

**Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee  
Minutes  
February 8, 2007**

**Item 1: Meeting Called to Order by Alan Friedman at 11:38 am.**

Roll Call

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

Committee Members Absent:

Parks & Recreation Staff Present:  Joe Stevens, Director of Parks & Recreation  
  Tim Seeberg, TRCC/Avalon Theatre Manager  
  Juli Adams, Event Planner  
  Dina Jones, Administrative Clerk

Guests:                               Ron Wilson, Sandstone Entertainment  
  Krystyn Hartman, G. J. Symphony Executive  
  Director  
  Kirk Gustafson, G. J. Symphony Music  
  Director

**Item 2: Approval of January 16, 2007 Minutes**

Alan Friedman moved to approve the January 16, 2007 Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee minutes. Ron Beach seconded.

Motion adopted by the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee:   Yes 7    No 0

**Item 3: Discussion with Symphony Board and Ron Wilson– Is Avalon in their future?**

Alan Friedman began by having our guests introduce themselves. He explained the reason the Avalon Advisory Committee invited the Grand Junction Symphony and Ron Wilson to our meeting is to discuss their needs as well as other organizations if there was a possibility to make the Avalon Theatre a performing arts center for the community. Kirk Gustafson started by giving some of the Symphony's history with the Avalon Theatre. Back before the Avalon Theatre reopened, Kirk Gustafson was a part of the committee at that time. The Symphony as a whole didn't think it was feasible to use the

Avalon Theatre in its present state. In 2003 a rough vision of a design was put together. After studying the design for six months, the Symphony explored the idea of a capital campaign to assist in raising funds, in which the net result was to make a 1000 seat hall. That also was found not to be feasible at that point. The stage at the Avalon in its current state is inadequate for a full orchestra. The stage at Grand Junction High School is 47 feet deep, the Avalon's is 25 feet. The general seating capacity at GJHS is 1200 to 1500 people. Discussion ensued around what needs to be done to make the Avalon economically and physically adept at handling performing arts groups like the Symphony. The question was asked, would the Symphony be comfortable holding multiple performances instead of adding more seating if the stage depth could be increased? What does the Symphony need? Kirk Gustafson said rehearsal space and storage space is needed. The idea of an additional performance is a possibility, but very difficult to do given the volunteer nature of the Symphony. The Symphony is made up of amateurs/volunteers so rehearsals with the exception of weekends are almost exclusively in the evenings.

Alan Friedman explained the idea was to have the Cinema at the Avalon moved to the building next door with a smaller screen and 100 seats. Kirk Gustafson explained that answers to these questions would ultimately involve more time to study it that Symphony has not currently done. They have to have some idea of the economic ramifications because going to a second performance would mean more overhead, etc. A lot of that depends on the rental charges for using the Avalon. The cost of renting the Avalon now for one night is 1/3 of what the Symphony pays for an entire year at GJHS. Many facilities have driven orchestras into the ground. It is Kirk Gustafson's job to see that doesn't happen. So they would have to look at all those things very carefully. Alan Friedman explained that we are looking for common ground in order to pursue the possibility of making the Avalon an ideal performing arts center. Stephan Schweissing asked how often the Symphony practices? Kirk Gustafson's response was typically the Symphony practices for a seven service subscription concert over a three week period of time, and the services become more compact as you get closer to the concert. Krystyn Hartman informed the Avalon Advisory Committee that there was a round table meeting held with various performing arts groups to brainstorm. This group learned they all are experiencing issues with finding the right hall or venue. The biggest problem is meeting the demand resulting from accelerated community growth. With more newcomers coming to town they have high expectation coming from a higher market. They are all feeling a public pressure. Many arts focused performers need a place to play. Grand Junction is a growing arts community.

Ideas were thrown out looking at existing buildings and how can we enhance what we already have. They expect to continue these round table discussions. Harold Staff expressed that many performing arts groups would look less than successful in a 1000 seat hall due to the fact that their audiences may be quite small. If the hall (or the Avalon) is improved, everyone who could possibly take advantage of the facility would. The question of how much rent can be charged would have to be addressed. What is the economic potential of this or any building and how can we maximize it? We need to look at every source of income. It has to be a cooperative effort with everyone having the

same vision. The Avalon Advisory Committee's job is to write that vision and present it to City Council. We would like the Symphony to be a part of this vision, therefore we would present City Council with a list of critical needs, then delineate which are short-term, and which are long-term needs.

Krystyn Hartman said enacting two performances back to back is something the symphony would look at but the stage issue would have to be addressed to avoid having a smaller orchestra. Kirk Gustafson said they are a professional orchestra in terms of they are paid but they cannot make a living out of it. Alan Friedman expressed what the Avalon Committee needs to know is what the Symphony's specific needs are and if those needs are met, could we count on them as a supporter. That would help the committee decide what to include in our proposal to the City. Harold Stalf said from a Downtown Development Authority perspective, we want the symphony downtown because they draw people. Ed Lipton expressed that every fund raising effort that encompasses every player is more likely to be successful. Kirk Gustafson said the seating issue was not the deal breaker with the 2003 proposal, the stage issue is. Alan Friedman invited Krystyn, Kirk and Ron Wislon to come to our meetings typically every third Tuesday if every month.

Tim Seeberg asked if 10 to 12 shows a year at GJHS are they selling out. Kirk Gustafson responded that they have 1100 season ticket subscribers leaving about 350 tickets to sell for each performance, thus it is not unusual for the symphony to sell out. It would take careful study and collaboration with amateur Symphony players to come on board because it would require them to complicate their life by tying up another night of their week. It is not something they could simply start doing today.

Krysten Hartman explained that they are keeping an eye on similar markets to see how they are dealing with these issues. They are having to look for other places to play. The question was asked what does the symphony pay GJHS, including rehearsals, to use their facility? Kirk Gustafson said approximately \$1500 per year on the premise that both entities partner on certain things. For example, this year they put in a \$70,000 piano and \$26,000 worth of shell pieces and they help with other costs to keep the low rent. Krystyn Hartman added the rent for the Avalon for the two Phantom performances with rehearsal was about \$1300.

#### **Item 4: Sub-Committee Update-Strategic Plan**

Andre' van Schaften began by announcing the members of the sub committee as being himself, Ron Beach and Marianne North. Andre' van Schaften continued by giving some background of the sub-committee. They have met twice for two hours and in addition some of them have done quite a few conference calls, done research, and met with all the members of the Advisory Committee with the exception of Ed Lipton who has been traveling. In total they have had 4 to 5 meetings. What the sub-committee is focusing on are the objectives set forth to The Avalon Advisory Committee by the City of Grand Junction which is basically to develop a plan for the Avalon Theatre to enhance it's use to the community in terms of aesthetics, culture, and economics. Also to recommend

capital improvement projects, identify funding sources, and to direct the operation of the Avalon Theatre so that it will function in the most efficient and financially responsible manner. Towards that goal the sub-committee has gone from a broad outline of what are the issues and how to solve them, to forming the committee's objectives, main issues, and an action plan. A draft of this document was given out. It shows the recommendations as the sub-committee sees them.

Due to the fact that it is now February and the City Council has asked we complete this project by the end of March, and the fact the Advisory Committee had a later start and missed a December meeting (not to mention the City Council elections in April), the first recommendation is to have Alan Friedman communicate with the City Council and indicate the plan will hopefully be done by the end of May. After today's presentation by the sub-committee and input from the rest of the Avalon Advisory Committee the sub-committee will be able to build a report and have a draft of the report ready by the April meeting. The April meeting will be a working meeting to really take the document apart and add to it to finish in May. The first item the sub-committee believes should be brought to the attention of the City Council is to streamline the operations, consolidate and integrate the operations of the Avalon Theatre.

Ron Beach interjected that after all the Advisory Committee meetings and sub-committee meetings and listening to the point of views of many people, the sub-committee has come to the conclusion that what is needed is to have one governing body (or committee) rather than two or three. This body would probably have eleven members, some at this table and others being recruited based on their specialty. There would be three special areas or responsibility and coordination. They are defined as management, fund raising, and architecture and construction. In the fund raising area we are most concerned with finding individuals who know where to get money, have connections with a variety of organizations and individuals in order to bolster the fund raising activities. We need to find individuals who have construction and architecture experience who add expertise in whatever remodeling activity we recommend and end up going forward with.

Andre' van Schaften addressed the final piece which is capital improvement projects that the City put the Advisory committee in charge of coming up with. Two capital improvements recommendations the sub-committee decided to give the City are a short-term and a long-term. The short-term is the concession area, the seats built on the main floor and the balcony, and some of the work that is projected for the balcony in terms of diminishing the number of rows in the upper section, thus allowing for more leg room in that section. The appearance of the inside of the Avalon Theatre is outdated, needs paint and other work. The sub-committee intends to be very specific in the capital improvements recommendations for the short-term. The long-term would be the amount of money and what it would take to purchase the green room, enlarging the stage, the wings, more restrooms, the lobby, and possibly more seats.

Marianne North talked about how fund raising cannot really take place until you have the management in place and the capital improvement projects have been decided on. Once that is decided on and you know about how much you will need, you can start working on

a fund raising plan. They would be conducted on capital improvements based on what is decided and possibly for operations. Operations should be supported by revenues and sponsorships ideally. The new governing body (or committee) should develop a fund raising plan. Marianne North listed the tasks on the sub-committee handout that was distributed. Marianne North referred to the best practices in fund raising. Non-profits rely on individual donors for most of their fund raising and that probably is where most of the fund raising will come from for the capital improvements for the Avalon Theatre. It is important that the committee work with the staff of the Cinema at the Avalon and other entities to look at individual donors as well as corporate foundations and government sources. We need to discuss what type of government type funding would be available, what specifically is the City of Grand Junction committed to as far as capital improvement funds, what monies are available from the Downtown Development Authority, and does Grand Junction have a lodging tax that can somehow be made available. We also need to look at what capacity does the City of Grand Junction have for writing grants and what capacity the current staff involved with the Avalon Theatre has for writing foundation grants. Another aspect of good fund raising is you must have the committee actively involved in fund raising. It is too costly and not as effective to hire a professional fund raiser. There is a workshop in Denver on March 7 called "Facilities Planning, A Road Map for Organizations which includes capital campaigns. It costs \$50 dollars. This would be very worthwhile and someone from here or the City should attend that. On March 21 they are offering a 5 star fund raising plan also in Denver for \$50.

Andre' van Schaften addressed the gray area is in the future usage of the Avalon Theatre. This is where the sub-committee needs the most help. Andre' van Schaften' welcomed discussion around this issue. Harold Stalf feels this is a good outline and working it threw in April is a good idea. Harold Stalf agrees that unless there is some significant changes to the venue, the current usage format is not likely to change (Cinema, concerts, community events). Andre' van Schaften reiterated that the usage will drive the long range capital plan in terms of what do we want to do, who will be additional users, how much is it going to cost, and where those funds will come from. Alan Friedman thanked the sub-committee for the work they have done. Ed Lipton suggested the committee take the short-term plan to the City in March and ask for additional time for the long-term plan. He would also suggest the item of what to do about the green room be moved from long term to short term agenda.

Harold Stalf believes the City wants to see a comprehensive plan that shows the financial needs of both operations and predicted required investments. They also would like to see a partnership not just a perception that they (the City) is simply being asked for funding. The City of Grand Junction does not want to spend two, three and four meetings on this. We need to have a well thought out plan and give it to the City of Grand Junction with the confidence that we have done our work thoroughly. Alan Friedman and Joe Stevens agreed with Harold Stalf and to some extent reiterated these thoughts. Joe Stevens feels City of Grand Junction would rather have The Avalon Advisory Committee's intelligence and bring one report to them rather than in two phases. It would raise a lot of questions going into the City Council elections and if we address it early on in the late spring or

early summer we will be able to address it as a staff and go in with our numbers for the CIP capital improvements program and the budget. Based on where we are at on enterprise operations of Two Rivers Convention Center and the Avalon Theatre we will have our best year in memory. From that perspective, if we are successful Joe Stevens feels more confident asking for capital improvements. He reflected upon other organizations who have gone to the City Council too often, when what Council really needed was a concise report and specific direction proposed. The key point to take to the City Council would be the issue of the users of the Avalon Theatre, which is followed up with a capital improvement plan outline.

**Item 5: Determine next meeting dates.**

It was decided the next Advisory Committee meeting will be on Tuesday, March 20. The meeting will be held at the Whitman building and lunch will be provided.

**Item 6: Items for next meeting**

Sub-Committee Update – Strategic Plan

**Item 7: Other Business**

Ron Wilson of Sandstone Entertainment was invited into the discussion to reflect his opinions of this meeting's topics; mainly surrounding the Avalon's seating capacity. Out of the 1002 seats in the house not all are usable including the row in the upper balcony that will be illuminated. Ron Wilson is quite comfortable with the other 8 rows in the balcony. Obviously more space needs to be created for handicap accessibility but Ron doesn't feel we have to do that at a cost to the seats because we can use in-fill seating that is in the same quality and nature of whatever new seating we come up. Without sacrificing seats we can have greater flexibility to handle it. There are a few areas on the floor that we could lose seating. Ron Wilson suggests losing the far left and right hand corners up front near the exits in rows B, C, & D, 2 to 4 seats in each. That could help resolve some of the flat space requirements for handicap seating. Another handicap requirement is to have multiple handicap areas across the room. In regard to total seats, if we can retain the floor capacity where it is and retain the middle balcony exactly where it is and don't do any other work on the upper balcony we'll be in good shape. In 5 or 10 years the Avalon should have greater comfort and be able to place a wider range of events in there because the population and type of clientele attending shows are of a higher cultural flavor. These people will be more supportive of the arts and going out and doing things of cultural nature.

Harold Stalf asked Ron Wilson how he feels about the lobby & restroom capacity? Ron Wilson said it depends on the show. A younger audience drinking more beer has a greater need for larger restrooms. Females can never have enough. Other types of shows seem to do fine with the current restroom capacity. Ron Wilson has never received a complaint about the restrooms. Most complaints would be the quality of seating not the number of seats. Alan Friedman said 39 seats will be lost once the balcony is renovated. As far as a leg room Ron Wilson feels the people are going to have multiple options now

(once the balcony is renovated). The only shorter leg room now will be the 8 rows of the middle balcony, however that is not bad. It is no worse than the Pepsi Center or anywhere else.

Marianne North would like to know in Ron's opinion, how many seats would he like to have ideally? Ron Wilson likes where the Avalon Theatre is right now. With that size venue, as the community continues to grow, you will be able to fill it or get it near capacity with a wider variety of shows on average. Tim Seeberg wanted to know if a 1300 to 1400 seat facility would draw the bigger performer names that would meet the level of cultural influence in the community? Ron Wilson responded there are a small handful of shows that would need 1300 seats & revenue from 1300 seats. That number is 2 to 4 each year maybe. Ron doesn't see that changing a great deal. We have more access & more potential currently with doing a greater volume of smaller acts that are out there. They wouldn't want to use a high school because they wouldn't be able to purchase alcohol.

With a 1500 to 2000 seat outdoor amphitheater, business would be very seasonal. There are risks of going outdoors (weather, etc.). If anyone in Grand Junction is going to move in that direction, Ron Wilson highly encourages them to look at a model like the Gerald Ford in Vail, Colorado. You have to have some sort of audience cover.

The type of complaints Ron Wilson is hearing from those who have attended concerts at the Avalon Theatre are the long-waiting concession lines and poor quality of the seats. When surveys have been done, seating is a strong issue both the quality and appearance as well as space between rows. Most are about the upper balcony. Tim Seeberg stated we are engaged in a contract and agreed on a design for the concession stand and balcony. It will probably be six weeks for construction, so about 2-3 months to get it done from today's date. Concessions will still be sold through the construction process, so generally Cinema and other shows will be minimally impacted and service will continue. Ron Wilson stated that people will appreciate improvement is being done even if it inconveniences them for one night. It's going to get the message out that there is a positive beautification project going on. Creating a strong first impression. Alan Friedman added it will only be 2 to 3 weeks that the normal concession operations will be impacted (this is how long it will take to get the newly constructed stand installed).

Harold Stalf wanted to make everyone was aware that the 7th Street project begins February 26th. 7th Street will be closed for the next 7 months. Main will be built first and reopen by June 15th. 7th Street north will be closed until it's completion around September. 7th Street south will be closed until it's completion around November 1st. A portion of the side lot will be chopped off with the round about. The only access into that lot will be the alley and it will only have about 7 spaces when it is finished. It shouldn't change the load in.

The last order of business would be to communicate with the City of Grand Junction that the completion of the proposed plans for the Avalon from this committee will be delayed. Joe Stevens will tell David Varley that it will be moved to the 1st week in June.

**Item 8: Adjourn**

Alan Friedman asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Harold Stalf moved and Andre' van Schaften seconded. The meeting was adjourned by acclamation.  
Meeting adjourned at 1:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dina Jones  
Administrative Clerk

Tim Seeberg  
General Manager, TRCC, Avalon Theater