

A White Paper on the Infrastructure Needs of the Asheville Civic Center
February 2005
Asheville Civic Center Commission

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The attached set of tables constitutes a White Paper on the current condition of the Asheville Civic Center. This document was created by a sub-committee of the Asheville Civic Center Commission with the sole purpose of building a factual basis upon which a decision about the future of the facility can be made. The information in this White Paper was compiled through interviews with center staff, key tenants, promoters, patrons, direct observation and research of existing documentation. A draft version was presented for their review to members of the City Council, the City Manager and the Civic Center Director. Their valuable comments and recommendations have been incorporated into this final version.

For those readers not familiar with the history of the center a short version follows. The core of the Asheville Civic Center, The Thomas Wolfe Auditorium, was built in the 1930s and open as the Asheville Civic Auditorium in January 1940. In the early 1970s the arena was built and the Civic Auditorium was remodeled and rechristened as the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium. With the exception of major systems which have failed and been replaced there have been no major expenditures for maintenance or improvement of the facility, the equipment or the infrastructure since the opening of the complex in the 1970s. The most recent estimate of the maintenance backlog, \$10 million, does not address the very severe structural and design problems in the Civic Center.

The information in this White Paper is presented in three parts. Part One is a list or overview of the problems of the Civic Center with an assessment of the impact of those problems on various stakeholders. Part Two is a suggested repair and replacement schedule or strategy. Part Three is a list of elements that should be considered as the city plans for the future of the Civic Center.

Our hope is that the city and its citizens will use this information to quickly formulate a strategy for dealing with the problems and issues surrounding the facilities as well as assess the attributes which should or could make the Civic Center a positive reflection of the city and enhance its leadership position in the western region of North Carolina. As a community we need to focus on defining the role of our Civic Center, fund it appropriately and measure its success against a set criterion larger than revenue and expenses. If we continue to measure the success of the center on a strict profit and loss basis or perceive the benefits flowing only to the City of Asheville we will continue on the downward spiral we've seen over the last decades and, to paraphrase Shakespeare, we can start digging the grave of the Civic Center the day that idea is born.

There are several next steps available to the City Council. We suggest that you immediately take action to repair the roof of the Civic Center or

see the facility damaged beyond repair. Second, you need to make a decision about the role of the Civic Center in the city, community, region and state. After that a strategy should be developed to insure that the center fulfills the desired role(s). Last a funding strategy needs to be put into place. We'd all like to think that there is a undiscovered pot of gold laying out there whose discovery would allow a painless solution to this and all the other painful problems of our community. Our Commission hasn't been able to locate this pot of gold. Neither has, I suspect, the city.

That being said we think the funding solution may be more multi-faceted than a single tax source, revenue source or donor. You need to consider a set of multiple solutions to the problem. User fees could be increased for events scheduled on weekend. Additional fees could be collected on each ticket to support the facility. Partnerships with key promoters could be negotiated to address event specific areas. The city could become promoters of events other than Ice Skating and realize a larger portion of the revenue from those events. Food and drink service in the center could be expanded. Alternative uses could be made of the facilities.

While all of these suggestions might help, at the end of the day it is going to take a large initial cash infusion to address the problems and a constant stream of cash following that to properly maintain the center. Several revenue sources have been proposed over the years and we're not going to recommend one over the other. We would like to suggest that you look to the county, state and federal government for sources of revenue. All have a vested interest in a venue like the Asheville Civic Center and therefore should be in a position to support it. A public/private consortium could be developed to update the facility while the city/county/state provides on-going funding.

The Civic Center Commission stands ready to assist the city in what ever manner it chooses to proceed. We would welcome the change to present our findings to you in a work session or general council meeting. As in the past we're ready to meeting with local, state and federal officials as well as private citizens to move this issue forward.

In closing I'd like to quote a section of Steve Spickard's paper on the Economic Impact of Convention and Conference Centers (1). Civic Centers are public precisely because they serve social purposes, yet are not sufficiently profitable to be provided by the private sector. If they were Wal-Mart would have one in every city. If they aren't profitable entities why do so many communities build and fund them? Why do state legislatures help pay for them? Why does the federal government invest in them? They serve a valuable role in our communities.

Max Alexander, Chairman Asheville Civic Center Commission
John Broadbooks, 2ns Vice Chairman Asheville Civic Center Commission

Part One: List of problems and issues with the Civic Center.

Safety: Items that do or could present safety issues to the patrons or employees.

Problem	Impact to the City of Asheville; Asheville Civic Center Patrons, Staff and Performers
<p>Roof: The roof is past its expected life span. Documented in Heery report and in January 2004 inspection.</p>	<p>The roof is in immediate need of replacement. It is too damaged to repair. Leaks in Thomas Wolfe pose health (mold), structural integrity issues, and undue wear and tear on seats, equipment and internal structure. Peeling plaster in the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium detracts from the ambience of the event and denigrates the image of the city, and responsible public officials. Major moisture pattern on the chimney and nearby wall surfaces indicates that water is leaking down beside the flue(s). When the weather turns severely cold there is a risk that the masonry will freeze and spall, creating a falling debris hazard and requiring a major repair effort.</p>
<p>Fire Alarm System : The Fire Alarm system is 34 years old and no longer meets code. Repair parts are no longer available</p>	<p>Fairly self explanatory. Increased vulnerability impedes safe evacuation and poses life threatening conditions to staff and patrons of medium to large events. Anytime you have a building with a number of people present fire and occupational safety is a must.</p>
<p>Thomas Wolfe Stage Area and Catwalk: Thomas Wolfe Auditorium catwalk and stage area do not meet OSHA regulations and are extremely hazardous. Rigging is also dangerous in arena.</p>	<p>Not only do these issues present problems to the stage crew they could also have an impact on performers and even the audience if part of the structure were to fall during a performance. The city, which is self-insured, would be placed in a financially vulnerable position.</p>
<p>Security System: There is no building wide security system in the arena or Thomas Wolfe Auditorium</p>	<p>First of all this presents a security risk to the staff and patrons. If someone were to break into the facility with the mindset to commit malice against either group our only detection and prevention system currently is the stupidity of the aggressor. Beyond this, the city's largest asset doesn't have a system to protect it from theft or pranks.</p>
<p>Americans with Disabilities Act Requirements: None of the venues in the civic center (arena, Thomas Wolfe Auditorium, Banquet Hall) meet the</p>	<p>While some improvement has been implemented to address this deficiency the center is not a friendly place to those with either visible or invisible physical disabilities. While this does present safety issues for the patrons, it more importantly goes to the question of What kind of city is Asheville, both for awareness and compliance.</p>

<p>current ADA regulation for access or emergency digress.</p>	
<p>Restroom Facilities: Size and number of restrooms in Thomas Wolfe Auditorium is inadequate.</p>	<p>Insufficient restroom facilities create long lines. The increased wait time, especially for the women s facilities, is a severe inconvenience to patrons, and further adversely affects individuals with medical conditions. As a safety, security and privacy issue, many women feel uncomfortable when the doors to restrooms remain open for extended periods as the queue extends out into lobby. This queue also impacts the flow of patrons, access to concessions during intermission, and those attempting return to a performance. Minimized access to the concession area and the inadequacies of restroom facilities adversely impacts center revenue.</p>
<p>Portable Staging and Risers: Portable Staging and Risers past useful life expectancy</p>	<p>Presents potential danger to center employees, patrons and performers.</p>
<p>Elevators: Elevator control system not maintainable</p>	<p>Failure could result in physical or mental injury to patrons or employees.</p>

Asset Protection: Items that adversely impact the physical facility and Equipment.

Problem	Impact to the City of Asheville; Asheville Civic Center Patrons, Staff and Performers
Limited office, storage and support areas	Chairs, tables, seats staging and other assets belonging to the Civic Center are stored externally in non-covered areas increasing wear and tear while decreasing life span. Lack of support areas makes it difficult to maintain equipment and tools. Dispersed or lack of offices reduce the efficiency of the staff, promoters and exhibitors.
The cooling tower is 34 years old, could fail at any time and should be replaced. It is past it expected life span.	A total failure of the system would result in a meltdown of the ice and the loss of a hockey environment and revenue. This would also disrupt any event in the exhibition hall as the melting results in many leaks in the hall. The cooling tower also drives the air conditioning a loss of which would cause sever discomfort of the patrons. Either of these failures would place the city in a bad light.
The emergency generator is not large enough to support the cooling tower	A power outage of 6 hours or more would result in the melting of the ice in the arena. This would impact planned events in the arena as well as the exhibition hall.
There is no backup plan for the arena or Thomas Wolfe Auditorium in case of an emergency shutdown.	Promoters and patrons would be left trying to figure out what to do. Symphony director said, a failure in the facilities would put the symphony out of business.

Ambiance: Items that impact the patron s enjoyment of the Civic Center experience.

Problem	Impact to the City of Asheville; Asheville Civic Center Patrons, Staff and Performers
Basketball floor in need of major repair and maintenance	Numerous changeovers in the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium between ice hockey and basketball have driven a requirement to invest in major repair and maintenance of the floor.
The HVAC including smoke hatches, traps, tubing, pipes, plumbing, compressors and circulators are old, broken and not maintainable.	There is insufficient heat, cooling and air circulation in the arena and Thomas Wolfe Auditorium Not only is this a discomfort to the patrons it drives higher utility bills for the city as systems are pushed beyond their capacity to make up for the non- functioning components.
The scoreboard in the area is old and has become a maintenance nightmare	Promoters view an old, defective scoreboard as a distraction from the event, and an embarrassment to the team. Patrons can t tell the score, time, period or player number due to the low resolution and/or missing bulbs.
The seating in the arena and Thomas Wolfe Auditorium is 1970 s vintage and size. 4000- 5000 arena seats (perm. And temp.) need to be replaced as they are obsolete and not repairable.	Over the years patrons have become larger and don t fit in the seats. Impeded egress and digress adversely impacts safety. Staff has limited flexibility to configure for various events. They are uncomfortable. The arena seats are also worn, torn and dirty.

Upgrades : Items that will allow the Civic Center to become "the premier entertainment destination.

Problem	Impact to the City of Asheville; Asheville Civic Center patrons, staff and performers
Sight Lines/Arena ÷ Sightlines are poor in the arena	Seats face away from the event floor. Many are obstructed by rails. Tickets prices provide false expectation of visibility.
Site lines/ Thomas Wolfe Auditorium: Sight lines in the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium are poor	Seats in balcony are at a 90-degree angle to the stage. Orchestra section rise doesn't rise at a constant rate. The length to width ration makes the cheap seats in the back of Thomas Wolfe Auditorium, really bad seats!
Meeting Rooms : No meeting rooms in or adjacent to Thomas Wolfe Auditorium foyer.	Precludes planning, preparation or organizational meetings/receptions prior to or following event.
Stage and Venue Lighting : Poor and noisy lighting	Detracts from and interferes with performances
Sound System : Poor sound system in arena	Difficult or impossible to hear announcer in upper level seats. Not only does this distract from performance it is a potential safety hazard as it could prevent people hearing or understanding directions during an emergency.
Exhibit Hall in arena doesn't suit physical or esthetic needs of exhibitors	Lighting is poor, not enough electrical or telecommunications links, facilities are worn, broken or in disrepair. Access is limited.
Limited kitchen facilities	Limits the type of concessions that can be offered by the civic center. It also limits the type of events exhibitors or other users of the center can host.
Restricted access to Banquet Hall	Limits the number and type of events that can be accommodated.
Limited meeting rooms in arena. None in Thomas Wolf Auditorium.	Limits the flexibility promoters have during potential events.
Limited access to service docks	Puts a strain on the staging crew. Limits ability to stage some scenery or other props. Presents a safety hazard to stage crew.
Lobby in Thomas Wolfe Auditorium is small, low and hard to get into.	Prevents assembly of parties, room for concession sales or organizational presentations.
Queues for tickets block entrance Thomas Wolf Auditorium	Poor layout causes confusion for patrons entering Thomas Wolf Auditorium. Once they enter they face a crowded, short, small lobby. Not a very good ambiance for an event for which you've paid \$20 to \$80. This poor layout also negatively impacts the ability to safely evacuate, or effectively respond to an emergency.
Dressing room area in Thomas Wolfe	Diminishes performer's ability to properly prepare for performance. Facilities (showers, seats, makeup, etc) are strained

Auditorium is third world	with larger troops.
Most exhibit tables are 34 years old and are beyond repair. Appx. 500 tables needed.	Can t meet the needs of potential users therefore makes center less desirable as a venue.
Need to update and add dressing rooms in arena.	Limits the ability of the arena to attract athletic tournaments.

Part Two: Suggested maintenance schedule to maintain the status quo.

NOTES:

- 1) IN GENERAL, REPAIR AND RELACEMENT OF BUILDING SYSTEMS SHOULD BE SCHEDULED FOR THE LEAST BUSY SUMMER MONTHS.
- 2) REPAIR AND REPLACEMENT OF OTHER ITEMS MAY BE SCHEDULED AT CONVENIENT TIMES.
- 3) ITEMS WITHIN EACH FISCAL YEAR ARE NOT RANKED IN ORDER OF PRIORITY.

FISCAL YEAR	ITEM	QUANTITY / COST
2005-2006	REPLACE RUSTED OUT EXTERIOR DOOR FRAMES	TBD
2005-2006	ACQUIRE SCARCE PARTS AND REPAIR RETRACTABLE BLEACHERS	TBD
2005-2006	REPLACE 4 FT. HT. PORTABLE STAGING WITH UNITS HAVING GREATER LOAD CAPACITY	TBD
2005-2006	REPLACE WORN OUT RISERS	6 SECTIONS - 8 IN. HT. 9 SECTIONS - 16 IN. HT. 9 SECTIONS - 24 IN. HT.
2005-2006	COMMISSION ROOFING SPECIALIST (ARCHITECT OR PROFESSIONAL ENGINEER) TO PREPARE CONTRACT DOCUMENTS FOR PHASED ROOF REPLACEMENT, INCLUDING SMOKE HATCHES. DETERMINE IF HATCHES ON THOMAS WOLFE ROOF CAN BE TEMPORARILY RENDERED LEAKPROOF AT A REASONABLE COST.	TBD
2005-2006	COMMISSION ELECTRICAL ENGINEER TO DESIGN FIRE ALARM SYSTEM MODERNIZATION AND EMERGENCY GENERATOR REPLACEMENT	TBD
2005-2006	COMMISSION MECHANICAL ENGINEER TO DESIGN 750 TON CHILLER REPAIR OR REPLACEMENT	TBD
2005-2006	REPLACE ARENA S SOUND SYSTEM AND/OR SCOREBOARDS TO PROVIDE TIMELY ANNOUNCEMENTS WHICH CAN BE UNDERSTOOD BY PATRONS	TBD
2005-2006	PARTIALLY REPLACE AGED EXHIBIT TABLES	200 EIGHT FT. RECTANGULAR 75 FIVE FT. DIAMETER
2005-2006	PARTIALLY REPLACE AGED FOLDING CHAIRS	1,000
2006-2007	REPLACE ARENA ROOF	TBD
2006-2007	REPLACE ELEVATOR CONTROL SYSTEM	TBD
2006-2007	REPLACE REMAINDER OF EXHIBIT TABLES	250 EIGHT FT. RECTANGULAR
2006-2007	REPLACE REMAINDER OF FOLDING CHAIRS	1,000

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2007-2008	REPLACE 750 TON COOLING TOWER OR RELINE WATER PAN - MUST BE DONE IN CONJUNCTION WITH ROOF REPLACEMENT	TBD
2007-2008	REPLACE CONCOURSE ROOF	TBD
2008-2009	REPLACE THOMAS WOLFE AUDITORIUM & OFFICE ROOF	
2008-2009	REPLACE ARENA FLOOR SEATS	2,600 SEATS (1,300 DOUBLES)

Part Three : Decision and planning elements.

DECISIONS AND PLANNING REQUIRED TO DETERMINE LEVEL OF FUTURE INVESTMENTS

VENUE	PLANNING & DECISIONS REQUIRED	ISSUES THAT CANNOT BE RESOLVED UNTIL PLANNING AND DECISIONS HAVE BEEN MADE
GENERAL	DETERMINE THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE CIVIC CENTER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - REPLACE BOILER AND STEAM PIPE SYSTEM - INSTALL SECURITY CAMERA SYSTEM - REPLACE CAST IRON PLUMBING SYSTEM - INSTALL MORE EFFICIENT RESTROOM FIXTURES AND INCREASE QUANTITY WHERE NEEDED - INSTALL ADDITIONAL TELEPHONE AND INTERNET SERVICES
THOMAS WOLFE AUDITORIUM	DETERMINE THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE VENUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - REPLACE OBSOLETE ELECTRICAL SYSTEM - REPLACE STAGE FLOOR - REPLACE CATWALKS AND RIGGING SYSTEM - ADDITIONS AND RENOVATIONS OR CHANGE OF FUNCTION
ARENA	DETERMINE THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE VENUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UPGRADE ELECTRICAL SYSTEM - REPLACE SCOREBOARDS - REPLACE SOUND SYSTEM - REPLACE AGED SEATS - INSTALL PERMANENT ICE FLOOR
EXHIBIT HALL	DETERMINE FUTURE USE OF THE VENUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RENOVATION
BANQUET HALL	DETERMINE FUTURE USE OF THE VENUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - REPLACE HVAC SYSTEM - REPLACE CARPET
SUPPORT FACILITES	DETERMINE TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONCESSIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RENOVATE CONCESSION AREAS - REPLACE HVAC SYSTEM