

**WHEELER OPERA HOUSE  
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF  
THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**DATE:** Wednesday, September 9, 2009  
**TIME:** Noon  
**LOCATION:** Wheeler Lobby  
**PRESENT:** Board Members: Ron Erickson, Chairperson  
Brian O'Neil, Vice Chairperson  
Cathy Markle, Secretary  
Pamela Cunningham  
Bruce Fretz  
Nickolas Erickson, Student Rep.

Council Members: Mick Ireland  
Steve Skadron  
Torre

City Staff: Randy Ready, Assistant City Manager  
Scott Miller, Asset Manager  
Steve Bossart, Asset Manager

Visitor: Linda Venturoni, Venturoni Survey

Absent: Matthew Loden, Ex-Officio

Staff: Gram Slaton, Wheeler Executive Director  
Rose Bennett, Wheeler Senior Finance Manager

**RECORDED BY:** Jeanne Kayne, Administrative Assistant

**I. CALL TO ORDER.**

Chairperson Erickson called the meeting to order at 12:10 pm. Erickson started the Board meeting with re-introductions of the two new Wheeler Board members, Bruce Fretz and Nickolas Erickson, and noted that he was sorry to announce the resignation of Barbara Conviser from the Wheeler Board. Erickson said she was asked to reconsider but chose to make her resignation final. He said he would ask City Council to fill this position as soon as possible.

**II. APPROVAL OF AUGUST 12, 2009 MINUTES.**

Chairperson Erickson called for the approval of minutes from August 12, 2009. Markle made the motion to approve with O'Neil seconding the motion. Markle proposed that the minutes be amended to include that the Board discussed whether or not it had the ability to appoint an advisory committee, or a public relations committee on the Wheeler expansion project, and whether or not they could invite Jane Battaglia to be part of it. Markle also asked for clarification in regard to an appointment of a Wheeler Board member. Ready explained that the Wheeler Board cannot appoint a new member for the Board as that is a function of City Council. Ready did suggest the Wheeler Board could appoint a sub-committee, or advisory committee in regard to the expansion project.

Markle requested her position be noted in the minutes in regard to the phone survey. She suggested the Board was not given adequate time to respond to the content of the phone survey. She felt that the survey as administered contained mis-information, in that HPC & P&Z had already addressed the height issue and requested the elimination of the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, which was included in the survey. She went on to explain the results of the survey were potentially useless because of the questions being asked and the length of the survey. Erickson commented that Markle's position as stated in the minutes in regard to the phone survey was not necessarily the position held by the Wheeler Board. He asked for any other additions or amendments to the minutes. Erickson then called for a vote to approve the revised minutes, and the minutes were unanimously approved.

Erickson at this point moved the presentation on the phone survey up in the agenda, and welcomed attending City Council members Steve Skadron and Torre, and Mayor Mick Ireland.

Ready introduced Linda Venturoni, explaining she was here with Venturoni and Associates of Dillon CO. She has been very involved in mountain resort economies, has done the Pitkin County community surveys for the last several years, and was very involved with the telephone and mail survey which went out in regard to the Aspen Area Community Plan last year. She is familiar with local issues and with resort economies. Ready explained this survey was conducted the month of August, and thus the results are quite current.

Venturoni gave a quick summary of the survey (summary attached). She explained the voter registration list was used as the call list with 380 respondents, which provided for the 5% margin of error. The survey started with an introduction to the Wheeler Opera House expansion project.

Discussion with the Board and City Council took place. After going through the survey results Erickson commented that the purpose of the survey was to give us direction on where the Board needs to go, and how to improve education and communication with the public.

Ireland stressed one of the most critical missions for the Wheeler and staff will be to prevent rumors from propagating that the expansion parcel is a park, rather than trying to convince people it was purchased for a certain purpose such as the expansion. He went on to elaborate that we have to choose our themes and stick with them, retain them and repeat them *ad nauseum*. Skadron agreed but cautioned that this theme has to address a specific need in the community. The need has to come from the community not the arts groups or the Wheeler. Ireland that we need to build an economy that is sustained not by construction and real estate speculation, but by a reason for people to come here, such as a strong arts and culture community and local arts center. It is this type of theme of building for the future for the community that Ireland stressed as appropriate for the Wheeler campaign.

Erickson expressed there was a lot of valuable information brought forward in regard to the phone survey. He explained this additional research could help us more accurately target a campaign to get community support. Erickson stressed that the Board needs to know that City Council is behind this expansion before they go any further.

Ready commented that the presentation and compiled results from the survey would be distributed to the Board and Council. He stated the survey provides good direction regarding misinformation, such as what is the difference between the Housing RETT versus the Wheeler RETT, and it points us in a good direction going forward. The next step in the process assuming

the Wheeler receives conceptual approval is proceeding on to final design at a guarantee maximum final price that can at least affect the undecideds.

Cunningham expressed that the Wheeler Board and City Council need to be mindful of the semantics used when describing such things as the Wheeler parcel. She also observed that one of the underlying issues going on is a return to the divisiveness of the haves and have-nots. Cunningham expressed we need to do an integration from the 2005 survey with the survey just completed.

### **III. FINANCIALS.**

Chairperson Erickson asked Senior Financial Manager Bennett if this was preliminary until the end of August, Bennett replied it was. Total revenues were 66% of the year, and 64.8% of budget and the expenditures are only at 57%. Erickson asked Slaton if we foresee any expenditures for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter or into the fall, Slaton explained the upcoming shows are already budgeted for. Erickson asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the budget. Slaton explained that what's missing on the spreadsheet is the investment interest number and the one listed is the final for July and there is not one yet available for August.

Markle asked about the Employee Housing Fund Transfer line item. Ready responded that it was an internal fund the City created this year designated for City affordable housing as of 2009. Ready explained every department pays in to it, to build or acquire housing for employees, the first project of which will be the construction of five units at the AABC which will go before City Council for final approval this fall. The Wheeler has paid in advance for one of the units. This is an annual transfer and investment from each department. When the unit is completed and begins to generate revenues these will go back into the employee-housing fund.

### **IV. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT.**

Slaton distributed the copy of a page from MSNBC's home page. The title was "Sunken Economy Boost Public Construction Projects." Slaton viewed it as a valuable tool, which is independent of the Wheeler, the City or even anything to do with Colorado.

The first MountainSummit Festival was a huge critical success, but we did not get the attendance we had hoped for at our first outing. Information we have tells us that despite a significant effort by ACRA and the Wheeler, the festival did not attract attendees from out of the valley, except for a good turnout from Telluride. Slaton saluted the entire staff, particularly Heather Gibson and Heather Larson, for their exceptional work on the pre-planning and execution of the festival, and Lauren Pierce for her long hours and getting everything done during the festival. The staff was great, and even total strangers commented on how engaged the Wheeler staff was, with an enthusiasm that was contagious. We also took pains at every event to mention Aspen Film's Filmfest coming up, and even brought in Aspen Film as a community partner on the presentation of "Big River Man." Ellen Hunt, the founder of Aspen Film, came to at least two of our screenings and was highly complimentary after each.

Cunningham added she had the great opportunity to attend Mountainsummit Film Festival and she agreed the Wheeler team was well received. Cunningham had friends who attended one film and continued to take on the rest of the festival.

21CMP news: Because we had clearly lost our ability to make a November 2009 ballot, and because the majority of our effort in August needed to be for the MountainSummit Festival, we did not work at all on the 21CMP in August. Slaton asked Steve Bossert from Asset

Management to comment on the Owners Rep negotiation. Bossart explained the initial team (Seamus Henchy) that was selected ended up being a disappointment as their fees became quite expensive and the negotiation of the contract language seemed to go nowhere. Bossart explained they have broken off negotiations with this firm and since been in negotiations with the number two team, Pfocus LLC. If completed, the Wheeler will be taking this contract to City Council for approval.

In terms of public campaign and support from Aspen's arts groups, Slaton mentioned that he was disappointed to receive the letter that many board members received from the board of Aspen Film. Despite three years of constant and documented effort to engage our user groups and the general public, including Aspen Film, it appears that there is still a significant failure to keep the communication flowing. Slaton said that he has offered to meet with the board of Aspen Film, as he has as well with Jazz Aspen Snowmass, at their convenience and go through any and all aspects of the expansion project.

Cunningham suggested holding presentations to the various non-profit boards here at the Wheeler. Cunningham mentioned that she spoke with both Jane Battaglia and Pete Loris and both were willing to be part of an advisory committee, or a public relations committee in regard to the Wheeler expansion project and outreach.

Slaton also provided a draft copy of a full-page informational ad to be run in the Aspen Times ahead of the 9/28 appearance before City Council. He asked that any feedback board member had would be appreciated by noon the next day, as the ad needs to be submitted for placement.

Cunningham and Markle suggested one point at a time be published and presented each week, rather than the full-page informational page at once, and Slaton commented that that was an appropriate strategy for after this run.

Slaton pointed out that the Wheeler is at the starting point for Year Three of our three-year agreement with the Wheeler Film Society. Jon Busch continues to tell us that he and Don need to "write a check" to cover their expenses each year; however, they also continue to clamber for dates on the calendar that they can have. He asked for the Board's future consideration on whether we should put out a new RFP in 2010 for the film program.

**V. ACTION ITEMS.** None.

**VI. INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS.** The Mission Statement review was table to the next meeting.

**VII. MEMBERS COMMENTS:** Both Fretz and Markle made a list of public outreach ideas, which will be brought up for discussion at the next Board meeting.

Markle brought up a concern in regard to using a consistent logo or branding of the Wheeler Opera House for Wheeler Opera House presents.

**VIII. CITIZEN COMMENTS:** None.

**IX. OLD BUSINESS UPDATE:** None.

**X. NEW BUSINESS:** Erickson again stressed that the board needs to begin brainstorming for ideas so that the Board can come up with an outreach program to educate the Public.

**XI. ADJOURNMENT.**

Erickson called for a motion to adjourn. Fretz made the motion to adjourn; O'Neil seconded it. The meeting was adjourned at 2:03 pm.

**THE NEXT REGULAR MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2009, IN THE WHEELER SECOND FLOOR LOBBY AT NOON.**