

PORTLANDERS TO SAVE THE KELLER

www.SavetheKeller.com

February 25, 2026

Dear Mayor Wilson and City Council Members:

We are grassroots Portlanders who strongly oppose abandoning The Keller Auditorium. **Walking away from The Keller and its iconic fountain will create an empty hole in the heart of downtown for years to come.** The Keller needs thoughtful renovation—not reckless demolition.

The Keller is profitable and popular with Portlanders. It brings 400,000+ people each year into the heart of the city, subsidizes other performing arts venues and supports a downtown neighborhood of nearby restaurants, hotels, and businesses that have grown around the theater and fountain. If the Keller goes away, downtown will permanently suffer. In Portland, we reimagine and restore public assets, like Providence Park and Moda Center. We don't bulldoze them, especially when renovation is less expensive, better for the environment, and better for our downtown.

Portland's largest performing arts venue belongs in the heart of the city, not isolated from other downtown cultural institutions with few adjacent amenities. The Oregonian said it well: *"The Keller carries decades of tradition, existing support facilities such as parking lots, a lower projected cost and a more central location architecturally tied to the city's signature fountain"* (Aug. 11, 2024)

A recent study by Chicago-based Hunden Partners recommending against renovating the Keller is inaccurate, flawed, and misleading. The report ignores critical information contained in the *Keller Auditorium Feasibility Study* presented to the City Council on May 29, 2024. It fails to address the negative financial impacts on downtown businesses of abandoning the Keller, the full cost of new public infrastructure required for a new theater and relies upon an incomplete and inadequate traffic impact study. The report also erroneously states that a renovated Keller would have 2,700 seats when the 2024 feasibility study clearly includes an expanded 3,000-seat theater. (Feasibility studies available at www.ournextkeller.org)

We urge you to end the 3+ years of uncertainty over the future of The Keller and make a public commitment to renovating Portland's beloved Keller Auditorium.

Here's why:

Portlanders overwhelmingly support a Keller renovation—not building a new theater elsewhere. 66% favor renovation while just 10% support building a new theater elsewhere in the city. Support for renovation jumps to 70% when compared to building a new theater near PSU. 80% view the Keller favorably and 89% say it's a critical downtown asset. (DHM Research survey available at www.ournextkeller.org)

Abandoning the Keller will create a massive vacancy, devastating our already struggling downtown. Closing the Keller will harm the restaurants, hotels, coffee shops, and bars that have grown up around the auditorium and fountain. According to a 2024 ECOnorthwest analysis, *"The abandoned building would be large, unattractive, unsafe and unsuitable for reuse. A new building would likely take many years to develop, is unlikely to support existing Keller Auditorium-oriented businesses to the same degree and will lack the current venue's history and synergistic relationship with the Keller fountain and larger Halprin Sequence."* (ECOnorthwest analysis available at www.ournextkeller.org)

Renovating the Keller costs substantially less than building a new venue near PSU. According to 2024 estimates, a Keller renovation will cost \$236 million while a new 3,000-seat theater at PSU will cost \$449 million. The PSU proposal also includes parking garages and other infrastructure bringing the total estimated cost to \$857 million. The PSU cost estimate fails to include the cost of Keller demolition.

Bulldozing the Keller flies in the face of the Portland Climate Action Plan. It is said that “the greenest building is the one that already exists.” Building a new venue and parking garages while demolishing the Keller makes zero environmental sense, especially when the Keller can be renovated to meet all modern safety and design standards and already has adjacent parking to meet the 1,260-parking stall requirement for Broadway shows and enjoys easy pedestrian access to buses, light rail and streetcar.

A “21st Century Keller” will be as good—or better— than a new venue. After renovations, the Keller will look, feel and operate like a completely modern space—inside and out. The new Keller will have a 3,000-seat “Broadway-capable” theater, an intimate new 150-seat performance space and year-round access to enlarged community rehearsal spaces. The auditorium will meet the latest ADA accessibility and seismic standards, have nearly twice as many restrooms, and offer seating and acoustics as good as a new venue. A new outdoor plaza will connect the Keller with Portland’s signature fountain—creating an additional outdoor performance and public gathering place.

A new 3,000-seat theater will create dangerous traffic congestion on I-405 and around PSU. The proposed site of the new theater at SW 3rd & Lincoln St. is already difficult to access. The addition of thousands of new cars into the area will create a traffic and air-quality nightmare in the entire neighborhood. A preliminary 2024 traffic study is incomplete, failing to address traffic back-ups on I-405 and how performance night traffic will impede light rail on Lincoln Street.

Theater workers and arts organizations impacted by a temporary Keller closure can and should be supported. It is unnecessary and fiscally irresponsible to spend \$449+ million to build an entirely new venue and close the Keller forever simply to avoid the mitigation costs of a 19-to-24-month renovation closure. For a fraction of the cost, local workers, performers and arts organizations impacted by a temporary closure can and should be compensated. Furthermore, multiple temporary performance venues are available and staggering Keller renovations to allow certain performances to continue should be explored.

For decades, Portlanders have made great memories at The Keller Auditorium and the iconic fountain at its doorstep. Today, the Keller stands ready to help lead downtown and Portland’s comeback. Portlanders are ready to help. All that’s needed now is leadership from City Hall to turn 21st Century Keller from a bold plan into an exciting reality.

Signed,

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Former Portland City
Commissioner

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Conservancy

Stephen Kafoury
On behalf of Concerned
Citizens, Former State
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Peggy Moretti
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