

KICK-OFF MEETING MINUTES

VALDOSTA MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM
Valdosta, Georgia
IPG Project No. 1160

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26 January 2012
8:30 am – 4:00 pm

Contacts/Attendees

City Representatives:

Larry Hanson | Mara Register | Pat Collins | Matt Martin - City of Valdosta
Christopher Wood – Mathis Auditorium

Steering Committee Members:

Dr. John Gaston, VSU
Nancy Warren, LVAC
David Motley, Valdosta Lowndes Conference Center & Tourism Authority
Jennifer Powell, Fresh Beginnings
Allen Lane, Lowndes County
Bob Goddard, III, LVAC
Ed Crane, South Georgia Pecan
Lou McClendon, Retired
Carol Whidby, Gerlock Dance Studio
Giovanni Panizzi, Team Temps

Design Team:

Rob Evans | Matt Hart | Malinda Taylor - IPG
John Starr | Frank Andre – Lord Aeck Sargent (LAS)
Michelle Walter, AMS
Steven Friedlander, Auerbach Pollock Friedlander (APF)
Kevin McOmber | Joe Garland – Clark Patterson Lee (CPL)
Jay Scott, Greenrock Partnership
Randy Crews, Crews Engineering
Trent Thomas | Cody Petijean – Georgia Engineering and Testing (GET)

Discussion

The meeting opened with introductions of the Design Team, City Personnel and the Steering Committee. It was noted that this process and kickoff meeting will help us distill information and determine what the project needs to be. IPG and the Design Team expect engagement by the Steering Committee and will also provide transparency and clarity back to these members of the community. Notes will be taken by the Design Team to be reviewed by the attendees and then distributed.

The Design Team reviewed the process and discussed the 2-day session. It is the intent of the meeting to get ideas down on paper. Initially, last December there were facility visits and today is a “Design Alliance Workshop” where we will create a roadmap for going forward. Following this kick-off meeting, we will return in March so that AMS can present information discovered, what these numbers mean for planning, and the quantifications required to develop space plans – initially, an assumption of 60,000 square feet will be used that is based on what was provided in the Request for

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Qualifications document provided by the City of Valdosta . In April, another coordination meeting will be planned. In June, three site plans and design concepts will be developed and presented, and finally in August, a final presentation will be made that has been distilled into one final concept plan.

The Design Team presented slides of the site visits to other facilities.

River Center

Comments from Steering Committee regarding River Center:

- Beautiful
- Good Back of House facilities
- Don't need enclosed loading dock, but a good loading dock
- Not custom fabrics for seats, but durable fabrics
- Top of line lights, but inaccessible for local maintenance

Must remember the importance and ramifications of decisions regarding cost. Intense pressure can cause cuts to be made that don't need to be made. The inaccessible lights are a good example and probably came from need to cut costs, but presents maintenance issues now. There are stories of mountain climbers putting on climbing shoes and rappelling down to change bulbs.

Spivey Hall

Comments from Steering Committee regarding Spivey Hall:

- Not enough Back of House
- Staff was cramped
- Needed individual meeting space

A theater consultant was not used in planning Spivey Hall.

Classic Center

Comments from Steering Committee regarding Classic Center:

- Balconies (box seats) down wall were all flush (and need to be angled)

Discussion Followed Regarding Balconies
It is important to scale the house and tickets accordingly. With balconies, you can control capacity and sell tickets only for floor seats and not sell balconies. It is important to scale the house and seating capacity – the balconies provide the opportunity to scale it proportionally. Side boxes are never good for sight lines. The boxes are about being seen, not seeing the show. There are some costs associated with box seats (like access corridors, etc.). Some patrons may like a show seen from the middle while other shows may be desired to be seen from the balcony.

Peace Center

Comments from Steering Committee regarding Peace Center:

- Continental Seating (no center aisle)
- They keep seats open all the time (they have a lot of money)
- Multipurpose space: used for warm-up of dancers and additional functions
- What type of damage is encountered? Food and Drink?

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Flooring was concrete
Allowing food and drinks will allow more maintenance issues
Under-floor supply is the premier HVAC System for Auditoriums.

Three design concepts were reviewed and discussed. These concepts were put together by the Design Team prior to the selection interview. IPG and LAS distilled and extracted these ideas within a vacuum based on the RFP document distributed by the City of Valdosta. These demonstrate how the back-of-house (support spaces) relates to front (auditorium, stage, pre-function area, etc.). It was noted that water features are creative, traffic calming devices. The Design Team includes experts in traffic and transportation planning and their current work includes water features and other traffic calming devices in their plans. All concepts try to put buildings up toward North Valdosta Road.

Concept A

- The most spread out; generous plaza and ties to Setzer property to the North. Parking is pushed to rear; green area to the front.
- CPL has already looked at options – they have reviewed the existing traffic flow, observed the red lights causing traffic congestion.
- Creative traffic design will enable flow.

Concept B

- Has water features and park like space.
- Plaza to south.
- Auditorium to front.

Concept C

- The Auditorium and Library have visibility from new gateway.
- Water feature is a big part of this concept.
- Parking to rear (with greater walking distance).

Strengths/weaknesses regarding site concepts were shared. These include parking closer to the building, adequate parking quantity, and transit studies to ensure the design is adequate for years to come. Existing users (Circus) could be accommodated, but is not a priority (an alternative site could be found for existing users if they can't be accommodated on the new site). Parking will be an issue for older people and needs to be considered. As a gateway into the City - what do we want visitors to see first? It needs to be significant and exciting.

It needs to be accessible and needs to accommodate everything we need to accommodate. Discussed issue of site design, existing property, and property acquired by the City. Outside space is very important – it may provide spaces for families with young children to come and go at their leisure (during a show).

The project will be an incubator for the community. Sell it as an economic development generator (construction will bring jobs). It was discussed by all present the impact of this project to the Five Point Area, the Valdosta and Lowndes County Community and South Georgia. The funding and the construction project and the final product will essentially be a stimulus project for the entire

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community. It will be a project that solves long-standing traffic and site issues and will be a gateway project. It should focus on all the benefits.

The project must have a vision while still understanding the total cost of that particular vision. Operations cost/usage and lack of usage will be addressed by the Design Team. Must provide all with transparent communication – people will buy in if they are part of the process with no hidden agenda. This is a “Citizens Project”, not City/County/Industrial project.

We must educate the community to know that we, as a community, have grown to the point where we need these facilities. People must know that their clubs and organizations will be welcome. Maybe a website could be developed so people can see, “What’s in it for me?”

The community must come together to have common interests to the project. There are excellent facilities at the University and filling the seats is a real challenge. We have to consider...will people come? People are not participating now...why not?

It can’t be sold as a “theater” because that may be too structured for most people to attend (especially for families). You have to get dressed, be there at a certain time, etc. (structure). It’s not based on the way families are structured today. Families today are flexible and need to come and go as they want. If kids are tired, they need to leave. You have to include the majority of people in the activities. We can’t build a \$20 million facility for 300 or 400 people to come to the theater.

Have we thought about videos that will show potential, multiple opportunities (picnics, walking, outside shows)? There are 86,000 people in the City on a daily basis that have the potential to use the facility. The facility must fulfill ALL of the needs/uses of the current Mathis Auditorium. Then, we can envision the future. We need to develop a Marketing Plan to get the community excited.

This needs to include some concept of the scale of the project. People should have a concept that they can identify with. I don’t know who would do it, but we should do it. A website could be a road map to show the features of the new facility. We must ask people what they want.

We need to determine and vet the uses of this facility to determine the core values. We have to be aware of social changes – what one generation loves, another generation will not.

Looking at the future, people still want to go to green spaces. I feel we’re building a beautiful park with an auditorium. I don’t think most people will go to the “show”, but they will go to the park.

Data provided from initial planning exercises was shared with all attendees. Neilson tracks populations and trends and provides descriptions of population segments. Neilson came up with descriptors that represent each segment of the population. The top 10 segments presented represent one-half of the population (for Valdosta and Lowndes County). All of the segments representative of Valdosta/Lowndes have similar characteristics. Disposable income should be heavily considered in ticket prices and events that will come here. Reviewed top five segments of 30 mile radius population (190,000 population). AMS will complete an inventory based on 45 mile limit (adding Tifton and Moultrie) to see if it will change the demographics in any significant way.

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The Design Team, specifically AMS Planning and Research will develop characteristics of the community and find similar communities that make sense for Valdosta. The Design Team will present recommendations to the City, but No final Business Operations Plan is complete until design is complete; they work together (design and operations). The City and Steering Committee must weigh uses and costs. The Design Team and subsequently the City and Steering Committee will work together to work the operations with the design. Size and seating capacity discussions and collaboration are critical. The process is about “right-sizing” the building which will be determined and thought out well.

The Design Team will select four communities with similar statistics and will study and write them up. Of the four communities, we will examine, gather statistics, and will interview these communities. There are important stories to hear from these communities. In March, the Design Team will present case study information. The Design Team will work with Michelle to determine the size of the building.

This project is a replacement for an existing building and the community needs to know what the market can support. This is the data that tempers the enthusiasm; not crushes it. It is the facts of what can be built while also being sustainable. This is our project we’re selling for our future. Our growth has occurred and we have to consider the growth. Schematic design renderings, SPLOST support, and the construction are very important, but we have to be able to sustain this facility or it will be a nightmare. The community cannot be put in a bind financially.

The seat count is a critical issue that needs to be determined and agreed to by all involved as each additional seat adds cost. We must be sure the seat count is correct because there are “deltas” that reflect seat counts and that can increase cost exponentially. Based on history, how do we justify seat counts? We have to work through and plan for future expansion, if the budget does not support a large building at this time. This building needs to last 50 years and be efficiently expanded. The City population grew by 25% over the past decade. We have to assume population demand will increase, not go down, based on University growth, population trends, etc.

Building Expansion and Phasing will be considered and illustrated, but the Design Team believes that phased seating should not be considered as a cost saving measure. Phasing the seating is NOT cost effective because base costs (MEP/Support Space) will still be built. Bigger (in terms of seat count) is not necessarily better. Balconies, lost space, and mechanical/equipment space will increase the square footage. Multipurpose space is easy to add; you have flexibility.

The production and show schedules of the current facility were discussed. These shows are somewhat market driven and we must examine the realities carefully. Valdosta doesn’t have a demanding schedule. There is a formula which determines if a show will come to a particular city (based on if they can make money). If they can make money, they will come. If they can’t they won’t.

The City issued a survey and there were 81 surveys returned. Specific users of the current facility are small in number, addressing how to creatively use space will increase this number. In reviewing the surveys/interviews, some people said they would actually pay double for the fees for the new facility (which indicates they know they are getting a good deal). Parking is the #1 issue: Drop-off, access, ease in parking, bottlenecks are important issues that will keep people from using the facility. If they

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come and have a great experience, and then leave and are faced with parking/bottlenecks, etc., it diminishes the experience and leaves them less likely to come in the future.

Note: throughout the day, members of the Design Team interviewed individuals connected to events at Mathis as well as others who generate shows or manage other community facilities in Valdosta. These interviews were scheduled to gather data that will be used in determining the arts and operations plan – a critical piece to the DesignTeam's scope of work for this project.

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Matthew S. Hart, Associate AIA
Project Manager

cc: Meeting Attendees (.pdf)
Project Notebook
IPG File: 1160/A1

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