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## **White Paper Addressing Sale of Properties Published by Baltimore Clayworks; Leadership Looks Ahead to the Future**

*Baltimore, MD ~ May 28, 2017* Baltimore Clayworks published a white paper today [on its website](#) providing stakeholders and the general public with more in-depth information about the progress of and reasons for the sale of its properties in Mt. Washington. The paper primarily provides an analysis of the opinions assumed to have been drafted and proffered by a small group of detractors. According to Clayworks' leadership, the white paper is the organization's detailed and substantiated attempt to address these issues and its reasoning behind the sale in a comprehensive and final manner.

"There is a consistent amount of misleading and erroneous information being disseminated, primarily from a small group of patrons and founders of the organization (referred to as 'the petition group' in the white paper)", said Devon Powell, Interim Executive Director. "They are desperate to derail the board's plans to sell the buildings, which is being done in order to extricate the organization from long-standing financial instability", and to allow it to develop strategic plans and sustainable operational models, relocate, and ultimately continue to serve the greater Baltimore community.

Powell agreed that some of the suggestions from the petition group might address certain aspects of the problems facing the organization or appear to be cogent options on the surface – but in reality aren't viable for resolving the prevalent and overall financial issues. He cites the white paper and a document titled "3 scenarios" provided by the petition group as a prime example. "In some cases the suggestions might seem rational to someone without more detailed knowledge, information, or expertise", but in many cases aren't due to factors that the petition group personnel didn't consider, didn't know, or don't have the expertise to understand.

Pointing to an offer to purchase the Gallery Building, Powell cites the IRS has strict rules for nonprofits regarding the sale of real estate – in particular with regards to inurement, or self-dealing. After conducting research on the option as presented, it

was rejected as a result of those factors. “Mr. Emmer is a patron and petition group member’s husband”, and the offer is considered to be well under market value, making the sale to him one that could be subject to penalties and the loss of the organizations nonprofit status under those IRS rules.

The petition group’s efforts, amidst demanding and asserting their desired ‘right’ to a voice in the decision-making process, have included instances of slandering the organization’s leadership via distributing numerous communications that also employ false statement, conspiracy theories, sensationalism and scare tactics to alarm politicians, residents, and other patrons. Powell noted that in his view, petitioners are actively creating an environment of discourse that has damaged Clayworks’ reputation and finances.

Members of the petition group’s leadership filed a lawsuit that included a temporary restraining order and injunction in an attempt to stop the sale of the properties in early April, as part of a failed power grab attempt. Prior to the voluntary dismissal of the lawsuit, Circuit Court Magistrate Lori Eisner noted in a pre-trial investigative conference that there was no legal standing or basis in law for such an action. Magistrate Eisner also commented while members of the oppositional group may not like the decisions made by the board, they have no right to impede them. “While we haven’t seen any indication this group is going to stop their efforts regardless of any amount of legal, logical, or thoughtful rationale we or anyone else provides them with, we are moving forward and are making it clear that this white paper is going to be our final comment on the matter”.

Powell also draws attention to an element unaddressed within the white paper to an underlying issue he and others he’s spoken with believe Clayworks has faced for years, and is of relevance to how the organization got into its financial problems. “There’s a very real ‘disease’ amongst nonprofit organizations called “Founder’s Syndrome”, and Clayworks definitely suffers from it.” Pointing to a plethora of research on the topic, symptoms include organizational problems repeating themselves, an inability to affect practical changes, resistance to any changes that will result in a (perceived or actual) loss of control, and fear that the organization will become “something we no longer recognize”. Deborah Bedwell, one of the organization’s nine founders and former Executive Director until 2012, who is still contracted to teach classes at the Mt. Washington facility, is one of the leaders and active organizers of the group opposed to the sale of the properties. In a statement provided to state delegates at a May 2 briefing in Annapolis, Bedwell attempted to blame those in leadership roles since her departure for the organization’s financial and related woes.

Directly contrary to Bedwell’s assertions are various and numerous minutes of meetings of the Board of Trustees during Bedwell’s tenure as Executive Director, many of which are referenced within the white paper and irrefutably demonstrate the financial instability of the organization and Bedwell’s acute awareness of it. “We don’t want to engage in public finger-pointing, and there is certainly gratitude to be paid at some level for her years of service to the organization – and of course she’s

welcome to her opinion - but misleading people isn't acceptable," added Powell. He further noted his own opinion of a strange phenomenon; folks within the opposition group are apparently either unaware or unwilling to accept that Bedwell was, as the organization's chief executive, arguably the largest part of how the organization got to this point. In continuing to focus attention to the spread of misleading information and a willingness amongst the petition group members and supporters to overlook or ignore responsibility, he highlighted that Marsha Smelkinson, another prominent member of the opposition group, also drafted many of the same meeting minutes going back to 2011. "These people were in the room five or six years ago discussing pretty much the same financial issues we are faced with today, or were aware of them enough to draft documented minutes of meetings. How they can now publicly proclaim the issues are a 'new problem' is incredible and, in my opinion, blatantly deceptive".

Kathy Holt, President of the Board of Trustees, is more interested in the future than the past, "We're moving beyond this phase of the process with the publication of this paper, and are now looking ahead to the future of Clayworks". She relayed that the organization is in the final stages of the selection process for choosing a consultant to assist with strategic and business planning, and have been active in searching for a new home for Clayworks' operations. "We think this is the time to bring together and into the process the people who want to see Clayworks thrive in the future".

In moving forward, Holt said she and the organization want to let patrons and supporters know that its programs and services are and will continue to be available through 2017, including:

- Summer Camps and Adult Classes will happen as scheduled, starting in June
- Fall classes will also be held in Mt. Washington and proposals for classes are currently being accepted
- Exhibitions are and will continue to be open for public viewing; People of Color, People of Clay is currently running and the Fellowship Show open in early July
- The retail shop featuring local and national ceramic artists is and will continue to be open for business, Wednesday-Sunday
- Community Arts activities are ongoing

"Promoting ceramic arts in the greater Baltimore community through our Community Arts programming is an area that the Board has identified as a key component, and one that will be made an even more prominent facet of the organization in the future", said Holt. Clayworks currently operates in satellite locations at Jubilee Arts in Sandtown-Winchester and Zeta Center in Park Heights, as well as conducts programming at Man Alive and Tuerk House, which are recovery centers.