



Shea Theater Arts Center
PO Box 773 / 71 Avenue A
Turners Falls, MA 01376

To the esteemed members of the Montague Finance Committee,

My name is Christopher "Monte" Belmonte. I am a Turners Falls resident and the President of The Board of The Shea Theater. I am writing in strong support of Turners Falls RiverCulture.

I moved into The Patch neighborhood in Turners 14 years ago, knowing very little of the town or the village. It was affordability that brought us to town. But in those first years, there was little to no reason keeping us in town for arts or entertainment-that was until Lisa Davol and RiverCulture became the chief arts and culture banner waver for the village. I remember going to one of the first Found Fashion Shows in Suzee's Third Street Laundry, which I originally heard about through Lisa and RiverCulture. As the years progressed, I began to hear and see more "happenings" happening in my adopted home town. Fast forward more than a decade, and Turners has gained a reputation as a cultural hub-much to the envy of nearby towns (take THAT Amherst!). This is thanks in no small part to the original work of Lisa and now the continued leadership of Suzanne.

For the organization that was the impetus in creating this new and vibrant arts & culture scene to lose support-at this time in particular when we are solidifying our place in the cultural aesthetic of The Valley-would be a tremendous loss. As President of The Shea for these last two years, we have already collaborated many times with Suzanne and RiverCulture. I was most impressed by two major collaborations.

One, when RiverCulture underwrote the ticket fees for those who needed assistance and made it possible to attend the Center For New American's talent show at The Shea. It enabled us to reach a community that lives very close to the theater but cannot often afford tickets. And two, when we collaborated with La Mariposa and RiverCulture to play host to Black History Month programming. In an era when our society is thankfully once again wrestling with difficult issues of race, La Mariposa, RiverCulture, and The Shea were able to hold an event that all 3 important town organizations could be proud of.

I urge you to support the funding of RiverCulture. We will be a better Shea Theater and a better Turners Falls because of it.

Thank you,

Monte Belmonte