

Port of Oswego - Ontario Center for the Performing Arts

Property of the Port of Oswego Authority

December 7th, 2020



Property of the Port of Oswego Authority

Introduction

The Port of Oswego is the only United States port on Lake Ontario. Established in 1779, today's Port is inclusive of an East and West Terminal; the Oswego Marina; the Thomas H. McAuslin Administrative Building; warehouse, open, and bulk dome storage; and the H. Lee White Maritime Museum, whose mission is to promote, protect, enhance, and collect the maritime historical resources associated with the Oswego River and drainage basin, the Oswego Canal, and Lake Ontario. Over the last three years, Port leadership has made significant investments in the Port and its future, with the long-term vision being to create a hub of activity that will draw people to Oswego's downtown. As part of that vision, Port of Oswego leadership would like to understand the opportunity for a performing arts facility at the Port.

DLR Group is an integrated design services practice with a Cultural & Performing Arts Studio specialized in projects that enrich communities and empower creative expression. The firm has been retained by the Port of Oswego to complete a Needs Assessment and Site Master Plan for the Port that assesses the opportunity for a performance space.

To complete this brief, DLR Group has assembled a team of architects, engineers, and planning specialists who have:

- Toured the Port of Oswego site and local performance venues;
- Interviewed local and regional leaders representing government, arts and culture, education, tourism, economic development, and beyond;
- Completed a market analysis, inclusive of the supply and demand for cultural space; and,
- Completed architectural and engineering assessments of the proposed building site, resulting in a proposed space program, massing diagrams, and cost estimates for a potential facility.

The findings of this work are detailed in the following pages.

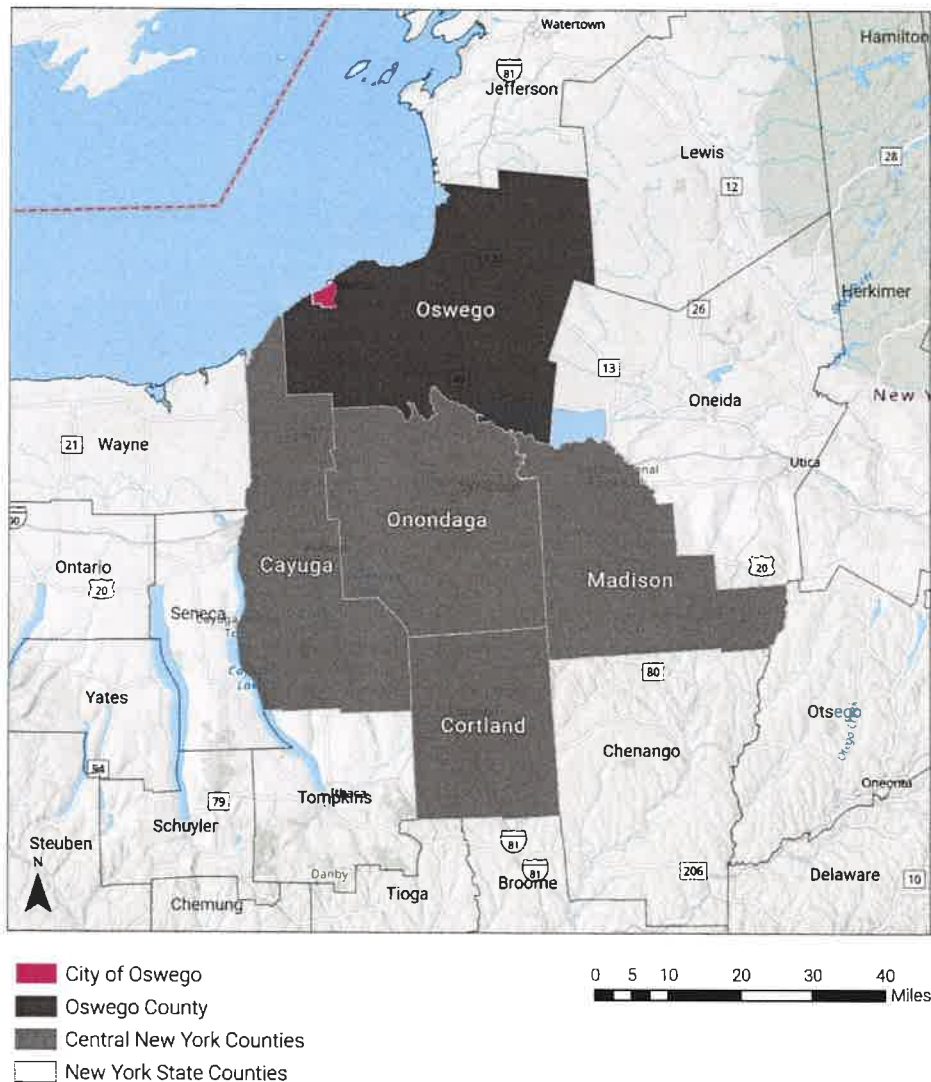
Market Analysis

To complete the Market Analysis, DLR Group collected data from Esri and the United States Census for the City of Oswego, Oswego County, and Central New York populations. Data and information were also collected on Oswego’s nonresident (visitor) population.

1. The Local and Regional Markets for the Arts

DLR Group defined the market for a cultural facility at the Port as the City of Oswego, Oswego County, and the Central New York region (defined by Empire State Development as Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, and Oswego Counties). These markets were identified based on conversations with local and regional arts service and program providers and can be seen in the map below.

Oswego Study Area



Collected data suggest the following:

Educational Attainment:

Twenty-eight percent (28%) of the City of Oswego population has a Bachelors Degree or Higher, compared to 33% of the US population. In the Central New York region, 26% of the population has a Bachelors Degree or Higher. This number drops to 19% in Oswego County. This is important to note as data from the National Endowment for the Arts

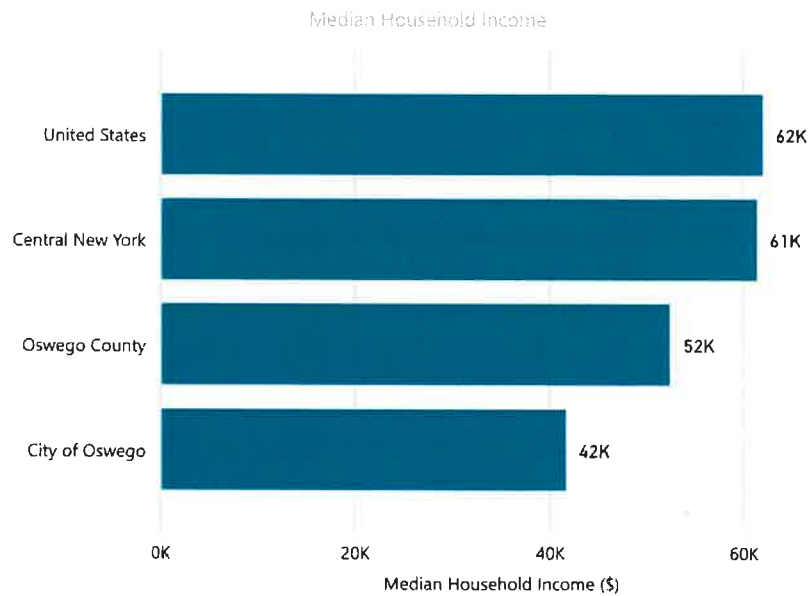
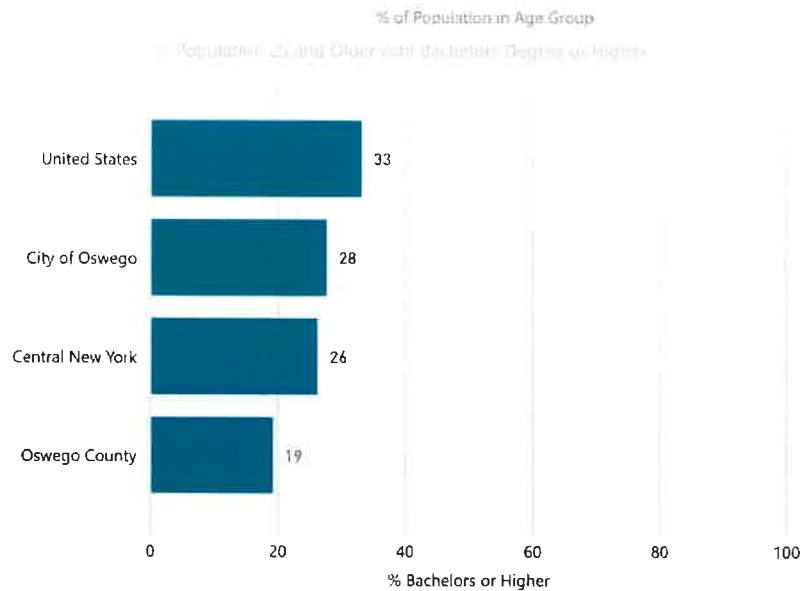
[Survey of Public Participation in the Arts](#)

suggests that educational attainment is the number one indicator of propensity to support traditional arts and cultural activities. In short, the higher an individual’s degree, the more likely they are to attend a play, ballet, or symphonic concert. Lower levels of educational attainment suggest likelihood to participate in or attend informal arts, things like outdoor festivals or events, experiential exhibitions, and other more contemporary art forms.

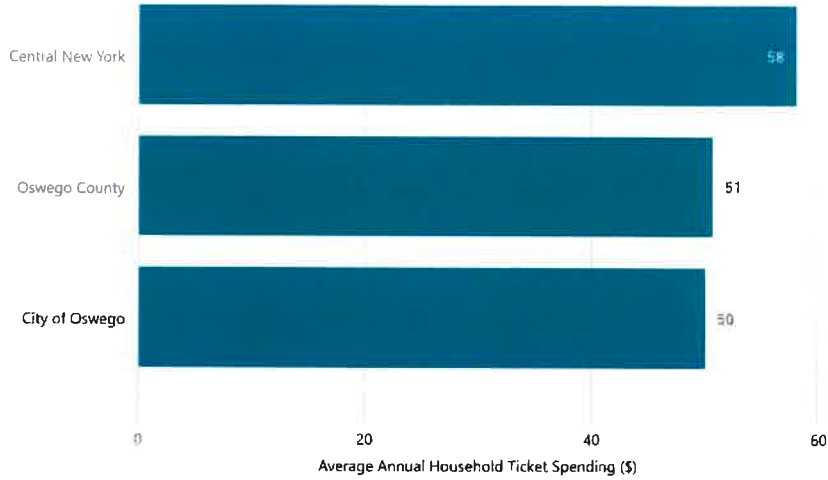
Median Household Income:

Median Household Income (MHI) falls below the national median of \$62,000 in all three market segments. In the City of Oswego, MHI is estimated at \$42,000; in Oswego County at \$52,000; and, in the Central New York region, at \$61,000. This suggests limitations on disposable income. Additional data on Household Ticket Spending indicates that Oswego households spent an average of \$50 on tickets

to cultural events in 2019. In the County, an average of \$51 was spent and, in the Central New York region, this number increased to \$58.

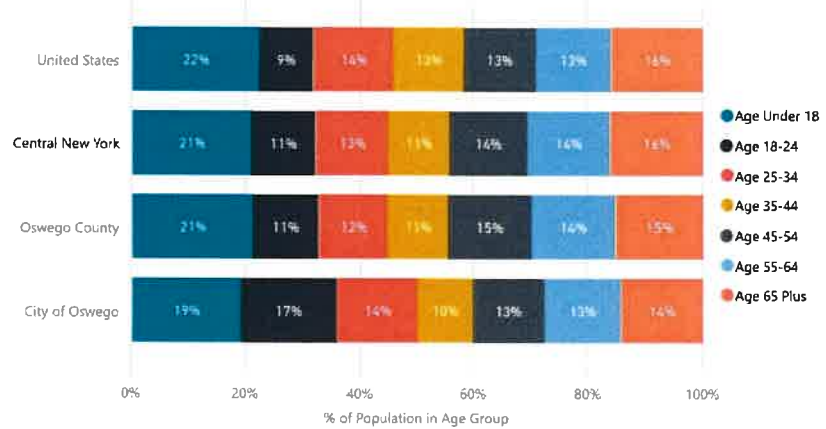


Average Household Ticket Spending 2019

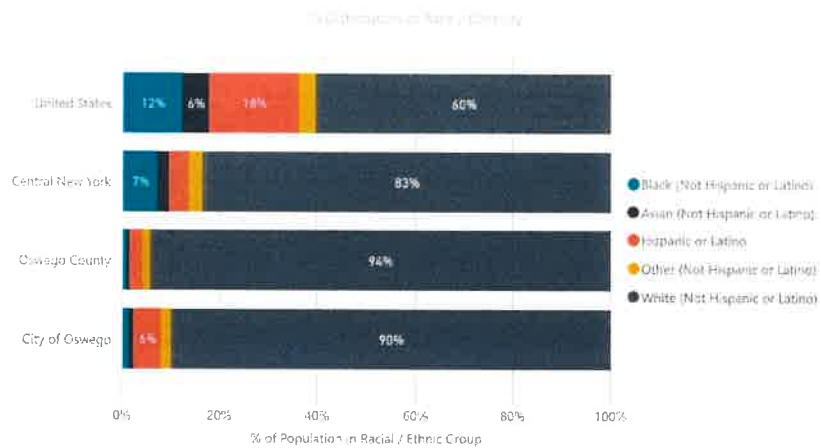


Age: The Age 18-24 population is considerably larger in the City of Oswego (17%) than in either the County (11%) or Central New York Region (11%). This is likely due to the presence of SUNY Oswego. Otherwise, the populations are comparable in age.

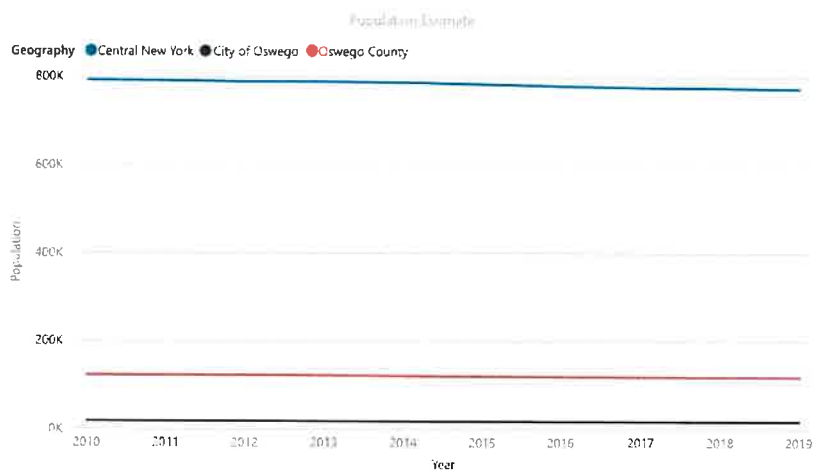
Age



Race / Ethnicity: All three market segments have a majority White (Not Hispanic or Latino) population. There are, however, pockets of diversity. Seven percent (7%) of the Central New York population identifies as Black (Not Hispanic or Latino) and 6% of the City of Oswego population identifies as Hispanic or Latino.



Population Trend: All three market segments are experiencing a slow decline in population. This decline has been most pronounced in the Central New York region, although it is a state-wide issue.



2. Nonresident Population

Oswego County has a well-developed tourism industry centered on sport fishing and history. In 2018, the latest year for which data was available, tourism generated nearly \$19 million in state and local taxes for Oswego County. That same year, 32,821 fishing licenses were sold in the County to out-of-state and international visitors. According to the Oswego County Tourism Office, these visitors tend to come year-round, “making camp” in one community and traveling throughout the area to fish, often chartering a boat and guide to do so.

In addition to fishing-oriented visitors, there is significant opportunity for a cultural facility in Oswego to attract the community’s history—or cultural—tourists, who have traveled to Oswego to visit sites like Fort Ontario, the Maritime Museum, and the Richardson Bate House Museum. The United Nations World Tourism Organization defines cultural tourism as

“a type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination. These attractions/products relate to an asset of distinctive material,

intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions” (Source: UN World Trade Organization *Tourism and Culture*).

When it comes to tourism development, cultural tourists play a significant role, as data suggests they spend more, stay longer, and travel more frequently than other types of travelers.

3. Conclusions

This research suggests that the long-term sustainability of a performing arts center at the Port of Oswego will likely depend on its ability to attract visitors from the local, regional, and tourism markets. As indicated above, these market segments are diverse in educational attainment, income, and age, suggesting a need for a mix of affordable programs. As an example, a month of performing arts center events might include a small jazz ensemble, a performance of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, Ballet Folklorico, a folk band, a curated festival of recreation or fishing-related films, a TEDx-style presentation on local history, a children’s show, and more. These events might be supported by casual, drop-in programs, like a gallery exhibition of findings from a NOAA research project or a series on wildlife photography. With all programming, the key will be to have a broad definition of culture such that visiting fisherfolk feel just as welcome in the facility as amateur Oswego historians, avid arts goers, local students, and young and multigenerational families.

User Demand

Gathering information on user demand for performance space in Oswego helps to inform recommendations on desired facility size and features. Quantifying this demand helps to ensure that there is enough programming to keep a facility active. Thus, the following is a summary of user demand for space as determined through telephone interviews with local, regional, and national stakeholders as well as leaders representing the following organizations:

- H. Lee White Maritime Museum
- Harborfest
- Oswego Music Hall
- Kodak Center
- Live Nation
- NOAA
- Oswego County Tourism
- Oswego Opera Theater
- Oswego Yacht Club
- SUNY Oswego School of Communication, Media and the Arts
- SUNY Oswego College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

1. Performance Space Utilization Summary

Of the organizations listed above, four have expressed interest in utilizing performance space.

- **H. Lee White Maritime Museum** is interested in a facility that could accommodate lectures, events, and conferences. The ideal capacity would be between 150 and 200, with total use amounting to 10 days per year.
- The **Department of Music at the SUNY Oswego School of Communication, Media and the Arts** currently utilizes the Waterman Theatre on the SUNY Oswego campus. The facility was built and designed for theater (as opposed to music) and is primarily used by the Theatre Department, leaving little room on the calendar for Department of Music performances. In total, the Department of Music's choral and instrument ensembles could use a 250 to 300-seat facility up to 10 times a year. This facility would need to have excellent acoustics, tiered seating, a raised stage with an orchestra shell, and back-of-house amenities like a green room, wing space, and storage for a grand piano, music stands, and large percussion instruments.
- **Oswego Opera Theater** is a nonprofit organization with deep connections to the SUNY Oswego Music program. The organization produces two operas a year, one of which is performed at the Waterman Theatre. Given the Waterman's busy calendar and poor acoustics, the Opera would be interested in utilizing a new facility at the Port. The ideal space would have a capacity of 400 and excellent acoustics. An orchestra pit, fly space, technical equipment, and a large stage would also be desired.
- **Ontario Center for the Performing Arts, Inc. (OCPA)**, commonly known as Oswego Music Hall, is a nonprofit, volunteer organization dedicated to the presentation of live music. The group currently presents 40 shows a year in the McCrobie Civic Center, an aging, city-owned facility with limited amenities and capacity restraints. With long-term goals to hire full-time staff, expand programming, and attract better known acts, the Oswego Music Hall would be interested in a multi-venue facility inclusive of a 400-seat theater and a smaller, 100-seat coffee house for smaller acts and informal events.

The table below summarizes these findings. The previously mentioned organizations have a combined 224 days of demand for performance space. OCPA has the most demand for space and has expressed interest in developing a programming agreement with the Port. Through this agreement, OCPA would present live acts and produce some events while also hosting events and programs sponsored by other organizations.

Port of Oswego Cultural Facility Building Study: Utilization Summary				
User Group	Capacity Requirement	Days of Use	Utilization Type	Facility Needs
H. Lee White Maritime Museum	150 to 200	10	Lectures, Events, Conferences	-
SUNY Oswego: Music Department	250 to 300	10	Live Performance	Good acoustics; Tiered seating; Raised stage; Green room; Wings; Storage for grand piano, music stands, big percussion
Oswego Opera Theater*	400	4	Live Performance	Good acoustics; Similar to Waterman Theater at SUNY Oswego; Orchestra pit; Fly space; Technical equipment
Ontario Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.	100 and 400	200	Live Performance	Projection screen; Lighting; Sound; Green room; Dressing room

*Accounts for two performance days and an estimated two additional days for production load-in and technical / dress rehearsals.

2. Additional Facility Needs

In addition to demand for performance space, several other organizations have expressed interest in this project. These include:

- NOAA, which is in the initial stages of reviewing Lake Ontario’s nomination to become a National Marine Sanctuary. While designation as a National Marine Sanctuary typically results in a programming partnership between NOAA and a local partner or partners, there is no set model or formula that the designation follows. It is likely that NOAA would require some sort of assembly and / or education space, although a final concept will be decided through a community engagement process.
- Oswego County Tourism has expressed interest in having a sheltered visitor center or kiosk at the Port to serve those boating and fishing in the area.
- SUNY Oswego College of Liberal Arts and Sciences has had great success with the Rice Creek Field Station. College leadership believes there may be an opportunity to build on that success by including a small research space at the Port for faculty and students working in ecology, meteorology, and astronomy.
- Harborfest could envision utilizing a small stage at the Port for festival performances or as a back-up performance space in the event of inclement weather.
- The global entertainment company Live Nation programs multiple venues throughout Central New York and New York State. Representatives from the company expressed

interest in programming a new venue but indicated that they typically focus on facilities with 2,500 to 3,500-person capacities.

- Leadership at Rochester’s Kodak Center expressed interest in a shared services agreement with a new facility that could reduce the costs of marketing, ticketing services, and other operational expenses. Additional conversations with leadership cautioned that attracting touring entertainment to a facility in Oswego could be a challenge, particularly if the facility is limited to 500 seats or fewer.
- The Oswego Yacht Club will likely need a new facility within the next few years. The organization has demand for a flexible banquet hall that can accommodate up to 120 people at tables and chairs. Ideally, this space would have access to a small commercial kitchen, bar, and outdoor area and could be used by the organization five times each year.

3. Conclusions

Information collected on user demand suggests that there is interest in, and support for, the development of a performance space at the Port. While there is demand specifically for a performance venue, additional demand exists for programming and event space. Further, the Ontario Center for the Performing Arts has stepped forward as a potential programming partner, overseeing the new venue’s calendar of events. Similarly, Rochester’s Kodak Center has expressed interest in developing a shared services agreement with the Port that would result in reduced marketing, ticketing, and other operational costs.

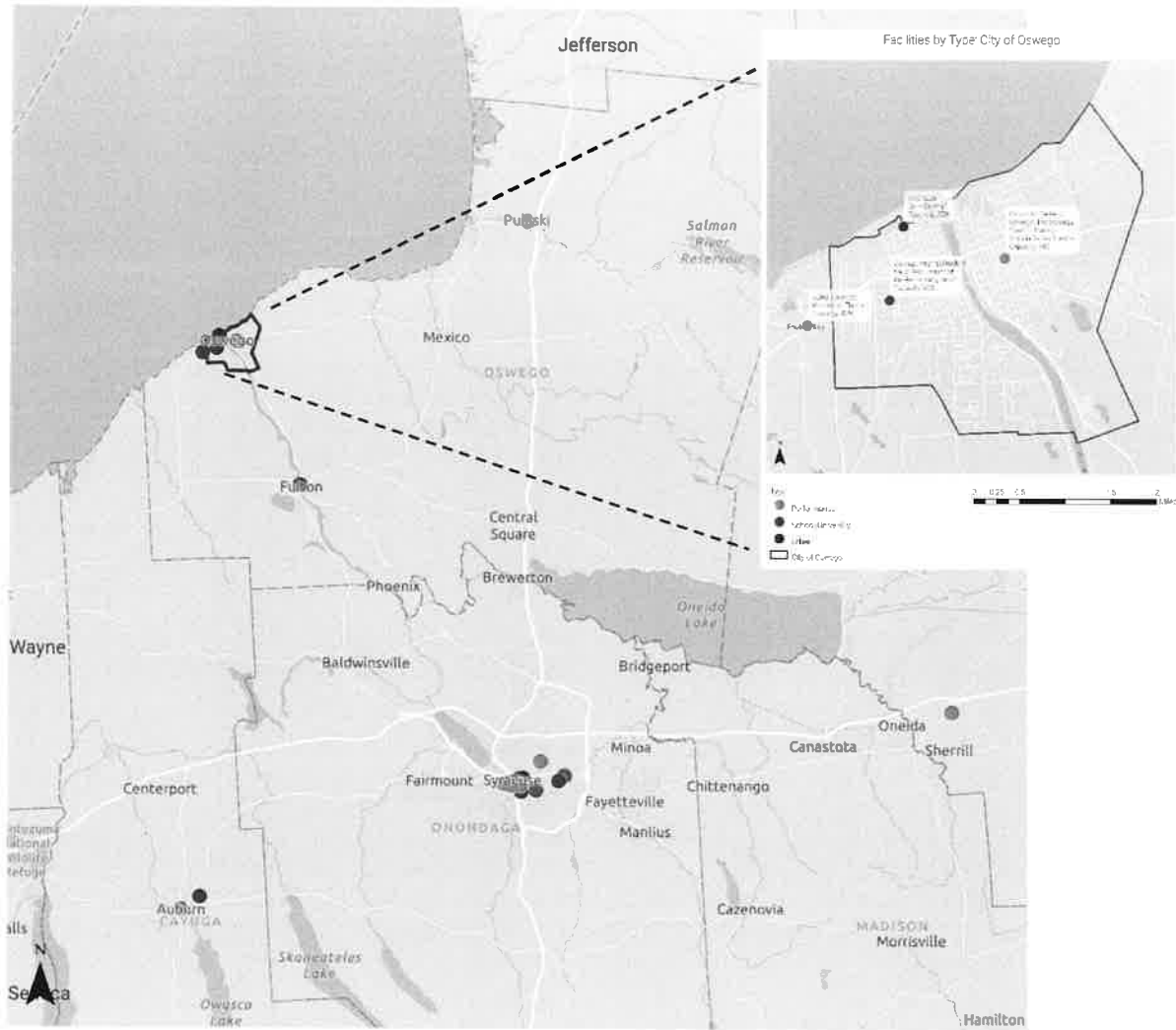
Competitive Situation

The Central New York Region is rich with arts and cultural facilities and programs. In planning for a new performance facility in Oswego, it is imperative to understand the existing supply of performance spaces in the region and whether there are gaps that a new facility might fill. To complete this task, DLR Group created an inventory of facilities that are used at least three times each year for a live performance event. The findings of that research are outlined below.

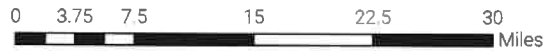
1. Performing Arts Facilities Inventory

The Performing Arts Facilities Inventory features 28 venues that are within 35 miles of the Port of Oswego. They range in capacity from 49 to 800 seats and include high school auditoriums, music venues, purpose-built performance venues, a gallery, and more. Eighteen (18) of the inventoried facilities are in Syracuse and four are in Oswego. The remainder are divided between the communities of Auburn, Fulton, Pulaski, and Verona. A map of all facilities, shaded according to facility type, is found on the following page.

Facilities by Type



- Type
- Music Venue
 - Performance
 - School/University
 - Other
 - ▭ City of Oswego
 - ▭ New York State Counties



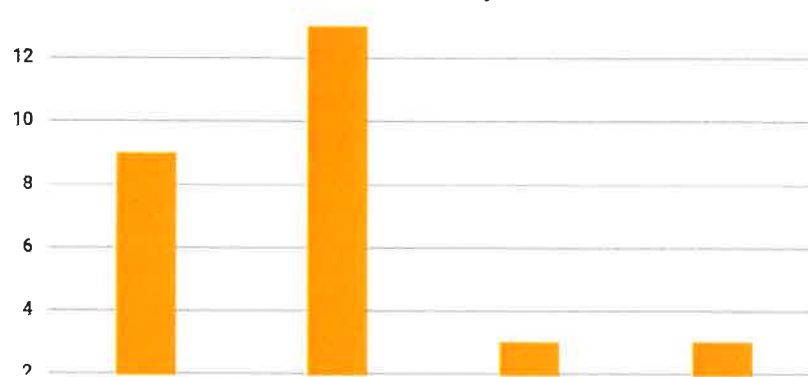
The inventoried facilities are brought to life through three types of activities:

- 1) *Presenting*: The venue pays to bring an act to market, assuming financial risk for the performance or production.
- 2) *Producing*: The venue retains a creative team to develop, rehearse, and perform a show in a venue that it owns or operates.
- 3) *Renting*: The venue makes its space available for use by multiple performing arts and community organizations, presenters, promoters, and others. Those organizations pay a fee to use the space.

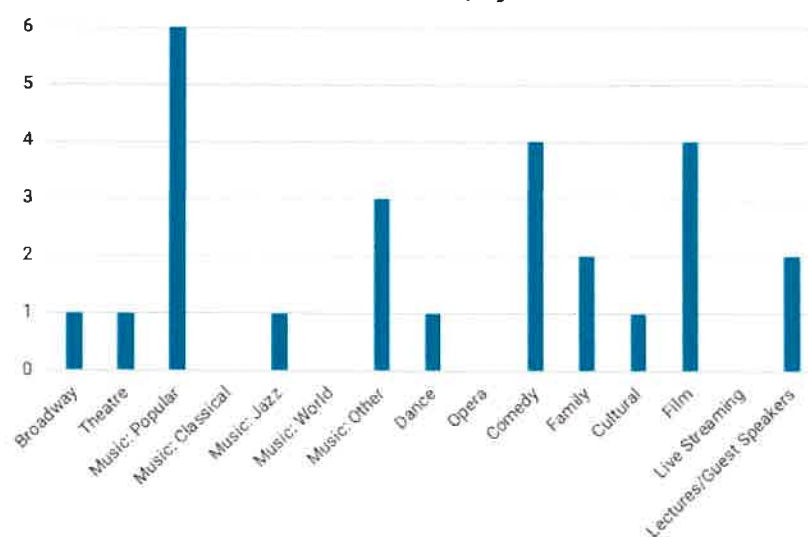
Many of the inventoried facilities, including the Waterman Theatre at SUNY Oswego, are producing venues. Others, like the Showroom at Turning Stone Casino, primarily present entertainment. A few venues support both activity types and some are solely activated through rentals.

A performance venue at the Port will likely be activated through rental activity, with the opportunity for an organization like the Ontario Center for the Performing Arts to function as a resident tenant, presenting, and perhaps producing, events. Presenting activity in the market is currently driven by music: 10 of the inventoried venues present music. Four venues present comedy and/or film.

The Number of Facilities Activated through Presenting, Producing, Presenting & Producing, or Rentals Only



Presented Events, by Genre



The User Demand Assessment suggests that there is considerable demand for a 100-seat and 400-seat venue in Oswego. The inventory indicates that venues of these sizes do exist in the market. Just one, however, the Oswego Players' Francis Marion Brown Theater, which has 100 seats, is in Oswego.

2. Conclusions

The Performing Arts Facilities Inventory suggests that Oswego sits in a vibrant regional arts and cultural community. In Oswego itself, however, there are very few venues and just one (the Waterman Theatre at SUNY Oswego) that was specifically built to operate as a performing arts venue. Programmatically, most venues in the market focus on producing work and presented entertainment is largely comprised of popular touring music. This suggests some opportunity for a new, purpose-built performance venue in Oswego that accommodates a diversity of acts and programs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the above research, DLR Group has arrived at the following conclusions and recommendations for a new performing arts facility at the Port of Oswego.

Market Analysis: The market analysis reviewed data for the City of Oswego, Oswego County, and Central New York region market segments as well as Oswego's nonresident market. Low levels of educational attainment and household income suggest that a new performing arts facility should offer a diverse mix of programs that include more traditional arts and cultural offerings, like theater and ballet, as well as more informal events and programs like folk or jazz music, spoken word or poetry events, festivals, and the like. Information on the nonresident market, which is largely comprised of cultural and recreational tourists, further supports the need for diverse programming that is attractive to individuals with varied interests and curiosities.

User Demand: Multiple local and regional organizations were interviewed through this study to assess potential demand for cultural space at the Port. Four organizations have expressed demand for performance space, with Ontario Center for the Performing Arts carrying the bulk of demand. Multiple other organizations, including NOAA and Oswego County Tourism, have expressed interest in additional ancillary facilities, including program space, an information kiosk, and banquet space.

Competitive Situation: The Central New York Region is a vibrant arts and cultural center with a variety of performance facilities and programs. Still, most venues are in Syracuse, and Oswego itself lacks an easily accessible, purpose-built venue. This suggests an opportunity for a new venue in the market, particularly one that is activated through a diverse mix of programs, activities, and events.

Given this information, DLR Group recommends that the Port of Oswego move forward with a performing arts venue that includes the following:

- A 400-seat venue that can accommodate live music, speaker events, film, and some theater. This venue does not require a fly tower or orchestra pit and may have some ability to accommodate seated events or banquets onstage (like a fundraiser or wedding).
- A 100-seat flex space or coffee house capable of accommodating cabaret, singer-songwriter, jazz, spoken word, or other events. This space may also be available for private rentals like corporate meetings, bridal or baby showers, and so on.
- Diverse and varied programming that adopts a broad definition of culture, such that the facility's annual calendar might include a live streaming of a Met Opera performance, jazz and folk concerts, a speaking event featuring explorer Colin O'Brady, a film festival, a presentation on the inside workings of the Port, and so on.
- An introductory gallery for the Maritime Museum that features rotating exhibitions.
- A café that is regularly open and accessible to the general public throughout the day.

Comparable Projects

Shalin Liu Performance Center | Rockport, MA

The Shalin Liu Performance Center is in Rockport, Massachusetts, a coastal community of 7,282 inhabitants. The facility is owned and operated by Rockport Music, a music presenting organization that hosts a year-round calendar of live music events (including the annual Rockport Chamber Music Festival), film, and HD broadcasts from the Metropolitan Opera and England's National Theatre. Rockport Music was established in 1981 and, in 2005, began efforts to establish a permanent home. In 2010, after a four-year construction process that included acquiring and demolishing an existing structure, the \$20 million Shalin Liu Performance Center opened. The Center's main venue is a 330-seat performance center designed to feature chamber music (Rockport music also presents jazz, classical, folk, pop, and world music). On the third floor, the venue features a reception hall that is used for educational programs and civic and corporate events. Both spaces have ocean views.



Images from rockportmusic.org

According to Rockport Music's 2019-2020 Annual Report, the organization had sold 22,120 tickets prior to its Covid-19-induced March 11 closure, accounting for \$983,059 in total revenue. This represented a 20% increase in tickets sold by that same time in FY2019. Additional data from the organization's 2018 Form 990 indicates a total revenue of \$6.4 million and total expenses of \$4.8 million. For that same year, Rockport Music employed 44 people, had a board of 21, and was supported by 192 volunteers.

**Newport Performing Arts Center |
Newport, OR**

Newport, Oregon, a community of 10,853, is located on Oregon's central coast. In the early 1980s, the community, led by the Oregon Coast Council for the Arts (OCCA), banded together to achieve the long-standing goal of developing a performing arts center. Following a needs assessment, the Newport City Council committed \$600,00 in urban renewal funds to the project, which were met by a \$1.1 million pledge from the Newport Development Commission. The Commission had also purchased four acres of land for the project, signing a letter of intent with the OCCA to build a performing arts center. OCCA was asked to raise \$400k.

In 1988, the Newport Performing Arts Center opened. It features two performance spaces: the 328-seat Alice Silverman Theatre and the David Ogden Stiers Theatre, a flexible black box with maximum capacity of 80. Additional venues include a lobby, gallery space,

and administrative and rehearsal spaces. While the venue accommodates touring productions and private events, it is primarily programed by the Performing Arts Center Resident Artist Team, a consortium of 11 arts organizations that activate the space with music, theatre, and dance.

The Newport Performing Arts Center is owned by the City of Newport. The OCCA manages the Center as well as the Newport Visual Arts Center. Given the Center's operating structure, revenues and expenses specific to the building are not available. However, the OCCA's 2018-2019 Annual Report indicates that expenses related to both the Performing and Visual Arts Centers accounted for 41% of the organization's total operating expenses.



Image from the NPAC Facebook page



Image from Meyer Sound 1

Great Lakes Center for the Arts | Bay Harbor, MI

The Great Lakes Center for the Arts opened in Bay Harbor, a planned luxury community along the coast of Lake Michigan, in 2018. The 40,000 square-foot venue features a 527-seat theater, a Community Engagement Room, a Rooftop Terrace and Main Level Patio, and a Donor Lounge. It hosts year-round programming in music, dance, theater, film, and intellectual dialogue.



Image from the New York Times

The project was catalyzed following a 1999 recommendation in a regional cultural plan that called for a purpose-built, state-of-the-art professional venue for the performing arts in northern Michigan. In 2014, Bay Harbor's developer donated land for the project and a \$28.5 million capital campaign was launched. Ground broke on the project in 2016 and the Center officially opened on July 7, 2018. By the end of 2019, the facility had hosted 76 events and had 20,000+ in total attendance, amassing \$1.75 million in ticket sales.



Image from Harbor Light News

In addition to year-round programming, the Center has a growing education program. In 2018/2019, educational programming reached 2,500 regional students. In 2019/2020, it was expected to reach 4,500 students (this number does not reflect the impact of Covid-19).

According to the organization's December 2019 Financial Report, the Center had \$3.5 million in revenues and \$4.5 million in expenses in FY2019. Additional information from the Center's Form 990 indicates that it employs 23 people, has a board of 20, and is supported by 80 volunteers.