

Munroe Center for the Arts - Accessibility & HVAC Updates
Town Meeting - March 2023
Audio Transcript

TIMESTAMP 00:00 - 00:24

CRISTINA BURWELL:

Hello friends and neighbors. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Cristina Burwell. I am the Executive Director for the Munroe Center for the Arts, located here in the old Munroe School building. I am here on behalf of our community to ask for your support to make this building accessible and upgraded to HVAC for 21st century use.

TIMESTAMP 00:25 - 00:56

CRISTINA BURWELL (V.O.):

The thing that makes the arts so inspirational is that it's all about possibilities. It is about expressing who we are. It is about building and creating. It is about gathering with others - surrounded in this sort of milieu that gives us hope and joy, and the ability to advocate for our own spirits and for higher causes.

For nearly thirty years, the Munroe Center for the Arts has rented this space from the town, and has been the steward to keep this inspirational programming going for generations of Lexingtonians - as well as steward for our home here in the Munroe School.

TIMESTAMP 00:57 - 01:23

CRISTINA BURWELL (V.O.):

We see over one thousand students every year and employ over seventy staff every year. We provide education in music, dance, painting and drawing, ceramics, theater, and more. We provide year-long programming and nine weeks of summer camp to generations of Lexingtonians. We also support the community through free, intergenerational events throughout the year, as well as a gallery that supports local artists and inspires us all.

TIMESTAMP 01:24 - 02:14

CRISTINA BURWELL (V.O.):

Stewardship of a building that is a hundred and eighteen years old is a heavy responsibility. We work hard to bring about the best arts education and experiences possible - but we have also prioritized this building: paying for a new roof, a new parking lot, as well as adding insulation and heat wiring to mitigate ice dams. We have worked with the town, both financially and logistically, to restore a hundred and twenty one windows. We have installed a fire monitoring radio and paid for alarm services, and recently changed the light fixtures to LED replacements. We also recently painted the exterior shingles, eaves, and woodwork; replaced carpeting, as well as all the locks, so that emergency services have a single master key.

I believe that in these thirty years, the Munroe Center for the Arts has been a good steward of this beautiful town building.

TIMESTAMP 02:15 - 02:43

CRISTINA BURWELL:

The challenge right now is to make sure this building is accessible for all of our residents, and that the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning is adequate to meet their needs. While we here at the non-profit have worked hard to raise funds to prepare architectural plans for accessibility and HVAC, the construction costs associated with this project outstrip our ability to make it a reality. We have a big hurdle right now and we need to work together.

TIMESTAMP 02:44 - 03:31

CRISTINA BURWELL (V.O.):

In 2019, the Munroe Center for the Arts undertook an accessibility survey by the Human Centered Design Institute to create a catalog of building features that are not barrier-free. Many of these we have been chipping away at, but there is one that is beyond our abilities. Alongside the windows project, a wheelchair lift was installed to provide access to ground floor programming in 2020. But this building has two more floors of programming that are not accessible to people that are unable to use the stairs: an older student who needs to carry heavy art supplies to class upstairs, a grandparent who wants to attend a ballet recital on the top floor, a job applicant in a wheelchair, someone using walking braces to pick up their child upstairs - to suggest a few building users.

TIMESTAMP 03:32 - 03:59

CRISTINA BURWELL:

There is a critical need for Town Meeting members to understand that no more capital work can be done on this building without first attending to its accessibility. This is a state of Massachusetts legal requirement, in association with the Americans with Disabilities Act, in construction work on a building. It is also a priority of the leadership of the Munroe Center for the Arts. The solution we are proposing to fix this also dovetails with another critical need of the building.

TIMESTAMP 04:00 - 04:41

CRISTINA BURWELL (V.O.):

This summer, the building's boiler failed. We were able to get the second of two boilers online, but are not sure how long this will last. As we take on construction for the elevator project, we are well-poised to update our HVAC to not only set up a more environmentally sound system that is not reliant on fossil fuels, but also to build in building-wide air conditioning.

When the building was built in 1905, there was no summer programming. They did not have dancers with their athletic practices happening on the top floor - and the times are changing so that we see both warmer weather, and longer periods of warmer weather in the fall.

TIMESTAMP 04:42 - 05:37

CRISTINA BURWELL (V.O.):

Our leadership has been working with an architecture firm for a year and a half to develop a plan to resolve these issues. We have worked with Lexington's Department of Public Facilities, Historic Districts Commission, Recreation Committee, neighbors, and other groups to best match up the building's needs

with our community's needs. Our design solution removes existing restrooms that were once made for very small, ambulatory people. The stalls are broken, the flushometers are in continual need to repair, and the spaces are tight. This area can then provide a hallway to a larger space that holds an elevator and two gender neutral, wheelchair-accessible toilet rooms on each floor. The selected design puts the elevator outside the main building because we can not afford to lose programming space in the existing building. The design also provides for a new front door for all users who enter the building.

TIMESTAMP 05:38 - 07:24

CRISTINA BURWELL:

The town of Lexington has established goals to improve accessibility and sustainability, which can be read in the 2022 Comprehensive Plan [and] the Fiscal Year '22-23 Select Board Retreat goals. We believe this project provides a solution for the town-owned building to achieve those goals. Over the years, the Munroe's leadership has evaluated different possibilities for accessibility and HVAC solutions, and believe this one that we're talking about now makes the most sense for our community and for high-quality arts programming.

Failure to act now will prevent universal access. It could result in additional costs if the boiler fails. Second to these ethical and financial obligations is that we can't do any more capital work here before we address accessibility. This project is not going to get any less expensive. The Munroe Center for the Arts has secured funding to pay an architect for plans and design work, to take this project out to bid now. We are unable to pay for construction costs to make this a reality. The project has been approved by the Community Preservation Act Committee for the fiscal year '24 project cycle, and we look forward to the town membership approving it likewise.

I am proud to have worked with bright and engaged people to help move this ball forward - to recommend a responsible solution for current and potential people who can be served here. I stand by to answer any questions that anyone might have, and encourage folks to visit our website at www.MunroeCenter.org/Access

Questions? Email Cristina@MunroeCenter.org

Read more about the project on our website at MunroeCenter.org/Access