



# GOVANSTOWNE

BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

January 13, 2009

The Honorable Sheila Dixon  
100 N. Holliday St., Rm. 400  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202  
Via Fax: 410-539-0647

RE: The imminent closure of The Senator Theatre

Dear Mayor Dixon,

As President of the Govanstowne Business Association (GBA), I am writing to express concern on behalf of our member businesses and the community about the endangered Senator Theatre.

We were pleased to learn in early 2008 that The Senator owner, Tom Kiefaber, and 4<sup>th</sup> district councilman Bill Henry met with you and Andrew Frank to discuss the economic difficulties the theatre was experiencing, and the efforts underway to explore a change of ownership and a possible conversion to not-for-profit operation. They were also encouraged by your recognition of the need to ensure that "Baltimore's Premiere Theatre" remain a vibrant landmark anchor for the Belvedere Square commercial district.

This past year, the GBA and community organizations, including the York Road Partnership (YRP) and the Belvedere Improvement Association (BIA), came together to sponsor the Town Hall meetings hosted at the Senator by owner Tom Kiefaber, and moderated by Bill Henry and others, to apprise members of the business and residential community of the challenges facing The Senator Theatre in a changing marketplace.

At those open public forums, and other meetings, potential solutions to the operational challenges facing the historic single-screen theatre were discussed and evaluated. The consensus that formed, based on existing models in other locations nationally, is that The Senator can indeed be taken to a new level to become the premiere multi-purpose educational and entertainment venue in our region. Offering a wide array of entertainment, the Senator's operations could become sustainable and the surrounding businesses would provide a much-needed boost to commerce in the area. There is huge potential for an enhanced Senator Theatre to attract many more people to the Belvedere Square commercial district from other areas of the city and from Baltimore County. Creative partnerships and funding are necessary, however, as well as the establishment of a non-profit entity.

The most recent Town Meeting in December outlined Mr. Kiefaber's desire to effect a transition from his family's stewardship of the renowned theatre to not-for-profit, community based ownership and/or operation. This option was presented as the best means of preserving and protecting the irreplaceable landmark facility for the enjoyment of generations to come. John Lind, an established expert in the redevelopment of historic theatres nationally came to Baltimore and encouraged the transition to the not-for-profit approach and expressed interest in acting as a professional consultant on the project. The Senator is a beloved source of pride for all who value its rich history as a unique and desirable point of destination for area movie lovers, and those sentiments were certainly apparent during the open forum.

Mr. Kiefaber informed the GBA that the downturn in the economy, coupled with delays in achieving a conversion to non-profit ownership and operation, have resulted in an alarming situation, and we understand that the theatre is facing imminent closure.

***The closure of The Senator Theatre, for any amount of time, would have immediate negative consequences for many – especially the surrounding businesses, the entire district, the City and the State. We need to work together to keep that from happening. What can you and other government leaders do? How can we help?***

**P.O. Box 39278**

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**Baltimore, Maryland 21212**

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As business owners and operators we are aware that the recent downturn in the nation's economy has exacerbated the challenges faced by you and your colleagues in city government. We understand that increasingly scarce resources must be carefully allotted in ways that best serve the citizens of Baltimore. We respectfully request, however, that immediate attention be paid by our government leaders and the applicable economic development agencies of Baltimore City to quickly determine how to prevent an abrupt closure of The Senator Theatre. While the expenditure of scarce public funds to do so will undoubtedly be difficult to accomplish, the results of a closed theater will immediately show extreme negative consequences, affecting many. Your creative expertise is critical.


The substantial investment of millions in public funds in the ongoing redevelopment of Belvedere Square will be put at great risk if The Senator were to close its doors, even for a short period of time. Many area businesses rely on the Senator for their commerce. In addition to the direct loss of much needed foot traffic that the theatre regularly generates, the psychological impact on the public would be immense. Also, the Senator generously hosts many functions annually for local non-profit organizations, and the loss of that venue would affect many. We fear that the economic losses to the City and its citizens will be devastating.

In response to the immediate need to ensure that The Senator Theatre remain open day to day, we are sharing our concerns with the entire GBA membership, the area community organizations and umbrella organizations, historic preservation groups and individuals. We are also responding to Mr. Kiefaber's urgent request that we participate in a press event as soon as possible, along with other area organizations, perhaps even this week. The goal is to alert the general public and the many devoted fans of the dire immediate situation at The Senator, as community awareness and involvement has always been so important to Mr. Kiefaber. It will also alert those who may be in a position to assist with expertise, or with financial or in-kind donations, in keeping the doors open at The Senator through the transition to non-profit – and with immediate needs.

Thank you for your timely attention to this matter. Your assistance will help us to preserve The Senator's day to day operation through this critical period and allow for the transition of the theatre to non-profit, community based ownership and operation. The Senator Theatre has a very bright future ahead, even in these difficult economic times, but that bright future of the theater and others will be eclipsed if The Senator closes its doors.

We appreciate your continued support of our community. Thank you for your consideration, and please feel free to contact me if you wish to discuss these issues in greater detail (ltpenza@penzabailey.com or 410-435-6677).

Respectfully,



Laura Thul Penza, President  
Govanstowne Business Association (GBA)

cc Andrew Frank, Deputy Mayor  
Governor Martin O'Malley  
Anthony Brown, Lt. Governor  
Senator Joan Carter Conway, District 43  
Delegate Maggie Macintosh, District 43  
Delegate Ann Marie Doory, District 43  
Delegate Curt Anderson, District 43  
Barbara Mikulski, US Senate  
Benjamin L. Cardin, US Senate  
C.A. Dutch Ruppensberger, MD 2nd District  
John Sarbanes, MD 3rd District  
Bill Henry, 4<sup>th</sup> District Council

Robert Curran, 3<sup>rd</sup> District Council  
Stephanie Rawlings Blake, President  
City Council  
M.J. Brodie, BDC President  
William L. Beckford, BDC Director  
Commercial Revitalization  
Catherine Evans, Belvedere Improvement  
Association (BIA)  
Karen DeCamp, York Road Partnership (YRP)  
Bill Struever, Struever Bros. Eccles and Rouse  
Mr. Tyler Gearhart, Preservation Maryland  
Johns Hopkins, Baltimore Heritage