

Rude Mechs is an Austin-based, nationally renowned theatre company that creates new works, produces them here in Austin, and tours them nationally and internationally. Their work is taught in universities across the country, and their company members regularly teach at institutions ranging from the University of Texas to Carnegie Mellon. The company has premiered five off-Broadway productions, received commissions from Lincoln Center Theater, Yale University, and Center Theater Group in Los Angeles, and has received over 200 national and local awards. Rude Mechs Artistic Directors have been recognized as some of America's most accomplished and innovative artists. Indeed, The New York Times highlighted Rude Mechs as one of three companies in the country "making theatre that matters." In short, Rude Mechs is a cultural asset of Austin, exporting the city's values and ideas across the globe.

The Off Center is a 10,000 sq. ft. warehouse devoted to the visual and performing arts that the Rude Mechs has been operating since 1999. The Off Center, characterized by affordability, accessibility, and diversity, is unique as an incubator for emerging artists, experimental work, and independent culture. In 2016 alone, The Off Center served as the venue for 121 independent productions by local artists in theatre, dance, and music with audience totals in the tens of thousands. Rude Mechs, through The Off Center, has a track record of fostering ingenuity, improving production values, and serving underserved socio-economic populations by providing this necessary space to artists at well below-market rates or for free.

The lease on The Off Center ends May 15, 2017. The company cannot afford current real estate market rates in Austin and also fulfill its mission of providing an affordable and accessible incubator for independent and diverse cultural production. This leaves the City of Austin with an even higher demand for small and affordable performing arts venues – vital habitats for hundreds of artists that depend upon these spaces and their resources.

The City, through its Imagine Austin plan, recognizes that the creative industry is an essential element of the City's unique and distinctive identity. The CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan, moreover, found creative industries had a total impact of \$4.35 billion on the Austin economy. And so, in its Music and Creative Ecosystem Omnibus Resolution, adopted on March 3, 2016, the City outlined its goals to protect its creative environment and promised to address the pressing need to develop affordable, accessible creative arts space of all kinds to meet the needs of artists, and cultural organizations.

The City of Austin has a history of leasing land at below-market rates to local non-profits with strong records of serving Austin and helping the City fulfill its commitments to its residents. Rude Mechs has a 20-year history of accomplishing exactly the goals outlined in the Omnibus Resolution through their artistic and community-based work and by managing The Off Center as a vibrant, affordable, accessible venue for Austin artists and arts patrons alike. Working with Rude Mechs to find a new location for The Off Center is a very effective way for the City to keep its promise to sustain and build the creative ecosystem. The City Manager should work with Rude Mechs to find a new, equivalent space for them to manage on city-owned property and offer the company a long-term lease at well below market rates.