

Grand Junction Commission on Arts and Culture
Minutes
May 23, 2007

Commissioners Present: Gunilla Bishop Don Meyers
 Jeanne Killgore Katherine Rhein (arrived at 4:30pm)
 Jeanine Howe

Commissioners Absent: Doug Clary, Vera Mulder, Lora Quesenberry

Others Present: Harold Stalf and Ron Beech (Avalon Theater Advisory Board), and Traci Altergott (Recreation Superintendent)

In the absence of a quorum at 4:00pm, the meeting began in an informal basis with a presentation from Harold Stalf, executive director of the Downtown Development Authority, and Ron Beech, both members of the Avalon Theater Advisory Committee. They explained that this committee had been appointed by the City Council to enhance the functional and aesthetic value of the theater and to direct the theater's financial operations. The committee includes representatives from the existing stakeholder groups – the Avalon Theater Foundation, the Downtown Development Authority, and Cinema at the Avalon – plus four at-large appointees. A strategic business plan for the theater has been developed.

Beech noted that the Avalon's strengths include: 1.) Being established as a centerpiece for downtown; 2.) Seating for 960; 3.) The new downtown parking garage; 4.) Proximity to other amenities such as bars and restaurants; and, 5.) Good acoustics. The theater's weaknesses include: 1.) Cinema at the Avalon's difficult booking quality films because of possible breaks in consecutive showings (required by some distribution companies); 2.) The need for new seats; 3.) The need for more leg room in the balcony; 4.) The need for a larger stage for the Grand Junction Symphony; 5.) Less than adequate load bearing capacity on the proscenium; 6.) Undersized lobby and concession stand; 7.) Inadequate liquor license; 8.) Inadequate restrooms; 9.) No green room or storage space; 10.) Fire safety issues; and 11.) HVAC problems. It was also noted that the public must realize that this building will need a continued public subsidy to be a fully functioning historical facility.

Stalf and Beech presented preliminary architectural drawings showing the Advisory Committee's proposed plan to address many of the above deficiencies. Stalf noted that the viability of the Avalon rests on maintaining the viability of its major tenants, most notably the Cinema at the Avalon, and, the committee hopes, the Grand Junction Symphony. The proposed solution includes a major 6,000 square foot two-story addition to the building on the east side, which would house a 2,000 square foot rehearsal space, 2,000 square foot storage space, an indoor/outdoor box office, two elevators, more restrooms, and a 112 seat auditorium exclusively for the Cinema at the Avalon. In the existing theater, the stage would be extended into the first three rows reducing seating to 830–850 seats. The proposed plan does not include significant sound system upgrades since most major concert promoters have their own sound systems.

At this point a quorum was reached with the arrival of Kat Rhein, and the regular meeting of the Grand Junction Commission on Arts and Culture was called to order at 4:30pm. In the absence of Chair Doug Clary and Vice-chair Lora Quesenberry, Jeanine Howe moved, and Jeanne Killgore seconded, authorizing Kat Rhein to serve as temporary chair for the duration of this meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

Stalf and Beecher explained that the strategic business plan for the Avalon Theater includes a recommendation that the City Council appoint a board to administer all the operations of the theater: hire staff, do fundraising, and basically manage the facility. Stalf noted that the City's subsidy of the Avalon has dropped from \$128,800 in 2002 to \$78,800 in 2005 to a projected \$53,000 in 2007. He explained that the improvements to the building would cost about \$3 million and could be funded jointly by the City, the Symphony, Cinema at the Avalon, and additional fundraising efforts, as well as increased concessions/alcohol sales, if the Symphony and Cinema boards agree to this proposal. The funding would include a commitment of \$33,000 annually from the Cinema at the Avalon in lieu of rent for five years, half a million dollars from the Symphony plus a commitment to raise another half a million, and an

annual projected operating subsidy of \$100,000 from the City, in addition to the City's share of the capital costs.

Stalf and Beecher stated that the committee is also discussing this proposal with the Symphony board and the Avalon board, and they plan to make a presentation to the City Council in July. They said the Symphony and the Cinema are leaning in favor, and they would like the Commission's support, especially at the City Council meeting when the plan is presented.

Don Meyers asked about possible "green" construction of the new addition. Kat Rhein mentioned the fact that several groups don't use the Avalon Theater because of the lack of backstage walking space and wing space on the stage, noting that the plan doesn't address this issue. Jeanine Howe mentioned that a 112 seat theater might be beneficial to smaller theater groups if a small stage area was included, not just a screen. The Coordinator noted that the feasibility of constructing a new addition rests on securing the Symphony as a permanent tenant, which would require that they perform their concerts twice rather than once, as is currently done, and on securing significant funding from both the Symphony and the Cinema for the capital costs.

After further discussion the consensus of the Commission was to support the idea of the City's investing in the long-term capital facility needs of the Avalon Theater; that making the Avalon more useable to a wide range of potential users is very beneficial; that the plan should include improving backstage and wing space areas on the existing Avalon stage; that the plan should investigate a more versatile stage area in the new small auditorium which could be used by groups in addition to the Cinema, with the provision that the Cinema is given use of the main auditorium if they are bumped from the small auditorium; that implementation of the plan is contingent on securing the both Symphony and the Cinema as long-term tenants for the theater. The Commission had no comment on the proposed staffing and management plan in the proposal, since this is a City Council decision. No formal action was taken, except to put the matter on the agenda of the next meeting, when the Commission will discuss writing a letter of support.

The Coordinator's Report for April was presented. The Coordinator noted that she will be out of the office on the date of the July meeting, and that there is usually little on the Commission's agenda at that time, and a motion was made by Gunilla Bishop, seconded by Jeanine Howe, to cancel the Commission's regular meeting in July. The motion carried unanimously. Howe reported that Rita Brady Kiefer's original play, which the Commission helped underwrite, will soon be put up for production and that the Commission will be credited for its initial support. Meyers reported having attended the Art & Jazz Festival, noting that seating at the concert stage this year had increased, the quality of the fine art vendors was higher, and the Art on the Corner sculptures are better than ever. Bishop and Killgore concurred.

A motion was made by Howe, seconded by Bishop, to approve the minutes of the Commission's meeting on May 23, 2007 as written. The motion carried unanimously. As there was no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Allison Cowan Sarmo
Cultural Arts Coordinator