

Village of Mariemont
Special Meeting of Council
April 20, 2026

Mayor Brown called the meeting to order at 9:45 a.m. Present were Mr. Ayer, Mrs. Stock, Mr. Van Stone, and Mrs. Wells. Also in attendance was Allyson West, Executive Director of Cindependent. Dr. Lewis arrived at the meeting at 9:48 a.m.

Mayor Brown explained that the purpose of the meeting was to authorize a donation by the Village to Cindependent, the Mariemont Theatre, of \$25,000. The beauty of this donation is that we would get a two for one match on this because Columbia Township and Fairfax have both agreed to donate \$25,000, allowing a total donation of \$75,000. Mayor Brown is asking for an up or down vote on this because other details will have to be worked out. He passed around a letter from solicitor Ed McTigue, outlining a need for accountability from the non-profit such as what the funds are going to be utilized for, to make certain the funds will be used for the direct benefit of the theater. We would formalize that in a document that we will have ready to go at the next Council meeting on April 27. This will also require legislation to move the money directly out of our general fund. Fiscal Officer Ranking has confirmed that we do have the money and can do that. Solicitor McTigue points out, in his letter, that a municipality can legally make this donation because there are special circumstances in which we are doing this – it is to a non-profit and is a direct benefit to this Village.

Mr. Ayer questioned why this donation needs to happen now. Does this allow the theatre to open faster? Ms. West affirmed that a donation of this amount from the three municipalities provides multiple opportunities – helps get the cash flow in the bank that can be used to purchase the equipment that is needed to reopen and plan some communication about updates to share news and excitement with the community. Cindependent has been quoted a 12-week wait time from ordering to delivery and installation of equipment. They are prepared to sign quote documents and place an equipment order immediately if they receive a \$75,000 donation. The initial equipment quote received of \$575,000 was higher than the quote they received before they were able to get into the space. They have been able to bring that down, thanks to the expertise of the contractors, bringing the difference down to \$125,000. Cindependent has a majority of that available in the bank to support that purchase, but they are carrying utility expenses now.

Mrs. Stock stated that the \$75,000 could help with the equipment order but wondered how they get to having the operational funds needed to actually open the theatre. Ms. West pointed out that the transition campaign can help close that gap while they rebuild the audience that was lost. The original plan didn't anticipate a delay of this length, but they had not planned on the amount of damage they encountered. They have \$471,500 in pledges with the current campaign. Mayor Brown asked for clarification on the equipment being ordered – projectors, sound equipment, and the hardware that is considered a must-have to get the movies back on the screens. Ms. West verified they are not talking about concession equipment or marquee letters but are talking about the five projectors, the audio systems that are in all five of the houses, the hardware and the software that plays the movies, the server infrastructure, and the relationships they build to get the movies back on the screen. Mrs. Stock interjected that no one would come to the movies without concessions. Her concern is how do they ensure that the \$75,000 donation will get the theatre opened? Ms. West is comfortable sharing the business plan and the path to operational re-opening at any point. Cindependent is rebuilding all of the vendor relationships, the staff, the team, the physical space, etc. The former manager from the Esquire theater group and former assistant manager are working with Cindependent. Substantial progress is made week by week and Ms. West remains optimistic and confident. Dr. Lewis pointed out that the theatre space definitely needs some TLC.

Mrs. Wells asked if Cindependent would be expecting annual contributions from the Village if we choose to make this donation. Ms. West explained that she switched the business model when Covid happened for all of their non-profit programs. They now operate on a surplus revenue model. The surplus is then invested into the programs year after year. They are looking at operating expenses for the theatre of over one million dollars. The former operator reported \$850,000 in revenue. The membership program that they launched is a way for Cindependent to communicate with the community that they have to be a part of this, but the revenue line item provides an opportunity to lean on it as they improve the financial footing of the theatre. The theatre reported \$450,000 of revenue from admissions alone, about half of that goes back to the distributor, meaning the available revenue on the admissions they reported was about \$250,000. Much of the work they have been doing is building out the revenue opportunity and comparing what they were able to report versus what Cindependent expects to be realistic and building out from there. For example, if they decide to refresh the space in a major way, there could be future asks for new purposes, but right now the goal is simply to get the movies back on in that theatre and what we're fundraising for is all directly related to that.

Dr. Lewis noted that the 501(c)(3) model for theaters is popping up more. Cindependent has developed relationships with other community cinemas. Building a diverse revenue stream that focuses on private rentals, advertising, admissions, improved concession sales and alcohol sales. There are many opportunities for what can be done to make the theatre sustainable over time. The theatre previously reported 197 on average attendees per day. Cindependent would need to increase that to 306 to break even financially. The Spinnenwebers (building owners) continue to be supportive partners, serving on the advisory council. One of the Spinnenweber brothers may be joining the board at Cindependent. Ms. West expects the theatre to be profitable within two years.

Mayor Brown asked for an up or down vote to proceed with the additional paperwork and documents for next week, at which point Council would have the chance to vote on moving the money for the donation. Mr. Van Stone commented that if Council does not approve this donation, then the opening of the theatre becomes to be determined. Mrs. Stock is on the fence because Council does not have all of the information but noted that voting yes today means that Solicitor McTigue will draft the necessary legislation and there will be another opportunity to discuss and do their due diligence.

Dr. Lewis moved, seconded by Mrs. Wells, for Solicitor McTigue to proceed with the paperwork to allow the Village to make a \$25,000 donation to Cindependent. On role call; five ayes, no nays. Dr. Lewis added that two of our neighboring communities recognize the importance of this theatre. Columbia Township initiated the donation and Dr. Lewis sees this as an incredible opportunity that should not be wasted.

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 a.m.

William A. Brown, Mayor

Kelly I. Rankin, Fiscal Officer