

The Bulletin

“Speakers Oppose Funds For Barnes’ Move To The City”

By Bradley Vasoli, The Bulletin
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Camden, N.J. — Opponents of moving the Barnes Foundation art collection from Merion to Philadelphia asked members of the Delaware River Port Authority (DRPA) to rescind \$500,000 in funding for the move yesterday.

Attendees against the relocation packed the spacious DRPA meeting room at Camden’s One Port Center. They charge supporters of the move of the majority of the artwork in the Merion location to a new facility on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway have not shown the idea to result in substantial economic benefit to the city. Meanwhile, they said, the loss to the nearby suburban community would be substantial.

“This project is not in the public interest,” Sandy Bressler, spokesperson for the nonprofit Friends of the Barnes Foundation, said at yesterday’s DRPA meeting. “The Barnes Foundation is an economic asset to Merion and Montgomery County.”

She and other Friends of the Barnes members cited a statement by Rutgers University economist Matityahu Marcus doubting the supposed benefit of moving the world-renowned art collection into the city.

“There is no available evidence that established economic criteria have been employed to assess the project’s desirability by any of the parties involved,” Dr. Marcus wrote.

The economist said policymakers should examine likely effects of the move on the whole region, citing estimates that placing the Barnes in Philadelphia would create 40 new jobs while ending 28 jobs at the Lower Merion facility, thus creating only 12 net new jobs.

Opponents of the move also got strong support from U.S. Rep. Jim Gerlach, R-6th, of Berks, Chester, Lehigh and Montgomery counties. His chief of staff Bill Tighe spoke to meeting attendees via speakerphone.

“We join with you all in everything you said and encourage the commissioners to reconsider this decision,” he said.

Other speakers denounced the move as an affront to the late proprietor Dr. Albert Barnes as well as the arts community.

“Many professionals in the arts and culture community view it with trepidation and dread,” Friends of the Barnes leader Walter Herman said. Others called the impending move “a desecration of one of the greatest cultural and art collections in this country” and “nothing less than the greatest theft of art since World War II.”

DRPA’s new chairman John Estey said the authority is considering the protestors’ request and should have an answer for them probably within a month.

“I would anticipate that before the next board meeting we will let them know what the board’s view is on that,” he said.

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