

Mayor Mitchell responds to UMass Dartmouth's abrupt exit of New Bedford

UMASS Dartmouth Chancellor Mark Fuller announced that the University is closing the downtown New Bedford Campus of the College of Visual and Performing Arts (CVPA) in the Star Store building. He noted in a message to staff & faculty:

“You may be aware that, since 2001, the state has fully funded UMass Dartmouth’s presence in the historic Star Store Building in downtown New Bedford, which has come to house many of our studio arts programs, serving roughly 200 students each year. However, that generous support has now come to an end. I am deeply saddened to report that, for this and all the reasons I will outline below, UMass Dartmouth has therefore been advised to transition our programs out of the Star Store ahead of the fall semester.”

Mayor Mitchell quickly responded with his statement on the situation in this press release:

“Minutes before his public announcement this morning, Chancellor Fuller called to inform me of his decision to relocate the CVPA from the downtown. To say that I reacted with surprise and dismay is an understatement. The CVPA has anchored the downtown’s cultural scene for over twenty years, extending the century-long work of its predecessor, the Swain School of Design.

At various points in the last year, I have offered the parties involved in the negotiations over the future of the CVPA – area legislators, UMass, the owner of the Star Store building, and the state administration – my help in facilitating an agreement. The fact that none of them thought my involvement was necessary, and that no one informed me that the university

was on the brink of pulling out of the City, suggested to me that a new agreement was merely a matter of time.

The notion that the University's decision ultimately hinged on whether a particular line item was included in the new state budget strains credulity. All the state entities and legislators have long been aware of the need to develop a new funding arrangement for the CVPA at the Star Store that would address the acquisition, maintenance, and operating costs once the original lease expired in 2021.

All the parties have had several years to structure an agreement which would put the CVPA on a firm, long-term footing in our downtown. The failure to arrive at an agreement will now be felt by the students, faculty, residents, local businesses, and the City, which stands to lose a major anchor institution.

The City will attempt to work with the state administration in the hope that this short-sighted decision can be rectified."