



# City Council Memorandum

City of Arts & Innovation

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**TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL      DATE: DECEMBER 17, 2019**

**FROM: COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT      WARDS: ALL**  
**DEPARTMENT**

**SUBJECT: FIRST UPDATE ON THE BOX 35% REDUCED FACILITY RENTAL RATES;  
MARKETING PLAN DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION; AND  
RESEARCH OF A UNIFIED TICKETING SYSTEM**

**ISSUE:**

Receive an update on The Box 35% reduced facility rental rate; marketing plan development and implementation; and research of a unified ticketing system.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

That the City Council receive and file this update on The Box 35% reduced facility rental rate; marketing plan development and implementation; and research of a unified ticketing system.

**BACKGROUND:**

On May 11, 2010, the City Council approved the design/build contract for the Fox Entertainment Plaza. On September 25, 2012, the City Council approved the final appropriation for the project, with a total investment of over \$19 million. The Box theater's size and the flexibility of the space allows for non-profits and community groups to use it with more ease than a larger scale theater. To facilitate the use for these groups, a three-tiered structure was created for the Facility Rental Rates and Fee Structure for The Box. The three groups were categorized as: 1) non-profit, 2) performance-based community organizations and 3) commercial.

On April 19, 2018, the Development Committee met and a motion was made by Chair Gardner and seconded by Vice Chair Perry directing staff to (1) prepare an analysis of what would be required to make The Box at the Fox Entertainment Plaza successful as a community theater; (2) reach out to members of the community theater groups and discuss feasible rates; and (3) look for alternative locations for a comedy club and return to the City Council and Development Committee. Staff developed a committee of community members (Box Committee) that have a diverse background that includes theater, non-profit, administration, business, and government. After a significant amount of research, evaluation, and discussion, the Box Committee was able to develop recommendations for The Box on a trial basis.

On November 29, 2018, the Development Committee met with Chair Gardner, Vice Chair Perry, and Member MacArthur present, to review and consider The Box 35% reduced facility rental rates

and service pricing fees for an 18-month trial period; facility maintenance fee increase for 300+ attendees per production; increase budget by \$25,000 for marketing plan development and implementation; and research a unified ticketing system. After discussion, the Development Committee voted unanimously to recommend that City Council approve the above mentioned items. These items were approved by City Council on February 26, 2019.

**DISCUSSION:**

The trial period for the reduced facility rate began March 1, 2019 and is applied to all rentals for events taking place between March 1, 2019 and August 31, 2020. Ongoing efforts have resulted in enhanced marketing of The Box and research to learn the feasibility of a unified ticketing system.

**Reduced Facility Rate**

Since the implementation of the promotional rates there has been a significant increase in rental dates with bookings already confirmed well into late spring of 2020. A comparison of rentals booked during the same time last year prior to the implementation of the reduced rates shows an increase in the number of rental days.

Comparison of Events & Rental Days		
	Events	Rental Days
March 2018 – February 2019	54	126
March 2019 – February 2020*	56	176
March – August 2020*	To be determined - 14 events already scheduled	

*\*Reduced facility rate applied*

**Marketing**

The Box Committee identified a lack of comprehensive marketing to raise awareness of the location and use of The Box. Efforts to increase marketing includes both staffing, signage, events, and social media.

The implementation of the reduced facility rate increased interest by users and to best respond to customers, staff utilizes the consultant services of Plantation Productions, Inc. to assist customers three days a week on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from Noon to 5:00 p.m. During this time, Plantation Productions, Inc. can schedule rentals, provide tours, and respond to general questions about the availability of The Box.

Signage with general information was added to the box office window and includes contact information should someone visit when there is no one available onsite. Additional signage was added in the exterior promenade to raise awareness. Three new signs were installed on the light poles that are visible from the parking structure and stairs.

Arts and Cultural Affairs staff in collaboration with Plantation Productions, Inc. coordinated three events including an Open House to showcase features and services available to users. The Open House was held on June 27, 2019 and resulted in two rentals that brought or are bringing approximately 250 visitors combined. In addition to the Open House, a new event series, PromenART, that combines various forms of art and entertainment kicked off in September 2019. PromenART will continue to take place in 2020 with events held every other month. The

PromenART events are scheduled during the monthly Artswalk to capture visitors from the event and showcase the venue to the arts community. In addition, staff will be doing target marketing for these events and programming to specific groups that can use The Box for their events.

Social media activity and engagement has increased since social media marketing efforts expanded. The Instagram account for The Box is experiencing increases in overall activity.

<b>Social Media Insights**</b>					
	<b>Posts</b>	<b>Followers</b>	<b>Engagement</b>	<b>Likes</b> <i>Total likes within a 3-month period</i>	<b>Comments</b> <i>Total comments within a 3-month period</i>
<b>Prior to 06/01/19</b>	33	356	598	307	9
<b>11/19/19</b>	69	580 (Increase of 224 followers)	1.6K	1.6K	27

\*\* The following information is based on averages prior to June 1, 2019 and compared to the average of June 1, 2019 to October 23, 2019.

Although much has come to fruition in the past few months, staff has recognized a need to obtain feedback and recommendations on how to move forward from a marketing expert in community theaters. Staff will seek these services in the first quarter of 2020.

Unified Ticketing System

Staff has conducted some preliminary research on unified ticketing systems that can be used by participating performing organizations. Staff has found that there is an array of services and formats that may provide this function for The Box. The process of identifying a unified ticketing system requires more time than anticipated. To best compare cost, staff is preparing a Request for Qualifications that is anticipated to be issued in the first quarter of 2020 and staff will return at the end of the 18-month period with a recommendation to City Council.

Staff has been implementing changes, increasing marketing, and diversifying usage; however, these changes are early in the process and some of that work, booking, use, etc. has not been realized prior to the publishing of this report. There is additional marketing, surveying, and programming that is yet to be implemented. After the 18-month trial period, staff will have comprehensive data that will allow for recommendations to be made to City Council on the benefit or not of this reduced Facility Rental Rate.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

At this time there is not enough data to provide the fiscal impact associated with the recent reduction of the Facility Rental Rates. Staff will provide the total impact of the reduction for The Box at the end of the 18-month trial period.

Prepared by: David Welch, Community & Economic Development Director  
 Certified as to availability of funds: Edward Enriquez, Chief Financial Officer/Treasurer  
 Approved by: Rafael Guzman, Assistant City Manager  
 Approved as to form: Gary G. Geuss, City Attorney