transition process in collaboration with the City. The transition task force’s role is twofold to: 1) lay the foundation for the new organization; and 2) recruit the new board. Good governance is the #1 priority. Therefore the task force will seek members with successful nonprofit board experience and recruit members with the following skills: arts management; fundraising; working artists; economic development; financial expertise; organizational change. The board will also need independent legal counsel and CPAs.
- 2. A Public Square for the Arts** – The Torpedo Factory’s first floor public space is one of the city’s most extraordinary public spaces -- a public square for the arts -- that is already a magnet for citywide programs and events on the waterfront. Our plan calls for **fully realizing the potential of this space** by planning and curating it with an impresario eye as a space for **innovative arts programs (large-scale and pop-ups)** to increase visitation, generate return visits, create media buzz, activate the waterfront, and reinforce Alexandria’s position as a must-visit arts destination. A re-envisioned Art Center starts here – on the ground floor.
- 3. Public/Private Partnership –Broadening and diversifying the Center’s support is a key to its sustainability.** The City’s \$1 to \$3 million annual rent subsidy is a huge gift and great advantage that can be leveraged to attract private donors. One of the most compelling reasons for establishing a new independent board and organizational structure is to raise money from grants, corporate sponsors and private donors. A fundraising effort to build a strong **public/private partnership** of individual donors, corporations, and private foundations to invest in the new Torpedo Factory is an important pillar of this plan. As evidence of the potential for this, *Community Members for the Future of the Torpedo Factory* has already received **\$100,000** in soft pledges in support of the Torpedo Factory’s new direction.

4. **Expanded Artist Residencies**—Core to the Torpedo Factory model is working artist studios. For decades, studios have been leased for lifetime terms with a one-size fits all approach limiting opportunities for artists to be in residence there. Currently, only two studios out of 85 are leased to artists of color. Lifetime residencies need to be replaced with a more **flexible policy** that allows for short, medium and long-term residencies. Artists will be consulted to create a policy that will attract local, national and international artists from richly diverse backgrounds (age, race, culture) and diverse artistic mediums. Artists will also be consulted to update the jurying process to align it with best practices in the field, including allowing digital submissions.

## **SUMMARY**

In summary, the *Community Members for the Future of the Torpedo Factory* is committed to ensuring that the pioneering, entrepreneurial legacy of the Torpedo Factory continues for future generations – that the Torpedo Factory evolves and thrives as the front door of the waterfront, as the creative heart of our city, and magnet for artists and visitors from all over.