

Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee

October 14, 2008

Item 1: Meeting Called to Order by Chair, Ron Beach at 8:00 a.m.

Roll Call

Committee Members Present: Ron Beach
Andre' van Schaften
Stephan Schweissing
Stephen Thoms
Greer Taylor
Harry Griff
Kathy Jordan

Guests: Roger Davidson, Grand Junction Musical Arts Association
Kirk Gustafson, Grand Junction Symphony
Michael Schwerin, Grand Junction Symphony
Ed Lipton, Avalon Foundation Board

Visitor & Convention Staff Present: Debbie Kovalik, Director of the Visitor & Convention Bureau, Two Rivers Convention Center & Avalon Theatre
Tim Seeberg, TRCC & Avalon Theatre General Manager
Dina Jones, Sales and Planning Assistant

Item 2: Welcome Harry Griff, New Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee Member, Downtown Development Authority Representative

Ron Beach extended a welcome to Harry Griff to the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee

Item 3: Approve Minutes.

Kirk Gustafson requested corrections be made to the September 23, 2008 minutes, stating on Item 3, line 2, that Tim Seeberg met with symphony orchestra members not the entire board and it is Grand Junction Symphony Orchestra not office. Also the correct spelling of Steven's name is "Stephen"

Andre' van Schaften moved to approve the September 23,, 2008 Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee minutes with the above correction. Kathy Jordan seconded.

Motion approved by Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee: Yes 7 No 0

Item 4: Progress Report and Discussion - "Roadmap" Meeting & Meeting with GJSO Venue Committee – Debbie Kovalik, Tim Seeberg, Greer Taylor, Stephen Thoms

Greer Taylor stated that the above members met with members of GJSO Venue Committee and Karen Hildebrant to discuss where the GJSO Venue Committee is in regards to supporting the efforts of the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee (ATAC) with the currently proposed Avalon renovation/expansion project. The GJSO committee stated that they want to be part of the decision making process, whether it be on this committee or another subcommittee. Kirk Gustafson stated that there is a written resolution that states the symphony board is ready to proceed, but needs to know

exactly what a commitment involves and that there should be some formalizing of the structure of the agreement and process. Tim Seeberg stated that he, Debbie Kovalik, Ron Beach, and Andre' van Schaften all met in an effort to explore what it might mean to 'take a step back' in this entire renovation planning process and look at where the project stands in light of the current local and national business/political climate. In other words, the question of 'should everything be reconsidered and re-evaluated?' needs to be asked. Tim Seeberg also handed out a binder of information to all committee members. Within it was a collection of documents that outlines the planning process and accomplishments of the committee over the last 18-24 months. It also included a time line that brings everyone up to speed in regards to where the committee started to where it is now.

Debbie Kovalik stated that it become very clear to her that the GJSO venue committee needs to have more of a clear focal point in this entire process. Ms. Kovalik reminded everyone that the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee has only been in existence for barely three years. Debbie Kovalik stated further that this committee needs to continue establishing deeper 'grass roots', which would allow each member of the current committee more opportunities learn each other's strengths and discover who would be best for important tasks that lie ahead. An example that Ms. Kovalik brought up is the GJSO. Ms. Kovalik explained that the GJSO is extremely organized and has an understanding of what each of their members is capable of accomplishing and how they might go about accomplishing things. Debbie Kovalik reminded all that the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee was created in order to advise City Council and City staff. Debbie Kovalik asked both Ron Beach and Andre' van Schaften to review the work they have done up until this point so that all committee members are up to speed on where all the current processes are going. Ron Beach stated that the documents that were given out to all of the committee members today show that the focus of the committee was always on the future and not the present. Ron Beach read aloud the original resolution that City Council passed when the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee was established. Ron Beach stated that the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee has not achieved what the original resolution stated as the committee has been so focused on improving the ascetic value of the theatre.

Ed Lipton explained in his view that the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee was born under the direction of former City Manager Kelly Arnold. Mr. Lipton explained Mr. Arnold wanted City Council to understand that a roughly \$65 thousand Avalon Theatre operating deficit each year was a good investment for the community. Mr. Lipton also said that after numerous meetings, discussions, etc, and based on the information, opinions and direction coming from Kelly Arnold was the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee constituted. Andre' van Schaften added that the actions the committee took were guided by the resolution that was originally passed. Andre' van Schaften further explained detailed aspects of the resolution and expressed more views pertaining to the committee's responsibilities. Mr. Van Shafen did explain that the committee was not even formulated until the Summer of 2006, and between the months of September to December of that year the committee really was only able to get their 'feet wet' on what's going on with the Avalon. Andre' van Schaften iterated that they started looking into the future of what the Avalon Theatre could be by its 100 year anniversary in 2023. In December of 2006 a subcommittee was established in order to work on a strategic business plan for the theatre. This research included fact finding, presentations, and initially discovering what might be required in terms of modifications or expansions of the theatre so that it could accommodate the GJSO. Once all of the research was completed, a strategic plan was presented and reviewed with City Council in a workshop format in the early Fall of 2007. Andre' van Schaften continued to discuss the detailed findings in the strategic plan to the ATAC committee members. What was presented to City Council was a roughly \$5 million dollar plan with the notion that an acoustical study of the theatre needs to be completed before final recommendations could be made.

When Mr. Van Schaften finished explanations and providing historical back ground, questions were raised on how the project started as a \$5 million dollar endeavor, and now it is up to \$14 million dollars or higher (potentially \$18 million, inflation adjusted)? Tim Seeberg stated that 80% or more of the cost differences are linked to the acoustic inadequacies of the current theatre. There were key findings of the Kirkegaard & Associates acoustical study that Tim Seeberg summarized to help understand the reasons behind the cost differences. Discussion continued in regards to the recommendations that were made by Kirkegaard. Andre' van Schaften stated that from this study the committee found it vital to improve acoustics of the building and the theatre's visibility sight lines.

Harry Griff asked if the committee would reconsider the \$5 million dollar option, and would that include the new annex building to the east, green room facilities and make the building more functional for its current use? Andre' van Schaften stated the \$5 million option would do relatively minimum to the existing theatre in terms of improvements that would accommodate the GJSO. Ed Lipton stated that he felt it could have completed the current foot print and the annex building but it would not allow the acoustical changes. Harry Griff asked if the stage would be able to be expanded. Ed Lipton did answer yes, however it wouldn't be large enough for the symphony without the expansion. Ed Lipton stated that with the annex, the storage problem goes away and Cinema at the Avalon would be able to have movies 365 days a year if they wished. Ron Beach stated that the annex would allow more restrooms and more lobby space for concession sales, additionally. Discussion continued in regards to items that would be included in the \$5 million dollar project versus the \$14 million dollar project, and what the pro/cons might be.

Harry Griff stated that the Downtown Development Authority (DDA), while it is now in a position to soon able to spend monies on downtown projects, the authority is not comfortable with a plan that can potentially reach \$18 million. Stephen Thoms interjected that the Downtown Development Authority has committed approximately \$1 million toward the project, assuming it were closer to \$5 million. Harry Griff stated a concern that the project being proposed by the ATAC has no representation in the City's 10 year capital plans; therefore, the committee is seemingly back to "square one" with regards to getting any sort of proposal off the ground. Trying to ascertain the situation, Andre' van Schaften asked Harry Griff and Stephen Thoms the question of where the DDA stands as a whole on any sort of Avalon Theatre project. Stephen Thoms responded that at the DDA retreat, the Avalon does sit high on their priority list. Debbie Kovalik stated that this committee needs to consider the development of financial models with regards to financing the theatre project itself, and projecting out how the theatre will financial perform once a project is complete. These models need to include things like, how many tickets need to be sold to various events and at what price in order to keep the theatre operating. Harry Griff stated that the Downtown Development Authority feels the corner of 7th and Main St. is one of the premier spots in the downtown area and the City, and it serves as an adjunct for the local hotels and other businesses. The DDA also felt that an annex to the existing theatre was a great idea in numerous respects and that the \$5 million plan was achievable. Discussion continued in regards to what internal improvements need to be completed in order to make the Avalon suitable for all parties and shore up its problems.

In an attempt to brainstorm the discussion, Debbie Kovalik stated that the committee needs to consider that the theatre may be best suited to be operating in the future much the way that it does today and make key improvements so that it becomes more operable and established in the cultural. Debbie Kovalik suggested that the committee might take an approach of raising the money first, then deciding how the money should be spent on improvements according to the stakeholders' and community's needs. Ms. Kovalik suggested that the current City Hall building was constructed along a similar

model. Andre' van Schaften commented that this committee is at a fork in the road and the committee needs to choose a direction that will allow this project to move forward and not come to a standstill. Harry Griff stated that the Avalon is underutilized. Mr. Griff feels that if no one is willing to put time and money into the Avalon, then there may develop an attitude that the theatre needs to be 'scraped' to make room for other development. Mr. Griff was implying that this option, while certainly undesirable, could come into reality. The other option Mr. Griff points out is that the theatre can be fixed, renovated, etc. Mr. Griff iterated that he is not suggesting to shut down or do away with the theatre, but that we all need to look at different options to make it more marketable and viable into the future.

Ed Lipton suggested that lowering cost of using the facility could be an option if it was managed under a different organization rather than under the City, for example if the Cinema at the Avalon managed the theatre. Kirk Gustafson reiterated that the Symphony is supportive of the latest Avalon renovation/expansion project, however there needs to be a coherent plan before formalizing the support. Ed Lipton stated that there needs to be a financial commitment given, not just a verbal commitment. Andre' van Schaften stated that the committee is at a point where it needs to face reality in regards to the fact that possibly the \$18 million project is out of reach at this time, and that perhaps a \$5 million dollar project is achievable. Andre' van Schaften stated that the theatre needs to remain part of Grand Junction and it is the ATAC duty is to ensure this happens. Greer Taylor suggested breaking this project into phases. Start with the \$5 million plan, and if more money continues to be raised, that we move into a second phase, which could be an \$8 million plan possibly. Discussion ensued. Andre' van Schaften proposed that the ATAC start looking at the \$5 million plan again and build the business plan around this figure in terms of operational profit or loss and outline clearly what the capital needs will be. Mr. Van Shaften iterated that all of this could take place in stages, addressing critical needs first, thus creating a positive 'buzz' in the community. Kathy Jordan asked if the Avalon Foundation Board (AFB) would then become involved with the fundraising aspect again. Debbie Kovalik suggested that the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee can assume this responsibility and possibly assume the ownership of the existing AFB 501c3 status.

Ed Lipton feels that the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee would need to become the new AFB because it is a foundation that can raise funds. Debbie Kovalik stated that the AFB would need to work with John Shaver in order to get the 501c3 changed over to the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee. Kirk Gustafson asked if it's possible to investigate how the 'phasing' of a renovation project could work and if it's feasible? Ultimately, Mr. Gustafson said, the goal would be to eventually move toward the potentially \$18 million solution, which would accommodate the symphony's needs. Mr. Gustafson also pointed out that Third Sector Innovation's fund raising feasibility study was designed in large part around an assumption that the symphony was part of the plan, and the study participants were largely symphony patrons and/or board members. This suggests that the fund raising projections could change if the symphony option were taken out of the equation. Harry Griff expressed that 7th and Main St. may not be the best location to complete this project as there are some challenges. One example is the lack of downtown parking. Harry Griff agrees that the committee needs to look at what are the short term and long term goals of any sort of project proposal. Mr. Griff stated that Public support is crucial on whether or not this project will take off. Andre' van Schaften stated that he feels the best way to continue is in a phased approach. First and foremost, Mr. Van Shaften says, the ATAC needs to make this theatre fully functional now, and then move forward from there with more expansive plans.

Michel Schwerin stated that reverting back to the original \$5 million plan with regards to the renovation of the theatre could result in loss of GJSO's support of the project. This would imply the symphony would not be a viable partner of the project going forward. Roger Davidson asked the committee to remember that the most cost-effective way to achieve the latest renovation/expansion plan would be to go with the \$18 million plan from the start. Completing the project in phased segments may result in increased compounded costs over time. Michael Schwerin stated that the reason why the symphony has not made a written commitment is that the current plan is not adequately clear and concise enough to go forward. Harry Griff asked if the ATAC went back to the \$5 million plan, could the symphony use the Avalon if the stage was not expanded? Kirk Gustafson stated that the symphony could not fit on the current stage. Discussions continued how to make the stage accommodate the symphony. Ron Beach asked Kirk Gustafson if the acoustical qualities of the Avalon would be the same as those at the High School under the \$5 million plan? Kirk Gustafson did not have an answer as that would need to be determined by an expert with further analysis.

Stephen Thoms moved that the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee needs to refocus their efforts toward a \$5 million plan, and thus put on hold or abandon the \$18 million plan at this point. Mr. Thoms reinforced that the motion is in response to that fact that \$18 million option is not currently a feasible option. Kathy Jordan second.

Motion approved by Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee: Yes 7 No 0

Harry Griff moved that the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee revisit the \$5 million dollar proposal for consideration at next month's meeting. Kathy Jordan second.

Motion approved by Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee: Yes 7 No 0

Item 5: Next Steps/Board Roles and Action Plan

Item 6: Other Business/Items for Next Meeting

Item 7: Next Meeting Date, Tuesday, November 18, 2008, 8:00am-9:30am. Two Rivers Convention Center

Item 8: Adjourn

Stephen Thoms motioned to adjourn the Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee meeting. Andre' van Schaften seconded.

Motion approved by Avalon Theatre Advisory Committee: Yes 7 No 0

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40am.

Respectfully submitted,
Dina Jones and Chasity Gray
Two Rivers Convention Center and the Avalon Theatre