

Lease Renewal Briefing Memo

To: Aubrey Hale, Planning Director, City of Ocala

From: Marion Cultural Alliance (MCA)

Subject: Lease Renewal Request – Brick City Center for the Arts, 23 SW Broadway Street

Date: December 12, 2025

Purpose

Marion Cultural Alliance (MCA) respectfully requests renewal of the lease for the Brick City Center for the Arts. This memo outlines MCA’s public value, alignment with City priorities, and the significant community benefit generated by continued operation of this downtown cultural facility.

Background

Since 2001, MCA has served as Ocala/Marion County’s arts advocate and cultural convener. MCA is a formally designated local arts agency (LAA) for both the City of Ocala (March 1, 2022) and the Marion County Board of County Commissioners (December 19, 2023). As defined by Americans for the Arts, MCA fulfills LAA functions through cultural planning, grantmaking, community partnerships, arts advocacy, and broad public access to the arts.

The Brick City Center for the Arts serves as MCA’s headquarters, public gallery, event space, and community arts hub. The City and MCA entered the original lease on February 14, 2006, supporting City goals to promote downtown redevelopment and maintain a strong arts presence in the urban core. For 19 years, The Brick has functioned as an essential cultural asset for residents, visitors, artists, and local businesses.

MCA’s Impact and Role

A Downtown Cultural Anchor

The Brick provides an ever-changing venue for visual and performing arts, including monthly exhibits, talks, lectures, senior art showcases, book signings, spoken word events, workshops, and community gatherings. Its courtyard features two murals by local artists, and its west-facing exterior displays a nationally recognized “living mural” of a black bear by Enrique Maranje—commissioned by the City of Ocala and now a landmark visitor photo stop.

Community Reach and Support of the Creative Sector

- **229,000 residents and visitors** welcomed since 2001
- **1250 local artists** showcased through exhibits, events, classes, and the gallery gift shop
- **Artist-friendly 30/70 sales split**, significantly more generous than the traditional 50/50 model
- **75 workshops** for artists to support and grow their business
- Quarterly refreshed gallery shop inventory highlighting local creators

Grantmaking & Cultural Investment

MCA is a major arts funder:

- **\$635,000 in Cultural Grants** awarded in direct support to local nonprofit arts organizations for programming and organizational needs, including **\$70,000 in National Endowment for the Arts funds** that MCA matched dollar for dollar.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, MCA pivoted to provide general operating support—such as the grant to the Reilly Arts Center that helped launch its online concert series viewed throughout the community and beyond.
- Grants have supported arts programming for **385,000+ individuals**, including students, veterans, seniors, individuals with special needs, and underserved neighborhoods. Supported programs include youth theatre, free ballet demonstrations, and ballet classes at the **Mary Sue Rich Community Center at Reed Place**.
- MCA provides **grant-writing workshops** and courtesy reviews of cultural grants, offering technical assistance to enhance success in the competitive grant process.
- **Friends Grants for Artists and Arts Educators** (up to \$1,500) support creative projects. MCA also funded the City's Cultural Arts Department for workshops by Art in City Spaces artist and art therapist April Fitzpatrick, tied to an exhibit at the **Mary Sue Rich Community Center** and exploring identity, resilience, and healing through hands-on art-making. The fund is named in honor of former Mayor E.L. Foster, Mack Dunwoody, Jim Copeland, and anonymous donor.

Public Art Leadership

MCA produced the community's inaugural and most iconic public art initiatives:

- **Four Horse Fever herds** since 2001 (introducing public art to Ocala)
 - **Horse Fever, Horse Fever in Motion, 10th Anniversary Herd, and 20/20 Herd**
- **Murals** at the Ocala Public Library (based on the Dewey Decimal System)
- **Knit Bomb** installation at the 2018 Levitt AMP series

The Horse Fever initiative raised **\$830,000**, launching MCA's grantmaking, creating millions of impressions for Ocala's creative identity, and contributing **\$335,000 to local charities** (MCA gifted 50% of each horse's auction proceeds to designated nonprofits).

Strategic Partnerships & City and County Alignment

MCA collaborates directly with multiple City and County departments, including Recreation & Parks, Arts & Cultural Affairs, and the Ocala/Marion County Visitors and Convention Bureau. MCA is a key partner in:

- **City of Ocala's Community Cultural Arts Master Plan** (MCA was a major funder)
- **Placemaking** and **cultural planning** initiatives
- **Americans for the Arts – Arts & Economic Prosperity Studies V and VI**
- **Levitt AMP Ocala Music Series** (MCA served as fiscal agent)
- Regular convenings of arts leaders to encourage collegiality, collaboration, and shared resources
- Joint efforts with the CVB to create **two funding sources** for arts organizations to promote Ocala/Marion County as a cultural destination

MCA's Executive Director serves as **Chair of the Ocala Municipal Arts Commission** and is an active partner with Master the Possibilities, the Ocala/Marion County Chamber & Economic Partnership, the College of Central Florida, Magnolia Art Xchange, MainStreet Ocala, and numerous nonprofit and arts organizations. MCA is a member of the **Florida Arts Alliance** and **Americans for the Arts**.

Organizational Capacity

Marion Cultural Alliance has a strong and experienced organizational structure with proven capacity to manage programs, facilities, and funding. The staff and board bring expertise in arts administration, community engagement, grantmaking, and cultural planning. MCA maintains robust financial management and reporting practices, successfully oversees multi-year grants and public-private partnerships, and leverages volunteer, artist, and stakeholder networks to maximize community impact. Its track record demonstrates the ability to deliver high-quality programming, sustain strategic initiatives, and steward the Brick City Center for the Arts as a vital cultural asset.

Key Points Supporting Lease Renewal

1. Significant Community Impact

- Free access to monthly art exhibits, cultural programs, and artist talks
- Arts education and engagement for all ages
- Support for hundreds of local artists through exhibitions, workshops, and sales each year
- Affordable, tiered artist membership (**\$45 per year**)
- Free **Creative Registry** where businesses, meeting planners, and event organizers can hire local artists

Public Benefit: Advances cultural enrichment, learning, and community identity in alignment with City goals.

2. Economic Contribution & Downtown Activation

- Drives foot traffic that supports surrounding businesses
- Strengthens cultural tourism through public art and consistent cultural activity
- Leverages private philanthropy and grant dollars to advance City priorities
- Funded **Ocala Metro Art Scene (OMAS)**—a year-round online hub for cultural events and ticketing <https://ocalametroartscene.com/>
 - 10,184 active users
 - 10,020 new users
 - 6,974 engaged sessions

- 52.07% engagement rate
- Avg. engagement time: 1 minute
- 68,259 total events viewed
- Founding partner of the **First Saturday Gallery Stroll (eight galleries strong)**

Benefit to the City: Sustains downtown vibrancy and supports local economic development.

3. Facility Utilization and Responsible Stewardship

- 2024 foot traffic=11,049 TYD 2025=9,735 (details attached, “MCA Workshops, Events, and Daily Foot Traffic”)
- Provides routine improvements, including annual painting
- Fulfilled the required capital improvement to the courtyard adjacent to The Brick (**\$77,732 total project cost**)
- Researching a refresh of the outdoor furniture for the courtyard*
- Operates the facility Monday–Saturday, ensuring continuous public activation. Hours Monday-Friday 10 am -5 pm, Saturday 11 am-4 pm
- Reduces operational burden on City staff
- Offers an affordable and unique rental venue (**~4 rentals per month**)
- Provides free use of the facility for City workshops or meetings (the current lease provides for 12 uses annually, valued at **\$7,800**-unlimited use moving forward-based on availability, priceless)
- The 2026 schedule of events and exhibits completed including unveiling of the 25th Anniversary horse (January 9th), annual Block Party (June), annual Art in the Attic (July), opening reception for each month’s exhibit, held one hour before the City’s First Friday events, and host of the Artists’ Oasis for FAFO’s Art Festival (October)
- **Benefit:** Protects and enhances a key City asset while maximizing its public use.

4. Strategic Partnerships with City Departments

- Collaborates across departments to advance shared cultural and community goals
- Provides arts expertise, cultural planning, and coordination

- Supports implementation of the 10-Year Master Cultural Plan
- Willing to assist the City with a campaign to secure funds for the Public Arts Fund for Maintenance created by the LILAC Foundation at the Ocala/Marion Community Foundation.

Benefit: Strengthens cultural infrastructure and interdepartmental alignment.

Analysis

As the designated local arts agency for both the City and County, MCA provides cultural leadership far beyond that of a traditional tenant. Operations at the Brick City Center for the Arts deliver:

- Substantial public benefit
- Economic activation
- Proven stewardship
- Alignment with national LAA best practices and City priorities

MCA's partnership with the City ensures that Ocala remains a thriving, culturally rich, and economically vibrant community.

Recommendation

City staff and Council are encouraged to renew the lease with Marion Cultural Alliance for the Brick City Center for the Arts. MCA remains committed to:

- Strong stewardship of the historic facility
- Providing broad public benefit
- Advancing the City's cultural, economic, and community development goals
- Fulfilling its responsibilities as a designated local arts agency

Renewal supports a proven public-private partnership and preserves one of downtown Ocala's most visible and impactful cultural assets.

Additional Information

2024 BY THE NUMBERS	Art Exhibits:	Pieces Exhibited:	Exhibit & Gift Shop Sales:	Participating Artists:	Gallery Rentals:	Foot Traffic:
	12	529	\$34,972	357	49	11,049
2025 BY THE NUMBERS	Art Exhibits:	Pieces Exhibited:	Exhibit & Gift Shop Sales:	Participating Artists:	Gallery Rentals:	Foot Traffic:
January - December 2025	11	558	\$54,062	310	38	10,031

Economic Impact of MCA and Brick City Center for the Arts (based on the Americans for the Arts Economic Impact Calculator) \$572,772

ARTS & ECONOMIC PROSPERITY IV
ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE NONPROFIT ARTS & CULTURE INDUSTRY > CALCULATOR

INFORMATION

STEP 1: POPULATION
POPULATION of your community: 250,000 to 499,999

STEP 2: TOTAL EXPENSES
Your Organization's TOTAL EXPENSES (please do not use commas): \$ 330,799

STEP 3: TOTAL ATTENDANCE (OPTIONAL)
TOTAL ATTENDANCE to your organization's arts events (again, do not use commas): 11049

CALCULATE Reset

TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT OF:

	Total Expenditures	FTE Jobs	Household Income	Local Government Revenue	State Government Revenue
Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations:	\$330,799	11.7	\$286,227	\$12,944	\$16,642
Nonprofit Arts and Culture Audiences:	\$241,973	6.9	\$151,318	\$12,917	\$16,178
Total Industry Impact (The Sum of Organizations and Audiences):	\$572,772	18.6	\$437,545	\$25,861	\$32,820

Print Your Results
Please see the [link](#) [print](#) below.

DEFINITIONS

Total Expenditures:	The total dollars spent by your nonprofit arts and culture organization and its audiences; event-related spending by arts and culture audiences is estimated using the average dollars spent per person by arts event attendees in similarly populated communities.
FTE Jobs:	The total number of full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs in your community that are supported by the expenditures made by your arts and culture organization and/or its audiences. An FTE can be one full-time employee, two half-time employees, four employees who work quarter-time, etc.
Household Income:	The total dollars paid to community residents as a result of the expenditures made by your arts and culture organization and/or its audiences. Household income includes salaries, wages, and proprietary income.
Government Revenue:	The total dollars received by your local and state governments (e.g., license fees, taxes) as a result of the expenditures made by your arts and culture organization and/or its audiences.

Example of Outdoor Furniture for the Courtyard

