

## **COUNCIL PRESIDENT KENNETH V. COCKREL, JR. STATEMENT ON REGIONAL ARTS FUNDING VOTE**

August 2, 2000

Today the Detroit City Council approved a number of initiatives allowing the question of whether or not to fund several cultural and arts institutions in Detroit and suburban Wayne and Oakland Counties to be placed on the November ballot. If voters approve this new tax, a regional arts council will be created to oversee distribution of the money.

Regional arts funding is something I whole-heartedly support. But due to concerns about the structure of this board, distribution of funding, and the programming this money will pay for, I had to vote no on this proposal.

First, under the Articles of Incorporation that creates the regional council, the votes of members of the board of directors on administrative matters are weighted. They are weighted based on the amount of tax dollars their communities generate through the millage. Under this formula, Oakland County, which generates the most revenue has the most powerful vote, followed by Wayne County, and then Detroit. Under this formula the city of Detroit clearly has a weakened position in making key decisions on annual administrative budgets, by-laws, staff hires, and other matters.

Secondly, the formula for distribution of funds is fixed only for one year. After that year, the regional council could opt to change the funding distribution. This means that while Detroit is slated to receive \$22.6 million during the first year of this millage, the amount could be reduced if a majority of the Regional Council pushes for that.

I do not like the uncertainty of having no "fixed" long-term formula guaranteeing a minimum amount of funding for the City's arts institutions. The bottom line is Detroit has to be guaranteed its fair share of money over the long haul. This deal doesn't do that.

Thirdly, Council never received detailed information on what the institutions receiving funding would spend the extra money on. Much of the information we did get was sketchy and did not specify the numbers of people who would be served by the funding, when special programs would be offered, or how many times events funded by the millage would take place in a given year.

I also question why some institutions were included at all. The Center for Creative Studies in Detroit, for example, will be funded. The Center is a private school, not a museum open to the public like the Charles Wright Museum of African American History or the DIA.

Other facilities like the Meadow Brook Theatre, the Michigan Opera Theatre, and the Music Hall could almost be considered business operations. They do play an important role in enhancing the region's cultural atmosphere. But should they be financed with public tax dollars?

These are our tax dollars at stake. It is estimated that this millage will cost the average Detroit homeowner anywhere from \$25 to \$50 dollars annually depending on their home's value. Detroiters need to be told in no uncertain terms what they are getting for their money. They also need an equal voice on the regional council that governs how and where that money will be spent.

Once again, the concept of regional funding for arts and culture institutions is one I support. But on closer scrutiny, I do not believe this particular proposal made sense in general and for Detroit in particular.

The final decision however will rest with voters in Detroit, Wayne, and Oakland County when they vote on this matter in November.