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Last Updated: 8:09 am | Thursday, January 25, 2007

Arts groups plead their case Other cities more supportive, report says

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Symphonies, museums and theaters throughout Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky will need more than \$950 million in capital and endowment funds during the next two decades, according to a new report commissioned by arts supporters.

The report from AMS Planning & Research in Connecticut contends that arts and cultural groups don't have the resources here that groups in competitor cities such as Minneapolis, St. Louis or Denver boast, either from taxpayers or private donors.

Arts supporters say the community probably has spent close to \$950 million in the last 20 years.



Supporters call the arts critical to the region's national image and quality of life, and claim that public investments in the arts stimulate the local economy.

At stake, they say, is the region's ability to draw people here and keep them here.

As one of the first steps in an effort to raise more money privately and publicly for the arts, the report is sure to rankle those convinced that

supporters want to raise taxes.

Jim Urling, chairman of the Coalition Opposed to Additional Spending and Taxes, said if the arts are popular enough they can be sustained by private support.

"I don't think it's the proper role of government," Urling said. "This is a classic sort of thing that ought to rise and fall with market forces. If people like it, they'll pay for it."

Supporters counter that the shortfalls already are affecting the programs and buildings they can afford.

"When people go to other cities and say, 'Why don't we have institutions like that?', they have to understand (something).

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"The resources available to those institutions greatly exceed the funding available to similar institutions in Cincinnati," said Doug McDonald, president of the Cincinnati Museum Center.

The museum center, for example, has a \$17 million endowment, about one-fifth that of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History and less than 10 percent of the Children's Museum in Indianapolis, McDonald said.

While the Fine Arts Fund provides millions every year to more than a dozen arts groups in operating funds, the new report covers capital funds, which are used for building and expansion projects, and endowments, which generally are preserved for long-term investments.

To make the case to local taxpayers and private donors, proponents have formed the Cincinnati USA Cultural Partnership. The new report cost about \$50,000 and was funded by the CEO group the Cincinnati Business Committee and the Greater Cincinnati Foundation.

It comes as the Cincinnati Art Museum is planning an expansion that could cost \$100 million, and the Playhouse in the Park is considering options that could cost tens of millions of dollars, trustees of those groups said.

"As we look at where we're headed in the next 10 or 20 years, we need to focus on our strengths," Greater Cincinnati Foundation board chairman Wym Portman said. "The arts and cultural history and roots here are one of our strengths."

While groups such as the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and the Art Museum have endowments of more than \$50 million, those often trail similar groups in other cities, the study said. Some, such as the Museum Center, are raising endowments now to try to reduce future reliance on public funding.

While they have not asked for a tax increase, arts supporters have argued for years for more taxpayer dollars dedicated to the arts.

They also will promote a campaign to increase private giving to the arts.

"I'm not sure we've gotten to the point where we're thinking about a tax increase, but I think in some form that (public funding request) is inevitable, yes," Portman said.

Jim Tarbell, chairman of the Arts & Culture committee of Cincinnati City Council, said he thought increased public funding was politically possible.

"I think so," Tarbell said. "It's all in who's telling and how they're telling the story."