

Dear Members of the Planning Commission,

My name is Claire Crause and I am a dance artist born and raised in Ann Arbor. I recently graduated from the University of Michigan with a BFA degree in dance, and am now based in New York City. I am proud to call Ann Arbor my hometown, as I grew up within the rich and diverse artistic community Ann Arbor harbors. I value the importance of Ann Arbor's ability to engage the community in the performing arts through both ticketed and free artistic events. These include events through the Ann Arbor Summer Festival, Sonic Lunch, The Ark, The Blind Pig, The Yellow Barn, and the myriad of performances made possible by the University Musical Society. Ann Arbor would not have its notable enriching artistic environment if it were not for these performance opportunities.

I have choreographed and performed in many shows around Ann Arbor, most recently within the opportunities offered by University of Michigan. I believe that it is important, however, for local artists to have performance spaces outside of the University property. Creating artwork within the University is important, but many artists feel the necessity of creating independent work and hosting shows unaffiliated with the University. This gives back to the Ann Arbor community at large, and provides opportunity for non-university artists to contribute performance work. Additionally, the University spaces are hard to access, even for students. As the former President of the Dance Student Assembly I am aware of the difficulty of securing university space for student use. Venues are booked out long into the future, and require substantial funding that most students cannot provide.

Then came Threads Arts Festival, a performing arts opportunity created by colleagues of mine from the University. I was overjoyed when I heard that Threads secured the Ann Arbor Distillery as the venue for this year's festival. This is especially exciting, given the closing of the Blind Pig and the Yellow Barn. The Distillery provides a space to fill that void. The Distillery is also a unique venue in that it can be utilized as a space for dance. Not many venues in Ann Arbor, outside of the University property, can double as spaces for both music and dance performance. This is crucial for arts festivals such as Threads, that actively seek to showcase multidisciplinary art forms. Broader and more diverse audiences are accessed when show can host multiple art forms, such as music, poetry, and dance, among others. More people are reached and the ability to engage more of the community becomes greater.

I urge you to reconsider rejecting the Distillery's ability to hold public events. Threads is scheduled to host their arts festival at the Distillery in August, and if this venue is closed Threads will not have a location. This event is integral for promoting the artistic values Ann Arbor so dearly claims, as talented performing artist from the local and nation-wide performing communities are scheduled to perform. Closing the Distillery will be a disservice to not only these performers, but to the Ann Arbor community at large. Please consider the larger community impact before making a decision.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Claire Crause