

Arts groups ask Council for funding in new city budget

By Aaron Besecker

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Arts and cultural groups Monday descended on City Hall seeking funding assistance in the upcoming city budget.

Nineteen of the 21 speakers during an hourlong public hearing in Common Council Chambers requested aid from the Council and Mayor Byron W. Brown in the city's new spending plan.

Many asked the city to provide a total of \$450,000 to organizations of all sizes. The funding source would be \$25,000 from each Council member's discretionary budget and \$225,000 from the administration.

"As there's been restoration of city funding for other operations, we think it's about time for the restoration of operational funding for arts and culture," said Tod A. Kniazak, executive director of the Arts Services Initiative of Western New York.

At least 15 organizations were represented by speakers at the hearing, as was the Buffalo Arts Commission, whose members are appointed by the mayor and Council president. The commission is responsible for maintaining all public art in the city.

Group representatives touted the work of their organizations, their economic impact and their role in contributing to the quality of life in Buffalo and the region.

Groups represented included Hallwalls, the Darwin Martin House, Theatre of Youth, Irish Classical Theatre Company and Music Is Art.

The mayor's proposed budget currently contains no funding for arts organizations, said Delaware Council Member Michael J. LoCurto.

The city's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30. The mayor introduced a proposed \$482.6 million spending package May 1, and the Council has until next Tuesday to adopt a spending plan.

In the current budget, the city provided \$200,000 for 27 organizations that saw their funding eliminated by Erie County. Half of that funding came from the discretionary budgets of each Council member, and the other half from the administration.

LoCurto said he supports funding in the amount requested or what was provided in the current budget.

"I think it makes sense on many levels," LoCurto said.

Funding for arts groups has received little if any mention during the last two weeks of public hearings and workshops held by the Council.

The Council leadership is expected to begin budget negotiations with the administration soon, possibly by the end of this week.

Two speakers during the hearing, which was attended by about three dozen people, called on city lawmakers to make an appointment to fill the vacant South District seat on the Council.