

Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee (AAC) Minutes

June 19, 2007

Item 1: Meeting Called to Order by Alan Friedman at 11:45am

Roll Call

Board Members Present: Alan Friedman
Edward Lipton
Harold Stalf
Ron Beach
Stephan Schweissing

Committee Members Absent: Marianne North
Andre' van Schaften

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

Item 2: Approval of Minutes

Minutes for the April 17th, 2007 were not available.

Item 3: Officer Election Discussion

Two of the Avalon Advisory Committee (AAC) board seat terms expire at the end of June 2007. The seats in question are currently occupied by Marianne North and Andre van Schaften. Alan Friedman was informed by Marianne North that she will not be seeking re-appointment to the committee. At this point it is unclear what Mr. Van Schaften's intentions are as to whether or not he is seeking re-appointment. The question was raised by Alan Friedman as to how this body should proceed given that these seats may go vacant for some undetermined time going forward. Harold Stalf suggested the committee nominate a new Chair person at this meeting and proceed with the other appointments/elections at the following meeting. The nominations would be subject to confirmation by the group as a whole. Harold Stalf nominated Ron Beach to be Chair person and Mr. Stalf himself offered to serve as Vice Chair at least in the interim and if this needs to change going forward, then by all means the committee may elect to do so.

Alan Friedman asked for a motion to nominate Ron Beach as Chair and Harold Stalf as Vice Chair. Stephan Schweissing moved, Ed Lipton seconded.

Motion adopted by the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee:
Yes 5 No 0

Item 4: Strategic Plan Update & Discussion

Ron Beach is aiming to have a draft of the Strategic Plan completed by the 10th of July and hoping to be ready to present to City Council in a workshop environment by August. He inquired openly to the group as to what the possibilities would be to be placed on the agenda for August. The group was not sure this was achievable.

Harold Stalf reported on the series of meetings that he and Andre van Schaften took part in holding with all the Avalon Theatre stakeholders since the last AAC meeting (the key stakeholders include the GJ Symphony Board, Avalon Foundation, Cinema Board and the Arts Commission). The purpose of these meetings was to present the basic points of a strategic plan outline, which is in rough draft development form as we speak. Mr. Stalf presented by himself at those meetings which Andre' van Schaften was unavailable to attend. As a result of these primarily information-sharing meetings there were many valuable ideas, suggestions and recommendations that came back from the various stakeholders, which the committee should incorporate into the final draft strategic plans.

Continuing his summary of presentations over the last month, Mr. Stalf commented that the stakeholder groups voiced numerous comments and questions surrounding the theatre's management structure proposals and about how fund raising for the facility's expansion will occur. An additional message that Mr. Stalf wanted to deliver in the presentations was that the Avalon Theatre needs to serve the cultural users of the facility, including the likes of Ron Wilson's Sandstone Entertainment and other similar private sector users so they can be artistically and financially successful. Harold Stalf believes a key message in the proposal report is understanding that the theatre (Avalon Theatre) is not a top revenue source. Mr. Stalf additionally commented that the committee and stakeholders must be proactive in identifying how changes made to the theatre are going to make things work better for the key tenants. Examples of this were the food concession stand and balcony seat renovations. These were right in line with helping the current tenants better succeed.

Alan Friedman wanted to know what the stakeholder reactions were to the management structures as proposed in the report. Harold Stalf commented that overall, reaction to it has been good. The Arts Commission as an example offered extensive, well thought out comments. The Arts commission seemed to offer some of the more objective feedback in Mr. Stalf's opinion. Since they are not theatre tenants, the commission was looking at the overall proposal from a non-biased perspective. The commission was thorough, to the point and asked many relevant questions.

Ron Beach wanted to know what must happen in order to set up a workshop session with the City Council. Joe Stevens replied that the City Council and City Manager would like to receive a written report from this body before a workshop can be scheduled. The Council prefers in most cases to have a draft in advance for review, which will help them determine whether or not to schedule a workshop into their agenda. Given the timelines that this committee would like to follow, Mr. Stevens suggested that it would be helpful to have a draft of this report by the 3rd Wednesday in July. Harold Stalf expressed that he feels the committee can forward it to City Council as soon as the committee meeting on the 26th.

Ed Lipton directed a question to Mr. Stevens asking realistically when the City begins planning the 2008 City budgets. Joe Stevens responded that the budget process is in progress now, and will continue into late summer/early Fall. Mr. Stevens further commented that with many things going on with the City right now, the sooner the committee forwards the report to the City Council, the better. Typically, Council needs until late November to early December to finalize the budget approval process.

The committee continued discussions and dialog over what areas of the draft report need most attention and/or re-work. Based upon feedback from other organizations and stakeholders, Mr. Stalf felt the major areas of discussion and concern are over the capital improvement changes to the theatre itself and the proposed management structures outlined in the draft report. Key to the success in the management of the Avalon, in Mr. Stalf's opinion, is to maximize the use of the existing liquor license on the facility. Another key proposal that needs working over is who oversees the day-to-day operation of the theatre in the new plan proposal. One consideration is the combining of daily Cinema and other event operations under one manager, instead of having two separate entities manage both separately. Combining this approach with maximization of the current liquor license usage could make the arrangement a financial break-even or possibly better, assuming it is the City that oversees daily operation. Tim Seeberg commented that he will consult with Cinema to investigate the financial end of this concept to determine if in fact it could work.

Stephan Schweissing, commenting on this management approach, feels the people who join the board for the Cinema at the Avalon, join for the joy of selecting and viewing film, not for the joy of managing daily film operations. Hence, it is his belief that investigating ways in which the current theater manager (that being the City) can consolidate all theater operations could be a welcome change for the Cinema at the Avalon. Mr Schweissing suggests that the Cinema board could be lacking enthusiasm about fund raising because they feel weighed down by management issues. So, the board relinquishing the responsibility of managing day-to-day Cinema film showing could be a win, win situation for everyone involved.

Commenting on this management concept, Alan Friedman's concern is that concession revenue is based on attendance, and the City and the manager would have no control over the type of films being played, thus have little control over attendance. Stephan Schweissing replied that it is to both Cinema's and City's advantage to maximize attendance. The City's benefits by helping to maintain and provide a clean and comfortable atmosphere for film goers. This should draw higher attendance in Mr. Schweissing's opinion.

Tim Seeberg commented that in the big picture, we should be trying to create a management structure that will make easier operating sense for everybody. However, the financial end of the picture needs to be favorable for the City to pursue assuming Cinema management responsibilities.

Harold Stalf informed the committee that Shaw Construction's cost estimate of renovating and expanding the Avalon Theatre could easily run as high as \$4.5 million. The question then becomes is it feasible to raise \$3 million or \$4 million dollars in our community for a project like this? Harold Stalf believes an analysis completed by a professional organization should give us the answer. Mr. Stalf commented that if such a fundraising effort is not feasible we'll know early on in the process. Harold Stalf feels the Downtown Development Authority could be a major contributor to the project if the GJ Symphony is of similar commitment. Mr. Stalf estimates that it could be approximately \$20,000 to fund a fund raising feasibility study. Joe Stevens interjected that the City possibly could pull together funds in the next budget cycle that represent a major contribution towards complete renovation of the existing Avalon seating. Tim Seeberg commented that depending on how fast the over all fundraising effort could get underway, maybe the City's contribution toward the seats could represent Phase 1 of a multi-phase project, including the expansion outlined in the proposal. Mr. Stevens suggested that if it can be done, that the seating renovation be done sooner rather than later, as there is little sense in waiting on that piece of the project.

Ed Lipton commented the Avalon Foundation has a \$2500 grant to print brochures, which could be used in the fundraising solicitations. However, the matching monies must be spent on an approved project by November of this year.

Harold Stalf recommends we contract with someone who can properly advise the committee and all interested stakeholders as to what fundraising strategy makes sense, if any. Concerning fundraising, Mr. Stevens commented that if this committee can build a case with a fund-raising council on the projects that have been completed thus far, the group could realize stronger support in moving to the next steps. Discussion ensued again concerning the order of steps that should be taken in terms of fundraising and building renovation and expansion.

Tim Seeberg asked that if the seats can be replaced by next year, and the fundraising study is completed soon, will it give us enough time to get us on a strategy by next year for raising the money?. Harold Stalf feels if City Council approves this proposal plan, the committee can kick off our campaign by January or February next year.

Item 5: Determine next meeting dates

The next Avalon Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday July 26th, 2007.

Item 6: Items for Next Meeting

A presentation of the finalized Strategic Business Plan

Item 7: Other Business

Alan Friedman received a letter from Stephanie Tuin, which asked the Chair person what type of backgrounds are pertinent for committee member candidates. Harold Stalf suggested individuals with long-term business experience and extensive associations in the community will make strong candidates.

Item 8: Adjourn

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

Meeting adjourned at 1253 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dina Jones
Administrative Clerk

Tim Seeberg
Manager, Two Rivers Convention Center and Avalon Theatre