

Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee Minutes

October 17, 2006

Item 1: Meeting Called to Order by Alan Friedman at 11.45am

Roll Call

Board Members Present: Alan Friedman
Edward Lipton
Marianne North
Andre' van Schaften
Stephan Schweissing
Harold Stalf
Ron Beach

Committee Members Absent:

Parks & Recreation Staff Present: Joe Stevens, Parks & Recreation Director
Tim Seeberg, TRCC/Avalon Theatre Manager
Cristina Duncan, Administrative Clerk

Guests: Ron Wilson, Sandstone Entertainment

Item 2: Approval of Minutes

Alan Friedman moved to approve the September 19th 2006 Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee minutes. Harold Stalf seconded.

Motion adopted by the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee: Yes 6 No 0

Item 3: Stakeholder Overviews: It was agreed upon at the previous meeting that the key stakeholders involved with the Avalon would present an overview of their role and place with the theater. Alan Friedman asked for brief presentations from the Avalon Foundation Board, Downtown Development Authority, Tim Seeberg from Two Rivers Convention Center/The Avalon Theatre and Ron Wilson from Sandstone Entertainment.

Two Rivers/Avalon – City: Tim Seeberg referred to the committee members' binder that was given to each member at the first meeting. Mr. Seeberg touched on different aspects of how the Avalon fits into his world including the everyday responsibilities (cleaning, maintenance etc) to the financial responsibilities (budget). The city is still in conversation with the Cinema at the Avalon over an operating or rental agreement. Tim Seeberg does not feel that the agreement process will interfere with the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee. Mr. Seeberg would like to eventually see the Cinema at the Avalon take on the day to day responsibilities the Avalon Theatre. Currently the city handles the budgeting of the Avalon Theatre and it does have it's own financials separate from the Two Rivers Convention Center. Tim Seeberg passed around a contract

that is used for Avalon events. Currently the city runs on a two year budget cycle and they have already set and revised the 2006 and 2007 budgets. Marianne North asked if there is a contract between the city and Cinema at the Avalon or if it had expired. Joe Stevens stated that they have extended the old contract and they are currently in negotiation for a new contract.

Avalon Foundation Board: Ed stated that the board's main function is to complete the needed renovations of the Avalon Theatre. They work indirectly and directly with different entities on these projects and coordinate with the City with regard to the actual renovations (ie permits). Harold Stalf asked how much money has been raised for the renovations. Mr. Lipton stated that approximately \$1,000,000 has been raised to date and it has been used for different things like \$6,000 for lights, \$500,000 to purchase the building itself, \$400,000 of that was from donations and the City contributed \$10,000. The facade renovations cost \$350,000. The last major renovation was the heating and air conditioning, which was partially funded by the efforts to raise money for the brick facade. All the brick money has been essentially spent. \$215,000 was raised for the interior walls in the main auditorium, 12 line sets over stage for rigging, side door, lighting and electrical upgrades and the trough for wires from the back of the theatre to the front of the theatre. With that money we also purchased conduits for electrical and lighting, touched up painting and added mechanical curtains; all of which was completed about 4 years ago. Harold Stalf asked when the building was purchased and when the renovation was complete and made ready for an opening. Ed Lipton stated that the idea started in 1982 and the building was purchased in 1992 or 1993. In 1996 or 1997 the facade renovation was done. The Cooper Theater (as the building was known) closed in 1988 and the building was empty until 1992. Total investment in the theater so far amounts to about \$1,500,000 to date

Downtown Development Authority: Harold Stalf said the DDA gave a grant of \$25,000 for projection upgrades to the Avalon in 2003 and it is now to industry standards. The Downtown Development Authority funds have a statutory restriction in place that prevents it from funding some of the Avalon needs. One of the Downtown Development Authority's main mission is capital improvement of downtown, streets, parking and pedestrian access. Ed Lipton said that the Downtown Development Authority managed the Avalon under an agreement with the Avalon Foundation Board. According to this agreement, the Downtown Development Authority would provide \$30,000 including staffing, etc. Harold continued that the Downtown Development Authority completed a major part of the fundraising for the Avalon and handled the records, mailings and sending out of notes regarding renovations and construction. The Avalon Foundation Board's function at the time was to set policy, fees etc. Ed Lipton said the agreement formally ended in December 2001. The Avalon Foundation Board ran the theatre for about seven months following. They approached the City about funding to subsidize operations and at the time that didn't work out. The Avalon Foundation Board at a time enjoyed a stretch of time working closely with Sandstone Entertainment's Ron Wilson to book concerts/shows. During that time it was Ed Lipton's opinion that theater operations produced net profits. This was prior to the City taking over management of the Avalon.

Sanstone Entertainment: Ron Wilson spoke briefly on his history of 26 years in the business. Mr. Wilson stated he is booking 8 to 14 concerts per year. The number of shows per year depends on how healthy the economy is doing financially. Observations were made by Joe Stevens that concerts are clearly a financial "win" for the Avalon, as typically on their own, the large concert shows make money mainly due to concessions sales. Ron Wilson says the night of the week and what type of show is going on affects attendance most. Additionally, it is the type of show put on that can really affect the concessions revenue. Andre Van Schaften asked how many months out does Ron anticipate and plan for concert shows. Ron Wilson said anywhere from 3 weeks to years. Mr. Van Schaften asked what negative factors make it difficult to host concert events at the

Avalon. Ron Wilson feels seating is without a doubt the biggest one and the upper balcony is by far the worse for seating. Ron Wilson does not typically sell tickets in the last 4 rows of balcony seats due to it being so uncomfortable. Ron feels that renovating the upper balcony section to be three rows instead of four will make it more comfortable. Ticket prices are based on what is paid to the artist or group itself. The food concession stand and seating are the two main challenges. Joe Stevens asked which one is more important. Ron Wilson said that seating is definitely more important. Harold Stalf asked if there are any limitations for sound or lighting. Mr. Wilson replied that there are not any major limitations. Ron Beach asked about portable concession stands to accommodate shifting and increased traffic flow. Harold Stalf suggested signage for the upstairs concession area. Tim Seeberg stated that they have tried to do that, but it has not worked very well. Moving on, Ron Wilson mentioned he can use Two Rivers Convention Center or Mesa Theatre as alternative concert venues. Two Rivers Convention Center has inherent limitations, such as the flat floor which creates sight line issues, limited production space and limited ability to fly sound. Two Rivers Convention Center does have a good stage, great parking, and facilities for the artist however. Ron Wilson feels that the Avalon is wonderful and is a diamond in the rough, but that you can not continue to book quality shows without dressing rooms, adequate seating and an improved concession stand.

Item 5: Recommendations and discussion about Avalon theater renovation and capital improvements.

Discussion ensued between committee members and City staff present about which direction to go with the Avalon in the short and long term, as well as what funding sources are available through the committee or in the community. Ed Lipton directed a question to Harold Stalf asking if the Downtown Development Authority can be a funding source for the current concession stand renovation stand project. Harold Stalf responded that the committee needs to develop a business plan to better help get funding for this project and other larger projects from the appropriate community, business and public entities. The Downtown Development Authority would want to see a business plan first so that the members can see an overall direction and purpose. This would build value in their view and help create the necessary buy in. He continued that Historical Grant funds generally are ear marked for improvements made to the outside of the building vs. the inside. Harld Stalf expressed his belief that the Avalon Foundation Board and City Council are two main sources besides public fundraising efforts. The Downtown Development Authority has an appropriate tendency to be concerned more with life/safety issues when it comes to supporting funding of major capital projects as related to something like the Avalon Theatre. Alan Friedman suggested a ticket tax and feels that City Council would be interested in supporting capital funding allocation the Avalon. Tim Seeberg agrees that the City Council is very receptive to the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee's needs and recommendations. Discussion ensued on Avalon safety issues such as when can a fire curtain be installed? A fire curtain is too heavy to be supported by the current truss work. Ed Lipton stated that new seats to replace all current Avalon seats will cost about \$200,000. Mr. Lipton feels the project can be mainly supported through public fundraising and possibly matching grants, however it will take considerable time and effort. Tim Seeberg attempted to reiterate that this committee should primarily focus on formulating a strategic plan which can be presented to Council four to six months from now. This critical step is likely to improve the chances of gaining Council support from a capital funding perspective. Joe Stevens recommended including a segment in the strategic plan which outlines which entities the committee wishes to be contributors toward any fundraising efforts. This approach may likely help get things like the concession stand, seats and life/safety issues funded through City resources. Additionally, the Downtown Development Authority and The Avalon Foundation

Board may explore creating a matching program on seats. In the end it seems to make sense that the business or strategic plan formulated by this committee be structured around the needs of the two primary building tenants (those being the Cinema at the Avalon and concert promoters).

Moving on, Alan Friedman raised the question of what the estimate is for construction of the concession stand. Ed Lipton stated that the concession stand estimates came in at about \$30,000 to \$60,000 and that he will have a better answer later this month or early next month. Ed Lipton asked how much the Downtown Development Authority and Cinema at the Avalon will be willing to contribute to this project. Joe Stevens expressed his support that the City will likely contribute a fair portion of money to the concession stand. Ed Lipton would like to have a bid contract to construct the concession stand agreed upon by the end of the year. Tim Seeberg clarifies that the City has in its capital plans to contribute \$30,000 a year towards making improvements to the Avalon theatre. Joe Stevens stated the City may commit about half of the required funds because the City clearly benefits from the use of the concession stand. However, that commitment is contingent on equal support from other key entities and users of the Avalon. Stephan Schweissing thinks Cinema at the Avalon will put money into the concession stand because it is very important to their business. Per Harold Stalf, the Downtown Development Authority would like to explore supporting funding the seats project rather than the concession stand project. Alan Friedman questioned which other entities can help come up with the difference in money required to fund the concession stand project. Harold Stalf stated that Downtown Development Authority would rather expend energy and resources on larger projects involving the Avalon. The committee generally feels that the Avalon Foundation Board will be able to solely handle finishing the concession stand project. Alan Friedman moved on to life safety issues for the Avalon Theatre. At the appropriate time Joe Stevens is willing to bring to City Council the history of funding for the Avalon and agrees the City has an obligation to assist in capital funding because the City owns the Avalon Theatre. Ron Wilson feels that time is of the essence on the seats. With all the improvements on other event places (multi plex theater as an example), the perception of the Avalon is worsening and mainly because of the seats.

Item 6: Brief presentations from each committee member outlining their role on this committee.

Alan Friedman would like to see the committee continue discussing the reason for the committee's existence and focus on the things that they wish to accomplish. Andre' van Schaften feels the Avalon is a jewel that needs attention physically, which will help it become a larger prideful piece of the community. Ed Lipton pointed out that he has been actively interested in the Avalon for at least the past 12 years. Mr. Lipton underlined the fact that he takes an active role in raising money to complete projects and believes that one major player in that scenario is the City. Stephan Schweissing is dedicated to seeing that the Avalon becomes a great asset and wants to see it succeed but has not seen acceptable progress as of late surrounding the topics discussed today. Harold Stalf feels the committee needs to take pride in the facility. Mr. Stalf has a passion for the building and would like to be a part in not only saving the building, but also see it continually improve. Ron Beach was attracted to the position due to his passion for the arts and he also feels that the Avalon is a jewel. Mr. Beach envisions the Avalon as being a performing arts center that can hold a broader spectrum of events. Mr. Beach would like to see the Avalon as a community facility that hosts major speakers, more and different types of concerts and special interest groups utilizing it. The broader use of the theater would create wider exposure for the theater.

Marianne North would like to see more activity downtown. She suggested 2nd run movies could show at the Avalon and somehow make the downtown a more viable entity of the City and valley.

Ms. North feels that there are numerous cultural groups that could use a theatre of this size. The theater should host more groups that appeal to families and children. Ms. North pointed out that she is versed in grant writing and brings educational experience that she feels can help this committee. Alan Friedman stated that economic impact is one of the few main arguments to support funding the critical projects facing the Avalon. Mr. Friedman would also like to see the Avalon sustain itself financially and gather information that will convince City leadership and other key entities to help fund capital improvements at the Avalon. Specifically, Mr. Friedman feels that the seats and concession stand should be completed simultaneously.

Item 7: Items for Next Meeting

Alan Friedman would like to discuss life safety issues at the Avalon, explore the costs involved with that and discuss more about who might fund it. Ed Lipton plans to bring final plans for the concession stand renovation. There was a suggestion to start thinking about having a joint meeting with City Council surrounding these topics discussed today.

Item 8: Other Business

Item 9: Adjourn

Alan Friedman asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Harold Stalf so moved and Ed Lipton seconded. The meeting was adjourned by acclamation.

Meeting adjourned at 1:26p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cristina Duncan
Administrative Clerk