

Piven sees 'more dynamic' Noyes Center

<http://evanstonnow.com/story/government/bill-smith/2013-03-08/55099/piven-sees-more-dynamic-noyes-center>

June 7, 2013



Piven Theatre's executive director says the group's expansion plan will make the city's Noyes Cultural Arts Center a much more dynamic space.

Leslie Brown says she submitted the final draft of Piven's proposal to City Manager Wally Bobkiewicz earlier this week. After the city reviews it and gives other tenants at Piven two weeks to look it over, the plan is expected to go before the city's Human Services Committee and then the full City Council for approval.

Under the plan, Brown says, Piven would get a 25-year lease on a larger portion of the space at Noyes than it now occupies, with an option to renew the lease for another 25 years.

Piven, she says, would commit to raise over \$1 million in cash, pledges and pro-bono contributions of professional services and would take out a loan from the city for a maximum of \$2.2 million to pay for renovations.

Piven now pays rent to the city, but under the proposal, it would be allowed to apply its rent payments, about \$60,000 a year, toward paying off the the loan.

Brown says that under the terms of its current lease with the city Piven can't share or rent out its theater or classroom space to other groups when its not in use.

Under the new arrangement that would be permitted -- and Brown says the addition of other groups that don't have a home of their own "would make for a far more dynamic space."

The new arrangement, she says, would also let the theater apply for a liquor license, so theatergoers "would be able to have the same opportunity as they do in the City of Chicago to have a glass of wine or beer during intermission."

Some other Noyes tenants have objected to what they've heard about the proposal, saying it will force some of them out of the building.

But Brown says she hopes all the other tenants will be able to stay, although she suggests some spaces might need to be reconfigured to be more heavily used than they are now.

"This is an old school house," Brown said, "Some rooms are rather large and perhaps could be adapted to house more artists than they do now."

Larry DiStasi, artistic director of Actor's Gymnasium, another Noyes tenant, [questioned at a Human Services Committee meeting Monday](#) whether Piven can pull off the expansion project, given that it has suffered losses in recent years, as disclosed in publicly available reports to Internal Revenue Service.

Brown said that, like a lot of other arts groups, Piven suffered losses in recent years, but that her predecessor as executive director "was very diligent in putting money aside to carry us through one of the most challenging economic periods in a very long time."

Piven has not incurred any debt, never took out a loan, never missed a rent payment or cut programming or scholarships, she said, adding that the group finished its most recent fiscal year with a surplus and has lined up about \$650,000 worth of pro-bono work from professionals and contractors for the renovation project.

Top: Students in an acting class for adults at Piven in a photo from the theater's website.