

# “MUST HAVES & DON’T WANTS”

## **SUMMARY OF DECEMBER 9, 2014 MEETING FINDINGS**

Alderman Brian McCarthy and Mayor Donnalee Lozeau invited stakeholders to a facilitated meeting to help the community begin to construct a vision for the design needs of a Performing Arts Center in downtown Nashua. The meeting was designed to create the list of “must haves” and “don’t wants” to act as the framework for the creation of a Performing Arts Center.

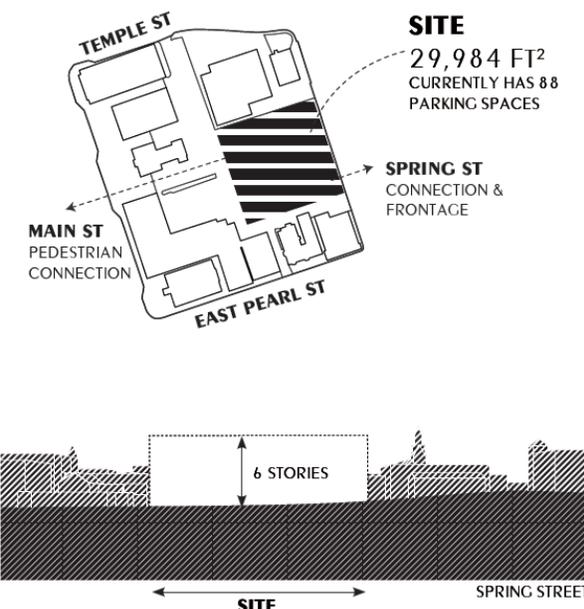
# “MUST HAVES & DON’T WANTS”

## SUMMARY OF DECEMBER 9, 2014 MEETING FINDINGS

### OVERVIEW

The City of Nashua has mulled the creation of a Performing Arts Venue in the downtown for decades. In the last several years a reawakening of the discussion ensued through the creation of the Nashua Arts Commission by Mayor Lozeau, the ongoing efforts of City Arts Nashua and the Chamber of Commerce, and an upwelling of grass roots community arts initiatives.

Alderman McCarthy and Mayor Lozeau brought the discussion back into the public eye in the fall of 2014 with a presentation to the Planning and Economic Development Committee by the Community Development Division’s Design & Research Assistant Renee Reder and Director Sarah Marchant, in collaboration with Economic Development Director Tom Galligani. The proposal detailed a new modern venue designed to meet the identified space needs from the 2002 Nashua Arts Center feasibility study, within the footprint of the Spring Street parking as summarized below.



The diagram consists of two parts. The top part is a site plan showing a block bounded by Temple St to the north, East Pearl St to the south, and Main St to the west. A specific site on Spring St is highlighted with diagonal hatching. Labels indicate 'SITE' (29,984 FT<sup>2</sup>, currently has 88 parking spaces) and 'SPRING ST CONNECTION & FRONTAGE'. A dashed line shows a 'MAIN ST PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION'. The bottom part is an elevation drawing showing a 6-story building on the site, with 'SPRING STREET' labeled below it.

**PROPOSED SITE INFORMATION**

THIS VISION PROPOSES A 5-6 STORY STRUCTURE USING A SITE ON SPRING STREET CURRENTLY USED BY A PARKING LOT WITH A PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION TO MAIN STREET.

**PROPOSAL**

BASED ON THE 2002 ARTS FEASIBILITY STUDY, IT INCLUDES:

- 100 PARKING SPACES
- 1000 SEAT THEATER
- 300 SEAT FLEX THEATER
- 100 SEAT MULTIPURPOSE ROOM (CONFERENCE SPACE)
- RESTAURANT & EVENTS/LOBBY SPACE
- STAFF AREA
- CIRCULATION ATRIUM
- OUTDOOR ROOF GARDEN

**DESIGN DESCRIPTION**

THE PROPOSAL SUBDIVIDES THE SITE INTO TWO VOLUMES WITH A CIRCULATION ATRIUM BETWEEN. THE FACADE COMBINES GLASS AND A WHITE BAFFLES TO CREATE TWO FLOATING BOXES FROM THE TWO VOLUMES. THE FIRST IS A WHITE BAFFLED 1000 SEAT THEATER ON A GLASS FACADED LOBBY/RESTAURANT. THE SECOND IS A WHITE BAFFLED PARKING AREA WITH A GLASS VOLUME FLOATING ABOVE INCLUDING THE 300 SEAT, 100 SEAT, AND STAFF SPACES WITH THE NASHUA SKYLINE AS THE BACKDROP.

THE PROPOSAL CELEBRATES A NEW VIEW OF NASHUA AND ART WHILE CONTINUING TO INVIGORATE NASHUA’S DOWNTOWN. VISIT [GONASHUA.COM](http://GONASHUA.COM) TO SEE THE PRESENTATION AND PDF. EXPLORE THE ART OF POSSIBILITY!

•THIS PROPOSAL REPRESENTS ONE POSSIBLE VISION FOR A PERFORMING ARTS CENTER IN NASHUA. IT IS SPECULATIVE AND CONCEPTUAL AT THIS STAGE AND THE POSSIBILITY WILL REQUIRE FURTHER STUDY.

Viewing the presentation as a kick off point, Alderman McCarthy and Mayor Lozeau moved forward with a facilitated public engagement session at Rivier University’s Dion Center entitled “Must Haves and Don’t Wants”. The purpose of the meeting was to construct a design framework for a downtown Performing Arts venue that stakeholders could move forward with. The meeting included stakeholders in the performing and visual arts, in the professional and business communities, city officials, and other engaged people from the community.

## DISCUSSION TOPICS

To ensure the meeting was able to focus on the actual design needs of a performing arts venue in Nashua, the participants were given the following ground rules:

- The location is intended to be downtown, but has not been solidified yet.
- The discussion was not to be limited by fiscal constraints.
- Assume the venue will have sufficient parking.
- The venue will meet all current codes for construction standards, ADA accessibility, and the number of bathrooms.

The engagement session participants worked in small breakout groups focused on specific discussion topics to extract the major needs and wants for a performing arts facility in downtown Nashua.

### Performance Space

Two breakout groups focused on the Performance Space needs of a venue. The groups came up with the following key design elements.

#### **MARQUEE**

A digital marquee with the ability to advertise directly on Main Street is essential in the design of the overall venue. The marquee should be able to accommodate headshots and show photos or advertising for current and future shows.

#### **LOBBY**

The lobby should be grand, welcoming, and spacious to allow for mingling, promotion of events, and showcase a gallery of world class visual arts. The lobby should be designed with the potential to host *fancy receptions* as well as including a one-stop easy ticketing box office. The lobby should be comfortable with space for the service of food and drinks.

#### **GALLERY SPACE**

The venue design should include sufficient space and materials in the walls and ceilings to properly display a variety of visual arts. The gallery would be ideal to display cyclical exhibits and should be managed and promoted to draw patrons from a large geographical area.

*“Our ideal facility needs to be able to accommodate a variety of different performance art style spaces, as well as a variety of audience sizes.”*

*~ Performance Space  
Breakout Group*

## PERFORMANCE STYLES VENUE

The venue should be designed to accommodate a variety of different performance styles. Theater space has different physical design requirements than dance performance space or recital halls, and all should be accommodated within this venue. Options include *black box windowless theater space*, *¾ thrust performance space*, *large stage productions*, and *large movie screen space*. Lastly, participants highlighted the need for an orchestra pit and areas for musicians within the performance space design.

## TECHNICAL

The venue should include state of the art lighting and sound systems, with the ability to adapt to future technology. Sound and lighting booths should be included in all performance spaces, including lighting grid designs and a walkable lighting grid for the larger performance spaces. The venue should have outstanding acoustics and sound separation between performance spaces. Acoustics should be designed to accommodate the variety of performance types the venue is expected to host. Lastly, the technology infrastructure should be designed to accommodate projection in all of the performance and event spaces.

## UTILITIES

The venue should incorporate the use of solar and wind energy, along with excellent HVAC systems which work in concert with the acoustics design.

## SEATING

Seating for the venue garnered a significant amount of responses. Seating should first and foremost be *comfortable with ample leg room*. In addition, seating should be *staggered to provide unobstructed sight lines* and be spaced to provide wide aisles between seats.

## ACCESSORY/BACKSTAGE SPACE

In contrast to existing facilities in the city, the new venue should provide significant backstage space. Design of backstage should include *multiple dressing rooms*, *backstage bathrooms*, *storage rooms*, *easy to control stage features (such as curtains, drops, flies, and lighting)*, *ample fly space* and an *intercom system*. Separate and flexible rehearsal space should also be accommodated for larger events and or competitions. Loading dock access is essential to the backstage design. All performance space should have a large, accessible loading dock which allows for easily loading equipment and materials in and out of the performance spaces.

## PERFORMANCE PREP SPACE

Performance preparation space is essential to support both the variety of performance spaces and backstage needs. This space would include a *scene shop*, *costume shop*, and *storage areas for props, sets*, and event related materials including tables and chairs.

## OFFICE/CLASSROOM SPACE

The venue will need ample space for offices of venue administrative staff but should also include office space for local non-profit arts groups. In addition, *classroom space* for a variety of arts, *lecture space*, *hands on art space*, and *rehearsal space* were included as essential support spaces.

## OUTDOOR SPACE

Rooftop outdoor space for performances, exhibits, music, demos and movies was strongly supported in any venue design. A rooftop outdoor space should include gardens (which could support restaurants or catering uses in the building) and have adequate electricity, sound, projection, lighting and water, to support the wide variety of activities outdoor space could support.

## OVERALL

The participants were overwhelmingly supporting of a downtown performing arts center and want to see the project completed *in the near term*; they want to see this project move from a discussion to reality. The venue should support large audiences with a minimum of 1500 seats, and smaller audiences with a 300 seat venue to support many of the existing groups. The venue should have the flexibility to accommodate small and large events, as well as an *identity*; it should feel like a special place. Design styles ranged from *elegant, modern, green, and aesthetically pleasing inside and out*. It is recommended that a professional arts space designer be utilized in the design process, with the overall goal to create a venue that *professional artists would be eager to perform in* to attract big name performers and comfortably accommodate audience members.

## Catering, Classroom, Conference & Arts Space

### CATERING/RESTAURANT SPACE

The venue should provide sufficient space for a full time, year round restaurant that patrons might want to enjoy, even if they don't have other plans within the facility. The restaurant should have a visual presence on a frontage street with direct access to the exterior. The restaurant kitchen should be sufficiently sized and designed to provide catering facilities for the entire venue, or catering facilities should be provided in some form on all floors. An excellent restaurant with *healthy and delicious food* should provide the options of *alcohol* and *lunch & dinner service*. Snack options should also be available in the facility.

### CLASSROOM SPACE

Classroom space should be designed with easy to maintain floors, and proper ventilation for arts with chemicals or high heat needs. Classrooms should be equipped with sinks and washing space. Classrooms would provide needed space for studio workshop classes and ongoing programs for all age ranges. Classrooms should have flexible tables to serve different size groups and mediums.

### FLEXIBLE SPACE

The venue should be designed with flexibility to accommodate multiple groups of differing sizes at the same time. *Space should be adaptable to music, theater, lecture, film and other uses such as conference space*. Flexibility should also be provided between dining and gallery space.

### PROGRAMMING

Programming for uses should be available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day with a balance between local and national talent, and uses for all ages. The excellence of the facility would support excellent, *Broadway quality*, performances. The venue should be open to classes, conferences and other events when major performances are not taking place. School related activities should also have access to the venue's performance and arts spaces.

## MARKET ANALYSIS

A market analysis should be completed to understand what is attractive to artists and arts organizations, and what niche markets could this facility fill. Design the venue size and performance space options so local artists are not competing against each other.

## VISUAL ARTS

The venue should have space for rotating art exhibits inside, outside and on the roof. Visual arts can hang or be displayed in the lobby, conference and restaurant areas. Visual arts should have a rotating schedule.

## Business Model/Business Plan

### NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A study should be completed to determine what the needs are of the local community for both professional and non-professional performing arts and to determine what market and facility needs are not being met by other venues in the region. The large theater spaces should be sized to accommodate national touring performances and unmet regional market needs. The needs assessment should clearly document what makes this venue different from others in the region. Participants felt strongly this should be the next step in moving the creation of a facility forward.

### CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

A very public capital campaign should be undertaken by a private organization, with City support. The City should explore capital funding options of bonding and the potential creation of a TIF District.

### OPERATION STRUCTURE

The venue should have a sustainable revenue stream to support paid staff to ensure smooth operation and maintenance of the venue. The management team should provide support for all aspects of the venue's operations from bookings, marketing, management, facilities, office space and restaurant/catering. The venue should explore funding options including for profit, non-profit, fundraising campaigns and the potential for the creation of a foundation or endowment.

### OPERATING REVENUE

Participants suggested a wider array of potential revenue streams to be considered for the venue as follows: *restaurant/retail tenants, leasable space for arts groups and organizations, affordable rental space for small businesses and local non-profits, a year round cinema that leases space, concessions, rental space for local artist performances, creation of a facility surcharge fee on all tickets dedicated towards facility operations, rentable function space for private events, wedding receptions, and rentable rehearsal space.* The potential for the creation of a downtown central business district tax/fee to support the venue should also be considered.

*“Nashua is 45 minutes from Boston, Lowell, Portsmouth, and Concord. We need to identify what markets this venue can and should serve.”*

*~ Business Plan Breakout Group*

## MARKETING/BRANDING

The venue will need a top quality marketing team with the ability to reach local, regional, and national performers and patrons. The venue should provide fantastic signage and directories to identify relevant space uses.

## CONCLUSION

The engagement session provided valuable information for what stakeholders believe are the most important features when considering the creation of a new Performing Arts Center in downtown Nashua. The session concluded with the idea that the next step in moving this process forward is to complete an updated Needs Assessment or Analysis, to determine the facility design and understand the feasibility of a venue as described above. The participants were careful to note that the venue's potential should not be limited by basing it solely on the existing local performance and art needs, but ensure the venue can meet regional and national needs on some scale. The fiscal reality of building and sustaining a venue of this magnitude is incredibly important.

The session was given overwhelmingly positive feedback on the survey provided to participants at the end of the day. The meeting was described as productive in terms of motivation, collaboration between a diversity of stakeholders, open communication, and discussion, and established a solid support for moving the project forward.



NASHUA PERFORMING ARTS CENTER