



City Council Public Remarks from 02-10-2025

These are remarks (with minor editing for this format) made to the City Council of Rock Hill that Kirk Irwin presented on February 10th, 2025.

I want to address the recent public posting for sale of the Tom S Gettys Center and make two requests of the Rock Hill City Council.

Even before my wife and I moved to Rock Hill in 2013, we were active in supporting the arts in Rock Hill. The Gettys Center was a vital part of the early work of our organization, Friday Arts Project, and the building was quite alive with art activity. Two significant Forums we organized about Arts & Culture in 2012 & 2013 were done in the Gettys Center. We run the Courtroom Gallery and have our studio there where hundreds have participated in our events. Those forums and our other events established our commitment to the arts community of Rock Hill, and we haven't looked back. We love this city. I think all of us do—who are gathered here on behalf of the Gettys Center's use for the arts. As fellow citizens like you it's our contribution to Rock Hill—using our imaginations, our creativity, our souls to make visible things that are true and beautiful. To make Rock Hill beautiful.

We've loved the way the city has grown, especially the last 10+ years. The businesses, the restaurants, the sports—have all contributed to the life of Rock Hill. But so have the arts.

- » Harriet Goode has had her studio in various places in downtown Rock Hill since 1984.
- » Friday Arts Project worked out of an entire floor of the Citizens Bank building in 2012 and we've been in the Gettys Center in some form since 2013.
- » The Arts Council of York County, then known as the Rock Hill Arts Council, has been in the Gettys Center since 1987—we have a photo of the Gettys Center in 1987 with signs over the doors about the Rock Hill Arts Council.
- » And finally, Rock Hill's two biggest festivals are based on...an illustrator. An artist's work. Vernon Grant was an unknown artist until he became Vernon Grant, and ultimately Rock Hill's favored adopted son.

You cannot deny the arts have been a part of Rock Hill's growth. And the City of Rock Hill has been a huge patron of those arts. Thank you! We would not be able to do the work we have done unless you had helped us be able to be in the Gettys Center. I think about that every time I turn off an errant light, or close an outer door left open to reduce the work of the aged HVAC systems. Thank you.

If you allow the Gettys Center to be removed as the center of arts in Rock Hill, you will essentially END the active arts in downtown Rock Hill.

A friend recently texted me this:

“...if we strip the beauty and the places where artists imagine, conceive, and labor at creating beauty...our cities become more of a sterile functional environment...When we travel to cities that have put cultural art and beauty as one of their central features...we are impressed. We go to those cities...those particular parts of those cities, to be awed and impressed.”

But I'll be honest, ultimately the arts can't compete with business. Any money made by the

arts will be pittance compared to that made by businesses. And that is the REALITY and VALUE of the arts.

Author Lewis Hyde once wrote:

“...a work of art is a gift, not a commodity...more (precisely)...works of art exist simultaneously in two ‘economies’, a market economy and a gift economy. Only one of these is essential, however: a work of art can survive without the market, but where there is no gift, there is no art.”

The art this community makes is a GIFT to Rock Hill. Our gift. Gifts are hard to monetize, because they are usually freely given and freely received...and therefore can become absolutely priceless. Please help us to keep giving gifts to Rock Hill, this city that we love so much.

The two requests I have are this:

- » First, I cannot find the public minutes of the Council meetings showing where the City Council discussed and voted to approve the public sale of the Gettys Center. If I could be directed to those records I would appreciate it.
- » Second, I would like to request that the City Council put a hold on the sale of the Gettys Center and enter a dialogue with leaders of the arts community chosen by Harriet Good and Melanie Cooper. Not as rivals, but as fellow neighbors, friends, and citizens of Rock Hill. The goal would be to find a way together to keep the Gettys Center as the center of arts activity in Rock Hill.

Thank you.

Kirk Irwin
Executive Director
Friday Arts Project

(From Mayor Gettys comments that night, his answer to the first request was that there were no minutes and no vote on the public sale of the Gettys Center because there was no offer on the property. As for the second request, to this date there has been no hold on the sale of the Gettys Center, and as far as I am aware no one from the city has contacted Harriet Goode or Melanie Cooper – or even myself – about opening discussion with the arts community)