

## PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

MAY 3, 2016

A meeting of the Planning and Economic Development Committee was held on Tuesday, May 3, 2016, at 7:00 p.m. in the City Hall Auditorium.

Alderwoman Mary Ann Melizzi-Golja, Chair, presided.

Members of Committee present: Alderman-at-Large Daniel T. Moriarty, Vice Chair  
Alderman-at-Large Brian S. McCarthy  
Alderman Tom Lopez  
Alderman Benjamin M. Clemons

Members not in Attendance: Alderman-at-Large Michael B. O'Brien, Sr.  
Alderman-at-Large Lori Wilshire  
Alderman Ken Siegel

Also in Attendance: Mayor Jim Donchess  
Ms. Sarah Marchant, Director, Community Development Division

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PUBLIC COMMENT - None

### PRESENTATIONS

#### *Nashua Performing Arts Center Feasibility Study*

This evening we have a presentation from Mr. Duncan Webb from Webb Management Services, Inc. to present the feasibility study for the Performing Arts Center.

#### Mr. Webb

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to come and speak with you tonight. I am going to give you an abbreviated presentation of the first half of the feasibility study that we have been working on for Nashua over these past months.

I am a management consultant to people who build and operate and renovate theaters. I've spent the last 28 years roaming around mostly North America working on these buildings. I was here 12 years ago when the last feasibility study and in that case we were working for an architectural practice. I have Scott Aquilina here who is an architect from Bruner/Cott that has lots of experience in New Hampshire, the theaters, and buildings. They will be helping us a little more as we get into the second phase of this work which is really exploring the physical options and the business planning for a proposed facility. What we are doing now is just establishing. The idea has been around for some time as is often the case. Often times it takes a long time for an idea to pick up steam. A fellow I used to work with used to say "it takes a long time for something to happen suddenly." That is the nature of these projects. The other thing he used to say was Duncan, we may work in the arts but it is all about politics and economics. In order for these projects to really move forward it's not enough just to have a strong idea about need and what is the artistic opportunity, it's really a matter of lining up that with the political argument and the economic argument. Often it's when you get those things all lined up, that's when these projects happen suddenly. Our job is to try to help people who have been thinking and working on this for some time to bring some additional information to the table and to help you as a community have a lively and informed discussion. We are giving you ideas and options which I will share with you tonight but really this is an important community decision and we are here to help you make that, we are not here to make it on your behalf. The key to that is when we started work here several months ago with the help of staff we had a great three days of meeting everyone. We were at the Hunt Library in two and three different rooms

having these ½ hour confidential interviews where everyone who was interested came through and talked about the project and by the end of three days we were exhausted but it is really the best way to figure these things out. What was important about the list of people was that it wasn't just supporters but all elements of your community; people, business leaders, downtown people and people who tend to be skeptical about building and spending. There was a really good cross section of the community and we heard lots of different opinions about all of this.

Before we talk about Nashua let me share a few of the broader trends that are occurring in our world; the world of art today. There is some bad news first. The audience for the traditional performing arts is declining upon the young people, 18 to 24 years; are really less interested in participating in western European performing arts than I was when I was that age. We are concerned about how tough it is for government to justify direct financial support for the arts. We are aware that there is more competition for philanthropy and that there are now causes like healthcare and environmental sustainability. We are also concerned about the fragility of art's organizations. This basic problem which is there is no productivity gained over time in the way that artists create. The commercial economy works and succeeds on the basis of productivity gains; we don't have that in our world. That means that the typical non-profit arts organizations have to work really hard just to stay even and over the long-term have to raise more of their money from philanthropy and grants and donations just to keep going in an environment where costs are always increasing.

The good news is that we have gone from a world where there were artists over here and the rest of us over here to a world in which everyone is an artist; whether it's fashion, accessorizing, scrapbooking, playing a guitar or quilting and that opportunity for everyone to be an artist creates a lot of opportunities for us as a society. While arts in schools have suffered in many parts of the country the arts sector has jumped in and recognized that philosophically we want to train the audiences of tomorrow and that's where the funding is. We are finally getting better at expressing the value proposition of the arts. It would be great if we lived in a world where it was enough to say the arts are great and we should support it but we live in a world where we have to suggest why the arts are important and what value they deliver to their communities. We are getting pretty good at that with the leadership of Jane Chu and the NEA. It's different in every community. In some places that value is about the arts and economic development to a creative place making, downtown revitalization, cultural tours and a variety of quality of life, business and workforce development, retention, community development, arts and education and the new one is the role of the arts in healing; whether it's spiritual or physical. We are finding that these arguments in different places work. What that then means in my world is that the buildings have to change in order to respond to these New Hampshire challenges. We've gone from Friday Night Lights to the Community of Living. The old image of a theater, the Marque lights up at 7:00 p.m. on a Friday night and the fancy people wearing their fancy clothes, now it's an idea where it's always open, it's inclusive, it's a 24 x 7 building and anyone can always walk in and have a coffee and it changes from this very special place for a few people up on the hill to a place that is deeply integrated into the life of the community and is for everyone. We worked hard to enhance the social experience around going to a performance. We've learned that intellectual and emotional enrichment is important but what people really need and want now is the opportunity to be in a social experience, story-telling around the clock. We have to include opportunities for participatory programs. We really have to make sure that the buildings are affordable to the arts organizations who want access to them. We support a much broader range of programs and audiences that integrate the traditional, the popular and the new with the challenges. Finally, we have to figure out what are those particular issues and challenges in the community that we can respond to with a project like this in order to have a strong value proposition behind it.

Whenever we talk about building a case for facilities, there are four issues. Is there an audience, are there users, what's wrong with the facilities we have got and then from a broader perspective, where are we going as a community and how does a project like this help us get there. These next slides are an attempt to address those four issues. The work that we have done to this point is simply getting us to the point of saying do we need something and if so what. The first thing we did is try to figure out what is the market for the arts in Nashua and we collected terrific information from the Symphony and ActorSingers and the Peacock Players to try to establish how far people are travelling to something here and help us think about two fairly distinct

market areas; one that is a 15-mile radius we felt would capture the City of Nashua but we are also curious about a 40-mile radius because there were people stretching out to the north and the south. These are just a few of the highlights of the demographics slides. What I find interesting and positive is that in the 15-mile radius you now have a population that's over 600,000 people and its continuing to grow. When we look out at 40 miles it's a population of close to 5 million by 2021. The 15 miles feels like a good area that really becomes the primary market for new buildings. We also observe a relatively high level of educational attainment and that turns out to be the best predictor of arts participation; more so than age, income or ethnicity. We looked at personal income distribution and this highlights the difference between Nashua itself and those living within the 15 to 40 mile radius; Nashua is less affluent and a little bit older than when you go into the 40-mile radius. Nashua has 87,000 people which is slower growing, diverse in age, larger number of families, good opportunities for increased family culturally specific. We love that the 15 mile radius has a population of 668,000 and growing and also diverse, more millennials and higher levels of affluence and education and there are higher levels of ethnic diversity. The 40-mile radius has a massive population, its Boston and the suburbs. We also thought a little bit about non-resident audiences, how do you get tourists to buy tickets to come to performances. This is an area that's changing a lot over the last 20 years when you think of the internet and the trend in how people plan their vacations relative to the olden days. We do see an opportunity for something but it's hard to get people here for that one thing. Marketing cultural tourism has to be built around the idea that there are a number of attractions and that this can be one more attraction in selling a package of activities and amenities in a community. The next issue was existing facilities. We did an exhaustive analysis of all of the buildings serving both Nashua and any other building in the 30-mile radius. We discovered that the local buildings have pretty limited presenting activity which means you are buying a touring artist, you take the risk and pay them to come, you market the show and you collect the box office proceeds and hope that you make a little bit of money. There is very little presenting going on locally, more producing and some level of rental activity. We also observed that local facilities are limited in terms of the features that they offer users, with only Keefe Auditorium having a fly system and a pit. This is a map of the major facilities and here we show the 30-miles radius and I also wanted to show the 50-mile radius because in the world of touring arts and entertainment, larger buildings can effectively preclude competition because when they buy a touring artist they will have in their contract an area of exclusion; meaning you cannot perform within 50 miles of here in the next six month. In this region you have not just large facilities in the 30-mile range but when you look at further away to Hanover and Worcester and Boston; there are a lot of large buildings that have heavy presenting activity that could restrain your options for touring artists. This is my favorite visual to understand a set of facilities. The horizontal axis is the capacity and on the vertical axis is our judgement of quality. We used eight different attributes to score a 1 to 4; 4 being good and 1 being not so good. It facility conditions, staff and support, theatrical functionality, acoustics, customer amenities, user amenities, atmospheric character and suitability for users. We scored them all and averaged it in order to come to some kind of a quality rating. It is subjective, it is us but hopefully it is consistently subjective. Here is what we observed for local facilities. Lots of tiny under 200 seat facilities and then Court Street and to Nashua High Schools and Keefe Auditorium. There are a couple of larger but generally low to moderate quality. Then if you add the regional facilities they are better quality at pretty much all of the capacities. I think it is significant that there is a gap between 1,000 and 1,800 seats. The one tricky part of this is that we have been made aware of two projects that are a mid-range capacity level that are coming on-line but we are not allowed to say what they are yet; it is not public information and if that reporter is here that was trying to get me to say it the other day, I'm still not going to say it. Here we looked at availability so the high availability ones are red, medium is blue and low availability is yellow. The size of the dot reflects how many different types of activity a venue supports. There is pretty good availability but not great for large capacity. This is just pure performance facilities; we have a school and university facility so as is often the case a lot of the facilities are that. Then one church facility that seems to be actively used and then other types; a bar and a clubhouse. To us that indicates a couple of gaps in that inventory; the smaller size and the larger size. The other facilities we inventoried just because we kept hearing wouldn't it be great if there were a better meeting and event space in Nashua. We took an inventory of all of the banquet halls from the Radisson down and what we noticed is that there is a pretty good inventory and lots of spaces. We would suggest that there really is only one in the downtown, they are all away from the urban core and secondly, they are of moderate quality, there are not a lot of great ones. That then becomes a separate opportunity. The third issue is the question of utilization and user demand. We looked at Keefe

Auditorium which is pretty busy first because of the school, then the symphony, then Actorsingers and community concerts but I would say it's quite busy. In 2015 there was almost 200 days of activity. Anything more than 250 days is a very busy room. We did the same thing on Court Street and here it's a combination of the Peacock Player's and the ActorSingers, Stage Coach, the Theater Guild and a couple of other smaller groups. This also is approaching a pretty high level of business for that space. We heard a lot of strong opinions both about Keefe and Court Street. People have been struggling about what do we do with these buildings for a long time and everyone is quite sure that they know the answer as to whether it should be reused or not. You will see that I am holding out the option for improving some existing facilities rather than starting from scratch but there are significant challenges to that in both of these cases. Court Street, in particular, people really wanted to talk about the problems there and said don't you dare suggest that you want to renovate that building. The other key issue then is what is the demand on the part of the users. We say to them, let's imagine that we gave you a nice room, how often would you use it and what for and are you moving what you have from somewhere to here or are you adding something new and still do what you were doing there. And, by the way, it probably won't open for 4 to 5 years. What it comes down to is that there is a little bit of demand for 750+ coming from the Symphony New Hampshire, ActorSingers that represents about 45 days of activity. More use, about twice that use for about 350 to 500 seats (inaudible) and then quadruple that at 166 days of potential use of a smaller 350 seat venue. That really is based on Court Street and Keefe being replaced or improved so it is not in addition to the activity in those places. The other element of this is that we are always with these projects looking for partners, someone to help partner in building, operating and programming. We talked a lot with representatives of the educational sector and we love it when the secondary and post-secondary schools want to participate in these projects. They bring daytime use and they are good at taking care of buildings, they are good at fundraising, they bring kids into the building and they create a more vibrant downtown. We talked to a series of local developers who are really working hard to repurpose existing structures in the community and some of the projects are already arts friendly and there seems to be more interest in doing more along that line. We also learned a lot about your emerging tech and business communities that are growing and we see an opportunity to develop facilities that bring a vibrancy that they are interested in as well as spaces that they can use on a day-to-day basis. The fourth issue is why this is a good thing for Nashua. Here we refer to the planning that you have been doing as a community and your Arts and Cultural Plan of 2015 specifically talks about your challenges around identity, education, driving commerce, centralization, growth and the idea that facilities are a strong way to get you there. We are even more interested in not just arts plans but broader community plans so we looked at your Consolidated Plan and the Home Investment Partnership Program that talked about these goals, strengthening neighborhoods, improving economic opportunities, quality of space and so on. We jumped onto those. We think there is a strong wave for the projects that we are talking about to respond to those community challenges. There are other good things like building a place that has a good quality of life, helping to attract businesses, helping you to keep workers here, neighborhood and community development and this idea that the MFA is the new MBA; the idea of teaching creativity and innovation as a skill that is important in the workplace.

Our conclusion is that we say to build a brand new stand-alone large capacity Performing Arts Center is challenged by the proximity to other large presenting Performing arts center's and limited demand on the part of local users for a venue with capacities of over 750 -1,500 seats. Additionally you have these two venues that are regularly used but are in great need of improvement. Having said that, we do see a tremendous opportunity to do more here. We are very impressed by the diversity of creative product in your community, there are a lot of interesting artists doing great work here who seem to be very committed to the development of Nashua as a community. These are not artists working in their tower of the tortured souls but artists who care about Nashua and the community and want to play a role in driving that future. Our recommendations are all about harnessing that arts-momentum and resources and directing them to help you move forward. We outlined a series of options. There was a fourth option but our Steering Committee quickly disabused us as that one as being a bad idea so we have three good options. One is to partner with a regional college or university on the development of a new downtown arts center. If we can find an educational partner it would really strengthen the case to do a medium or larger capacity hall. Secondly, to develop a downtown meeting events and music space. The very good regional place is in Portsmouth, 3S Arts Spaces. Great space and is really good for music. It's not your parent's art center and it can support a wide range of music programs;

traditional, classical and folk but it's also a contemporary music venue and it has the potential to do meetings and special events as well. The third option is to develop an arts district anchored by a renovated Keefe Auditorium and Hunt Building. Keefe Auditorium, even though it's only a block from Main Street feels like another world out there so it's the idea of creating a district that tries to build between that end of Main Street and the other end of Main Street.

Option one depends on finding an educational sector partner. We tested the waters and we are not just thinking local but getting the University of New Hampshire or Southern New Hampshire or Rivier or the Nashua Community College interested in doing something like this. We have to do it carefully and strategically and interest them in coming down the aisle with us to do something like that. We like these partnerships with education sector buildings profoundly impact cities and particularly downtown's and because these partners bring resources to these projects. The meetings, events and music centers are a reflection of the fact that a building that supports a broader range of programming can play a significant role in the economic development of Nashua. This piece brings more activity and it drives earned income and supports local businesses. To me it sort of begs for the adaptive reuse of some great buildings in Nashua. It would be great to use some existing structures to be able to create great places for meetings, events, music and performances. Then there is the idea of the district, the Hunt Building all the way to the Keefe Auditorium. The idea is maybe renovating Keefe Auditorium is a worthy option. We presented these ideas to the group and again, we wanted to say that it's really important that you all as a community decide which of these you want to move forward with. People kept asking what I would suggest if I could suggest one and I hope this is fair. We said if we could do one thing, we really think the idea of art's district is so great. You have an amazing Main Street with existing structures and maybe it's hard to connect Keefe Auditorium to that. Maybe instead you find structures or sites near Main Street that can be redeveloped or developed. Here we would encourage two pieces that is a 300 to 400 seat piece and another 750 plus or minus seat piece. Both of those have a relatively high level of flexibility so that they are good for the traditional Performing Arts Center but also for contemporary arts for meeting and special events. We also think the addition of the meeting and event capability is important but we also think it would be great if you could find an educational sector partner and again, it's really a matter of encouraging discussions to start and continue to see if those partnerships are there.

My final slide and questions for you all are do you think that we have fairly described the situation and the opportunities, have we missed anything in terms of the basic information we have collected. Do you think that our recommendations are in line with your sense of needs and most importantly, how you would like to move forward? I'm happy to answer any questions.

Alderman Lopez

I'm curious about the design of a meeting center. Did you receive feedback and consider conventions as part of your space usage?

Mr. Webb

No, we were pushing more in the area of conferences rather than conventions; meaning your market is regional meetings and events as opposed to larger national trade show type things that generally would require you to have an on-site hotel and a much larger footprint. We think the opportunity is to do something where the market is Nashua and the region around it.

Alderman Lopez

I was thinking specifically of SteamPunk or AnniMae conventions; events that happen pretty frequently in Manchester and Boston; not necessarily a business convention.

Mr. Webb

We don't want that capacity to become the tail that's wagging the dog. Still we are talking about a capacity of up to 1,000 people for events.

Alderman Clemons

I understand that you looked at an educational partner but did you discuss at all having a corporate partner or a hotel that might be interested in coming to downtown Nashua and being the catalyst that spurs all of this?

Mr. Webb

We did not hear specifically about big corporate partners and hotels that are coming here. If you are aware of those opportunities we should explore those but we didn't hear those in our research.

Alderman Clemons

You didn't hear that from people in the local community? Downtown Nashua does not have a hotel right now and one of the things that make a downtown vibrant is a hotel in my opinion. I have always envisioned with the Performing Arts Center having something like that intertwined and I'm not sure if the opportunity is there along with a conference center and things like that.

Mr. Webb

We have the same issue in downtown Peterborough. I think the things we are talking about here, building a district along Main Street and adding some of the facilities we are talking about will be the thing that brings a hotel to the community rather than the other way around. Hotel developers aren't free thinkers often; they need to see a very specific set of market conditions in place before they take their risk.

Alderman Siegel

Regarding hotels, a friend of mine is a hotel developer and I had him look into this last term and his statement to me was that Nashua's downtown doesn't have any specific economic drivers that would warrant a hotel of any size. The hospital does not count. He also said that the market is relatively saturated in general for Nashua and most of the hotels need to be more accessible to transportation. He was a little negative about it. I think as far as the chicken and egg problem he wants to go after it after the egg is hatched. I appreciate all of the effort that you put into this and there is a lot of good information and it was done in a pretty organized way. One of the things that I see up there is that there was a question of the users saying okay, how many days would you use this facility. I guess part of me says that I understand that you can almost put any number there. A facility that is particularly good you could say you would use it all of the time. I have a room full of synthesizers and if you gave me a gigantic performance hall I would want to be in there every day to play them but the problem is what I would like to see as a metric is what says how many dollar performance days are there and what are they worth because ultimately there has to be some economic driver that helps to pay for everything, otherwise you are going to ask the city taxpayers to dip into their pockets which isn't going to be very popular. We would like these things to help pay for themselves.

Mr. Webb

Right, so the level of demand is now based on us talking with them about how many performances they are currently doing and their aspirations. You are right, it's often a problem that groups will say they will be in there for 8 weeks so we have moderated those numbers a little bit but the other thing is that this next round of work, the business planning, is very much about proving the financial capacity of users to pay rent and to build a financial model that suggests a building that is sustainable for the long-term. We started to nibble around that

question a little bit enough so we could make activity projections that we feel are reasonable but we really need to dig into that question in the next round.

Alderman Moriarty

I'd like to complement you on the presentation. It was about two years ago we had a concept of arts center. At that time, it seemed to me the two pieces of information we needed was a survey of available centers in the region and a survey of demand. The fact you brought exactly those two, I'm very happy to see. It was a letdown. I saw this coming when we saw the conclusions on Slide 41. The very first sentence, the case for building a new large capacity performing arts venue is challenged by the city's proximity, etc. I was hoping for better news. I presume you've done these studies a lot. Can you give us an example of a case where you did a study and the conclusion was the case was strong?

Mr. Webb

My friend lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Chapel Hill doesn't have a performing arts center. Chapel Hill is a performing arts center. We're replacing the old image of a palace of the arts into an image of a community of an urban area that effectively becomes an arts center. You can develop it over time. It drives commercial development. It drives cultural tourism and attracts businesses to locate here and ultimately to be the thing that convinces a hotel to be developed. We feel there's demand that is not being satisfied by the current set of facilities. The Symphony is in good shape. There's the Riverwalk Coffee Shop. The programming they are doing is terrific.

Alderman Lopez

When you are talking about an arts district, and the comment you just made about the other community, I'm thinking of a trip I went to Florida with Positive Street Arts. We went to Art Basel which is an international art Convention. It's unbelievably well set up, very, very exclusive. It's not a 24/7 situation. Then we also went to another community called Wynwood Walls where graffiti art was on every visible surface for several blocks. The excitement wasn't this is a one-time event; it was more this is an experience. The community was part of it. There were different clubs and restaurants that were part of it. It was an active community, not just built-up for a one-time event. When you say create an art district, are you imagining that kind of synergy between multiple locations throughout the year?

Mr. Webb

One, it's year round. Two, you can events and festivals that help drive it, but it needs to be a year-round thing to drive year-round economic activity plus new adaptable use plus potentially new construction plus commercial development.

Alderman Lopez

So it is not just building two buildings; it's to encourage the development of many, many different levels of activity.

Alderman Clemons

The problem with the Keefe Auditorium, aside from the fact that it would need to be renovated, is it is owned by the school district. It couldn't really come from the city as far as what kind of control we would have over the facility or the renovations. The school is the board that oversees that. I like the idea of an arts district, but how much the Keefe Auditorium could be an anchor for that I'm not so sure.

Alderman McCarthy

I would comment when we had the steering committee meeting, I had much the same comment. Keefe is detached both physically and programmatically from the rest of downtown. One of the things we are trying to achieve is to help with downtown. An arts district that is centered more up close to the Temple Street intersection, which is ostensibly the city's 100 percent corner as of now, that involves probably the use of Court Street and another facility, seems to be the sort of thing we might be able to get the advantages of the district. I came forward with the proposal to do something, and we had not gotten to the Spring Street proposal. I am now thinking that something a little more distributed than that, using some of the existing facilities and building what we need to build, but keeping it in the proximity of Main Street and the existing downtown, would probably get us what we want and would probably wind up being cheaper than the thing we had envisioned. When we look at the 750 seat auditorium, one of the discussions we had is, if we renovate Court Street and go ahead with the plan to put the big auditorium on the Spring Street site, but just elevate it above the existing lot so we're not losing the parking or any of the other things, you still get a facility that can be connected to Court Street; at a second level can be connected to Main Street at a first level. We can build what becomes a district because it is distributed a little geographically and provides the number and size venues that we need.

Chairwoman Melizzi-Golja

Mr. Webb, I would just like to thank you. The thing I find encouraging is your comments about including the local colleges. As someone who has lived in several college towns when I moved here 20 years ago, I was amazed to see we would never know we had a college down Main Street. I've always thought trying to partner with Rivier at a minimum is something that would be a benefit for both communities.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairwoman Melizzi-Golja

I'm going to open it up to public comment, but before I do that the first public comment is a document I received from Meri Goyette. I will read that first and then open it for public comment.

Good evening, since I am unable to attend this meeting, I hope that someone will be kind enough to read the following. As a participant and observer of the art scene in Nashua for fifty odd years, I thank you for the opportunity to express my thoughts regarding the proposed building of a performance art center. Nashua has grown and visual and performing arts have been shown to be of importance to the economic and well-being of a city. Over the years, the arts flourished. The opera house was above the railroad station, and there were movie theaters in the downtown. On Sunday afternoons, music lovers gathered at homes and musicians played for friends. Art work, created by area artists, was exhibited in Greeley Park and the Nashua Arts and Science Center opened its doors to the public with Director Jafar Shoja at the helm. Art lessons and workshops were available, and art from the Boston area was exhibited. The prime movers of Nashua's first art center on East Pearl Street were very involved, giving financial aid and expertise. The small house on East Pearl Street outgrew its purpose and it was decided to pursue an ambitious plan, a new center. Architects were brought in, funds were raised and in a short time, the new center was created, complete with a concert hall, offices, exhibition space, a children's museum and food available to the public, staffed in the "eatery" by volunteers. Members of "The Muses", and youth organization, were bused to Boston with visits to the Museum of Science, the Wax Museum, historic sites and in the summer, north shore beaches. A memorable experience was arranged for boys, ranging in age from ten to the early teens: a trip to the Kennedy Space Center for the lift-off of Apollo 11, the first manned flight to the moon. Unfortunately, it was evident that Nashua could not support this facility due to

many unforeseen factors, and it was closed, to be opened again as the Court Street Theater, now called the Janice B. Streeter Theater. 14 Court Street is home to Peacock Players and Symphony, NH and the Janice Streeter Theatre is booked with community productions, movies and dinner outdoor in the downtown; food, entertainment and unique experiences for all tastes and ages in Nashua. Concerts in churches, small productions at the Hunt Memorial Building and school and college auditoriums, art in downtown windows and more, this is our city today! My suggestion: concentrate on what we have –improve existing buildings, Court Street, Elm Street, rather than spend funds for a large, expensive performance art center. In addition, the Indian Head Bank building, a magnificent and historic landmark on Main Street is for sale!! The floor plan shows that with planning, it could be used as a "chamber for the arts housing a visitor's center, a gift shop and offices for various art organizations, art exhibits, a movie theater and more. This evening we are here to hear details of the second study of a Performing Arts Center. Thank you for the opportunity to state my thoughts, unchanged since the first study was made. I see Nashua different than its neighboring cities. I see no need for a performance art center. My reasons what I call, "pockets of art" enliven our city. The summer season begins in Greeley Park and music and theater performances at the hatch shell. International artists come to Nashua, under the direction of John M. Weidman, creating sculpture for the only such international sculpture symposium in the nation, producing public art with funding from our community. Symphony New Hampshire and the community concert series, ActorSingers, and Gate City Ballet perform at Keefe Center for the Arts that have the largest seating in the state. Dinner with movies in the open, downtown, food, entertainment and unique experiences for all tastes and ages in Nashua: the Court Street building, school auditoriums, art in downtown windows, and more. This is what our city today and once again concentrate on what we have. Improve the buildings: Court Street, Elm Street with funds expected to be received for a large, expensive performance and art center. Nashua already has art everywhere! Let's concentrate on making what we have even better.

Respectfully submitted by Meri Goyette.

Ms. Latha Mangipudi, 20 Salmon Brook Drive

You touched upon the cultural diversity and racial and ethnic diversity, but I didn't see a whole lot of need for bringing all the cultural diversity and ethnic diversity to downtown. We still live in silos. The Performing Arts Center is like the high schools and Keefe Auditorium. It's all school based. If you have to have a performance or art on a rotating regular basis, there has to be an anchor in downtown. What would that be?

Mr. Claude Nivens, 3 Bartemus Trail, Hollis

For 37 years I worked for Raytheon. I retired in 1995. At that time I decided to go back to college and study art at the New Hampshire Institute of Art. It took about three years. I was looking for an art association to join down in the Nashua area, and couldn't find one. I joined the Manchester one. About three years after that our daughter divorced with five kids and moved to Nashville to work. We went down to support her, and I found a lot of visual art. We joined the league in Nashville, the Fish Center which is donated by the Fish Foundation. The old post office they converted to a visual arts center. There was an old bath house that they converted to studios. Artists would come in once a week to work with other artists. The arts have a tremendous effect on depression, anxiety and even with children they are finding great, great benefits and older people with dementia. We were there for ten years and we were able to do in an arts center. We had one gallery for the 200 members. We had another gallery for the invited artists throughout the United States to come in. We did a lot of work with disabled children, after school programs. We had another gallery for the homeless and disabled children to display their art. When we came back to Nashua, I looked for a place to join. The Nashua Arts Association started moving around. They were on Pearl Street for a while, in the Mill buildings for a while.

Then they moved to the Hunt. A short time ago, RJ Finley gave them space at Temple Street. It's a first class gallery if you've seen it. We're growing. We had an Emerging Artist Student Talent Show in March, and we had over 60 students come in. We have our 63<sup>rd</sup> Annual Greeley Park Show. We'd like to see something for the visual arts.

Mr. Ken Gide

I'm from Ward 6, my alderman is Ben Clemons. It was Ben Clemons' mother who got me to run to be a state representative. Ben, tell your mother I am looking for her. I am a state representative, fourth term. I'm on the Commerce Committee which is banking and insurance. I put a bill in last year to study the economic impact of the arts and culture in the State of New Hampshire. I just wanted to comment and say I thought it was excellent. My opinion would be to put a parking garage right where the library parking is. The 30 Temple Street is always looking for parking. I'm sure they would donate a little bit of land where you could expand the arts and science center more. You would have a parking garage that would run a ramp right to the arts center. I'm sure 30 Temple Street would love to run a walkway to their building because their building when it was full, and I worked there before, their biggest complaint was there is no parking. I think you're on the right step, but I do hope that the aldermen and the mayor can one day sit down and talk because I can tell you a lot of what we have found. I just started to right the report. In our committee, there is a Martha Fuller Clark Senator, Fred Rice, Danielson and myself. We've got the library, we have the travel people. We've looked at Nashua, and we've looked at the state. I think I could be helpful, but this is not the time. Thank you very much. Good job.

Ms. Tracy Hatch, 31 Pennichuck Street

I'm the President and CEO of the Greater Nashua Chamber of Commerce. I also am the Chairman of the Nashua Arts Commission. I wanted to express the Chamber's support in general for the work that is being done. We recently adopted a strategic plan which includes advancing and supporting a thriving arts and cultural environment within the City of Nashua. This is right in line with the work that we are hoping to be able to support. You looked at demand by arts organization in terms of days use. Did you also look at audience demand, for example people who might today go to Boston to go to the theatre and how often that might be used.

Mr. Webb

The first slide is about market size, market characteristics and market potential. We do believe there is untapped potential within that 15 mile range of relatively well educated, relatively underserved potential.

Ms. Hatch

Did you look at costs of renovation of existing facilities versus construction of a new facility?

Mr. Webb

That's the work that Scott will lead us in the next round, looking at choices of renovations versus replace.

Ms. Hatch

Did you look at whether any restrictions on the current facilities would impact whether or not they could be used for the purposes you might want to have them? I think particularly of the restrictions of alcohol at Keefe Auditorium.

Mr. Webb

It is important, and it's not just because we want to have a drink. The fact is that when you are trying to create a social atmosphere and environment, things like that does matter.

Mr. Chris Williams, 7 Mahogany Drive

The earlier slides, the comparisons of different size venues, you were talking about venues that were 1,000 or 2,000 seats or more, and there is a high number of those already in existence. Therefore, anything higher than 750 would not really be to our advantage, is that correct?

Mr. Webb

We want to be a little bit vague about the exact seat count. If we could get 750 up to 1000, for the Symphony if we could push a little higher that would be great, but we are definitely discouraging 1500 plus.

Mr. Williams

The reason why I pressed on that is I wouldn't want us to use the logic of not competing with other venues that are 1500 seats or more because they already exist and then forget that the Palace Theater in Manchester is just under 900 seats and therefore put a 750 seat theater in our city that is going to just directly compete with them. If it is something around 1000 seats I think that's terrific for us to pursue.

Mr. Bob Edwards

I have no association with Nashua. I did buy a car once. We are here from Peterborough and are involved with the ConVal Vision and Performance Arts opportunity. When I read the preferred options and you refer to continual discussion with regional educational facilities, it interests us because ours would potentially be on the campus of the high school. I understand this might be private tax dollars as opposed to tax dollars, which is similar to what we are talking about. When you were talking about education, did you consider any aspect for technical arts component, in addition to band and drama, which might lead to corporate sponsors to help with the private fundraising effort? I'm thinking of something to do with filming or audio type of education.

Mr. Webb

If there is an educational partner and they want to drive the curriculum in that direction, absolutely. Those are difficult pieces to add without users, sponsors, and partners.

Ms. Latha Mangipudi

How do you propose packaging of attracting international or other tourists from Boston to Nashua?

Mr. Webb

I think it starts on the branding effort. You have to make a decision of what you want to sell to whom and then build a package around it. Attractions and amenities, visual and performing arts, will help you build a strong brand around downtown. Great vibrancy, affordable family entertainment. We're not going to drive that bus, but we see an opportunity to help the people who are in charge.

Mr. Williams

Was much consideration given in terms of the two different sites to our river, our riverfront downtown, the Mill Yard, etc., in terms of maybe that serving as a venue or is that something that gets addressed further down the process?

Mr. Webb

Scott is busting with a lot of other people to work on the site question. We have to figure out what to do first and then we will figure out where to put it and how to manage it and what it will cost. We are focusing just on the concept.

Liz Liz Ricoppi, 15 Middle Dunstable Road

I've been listening to this discussion for years. I'm troubled about the difference between 750 and 1000 seats. It's 250 seats but the difference is can our symphony performed there? Can the ActorSingers perform there? In addition, the arts district conceptually sounds really good but I can't conceive of it from Keefe to the Hunt. It's just huge. If we're talking about 750-1000 seat facility elsewhere, I think we should give some consideration to what's the difference between 750 and 1000.

Mr. Webb

Before these buildings are built, people argue about three things: 1) is there enough parking, 2) will there be enough women's bathrooms; and 3) seating capacity. The seating capacity is the most active and aggressive.

Mr. Bob Booth

I'm president of Symphony New Hampshire Board. We regularly sell more than 750 tickets. We've gone to 1480 within the last couple of years. That would hinder our growth. Our last production of the season got a half-page glowing review in the Boston Globe. There are other groups in the community that regularly sell large ticket numbers as well.

Mr. James Vayo, Downtown Specialist for the Division of Economic Development

Some time ago I had the opportunity to interview it Duncan about this project and the study. I shared my opinions with him, and it's neither here nor there. It's really for the community to decide what the most feasible approach is. At that time Duncan had brought up the idea of an arts district in the meeting. It never dawned on me to even think about that as a potential outcome of the study. I think it is brilliant because some of the best experiences I have had in patronizing the arts has been in places where art wasn't defined by four walls of a facility. It was defined by the community. Those two examples are the Mass Mocas in North Adams. If you go down the main street in North Adams, you see something called Moca Main Street. The art and the culture of the arts spread throughout all of the downtown area which is largely abandoned and seeded life where life did not exist before. The second example of this arts district is an entire town in New York known as Beacon, New York. There's a very well renowned facility called the dia. Dia is directly connected via the commuter rail to New York City. All these artists associated with New York City have set up camp in Beacon. When you walk down the Main Street, you see all the storefronts. Some are businesses, some are art facilities. It's really quite a remarkable experience. Many of the single family homes have been bought by arts, 40 – 50 percent of them have sculptures in their front yards. I think this idea of a district could play into our economy in a very positive way. I very much award you for that thought bubble, and I will hold the torch for as much as possible.

REMARKS BY THE ALDERMEN

Alderman Siegel

It's all well and good to talk about art districts, but this nice, cuddly art district is wedged in a neighborhood arena around Main Street which is less than desirable and that's a problem. Every single art district that you refer to that are thriving art districts, the surrounding streets are generally regarded as fine. It's a real issue that we face in Nashua. I'm concerned that we can pour a lot of effort and thought into something without recognizing that we have to get people to come down. People will come down when they feel it's a worthwhile place to be. Main Street is fine, but there is genuine concern that people have with what's going on in the surrounding streets.

Alderman Clemons

I live on one of those streets Alderman Siegel is talking about, and I find it a fine place to live. I think building something like this downtown is going to be something that will lift up the neighborhood. It will be a catalyst that will spark interest in the neighborhood surrounding downtown. I think it will naturally uplift the area.

Mr. Scott Aquilina, Bruner/Cott Architects

A model of a town in-between where Duncan and I grew up - I grew up in Buffalo, New York, and Duncan grew up in Toronto - is Niagara-on-the-Lake. It's a beautiful destination town where the Niagara River hits Lake Ontario. They have a great big festival theater for the Shaw Festival that has more than venue within it. When I was growing up, and when Duncan was growing up and we went to visit it, it didn't have that big venue. It had a series of smaller venues on the Main Street. You would go and enjoy dinner and you would enjoy a performance. It was all kind of woven into the fabric. It worked then and I think it's an interesting model for you. It could eventually lead to some grander thing down the road, but it's a great place to start.

Alderman Clemons

I actually went to Niagara-on-the-Lake in February. It's a beautiful town. Even in the dead of winter in Canada, it was an exciting place to visit. That is a good example. When we went there, it was initially a trip to Niagara Falls. When we went to the town and saw everything, this is the place. We went to Niagara Falls but that is the place we are going to back to. It was a great experience.

Alderman Siegel

I noticed there are people who spoke that are not from the Nashua area, I was wondering to what extent you tried to recruit people from outside the Nashua area to contribute financially to this?

Mr. Webb

Yes we have to get contributions from outside, but this is a project that has to be driven by the voters and taxpayers of Nashua first. We can hope and believe given our experience in other communities that financing will come from away if it's a good enough project.

Mr. Jamison Hoff

I live out in Hollis. I would encourage the people in Nashua who would be involved in the project to get experts in fundraising to understand periods of high economic activity are followed by recession. It's very difficult to raise funds in a deep recession. There are a number of significant other non-profit organizations right in Nashua that cycle through significant capital campaigns. They have learned to get in line and not run campaigns at the same time. If the City of Nashua plans to partner with the Greater Nashua region or a

shared fundraising, I think it would behoove the members of the committee to do some research about when those other organizations already existing in Nashua plan their next capital campaign.

Chairwoman Melizzi-Golja

We talked earlier this evening that we will be getting together for a follow-up discussion. We are looking at June 10 for that follow-up meeting. The conversation isn't ending here. You are always welcome to join us. In the next weeks if you have thoughts, feel free to communicate with us.

COMMUNICATIONS - None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS - None

NEW BUSINESS - None

GENERAL DISCUSSION

PUBLIC COMMENT

REMARKS BY THE ALDERMEN

Alderman O'Brien

I would just like to thank you for giving us the opportunity, the non-members of the committee, to come and hear this. This is part of the vision, and I thank you because now I have part of the vision to improve Nashua. Thank you for your presentation.

ADJOURNMENT

**MOTION BY ALDERMAN CLEMONS TO ADJOURN  
MOTION CARRIED**

The meeting was declared adjourned at 8:37 p.m.

Alderman-at-Large Daniel T. Moriarty  
Committee Clerk