

Baltimore Clayworks
PRESS RELEASE FORMATTING

Clayworks Board Moves Forward With Sale of Buildings; Appoints Interim Executive Director

April 14, 2017

The Baltimore Clayworks Board of Trustees, in an Executive Session held on April 6, passed a motion to execute a Letter of Intent (LOI) regarding the sale of both of its properties (5706 & 5707 Smith Avenue) in its continued effort to both address ongoing financial burdens and create a sustainable fiscal future for the organization. In addition, the board appointed Devon Powell, Director of Finance & Administration, as Interim Executive Director, while Mary Blair returned to the board as Vice President, stepping away from her role as Acting Executive Director.

“I’m looking forward to making use of my experience and expertise at Baltimore Clayworks,” said Powell, who has nine years of experience as a senior executive for two international nonprofits, successfully building those organizations into stronger business entities with stable finances and reserves, defending them from regulatory and legal pressures.

The board’s decision to sell the properties has drawn criticism from a small population of petitioners, but has also drawn a substantial amount of praise from supporters:

It's a shame Mt. Washington will be losing a terrific art organization. However...I give the board credit for realizing the financial reality of the non-profit and making plans to take action. Many good wishes for a great new location.

I support the board's decision to look at options of moving to a less expensive location. For me, as a student, Baltimore Clayworks is not about the Mt. Washington location. It is about the classes, the instructors and the community. I will continue to take classes no matter where you go.

Powell commented on the stressful environment and pressures the board, in particular, has been facing, “The board has shown tremendous courage and devotion in performing their fiduciary duties and beyond”, noting the steady financial contributions by many of the board members over the six months he’s been with the organization. “Board members have given both money and immense amounts of personal time in support of artists and staff, even in the face of some vocal and at times vitriolic opposition,” he added.

The board’s outlined next steps are numerous, and include the creation of formal, three-year business plans, identification of potential spaces in the city with an eye on the Arts Districts, adding new board members with business expertise and high-level networks, and the development of a new strategic plan for the organization. An

invitation for participation and collaboration on the strategic plan in particular from all stakeholders, including artists, students, instructors, and the broader community was also directly stated as a priority.

The message that the board ultimately wants conveyed is a simple one: Clayworks may be moving from Mt. Washington, but isn't going away. "One of the questions that came up during the discussion of the myriad of options was 'Do we need to have the "Baltimore" in the "Baltimore Clayworks"?'", and the answer was a resounding "Yes!", said Powell. The Community Arts program has since been a lightning rod around which numerous board members have expressed their strong desire to protect and see grow as a priority. Moving close to the city would certainly serve far more of the true Community that are currently counted amongst the Clayworks population.

The opportunities presented with relocation would also benefit the artists, many of whom have expressed support for the shift. "I'd wholeheartedly support the organization moving to or closer to the Arts District", said Travis Winters, a Resident Artist of two years at Clayworks and recently recognized as an *Emerging Artist* in the current edition of *Ceramics Monthly*. "Having the opportunity to be around and easily interact with other artists, and be more immersed in that kind of



Resident Artist Travis Winters & Intern Bianca Loscoco work with a group of new students during a "Try It!" class; Saturday, April 8, 2017

environment, would be ideal for me and I would think other artists. There is no opportunity for that kind of overt interactivity and collaboration amongst artists in Mt. Washington - outside of the people at Clayworks".

Despite the complications and concerns, there continues to be a lot of optimism at Clayworks, as well as hope and joy - with gallery visits/sales and classes running this past weekend.

"While Clayworks was born in Mount Washington as a kind of co-op, it has become so much more...a teaching and learning place; a way to reach out to people in places that wouldn't have an opportunity to experiment with clay; a place for emerging artists to develop and share their work; a venue for Baltimoreans to see local, regional, national, and even international artists' work; where children can make

work in an environment outside their usual school classes", said Kathy Holt, Board President. "Clayworks is much more than a location...it's an experience meant to be shared".

