

## RECORDING SECRETARY'S RECORD OF MEETING

### **City Council Playhouse Design Steering Committee Meeting #1**

March 14, 2023

Present: Mayor Sepi Shyne, Councilmember Chelsea Byers (Chair), Commissioner Mito Aviles, Commissioner Lindsey Deaton, Commissioner Dawn Moreno-Freedman, Commissioner Andrew Solomon, Commissioner Elaine Polachek, Commissioner Richard Karliss, Commissioner Rogerio Carvalheiro, Laura Zucker from AEA Consulting, Nicki Genovese from the Performing Arts Division of the City of Los Angeles, John Mulhern from the Broad Stage, Mary Sager McFadden from Pamela Burton & Company, Bryan Eck from the University of Southern California; City Staff: Urban Design and Architecture Studio Manager Ric Abramson, Arts Manager Rebecca Ehemann, Project Architect Michael Barker, Arts Division Grants Coordinator Eva Angeloff, Facilities & Field Services Manager Helen Collins; from Perkins & Will: Yan Krymsky, Leigh Christy, Eubie Han, and Max Hu.

Item 1.A. The meeting was called to order at 5:01 p.m.

Item 1.B. and 1.C. Chair Byers read the land acknowledgement and introduced the Steering Committee members. All members briefly explained their backgrounds.

Item 1.D. Urban Design and Architecture Studio Manager Ric Abramson introduced the design team at Perkins & Will, briefly discussed staff's excitement for starting this process and moving the project forward.

Item 2.A. Urban Design and Architecture Studio Manager Ric Abramson described the history and objectives of the project. He outlined the history of Council directives, including the rehabilitation study for the existing Coast Playhouse, after which Council made the decision to instead move forward with constructing a new facility.

Item 2.B. Urban Design and Architecture Studio Manager Ric Abramson provided an overview of the City Manager's Advisory Group process, design team selection, and initial input from the community. He discussed the Advisory Group's interest in the Perkins & Will competition concept because of its grand entry sequence through an outdoor space and the way it creatively put the performance space on the second floor, creating opportunities for the ground level open space and rehearsal space. He briefly discussed the two community meetings previously held, and how the projects six primary objectives relate to the values of the community and the General Plan.

Item 3.A. Urban Design and Architecture Studio Manager Ric Abramson outlined the Steering Committee's roles and responsibilities, which include providing areas for the team to focus on, given the budget and square footage constraints of the facility, guidance on the most important aspects of the facility, and direction in the form of specific feedback on design questions. He outlined the intent for the next meeting, which will be to provide feedback on an initial concept

design, and then the final meeting, which is to make final adjustments before returning to City Council with the final schematic design.

Item 3.B. Arts Manager Rebecca Ehemann described the programming goals for the facility, including that while it will be a facility with less than 99 seats, it will host smaller groups, providing a place to launch projects with low budgets, with between 1 and 20 people shows. It will include theater, musicals, and panel presentations. She discussed the need to right-size the elements of the facility and have good lighting and comfortable seating.

Item 4.A. The Perkins & Will team shared their initial concept vision for the playhouse. Yan Krymsky and Max Hu discussed the design drivers of the project, which included participating in the public life of Santa Monica Boulevard, a compact, efficient, and green design, utilizing the rehearsal space to activate the outdoor space, and being a model for low carbon construction, and a unique building identity.

Laura Zucker asked about the size of the stage, and Yan Krymsky clarified that the current design is 45' x 45' by approximately 25' tall, with a stage of approx. 18' x 45' in a proscenium layout.

Nicki Genovese asked about the intent for flexibility of the space, and Yan Krymsky clarified that the subject of flexibility is a topic of the nights conversation. Commissioner Elaine Polachek asked about restrooms accommodations, and Commissioner Andrew Solomon asked about whether or not there is any programming currently for concessions.

Item 4.B. The Perkins & Will team provided an overview of the community outreach process. Yan Krymsky highlighted key feedback from the community outreach meeting on February 14<sup>th</sup>, including the need for a high functioning space, a timeless and innovative building, noise considerations related to outdoor performance, signage, and the storage and staging needs of the playhouse. He also described key feedback from the second meeting, including accessibility, backstage support, provisions for multimedia productions and live streaming, pre-function programming such as a café, noise concerns related to outdoor performance, digital vs static billboards and scale of signage, and an enlarged lobby and concessions area.

Item 4.C. The Perkins & Will team initiated a discussion with the Committee about next steps for the design of the facility. Yan Krymsky listed the current program and potential additions and enhancements for the Committee to consider, including a larger lobby, additional uses for the performance and rehearsal spaces, concessions, a digital billboard, concessions, and box office multifunctionality. Ric Abramson mentioned a fly tower as a potential addition that could be considered.

Item 5.A. Members of the public provided comments.

- Joel Daavid spoke from a producer and set designer standpoint, that the bigger the space, the better, with a minimum of 50' x 50' and access to the grid, loading, and dressing rooms immediate to the performance space.

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- Rick Sparks spoke about including a memory wall or some remnant of the old box office. A way of recognizing the history of the space and performers and companies of the Coast Playhouse.

#### Item 6. The Steering Committee Members Provided Comments.

Laura Zucker spoke about the need to design the theater from the inside out, including size, height, adequate crossover, wing space, and dressing room access. She suggested cantilevering the performance space to enlarge it. She discussed flexibility, and that with this scale of operations it is prohibitive for small companies to reconfigure the theater. She mentioned that even the Redcat theater does not utilize its flexible design.

Nicki Genovese discussed current renovations in LA and the need for clear programming and use expectations, the need for accessibility for less able bodied patrons. Commissioner Andrew Solomon asked if the space can include an outzone/ parklet, and Ric Abramson replied that there are two options for the street: either a curb extension to add more sidewalk or a pick-up drop off area. Commissioner Solomon also asked about adding a concession to activate the frontage on normal days, such as a small coffee shop. He mentioned the success of the now-closed Conservatory coffee shop.

Commissioner Lindsey Deaton stated that a 2<sup>nd</sup> floor theater works at this size, as evident at San Diego's Diversionary Theater, which has a similar layout. She also mentioned a coffee bar or drinks, and that a large design challenge will be connectivity to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor.

John Mulhern stated that 45' by 45' is not large enough for the current performance space program, and that 18' by 45' is an odd shape for the stage. It needs to be deeper, and not including wings and backstage crossovers. He noted that standard wings are 25' clear, with an additional 5' for grids and lighting. He also discussed a seating option with a center aisle and raked fixed seating.

Mayor Sepi Shyne thanked the team for their work and the great comments. She was supportive of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor performance space, net-zero targets. She noted that accessibility is critical and was interested in broadcasting capabilities to expand the reach of the facility. She mentioned the diverse community and the many comedy/ improv teams locally, and the need to provide a space for those LGBTQ+ folks who come to WeHo for sanctuary. She was supportive of a coffee shop and was interested in utilizing the box office wall to honor the history in the City.

Nicki Genovese stated that LA just began experimenting with streaming during the pandemic, but there are high costs related to it. She mentioned that a digital box office is an accessibility issue for those without access, and that an office would be needed for staff, as well as a space to hold meetings.

Mary Sager McFadden noted her appreciation for the dynamic and exciting building design, and that cantilevering over the open space can create an outdoor stage-like space. She discussed the

parklet design and discussed the idea of it being more of a tree grove without planted berms, and opens up more to the street, with the idea that maybe food trucks can park in front.

Commissioner Elaine Polacheck noted that the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor performance space creates adjacency issues for the functionality for performers and stressed the importance of restrooms.

Commissioner Rogerio Carvalheiro liked the idea of a coffee shop open to both interior and exterior, and larger, more bathrooms.

Bryan Eck noted that the success of the open space is more about programming and design, not scale, and that expanding the building into the space should not be a problem. He mentioned that parking behind the open space creates issues with headlights at night and creating an inviting pedestrian environment.

Commissioner Dawn Moreno-Freedman appreciated the efficient design but wondered about a roof deck. Yan Krymsky responded that it is an option, but costly, and difficult because you need to bring people even further up into the building.

Laura Zucker stressed the importance of a programmatic plan before finalizing the design of the theater. She was supportive of a digital billboard that could stream interior functions to the outside. She stated the need for more restrooms.

Commissioner Mito Aviles asked if the stair could become a ramp for accessibility. Yan Krymsky responded that it would likely be spatially and cost prohibitive. Commissioner Richard Karliss expressed his support for expanding the theater into the open space, and that rooftop programming is an issue due to noise.

Chair Chelsea Byers noted that the City owns the block east of the theater, and that even if the open space is reduced, there is opportunity to expand it relative to future development to the east by the City.

Commissioner Carvalheiro asked if the 5 parking spaces shown dictated the scale of the open space. Ric Abramson replied that the parking may no longer be needed, though loading will be.

Ric Abramson mentioned that if there is a desire to expand programming and scope, the Steering Committee would direct staff to ask Council for additional funding.

Commissioner Lindsey Deaton noted that the site is shallow, and alley access is difficult, and there will be a need to build and unload/ load sets. She also mentioned that if the space is built, the programming will come, noting the success of San Diego's Diversionary Theater Programming, which is booked every day with cabaret, kids programming, poetry, and book readings. However, this will need to be staffed and managed. She stated that income-oriented services such as coffee are important.

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John Mulhern mentioned the high costs of streaming and simulcasting, as well as projectors, and asked whether or not the budget included these items. Ric Abramson stated that the initial budgets only included a minimal provision of equipment.

Rebecca Ehemann stated that many performances will be subsidized by the city, and the playhouse will provide a community benefit. Laura Zucker added that the more subsidy the City provides, the better work there will be. Nicki Genovese suggested using a sliding scale for use fees depending on commercial vs nonprofits.

Commissioner Aviles, Ric Abramson, Bryan Eck, and Chair Byers discussed the current \$6.5 million budget and what is included as well as what is not, including FFE, digital billboards, and potentially the open space, as well as the need to adjust the budget for escalation.

Chair Byers recommended officially bringing concessions into the building program. Helen Collins added that concessions are usually a third-party vendor. Laura Zucker had the idea of including ticket sales in the concessionaire's contract.

Mary Sager McFadden stated that an outdoor performance space does not seem functional given the noise from Santa Monica Boulevard, and that a grove of trees with a coffee bar could be better suited. The space could still be flexible for puppet shows and gatherings, but not performances.

Chair Byers, John Mulhern, and Commissioner Polachek discussed the curbside options, and concluded that the pick-up/ drop-off capability in front should be retained for the purposes of accessibility to provide a drop-off area for disabled guests. John Mulhern defined the loading needs for typically one or two 19 foot U-Haul's for this scale of operation, at a maximum.

Nicki Genovese and John Mulhern discussed a more reasonable cost for this playhouse in today's dollars. Nicki Genovese suggested a ballpark of \$10 million, while John Mulhern suggested a range between \$12 million and \$15 million.

Commissioner Moreno-Freedman mentioned the unsuccessful concessions at the West Hollywood Library and to consider a mobile concessions cart, and Mayor Shyne responded that many residents would frequent a coffee shop in this location.

Ric Abramson asked the Committee for direction of flex seating. The Committee, including John Mulhern, Laura Zucker, and Nicki Genovese, was in support of fixed comfortable proscenium style seating, noting that flexibility creates losses in functionality that are not worth it. They discussed alternative seating configurations with more leg room and no aisles as an option.

Yan Krymsky asked for direction on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor performance space. The Committee recommended that the benefits provided by the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor space seem valuable and that the design team should continue with the elevated space and additional costs such as more elevators will have to be assessed later.

Chair Byers stated that the meeting will be adjourning and stated the date and time of the next meeting.

Item 7.

The meeting adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

*Michael Barker*

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Michael Barker, Project Architect