

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

**DATE:** Wednesday, March 9, 2011  
**TIME:** Noon  
**LOCATION:** Wheeler Second Floor Lobby  
**PRESENT:** Board Members: Ron Erickson, Chairperson  
Brian O'Neil, Vice Chairperson  
Cathy Markle, Secretary  
Richard Cohen  
Bruce Fretz  
Tom Kurt

Absent: Luke Seamans  
Matthew Loden, Ex-Officio

Guests: Steve Bossart, City Asset- Project Manager

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

**RECORDED BY:** Lauren Pierce, Marketing Coordinator

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

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

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

Erickson called for the motion to approve the minutes of February 9, 2011. Fretz made the motion to approve the minutes; O'Neil seconded. O'Neil and Erickson voted to approve the minutes. There was no discussion.

**III. FINANCIAL REPORT**

Slaton presented the financial report with early numbers, which showed the first two months of 2011. The Wheeler is already \$80,000 ahead of budget, even with the interest numbers from February being included yet.

**IV. EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS REPORT**

- February was an interesting month, in that one particularly strong weekend (February 11 – 12) sold 40% above expectations and wiped out deficits from most of the shows prior to it in 2011. However, that seems to have been a happy aberration and sales continue to be off by about 20%, which is reflective of national averages for 2010.
- The Wheeler will be approaching City Council with a first-supplemental request for funding for two important projects. The first is for a replacement of its chillers, which provide cooling during the summer season and which have been deemed ready to fail. We believe that Council will be supportive of this request. The second is for soundproofing of the audience chamber via an internal set of windows

which will also serve to substantially cut drafts and heat intrusion, thereby lessening our energy usage and creating significant cost savings. This second request is necessary because the Wheeler has a New Years Eve booking that will be negatively impacted by a free event in Wagner Park that the City produces and that, for whatever reason, cannot adjust to allow our event to coexist side-by-side with it. For this reason, we may call on you as board members to render your support for this unbudgeted purchase.

- The Wheeler has jumped in to play a far larger marketing role for the Randy Newman concert this weekend that is a fundraiser for Aspen Film, and continues to push Aspen Film's ShortsFest at all of our film screenings. This includes projects such as "The Last Lions," which sold out for us, and "Concert For George," where we drew 237 people during awful weather. Both of these projects came to the Wheeler courtesy of Martha Luttrell, who formerly was a key member of Aspen Film's board of directors. I bring this up because the Wheeler is often portrayed as being at odds with Aspen Film rather than supportive and working symbiotically, whereas this is not at all the case.
- The Mountainfilm Mondays series has so far been a solid success, drawing an average of 80 patrons for the first three screenings and 126 this past Monday for "Bag It." You may remember that an average of 80 patrons per screening was the benchmark goal set for the Wheeler Film Society, and we believe that this is a sustainable number if programming is done effectively.

Markle asked if there is significant sound penetration into the Wheeler if an event is going on in Wagner Park and Slaton answered that yes, it is very perceptible and compromises the event experience at the Wheeler. Markle further asked if the Wheeler is still meeting the City's Canary Initiative and Slaton answered that yes, with the completion of the boiler project several years ago, the Wheeler leaped many years ahead in its Canary Initiative requirements. Completion of the window project would further our energy savings and thereby further advance our obligation towards the Canary Initiative.

Erickson commented that he has had several conversations with other film-presenting entities in town, specifically the Wheeler Film Society and Aspen Film. In both cases he has stated that the Wheeler has the right to book film programming as it sees fit and that film is not a proprietary property of any one organization.

## **V. ACTION ITEMS**

### **Introduction of new Wheeler Board Member Dr. Tom Kurt**

Erickson introduced and welcomed Dr. Tom Kurt to the Board. Kurt has been an usher/volunteer for the Wheeler for many years and is eager to help in this new role.

### **Nomination of Board Officers for 2011**

This item was continued to the April 13 meeting, in concert with the election of Board Officers.

## **VI. INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS**

### **Update on Restaurant RFP – Preferred Candidate**

Slaton stated that on Tuesday, March 15, there would be a work session with City Council where the four finalist restaurant candidates would give presentations to Council, and that it is possible that the lease would be awarded at that time by Council vote. The Wheeler is playing a secondary role in this work session, as is Asset Management staff. This will be a public meeting.

Cohen asked about the footprint for the restaurant space. Slaton answered that in the executive session, Council decided to maintain a smaller, second rental property in the Valley Fine Art location, but reduced to approximately 550 square feet. Councilman Torre had commented in the executive session with Council that the construction should be done such that should a future Council wish to incorporate that remainder space into the restaurant, it could be converted easily. A question was raised as to whether the kitchen could be located elsewhere, and staff answered that because of the utilities and venting chases, the kitchen needs to be located in the western portion of the restaurant space. Considerable discussion followed as to the Board's role in making a recommendation to City Council on the restaurant candidates. Slaton suggested that since the Board's input from the previous Board meeting was included in the recommendation memo to Council, at this point the Board might best serve the process by being vocal with what it feels is the best thematic and community fit for complementing the Wheeler's operations with a resident restaurant.

#### **Update on Basement/First Floor Construction Project**

Bossart stated that the RFP for a Construction Manager At Risk (CMAR) had been completed and the contract awarded to Aspen Constructors. Aspen Constructors has already begun working with the architectural and City teams with project budgeting, building probes, and generally helping us to stay on track with our aggressive schedule.

Slaton commented that the Wheeler has suspended all further bookings for the fall and will only be honoring grandfathered commitments (Aspen Film's Filmfest, Aspen Skiing Company's The Meeting, etc.) until given clearance to take on new bookings by the construction team. Slaton also said that Wheeler staff has targeted May 15 for completing a move to temporary offices, where they are expected to work for approximately six months.

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

Markle brought up a concern from Jon Busch and questioned why the Wheeler does not help market the Wheeler Film Society. Slaton commented that this has been an ongoing point of contention with Busch, and that we are holding the Wheeler Film Society to the terms of its agreement with the Wheeler, where marketing is clearly addressed.

Questions were also raised by Markle and Cohen about the effectiveness of the Wheeler Board, and whether its stewardship is being compromised by the speed of some of the recent projects' processes. There is a general agreement by Board members that they do not want to be a rubber stamp for City Council's decisions, although there are varying degrees of concern by members as to how much the Board is presently at risk in this regard.

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

None

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

None

#### **X. NEW BUSINESS**

None

#### **XI. ADJOURNMENT**

Erickson called for a motion to adjourn. O'Neil made the motion to adjourn, and Erickson seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 1:14 pm.

**THE NEXT MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6, 2011, IN THE WHEELER SECOND FLOOR LOBBY.**