

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

DATE: Wednesday, January 11, 2012
TIME: Noon
LOCATION: Wheeler Chorus Dressing Room
PRESENT: Board Members: Ron Erickson, Chairperson
Brian O'Neil, Vice Chairperson
Richard Cohen
Bruce Fretz
Tom Kurt
Richard Stettner
Luke Seamans

Absent: Matthew Loden, Ex-Officio

Guests: Randy Ready, Assistant City Manager
Steve Bossart, City Asset Manager
Jeff Pendarvis, Facilities & Properties Manager
Tom Schwerin, Citizen

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

RECORDED BY: Lauren Pierce, Marketing Coordinator

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Erickson called the meeting to order at 12:03pm.

II. APPROVAL OF November 16, 2011 MINUTES

Erickson called for the motion to approve the minutes of April 13, 2011. O'Neil made the motion to approve the minutes; Cohen seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

III. FINANCIAL REPORT

The Board reviewed the Financial Report for November 2011 and a preliminary report for December 2011. Slaton pointed out that the year to date comparison of revenues to expenses did well. Slaton mentioned that for the year in total, the Wheeler would have had an overage had it not been for the expense of the basement and first-floor renovation.

IV. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- The Wheeler had its most successful winter holiday week in the seven that Gram has been in charge of the venue, in which the Wheeler featured six performances over six days, including three that were self-produced (Kim Carnes, Best of the Fest, and the New Year's with David Bromberg). The simple net figure from the week (show expenses minus advertising, and no soft-costs) was a gain of nearly \$6,700, compared to a loss of nearly \$19,000 in 2010, a loss of \$36,000 in 2009, and a loss of nearly \$57,000 in 2008. The Wheeler staff really stood up and

embraced the challenge of this rather aggressive schedule, and Gram particularly wanted to single out the Wheeler's tremendous box office staff, as well as its marketing manager.

- The lineup for the third 7908 Aspen Songwriters Festival is set, running March 21 – 25, which means that we had to add an extra day to fit in all the talent we wanted. We have received a \$13,000 title sponsor in C. F. Martin, the foremost maker of acoustic guitars in America, and I have just returned from a fundraiser party in Fort Lauderdale that raised over \$80,000 to establish The 7908 Foundation and underwrite up to \$50,000 in losses for this year's festival, if needed.
- Normally, Amy would be sitting here for the board meeting, but she is out fulfilling the first leg of a six-city competition to find Colorado's best songwriter, which will be an auxiliary event to our 7908 Festival. This is a component that Councilman Torre very much felt 7908 needed and would benefit from. The towns involved are Winter Park, Boulder, Steamboat Springs, Vail/Beaver Creek, Breckenridge, and Aspen. Finalists from each of these towns will come to Aspen for the festival and be reviewed by a panel of judges as they perform in venues around town. The winner will get to perform in front of the final show of the festival.
- Even as we finish up the basement and first-floor remodel, Gram is pressing ahead with the possibility of renovating the balcony. Last week, Gram met with Amy Guthrie of Historic Preservation and with Stephen Kanipe of the Building department to gather their input. What appears to be developing is a "three bears" approach to considering the project:
 1. The biggest project is Gram's preferred scope of work, which would include totally dismantling the balcony, moving it forward about six feet (to the other side of the window it presently abuts), raising the profile of the balcony eighteen inches, taking some of the bow out of the front of the balcony, and grading the seating areas more gently up to the back of the house, providing much better sightlines, wider aisles, and a safer pitch while also benefitting the view for the seats at the back of the orchestra. This approach would require us to add a stair, which would mean losing seats at the back of the orchestra and moving the sound pit in by two rows, but we would be able to make up seating in the balcony.
 2. The medium-sized project would also involve dismantling the balcony and moving it forward, but preserving the bow of the balcony as-is, which would make adjusting the seating area to be more beneficial to the patron a much more difficult task, but not insurmountable. We would still need to add the second stair and lose seating at the orchestra level. This approach would result in a net loss of seating overall for the Wheeler.
 3. The most conservative approach would be to not dismantle the balcony, but rather preserve its shape while gutting the existing seating and rake, and replacing the rake and seating as best we could under existing conditions.
 4. In all three approaches, the projection booth would be demolished and reduced by somewhere between 20% and 40%.

which would allow us to recapture some seating.

- Gram has discussed the possible project with both Matthew Loden of the Aspen Music Festival, and with Laura Thielen of Aspen Film, both of whom are very enthusiastic supporters of the idea, for very different reasons. Laura's primary interest is in bringing our film exhibition delivery system up to the coming new standard, which would be by digital download. Matthew's is more about audience comfort and improved seating. Long-short is that any change would be a tremendous improvement to what presently exists. Depending on the final scope of the project, the ideal timeline would be either April – early June 2013 for the more conservative approach, or early October – mid December for the largest version. The next step is most likely to get this idea in front of City Council to gauge their reaction and willingness to support moving forward on the project, and then engaging a theatre architectural firm to explore plans, timeline, and costs.

Stettner addressed the balcony renovation, questioning if the Board should seek cost comparisons to the three approaches to take to City Council. Slaton explained that due to the old building, there would be no way of predicting a cost. From the experience of the current renovation, unexpected expenses come up as you get into the structure of the building. Slaton mentioned to the Board that he will introduce the idea of the balcony remodel to Council at the February 28, 2012 work session. The Board supports Slaton with the proposal and unanimously recommended that he approaches City Council with the biggest project and Slaton's preferred scope of work.

V. ACTION ITEMS

None scheduled

VI. INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

Update on Basement/First Floor Remodel

Pendarvis explained to the Board that currently the team is going through the punch list. There have been unexpected problems with the HVAC system, which all parties are addressing.

VII. MEMBERS COMMENTS

Schwerin addressed the Board, at the request of City Manager Steve Barwick, to share his thoughts about an alternative way to fund operations at the Wheeler though a possible sale and leaseback of the property. The Board welcomed his thoughts and thanked him for his input.

VIII. CITIZEN COMMENTS

None

IX. OLD BUSINESS UPDATE

None

X. NEW BUSINESS

None

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Erickson called for a motion to adjourn. Stettner made the motion to adjourn, and Fretz seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 12:58 pm.

THE NEXT MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2012, IN THE WHEELER SECOND FLOOR LOBBY.