

To Cheryl Mendelson <cmendelson@vwfoundation.org>
Chief Executive Officer
Van Wezel/Sarasota Performing Arts Center Foundation
Date: November 28, 2022
RE: SPAC use of Van Wezel name

Dear Ms. Mendelson:

You may recall that my sister, Katherine Van Wezel Stone, and I met with you and Jim Travers last June in a Zoom meeting regarding the status of the Van Wezel Hall and the Van Wezel Foundation. Among the issues we discussed were the name change of the Van Wezel Foundation to *Sarasota Performing Arts Center (SPAC) Foundation in 2019* and the SPAC Foundation's plans to replace the Van Wezel Hall with a new, larger venue in the Bayfront Park. In that regard, I very much appreciate the material you sent that provided background information and technical support explaining SPAC's rationale for its plans.

Today I want to bring up a related matter – the manner in which our family name, Van Wezel, has been used by SPAC in its on-line and print materials. That is, in much of the material we have seen promoting the anticipated SPAC facility (SPAC Hall) there is a conflation of the SPAC and Van Wezel Foundation names. As you know, the SPAC Foundation officially changed its name from the Van Wezel Foundation to the SPAC Foundation in 2019. At that time, it also changed its original mission so that it was no longer committed to the operating and maintaining the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall. However, we see frequent instances in which the names of the two Foundations –Van Wezel and SPAC – are referenced in such a way as to obscure the distinction. For example, the November 15 edition of the on-line newsletter *Florida Politics* has a brief article under the headline: *The Van Wezel Foundation Launches Education Resource for New Sarasota Performing Arts Center*. The article begins:

“The Van Wezel Foundation on Monday launched the OnPoint campaign to support the new Sarasota Performing Arts Center, a transformative project for Sarasota and the region -

Source: <https://floridapolitics.com/archives/562813-van-wezel-foundation-launches-education-resource-for-new-sarasota-performing-arts-center/A>.

Such use of the name of the *no-longer-in-existence* Van Wezel Foundation Van Wezel creates an unmistakable impression of Van Wezel support for the SPAC plans. The SPAC promotional literature is even more misleading when, as in many of its public materials, the SPAC Foundation name is not used at all, instead substituting the Van Wezel name. To be clear, we object to any SPAC literature that suggests that we, or any entity associated with the Van Wezel name either

1. concurs with SPAC's conclusions regarding the long term viability of the Van Wezel Hall, or
2. agrees with the conclusions promulgated by SPAC that replacing the Van Wezel Hall with a larger performing arts facility is in the interest of the City of Sarasota,

We do not agree with these positions, and thus regard the use of our family name in the SPAC promotional literature as misleading and highly inappropriate .

In Sarasota, the Van Wezel name has for more than 50 years been attached to the iconic purple hall that is widely recognized as a wellspring that lifted Sarasota's reputation as an artistic and cultural mecca. As it was put by *Harold Bubil* in his July 22, 2017 article, *Florida Buildings I Love No. 33: Van Wezel Hall, 1969*, and reprinted in the November 21 2020 edition of the *Herald Tribune*:

If any single structure represents Sarasota's cultural stature and architectural heritage, it is the Van Wezel, construction of which was funded by a bond issue in addition to a gift from Lewis and Eugenia Van Wezel.

The Hall has not only been a source of pride for the City of Sarasota but also for us, the oldest surviving members of the Van Wezel family and the namesakes of our grandfather, Lewis Van Wezel, and our mother, Louisa Van Wezel Schwartz. Accordingly, we were devastated last spring when we learned of the grim future that awaits the Van Wezel Hall in the event that SPAC's plans come to fruition.

To us, it is particularly ironic and poignant that the name Van Wezel is being used by SPAC to promote a plan that would likely lead to the deterioration and likely demolition of our grandfather's gift and legacy. As we pointed out in our June meeting, the provisions in the Agreement between SPAC and the City of Sarasota will vastly restrict the scope of the performance offerings at the Van Wezel Hall once the SPAC center opens and will divert revenues from the Van Wezel Hall to SPAC. With such restrictions in place, it seems inevitable that the Van Wezel Hall will become a white elephant and, as such, soon be relegated to the wrecking ball.

To be clear, we object to the use of our family name in a way that suggests support for SPAC's plans to disable, and, we believe, eventually eliminate the Van Wezel Hall. We do not object to SPAC invoking the name Van Wezel Hall as a building or as a previously existing Foundation. What we object to is using the Van Wezel name to promote positions taken by SPAC with which we strenuously disagree.

We believe that our goal of keeping the Van Wezel Hall as a functioning performing arts venue is aligned with the wishes of our grandfather and the best interests of Sarasota citizens. Particularly in light of our opposition to SPAC's avowed purpose to eliminate the Van Wezel Hall, we feel strongly that it would be proper for SPAC to drop the use of the Van Wezel name in its public pronouncements regarding the proposed SPAC Hall. We therefore ask that SPAC take immediate steps to disassociate the name Van Wezel from the SPAC name in all print and on-line materials and from all future public communications stating or implying that the Van Wezel Foundation is supportive of SPAC.

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