

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

DATE: Wednesday, April 13, 2011  
TIME: Noon  
LOCATION: Wheeler Second Floor Lobby  
PRESENT: Board Members: Ron Erickson, Chairperson  
Cathy Markle, Secretary  
Richard Cohen  
Bruce Fretz  
Tom Kurt  
Luke Seamans  
Matthew Loden, Ex-Officio

Absent: Brian O'Neil, Vice Chairperson

Guests: Michele Kiley, Fiercely Local  
Dana Ganssle, Rowland and Broughton

Staff: Gram Slaton, Executive Director  
Heather Larson, Sr. Manager – Operations  
Rose Bennett, Sr. Manager - Finance  
Lauren Pierce, Marketing Coordinator

RECORDED BY: Lauren Pierce, Marketing Coordinator

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairperson Erickson called the meeting to order at 12:08pm.

**II. Update on Restaurant RFP – Selected Candidate**

Michele Kiley from Fiercely Local introduced herself to the board. Fiercely Local is honored and delighted to be selected as the candidate for the restaurant space. Kiley wishes to hear the goals of the board and be in consistent communication with the Wheeler. They are comfortable and confident with the team put in place. Fiercely Local will be trying to sell the Cheese Shop business, although if it does not sell, they are not interested in running two businesses. Kiley was not prepared to discuss creative or layout for the restaurant space at this time, they will be presenting at next month's meeting.

**II. APPROVAL OF MARCH 9, 2010 MINUTES**

Erickson called for the motion to approve the minutes of March 9, 2011. Fretz made a request for several corrections and recommended minutes be approved as corrected; Markle seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**III. FINANCIAL REPORT**

Erickson pointed out that the Real Estate Transfer Tax is down. Slaton pointed out that the reason the Wheeler shows a negative balance for the month was because \$346,000 was paid out in Arts Grants. Should the leases with the new clients after construction not perform sufficiently, City Council will have to look at creative ways to fund the arts at its current levels. Erickson asked when the Red Brick West End Project began and requested any loans to the city from the Wheeler

should go through the board for approval. Ready reported that the Red Brick West End Project loan began in 2006 and will continue through 2016. Ready also assured the board that any future loan requests will be presented to the board beforehand.

#### IV. EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS REPORT

- Slaton passed out final sales figures for the first half of 2011, which show that the Wheeler reached 96.4% of its goal for all programming, including eleven individual shows, two festivals, and a film series. Considering the slow start to the calendar year, these figures are considered by staff to be quite strong. These figures also help better define certain programming types that are working and highlight those that need either different consideration or removal from our presenting profile.
- The first Aspen Laff Festival performed well, despite a serious loss of momentum after its three opening performances on Wednesday to the black hole of St. Patrick's Day (Thursday) that had to be rebuilt going into the weekend. The performances were all strong and clearly delineated that this is a different festival than in the past. Our recommendation to City Council will be to continue this festival in 2012, with it moved three weeks earlier into February for better results and no interference.
- The second 7908 Aspen Songwriters Festival performed above expectations, exceeding our in-house goal by 21.5% and last fall's dollar sales by 264%. Our costs for the festival were about the same, so the \$34,000 difference is very substantial. Our recommendation to City Council will be to continue this festival again in 2012, moving it one week earlier to lessen the impacts of daylight on the early shows and give us one more week into late spring break to assure further growth.
- The Wheeler will be moving its offices into the basement of the Aspen Daily News building, sharing space with City Engineering, beginning May 15 and lasting until the Wheeler office construction is completed, which we hope will be on or before November 30. Staff will be farmed out as available to other City departments during this extended downtime. All Wheeler staff will be transitioning to smart phones as the preferred method of contact, and we expect when we return to be largely weaned of land-line telephonic communication.
- The Aspen Show Tickets website just received a huge upgrade that makes it far more user friendly, and which will shortly allow us to compose and deliver email blasts from it rather than the outside service we presently use, saving us money on electronic communication.

#### V. ACTION ITEMS

Election of Board Officers for 2011

This item was continued to the May 11<sup>th</sup> meeting due to the absence of Brian O'Neil and the question as to whether Markle and O'Neil will remain on the Wheeler board.

#### VI. INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

*Update on Basement/First Floor Remodel*

Dana Ganssle of Rowland and Broughton presented the draft plans to the Board for the basement and first floor remodel. A goal has been set for May 3, 2011 to receive the building permit. The first floor tenant's kitchen layout and ideas are vital for the permit goal and a demo permit has been requested for a week before the building permit.

Ganssle explained to the Board that the basement design allows for the space to remain and not have to be re-engineered in the future if the space does not always remain as the Wheeler administrative offices. The Board was concerned there are no bathrooms in the basement for staff. The staff does not want bathrooms on the basement level and have no problem utilizing the facilities on the street level. The plumbing will be constructed as so that if the basement space is rented out the tenant may easily include facilities. The remodel will create 40% more useful space in the former building shop area.

Ganssle presented the retail spaces, highlighting the restaurant bathroom space, linear layout for the kitchen, wheelchair lift location, and explained that no construction will interfere with the Hyman and Mill Street façade. The Board approved to place a fence as close to the sidewalk as needed for construction space in the adjacent parcel. Slaton pointed out to the Board that Fiercely Local has shown interest in using the parcel as outdoor seating, much like the Jerome's outdoor space. The City will be paying for the lease spaces remodel and basic finishes. The restaurant tenant will be responsible for kitchen equipment and all items needed to run their business.

City Council expressed interest in penetrating into the box office from the restaurant dining area so that patrons can go straight from dinner into a show without going outside. The Board does not support this idea. Ganssle reassured the Board that the current plan does not have to go through approval. If anything comes up in the design and construction that would need to go to Council approval, Rowland and Broughton will go a different route to keep the project on track with the deadlines. Slaton explained to the Board that the project team will present a cafeteria plan approach to City Council; that is, the basic remodel will cost X amount, and additional items for Council's approval will add X amount on to the total cost of the project. The remodel is budgeted at \$2 million and the basic package is expected to come in below that. Slaton would like to fold other related projects into the remodel as appropriate, such as correcting the Hyman Avenue sidewalk so that water runs away from the building, as well as adding a snow melt system for improved public safety.

#### *Completion of Second Year of Contract- Wheeler Film Society*

Jon Busch currently has a 3 year contract with year to year review by the Wheeler Opera House Board to operate the Wheeler Film Society. Erickson reminded the Board that it costs the Wheeler about \$1,500 to open its doors each night. He proposed that we make the Wheeler Film Society fiscally responsible to relieve the burden on the Wheeler. Busch's programming will end in early June and likely remain dark throughout construction. The Board decided to extend his lease and possibly renew the lease for a third year at the end of June 2012.

#### **VII. MEMBERS COMMENTS**

Markle informed the Board that she will be formally withdrawing her position on the Wheeler Board following a letter to Council.

#### **VIII. CITIZEN COMMENTS**

None

#### **IX. OLD BUSINESS UPDATE**

None

**X. NEW BUSINESS**

None

**XI. ADJOURNMENT**

Erickson called for a motion to adjourn. Cohen made the motion to adjourn, and Markle seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 2:15 pm.

**THE NEXT MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR WEDNESDAY, MAY 11, 2011, IN THE WHEELER SECOND FLOOR LOBBY.**