

# Victoria's Jane Danzo resigns as chair of the B.C. Arts Council over "devastating" cuts

**Council lacks government support, says Danzo who wants to be an independent voice**

By Jim Gibson, timescolonist.com August 18, 2010



Jane Danzo  
Photograph by: Files, timescolonist.com

Victoria, B.C. - Victoria's Jane Danzo has resigned as chair of the British Columbia Arts Council, citing "devastating" cuts in arts funding and the council's lack of autonomy in a letter to Kevin Krueger, minister of tourism, culture and the arts.

"In my opinion, the work of the B.C. Arts Council Board, has not been supported by government on a number of different levels," she wrote in a letter released Tuesday.

In an interview, Danzo said: "Simply put, I stepped down in order to speak out in hopes that the arts and cultural section of the province of British Columbia will be better served."

"I do not have any specific plans to become an official advocate," she added.

"I'm here to mentor, offer advice, and continue to offer support to local arts organizations in particular, to be a patron, a donor and to describe the importance of the arts in the lives of every British Columbian," said Danzo, who previously spent 11 years — six as president — on the Pacific Opera Victoria board.

"I hope her resignation will help pressure the government to restore arts funding," Victoria-Swan Lake MLA Rob Fleming said yesterday.

"We owe Jane Danzo a debt of gratitude for her leadership in a difficult time and need to take her accusation of political interference seriously."

The 15 arts council board members are appointed by provincial order in council, which Danzo said means “we are in service of the government.”

“It’s very difficult to service two masters,” she added.

Arts council vice-chair and retired business professor Stanley Hamilton replaces her.

The Arts Council Act says the board’s main purpose is to provide support for the arts and culture sector, according to Danzo. The council develops an arts strategy in sync with the government priorities and policy, she said. Further, it approves the ministry’s peer-reviewed recommendations for arts grants.

Danzo was appointed four years ago and spent the last year as arts council chair. She experienced increasing frustration, citing in her letter the continued arts funding cuts in last spring’s budget. The government ignored both its own standing committee on finance and government services, and the arts council’s recommendation that arts funding be restored to 2008-2009 levels, Danzo wrote. (A vacationing Krueger could not be reached for comment.)

Instead, in its spring budget, the government announced its roughly \$10-million Legacy Arts funding, a proposal arts council members first learned about on budget day, Danzo said. Last month, the legacy funding morphed into something dubbed Spirit Festivals, in part to recapture the Olympic fervour.

“The details of festival funding have been developed by ministry staff. The [arts] council as a body has not been informed along the way,” Danzo said, believing the festival money would be better spent on supporting the arts groups that had made the Cultural Olympiad such a success.

What tipped her into resigning was a meeting late last month at the ministry. (She refused to say who else attended.) The meeting confirmed that the arts council does not have an independent voice from government, something Danzo once understood it did.

The current art council’s relationship to government does not function well for the arts community, according to Danzo. It’s not independent of the government. Ideally, the province would give the arts council a lump sum to administer to the groups without any government influence, she said.

Danzo has offered to assist the government in any future reconfiguration to improve the B.C. Arts Council role. In her letter, she recommended the minister review the models used in those other provincial jurisdictions where the arts councils are at arms-length from government — “where they are respected for their expertise and judgment and where, as a result, the arts and culture sectors are better served. Surely such co-operation could produce only beneficial results for the B.C. arts community.”

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