

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

DATE: Wednesday, November 10, 2010
TIME: Noon
LOCATION: Wheeler Lobby
PRESENT: Board Members: Ron Erickson, Chairperson
Brian O'Neil, Vice Chairperson
Richard Cohen
Matthew Loden, Ex-Officio

Absent: Cathy Markle, Secretary
Bruce Fretz
Pamela Cunningham

Guests: Steve Bossart, Capital Asset Project Manager

Staff: Gram Slaton, Executive Director
Heather Larson, Sr. Manager - Operations
Rose Bennett, Sr. Manager - Finance

RECORDED BY: Heather Larson, Sr. Manager - Operations

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Erickson called the meeting to order at 12:05pm.

II. INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

Review of Webb Presentation and Update on 21st Century Master Plan

Bossart reported that the September 21 presentation Duncan Webb made to City Council regarding the needs assessment study went well. The presentation provided answers to Council's questions regarding the demand for an additional performance space, the size of that space, and alternate sites available in town. During that meeting, Councilman Dwayne Romero stated that with the information that was presented, he felt compelled to "do something" regarding this project, indicating that he is in favor of adding a second performance space in some form.

In the October 19 budget work session, Council approved funds for remodeling the Wheeler's basement offices and first floor lease spaces and asked for a proposal for the project. Bossart announced that we will be continuing to work with the same design team that has been working on the theater expansion project during the past couple years, so there will be no procurement process. Farewell Mills Gatsch (FMG) out of New Jersey will still be involved in the design process, and Aspen-based Rowland & Broughton will be the architects of record. This proposed team passed on consent at the November 8 Council meeting. Bossart is recommending that the RFP for pre-construction services be issued soon, since the timeline for the remodeling project is tight.

Regarding the 21st Century Master Plan, Council members indicated that they were interested in exploring alternate sites. Bossart said that when Council gives the Wheeler approval to review

properties in town, we will do some formal research and present our recommendations to Council, which will include a rough budget of the project.

Slaton referred to the timeline that was distributed for remodeling the Wheeler basement and first floor spaces. He noted that the Wheeler staff would move out of their offices at the end of August – prior to the MountainSummit festival – and that demolition would begin the day after Labor Day. The construction will be completed and the affected areas officially re-opened in mid-December. Slaton has discussed this schedule with Rowland & Broughton, and they are comfortable with it, despite the unknown factors that exist when working with a building over 120 years old. Slaton also mentioned that he plans to put the RFP for the lease spaces out early, so that the renters are selected before construction begins, ensuring that the changes to the lease spaces match the needs of the renters.

There was some discussion about the board's role in the remodeling project and whether additional meetings would need to be scheduled. It was determined that a special board meeting may be called before the selection of the lease clients. Erickson noted that he thought it was important to get input from Council on the RFP for the lease spaces, so that it accurately reflects their vision for those spaces.

III. APPROVAL OF AUGUST 11, 2010, MINUTES

Erickson called for the motion to approve the minutes of August 11, 2010. O'Neil made the motion to approve the minutes, and Cohen seconded the motion. The vote was three for approval and none against. Loden is not a voting member. There was no discussion of the minutes.

IV. FINANCIALS

Erickson noted that he was happy to see that total revenues to date were at 85% of the budgeted amount, while total expenses were only at 39% of budget. Bennett confirmed that the housing fund loan would be paid off in December. Bennett also clarified that the employee housing fund expense is an item mandated by the City Manager, and that that money is intended for the purchase and maintenance of a housing unit to be used by a Wheeler employee. Erickson was concerned that the Wheeler has not yet received the employee housing unit we have paid for, and he asked Bennett to provide some more details so he can discuss it with the City Manager.

V. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The Wheeler beat its goal for the 2010 MountainSummit Festival by 16% and had a year-over-year improvement in dollar sales of nearly 40%, despite lower ticket prices and fewer ticketed events. The initial 7908 Aspen Songwriters Festival's sales were nowhere near what we wanted them to be, but the quality of the event was outstanding and the buzz that it has generated, both in town and already in the industry, is exactly what we wanted. The biggest problem we could associate with the 7908 Festival was that they date was nowhere near as devoid of activity as we had been led to believe. For that reason we have relocated it to the end of March 2011 for its second outing, where it can shore up a different time of year – the end of ski season – when there is far less activity and a more conducive climate to grafting a festival to tourism.

We are also all set with our new comedy festival, the Aspen Laff Festival, for March 16 – 19, 2011. We will be able to go out with marketing for this prior to the start of the winter season, which allows us to get a tremendous jump on things.

In fact, we are at the point of limiting any further bookings for the coming winter season. Heather and I have real concerns about staff overload, as each week from January on has on

average more than four live events scheduled in it. This is quite a change from how the book looked five years ago at this time.

We have created a new position to fill the void in the staff created by the departure of Jeanne Kayne. The job will be Marketing Coordinator, allowing us to have a dedicated person to lay out, schedule, and deploy marketing plans for all our shows and festivals, as well as pursue sponsorships, etc.

Slaton thanked the board for allowing him to take an extended leave during late September to mid October to take care of important family business back east. He acknowledged that Heather did an outstanding job of carrying on his job as well as her own through Skico's "The Meeting," Aspen FilmFest, the John Denver tribute concerts, and a lot more, and how it is a great feeling to know that he can in fact get away if needed and be assured that things will continue to hum along here.

VI. ACTION ITEMS

None

VII. MEMBERS COMMENTS

Erickson mentioned that he saw the movie "Bag It" during the MountainSummit festival, so he understood and supported the Wheeler staff's decision to discontinue selling bottled water. However, at the Aspen Community Theater performance he attended, he noted that there was a long line for the water cooler on the bar, and he felt that there wasn't an adequate supply of water for the number of people in attendance. Larson said that staff would look into purchasing an additional water cooler for the bar and would also try to display the branded aluminum water bottles more prominently in the gift shop area to encourage sales of reusable bottles.

Erickson also noted that the January board meeting agenda would include election of officers for 2011, so the board will need to make nominations in December.

VIII. CITIZEN COMMENTS

None

IX. OLD BUSINESS UPDATE

It was noted that one current board member's seat has expired and that other citizens have submitted applications for that position. The applicants are waiting for Council to move forward with the process, so the current member will remain in place until otherwise notified. The student representative seat on the board is still open, but there have been no applicants for the position.

X. NEW BUSINESS

None

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Erickson called for a motion to adjourn. Cohen made the motion to adjourn, and O'Neil seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 12:56 pm.

THE NEXT MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2010, IN THE WHEELER SECOND FLOOR LOBBY.