

**From:** [Matt Otto](#)  
**To:** [Robinson, Melissa](#)  
**Cc:** [Ross, Lisa](#); [Public Testimony](#); [MayorQ](#)  
**Subject:** ordinance #260143 Blue Room/Jazz Museum  
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TO: Councilwoman Melissa Robinson, 3rd District Representative  
CC: Mayor Quinton Lucas; Members of the Kansas City Council

Good afternoon Councilwoman Robinson, Mayor Lucas, and Members of the Kansas City Council.

My name is Matt Otto. I am a Kansas City–based saxophonist, composer, tenured professor of Jazz studies at KU, and long-standing member of the Kansas City jazz community, with an international performance and recording profile and a career representing Kansas City in academic and artistic contexts worldwide.

I write to provide public testimony regarding Ordinance #260143 and the allocation of funds to the American Jazz Museum.

I want to begin by acknowledging Councilwoman Robinson for initiating this ordinance and for her continued advocacy for cultural and economic investment in the Third District. Strengthening the American Jazz Museum and the 18th & Vine District is a meaningful and necessary civic priority.

The American Jazz Museum and 18th & Vine have been central to my development as an artist and to Kansas City’s global identity as a jazz city. These institutions carry not only local significance but national and international symbolic weight. In the current cultural and political environment, the preservation and responsible stewardship of Black American cultural institutions requires exceptional care, transparency, and community accountability.

Ordinance #260143 represents a substantial opportunity to modernize the museum and expand its reach as both a cultural destination and an educational resource. However, physical renovation alone is insufficient. Institutional infrastructure—governance, leadership continuity, staffing, communication protocols, educational vision, and stakeholder engagement—must be addressed with equal seriousness.

I became aware of Ordinance #260143 only within the past several days, despite being deeply engaged in the Kansas City jazz ecosystem. That delay highlights a breakdown in communication between decision-makers and the artistic community most directly affected by these initiatives.

I respectfully submit the following concerns:

1. **Insufficient public communication.** There has been limited consistent outreach to Kansas City jazz artists and community stakeholders regarding the ordinance and its

development.

2. **Lack of accessible project documentation.** To my knowledge, detailed plans, budget outlines, and RFP frameworks were not made available for community review and structured feedback during the process.
3. **Absence of formal local artist consultation.** Kansas City jazz artists were not invited into an advisory or consultative role regarding the Blue Room relocation or broader planning decisions.
4. **Leadership continuity gaps.** The absence of a permanent Executive Director since August 2025 raises concerns about strategic oversight, institutional memory, and accountability during a major capital project.
5. **RFP visibility.** It is unclear whether RFP opportunities have been broadly communicated to local stakeholders, including artists and community organizations.
6. **Mission balance.** The American Jazz Museum's dual identity as a museum and a performance venue requires careful governance. There is concern that venue operations are overshadowing the museum's curatorial and educational mandate.
7. **Gerald Dunn.** Gerald Dunn has been a consistent and effective advocate for Kansas City jazz musicians and visiting artists. He is an accomplished musician and a central figure in the Kansas City jazz community, with deep institutional knowledge of the Blue Room and the American Jazz Museum. His continued presence in this role is broadly supported within the artistic community and is essential to maintaining informed, credible, and musically grounded booking and artist relations at the Blue Room.

One potential structural solution would be to expand collaboration with the Jazz District Redevelopment Corporation (JDRC) or a similar entity to handle booking, fundraising, and district activation, allowing museum governance to focus on historical preservation, scholarship, and education.

I support the intent of Ordinance #260143 and the investment it represents. I urge the Council to pair this investment with robust governance reform, transparent planning, and formalized artist and community engagement mechanisms.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Matt Otto

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