

MINUTES

FACILITIES COMMITTEE MEETING

5:00 P. M., FEBRUARY 3, 2020

A/V CONFERENCE ROOM

Jennifer Pharr, Chairperson, called the meeting of the Charleston City Council Committee on Facilities to order at 5:00p.m., FEBRUARY 3, 2020, in the Audio/Visual Room in City Hall.

Committee Members Present:

Jennifer Pharr, Chair
Ben Adams
Brady Campbell
Adam Knauff
Sam Minardi
Shannon Snodgrass

1. Approval of Previous Minutes –

Councilmember Snodgrass moved to approve the minutes of the previous meeting on 1-21-2020. Councilmember Campbell seconded. There was no objection and the minutes were approved.

2. Continued Discussion of the Municipal Auditorium –

Councilmember Pharr stated that during their last meeting, the Committee was discussing what repairs needed to be done to the facility. She introduced Acting Director of the Charleston Coliseum and Convention Center, Jim Smith, who distributed a financial report to the Committee. Smith explained that the report contained revenues versus expenses for the facility over the past 2 years, which is typically how they forecast upcoming and projected revenues and expenses. He added that, if it was decided to close the Municipal Auditorium, the 3 full-time employees would need to be absorbed into the Convention Center Budget. With those employees included, over the past 2 fiscal years, the revenue versus operating expenditure difference is about \$192,000. Without those employees, that number is about \$28,000. Smith added that the 80 days of usage for the facility is mostly during April, May and June. He asked the CVB to examine the economic impact of the Auditorium for 4 of the larger live shows, that number was determined to be \$743,293.

Tim Brady, of the CVB, added that their conservative impact calculations were based on the number of tickets sold and assumptions that include out of town versus local visitors and what they are likely to spend on hotels, restaurants, etc. He also mentioned an ongoing discussion of bringing in a 3rd party booking and marketing agency that may be able to give them a better idea of what they would be able to book for the Municipal Auditorium.

Snodgrass asked how the 3 employees assigned to the Auditorium are utilized when events are not occupying the facility. Smith answered that the staff is shared with the Convention Center. Snodgrass stated that, based on those numbers, the return of investment for improvements to the Municipal Auditorium would be slow if ever. Smith added that the Master Plan developed by the Director of Planning, Dan Vriendt, had a 5-year plan of addressing priorities. Snodgrass asked if the events could be absorbed by the Convention Center. Smith answered they would have to find a way, primarily because of the economic impact of those events. This would most likely involve partnering with smaller venues such as the Little Theatre and the Clay Center. Smith added that, based on projections, this would be a record setting year for the Municipal Auditorium.

Councilmember Adams confirmed with Smith that the Auditorium operates 80 days/year and the Convention Center roughly 120-180 day/year. Councilmember Adams expressed concern over potentially missing out on larger shows by absorbing the smaller ones from the Auditorium. Smith added that the Municipal Auditorium has optimum seating for these groups that may not want to move to a larger venue like the Convention Center. Snodgrass asked what the seating capacity for the facilities were. The Clay Center is 1,850, 3,500 for the Municipal Auditorium and the Cultural Center is 72,000.

Smith added that when they began to explore renovating the former Civic Center, they considered eliminating the Little Theater. They were advised by their consultant to keep it, because to build a similar property from scratch would be an exorbitant cost. It also helps to make the Convention Center a unique property that is a convention center, arena and performing arts facility.

Councilmember Snodgrass asked if the Convention Center Board had formed an opinion over what should be done with the Municipal Auditorium. Mayor Goodwin answered that the discussion is not new. Moving forward, she would like to see what a 3rd party booking and marketing agency would have to say if the Board should approve that. The return on investment must be for more than 80 days. Brady added that he believed that 2 companies will be interested in making presentations to the Board. He believed that the Committee should consider their opinion on what they will be able to do with the Municipal Auditorium. As a member of the Board, Councilmember Minardi added that the companies will give their bids and a presentation on the total scope of what they can do with the 2 facilities. They will likely have a better opinion on what to do late spring/early summer.

Councilmember Pharr stated that during the last meeting, the Committee also discussed the fire safety upgrades for the Municipal Auditorium. She confirmed with Smith that the estimated cost will be \$144,000. City Manager, Jonathan Storage added that it is the least costly of the major, significant safety repairs. Councilmember Pharr asked how long that repair is projected to take. Dan Brown, Facilities Superintendent, answered that they would need to first get bids which would include a time frame. Councilmember Minardi asked what kind of economic impact a 2-week basketball tournament would provide. Brady answered that 2 weeks of high school basketball is 10 million in economic impact.

Storage added that whatever the results come back from the 3rd party agencies, there should be significant community engagement and education. Councilmember Pharr expressed concern over having an operational facility with sub-optimal fire safety equipment. Chief of Staff, Matt Sutton added that the Fire Department and Fire Marshall are comfortable with the current situation, otherwise they would shut it down.

Councilmember Pharr suggested having Mountain Stage tour the Auditorium for their input and see if they would be interested in moving their shows. Sutton responded that he would guess they would rather keep their shows in a smaller, more intimate setting. From the audience, Councilmember Bays added that she has spoken with them, and one of the biggest concerns is that everything is do-it-yourself, in that the performers are responsible for ticketing, merchandise, etc. They suggested that the Committee speak with the Stagehand Union for their opinion on what could be done to the facility. Councilmember Knauff confirmed with Smith that this opinion would be of interest to him and his staff since the union already works independently in all of their facilities. Councilmember Snodgrass and Smith discussed the fact that the list of improvements put before the Committee didn't include things that would obviously attract acts such as improved acoustics, ADA compliant bathrooms and an updated point of sale system.

Councilmember Bays asked Smith about the rental fees for the Auditorium. Smith answered that typically the rent is capped at \$4,200 which would include expenses such as stagehands and extra fire safety personnel. Deals also vary depending on capacity of the show, the guarantee for the artist, etc. Knauff confirmed with Brady that, in his opinion, any consultant would give an honest opinion on what they think could be done with the Municipal Auditorium.

3. Miscellaneous

Mayor Goodwin told the Committee that the Administration will be asking them to give their input on some other City-owned buildings. She reminded them that since the City is responsible for those buildings' upkeep, such as replacing HVAC systems and paying gas and electric bills. Councilmember Pharr asked how many maintenance repair requests were received in 2019. Storage said the number of requests is staggering. He added that the buildings are a huge financial burden to the City. For example, in March of 2019, the natural gas bill for Roosevelt Community Center was \$15,000.

Councilmember Snodgrass asked the Administration to give the Committee a list of the 10/15 top buildings they felt had viable alternate options.

Councilmember Knauff motioned to adjourn the meeting. Councilmember Minardi seconded.

Meeting adjourned.