

FARMINGTON CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
NOVEMBER 10, 2010

A special meeting of the Farmington City Council was held on Wednesday, November 10, 2010, in Council Chambers, 23600 Liberty Street, Farmington, Michigan. Notice of the meeting was posted in compliance with Public Act 267-1976.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Mayor Buck.

PRESENT: Buck, Knol, McShane, Wiggins, Wright.

ABSENT: None.

CITY ADMINISTRATION: City Manager Pastue, City Clerk Halberstadt.

CIVIC AD HOC COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Brian Belesky, Galen Chandler, Brian Kantz (Chair), Erik Lindquist, Mary Morgan, Charles Paul (Vice Chair), Brian Rich (Secretary/Treasurer), Mara Topper, Jim Wasiloff.

OTHERS PRESENT: Scott Freeman, Civic Theatre Manager.

APPROVAL OF REGULAR AGENDA

11-10-203 MOTION by McShane, seconded by Wiggins, to approve the agenda as presented. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

CIVIC THEATRE AD HOC COMMITTEE PRESENTATION

Mayor Buck laid out the format of the meeting, allotting 45 minutes for the presentation and 45 minutes for questions. He commended the committee for a terrific report and thanked Scott Freeman for his presence.

Brian Kantz thanked Council for the opportunity given to the Civic Theatre Committee. He commended the strong, active committee members. He stated for the Civic to succeed it must be run as a business. He outlined the strategy to accomplish same contained in their report. The objectives cited to achieve this goal included:

- Improve the profitability of existing core business
- Extend relationships with Downtown organizations and potential sponsors
- Expand ticketing and online services
- Develop and create long-term rental clients
- Recommend a management model to best suit the objectives of the City of Farmington

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He expressed concern regarding the loss of the church rental and the need to secure future rentals.

He emphasized the need for the Civic to be defined as an experience. He further expounded on points included in the report such as technological improvements and building the brand of the Civic in an effort to fill the house. He stressed the importance of supporter involvement.

Questions and comments were entertained.

Wright advised an operation run by the community for the benefit of the community cannot really be defined as a business; and that for the Civic to be economically viable there needs to be a real commitment from the community.

Further discussion was held concerning the importance of the Civic's history and finding better ways to market the theatre and meet the needs of the community.

McShane commented that she was on Council when the Civic was purchased. She recommended pursuing grants for the theatre under historical or arts and culture.

The report presented the following topics as area of study and discussion was held on same.

Facility Process Improvement

- Clean-up checklists
- Security checklists –fire security, patron safety, etc.
- Ticket sales sheet
- Concession inventory control
- Computerization of operations
- Credit card usage
- Phone optimization
- Farmington Historical Society partnership

Topper indicated the committee toured the theatre to determine general cleanliness and where improvements need to be made. She also noted there were a lot of possibilities for utilization of space.

Wasiloff spoke about the 5-S methodology to organize and maintain the Civic.

Kantz indicated the key is to computerize all aspects of operation.

Belesky stated the phone system was audited and noted a number of recommendations. He also indicated the fire suppression system has not been inspected in two years and cited a number of deficiencies.

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Paul spoke about internet opportunities, business administration, improving opportunities for rentals and facilitating the downloading of movies.

McShane inquired if insurance has been investigated for the Civic and Pastue responded that MMRMA covers the Civic.

Rich spoke about the importance of credit card usage for the operation and discussed the various credit card providers.

Topper noted that Brian Golden was excited about the opportunity of taking over the museum part of theatre, potential grant opportunities and organizing displays.

Marketing/Advertising/Promotion/Brand Creation

- Website
- Facebook
- Newspaper
- Signage/Marquee
- Sponsorship opportunities

Kantz indicated four domains have been purchased for the Civic.

Galen stated existing web pages are outdated and offered suggestions on improvements and possibilities.

Further discussion was held regarding the importance of social media and management of same.

Staffing

Kantz indicated the need for a full time theatre manager with part-time trained staff that are equipped with checklists.

McShane commented on the lack of communication when there is equipment failure. Discussion was held regarding staff deficiencies including custodial operations.

Product Pricing

- Increase concession price
- Increase ticket price
- Pre-movie advertising

Discussion was held regarding above topics and changes to same.

Movie Theater Operations

The committee identified a number of fixes and potential changes to turn theater operations into a better model. The following areas were cited as examples and discussion followed.

- Movie selection
- Friends of the Civic (volunteer/donor program)
- Civic card (annual pass)
- Upgrading and maintaining movie equipment

Rental Operations

The committee cited this area as being ripest for growth. The following opportunities were identified as possible areas for same.

- Rental contract
- Long term tenant
- Follow-up with rental clients
- Live event

Long Term Solution for Management

The committee suggested nonprofit management structure for Civic in order to give the theater back to the community. This would be a two phase project.

- Phase I – Establish the Organization
- Phase II – Participate in the operation and management of the Civic

Lindquist indicated he visited Traverse City in July to observe the operations of the State Theatre. The theatre is a nonprofit organization run by Michael Moore and film festival group. Moore set up a foundation to help restore old theatres and revitalize communities. He advised some of the committee members participated in a phone conversation with Moore who provided some good advice on improving the Civic.

The Committee suggested formation of a nonprofit organization as a viable option. It would continue to be owned by the City, however, a tremendous amount of volunteer and community involvement would be needed to succeed.

Lindquist stated he is starting a club to try and develop a fan base for the Civic Theatre. Further discussion was held concerning the many opportunities that may present themselves with this venture.

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Kantz commented that Committee members were impressed with the number of enthusiasts for the Civic.

Wright stated one solution to help solve the issue of continuity would be to engage a dedicated group of individuals to run same.

Lundquist agreed that the Civic should be run as a business but that the model needs to be changed for improvement.

Mayor Buck inquired as to which model the Committee is leaning towards. Chandler responded there are four possibilities of which no preference was stated.

Further discussion was held concerning nonprofit status as a long term commitment, the results of a SWOT analysis, and the Detroit Zoo being cited as an example.

Wright stated that a nonprofit needs the leadership of a number of voices. He did not think the City wanted to run the Civic.

Pastue indicated the City recognizes the Civic has not reached its full potential. He wants the Civic to succeed without necessarily operating or controlling it.

Knol commented that a nonprofit entity is better able to build grass roots support and felt there would be more opportunities for grants and donations. She cited negative aspects of a City-owned theatre as a profit making business.

Further discussion was held concerning content management, becoming a part of the State Theatre Project as a nonprofit group, and the antiquated model the Theater is currently operating under.

Mayor Buck reiterated that the wisdom of Council when the Civic was purchased was to prevent it from failing and to preserve it as an icon. He stated the Committee's recommendations will make it possible to take it to the next level. He advised it should not be run as a stand alone enterprise.

Wright stated the importance of an interactive body of committed people to redirect the Theatre from its current path.

Responding to a question from Wiggins, Lindquist stated the transition period for the State Theatre in Traverse City was immediate. He noted it has been a successful operation primarily because of the quality content.

Wiggins noted the advantage of the Civic over the State Theatre is that it has not been mothballed, but rather it is a going concern with an identity and clientele.

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Further discussion was held on possibilities of the Civic and implementing same.

Mayor Buck called for final comments.

Kantz stated the Committee has fulfilled the charter set forth by Council and is looking to be dissolved.

Mayor Buck asked the Committee to delay dissolution for 60 days to allow Council a chance to study recommendations.

Kantz asked about Scott Freeman's view of the Committee's role over the next 60 days.

Freeman indicated direction should come from Council.

Pastue discussed Freeman's role as the manager of the Civic. He commended the Committee's report. He stated Council needs to determine where the City goes from here.

Freeman indicated there will be follow-up questions to the Committee regarding its recommendations and elements of the report.

Topper indicated she would be happy to come back and answer questions but is not interested in continuing further work on Committee.

Mayor Buck said Council would like the opportunity to come back with questions before the Committee dissolves. He recognized the tremendous talent and thoroughness that went into the report.

Lindquist stated the Civic is first in line for the State Theatre Project. An application has been received to move forward but approval from Council is needed.

Knol thanked the Committee for the depth of information and thoroughness of the report.

McShane indicated she would like to see a continuing relationship with the Committee. She asked them to support Freeman in his position and Wright echoed same.

Wiggins assured the Committee the report won't be put on a shelf.

Rich thanked the Council for the opportunity to learn about the Civic and the entire industry.

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Mayor Buck expressed gratitude for work that has been done.

OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was heard.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment was heard.

COUNCIL COMMENT

Mayor Buck noted an article from the Farmington Press regarding the good report from the City's recent audit.

In honor of upcoming Veteran's Day, Buck asked everyone to thank those who served.

He commended City Clerk Halberstadt on her excellent work on the recent General election.

ADJOURNMENT

11-10-204 MOTION by McShane, seconded by Wiggins, to adjourn the meeting.
MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

J.T. (Tom) Buck, Mayor

Susan K. Halberstadt, City Clerk

APPROVED: December 20, 2010