

Keefe Auditorium Commission
Thursday, July 2, 2026
City Hall, Room 208
4:30 PM

The Keefe Auditorium Commission met on the above date in Room 208 of City Hall, called to order by Chairman Dennis Schneider at 4:31pm. In attendance were Shawn Smith, Dennis Schneider, Alicia Gregg, and Carl Dubois, Daniel O'Donnell and Joseph Olefirowicz joined the meeting shortly after the beginning. Also in attendance were Tim Cummings and Amy DeRoche. Mark McKevitz, Joe Mobilia, and Ned Collier from the architectural team (Icon) joined the meeting via remote connection.

Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes

Approval of Meeting Minutes of March 19, 2026. Motion by Shawn Smith, seconded by Alicia Gregg, to accept minutes. Minutes were corrected to remove Liz Hannum and add Amy DeRoche for attendees. So voted.

MEETING OVERVIEW

The meeting clarified that the primary goal is to establish reasonable, diligent cost estimates for renovation options that deliver usable facilities meeting code and functionality requirements.

- **Estimation Objectives Set with Clarity**
 - The first phase focuses on producing estimates that are both appropriate and fiscally responsible.
 - Appropriateness means meeting code compliance and usability standards for at least two levels of use, avoiding bare minimum code-only scenarios.
 - Dennis emphasized that the baseline must produce a usable facility, not just code compliance, to ensure value to the city and community.
 - Affordability is not a parameter at this stage; the goal is to get responsible cost projections without prematurely limiting scope.
- **Defining Usage Levels and Options**
 - ICON developed four scenarios: minimal upgrades (code compliance), a mid-level small addition, a touring-level upgrade, and a new theater retaining the facade.
 - The legislative charge was to study three alternatives: minimal upgrades, upgrades to host touring companies, and new theater with facade maintained.
 - The middle option was expanded into two levels to better bridge costs and capabilities between minimal and touring levels.
 - All options are operable standalone buildings with demolition and mechanical system upgrades common across them except the new build.
- **Phasing and Fundraising Constraints**

- The options are not designed as incremental phases; each is a separate capital project requiring full funding.
- Experience from other venues shows phased fundraising for such projects often stalls after phase one, so fundraising should consider whole project sums.
- Fundraising considerations are separate from initial architectural estimates and are deferred until after cost numbers and use plans are clearer.
- **Commission Consensus on Scope Boundaries**
 - The commission recognized the legislative resolution as the guiding document for scope and was aligned on three primary options consistent with that resolution.
 - There was agreement that community theater plus outside groups is the baseline use case, not just minimal code compliance.
 - The discussion emphasized not wasting taxpayer money on options that only preserve minimal or community-only usage.

Design Options and Functional Analysis

Detailed design concepts for the three primary options were reviewed, focusing on usability, code compliance, and performance capabilities.

- **Option One: Minimal Upgrades**
 - Focuses on the original theater section with new compliant toilet rooms and mechanical systems.
 - Seats remain unchanged; no backstage or performance space upgrades beyond code compliance.
 - The facility remains usable for limited events like community theater and small performances but with constrained backstage and access features.
 - No AV or theatrical lighting upgrades are included in this option.
- **Option Two: Small Addition and Moderate Upgrade**
 - Adds a 6,000 square foot (sf) single-story mechanical and lobby expansion to improve accessibility and seating, including ADA compliance without changing the seating slope.
 - Introduces some backstage improvements such as upgraded seating, a new loading dock, and minor stage enhancements.
 - Joe described improved theatrical lighting, new seats, a crossover corridor, and partial rigging upgrades to support touring productions better.
 - The design improves usability and accessibility but still limits major loading and backstage expansions necessary for larger touring shows.
- **Option Three: Touring Level Upgrade**
 - Includes a two-story, 21,000 sf addition with a new loading dock designed for simultaneous 53-foot truck access and expanded backstage space.
 - Upgrades front and back of house, including rehearsal spaces, green rooms, and increased mechanical facilities.
 - ADA seating and elevator access throughout, with renovated control booths and sound/light lock areas.

- Joe outlined extensive theatrical infrastructure upgrades: new lighting catwalks, variable acoustics, orchestra shells, and rigging enhancements aimed at attracting touring companies.
- Challenges with loading logistics were discussed; a wider corridor and larger loading dock opening are necessary for large set pieces and truss transport.
- **New Build Option (Option Four) Pricing**
 - Pricing is underway for a full new theater retaining only the facade, encompassing roughly 80,000 sf with a larger stage.
 - No detailed floor plans yet; cost estimates will carry large contingencies due to lack of detailed design.
 - The new build is expected to be the most expensive option, but it offers the greatest flexibility and upgraded facilities.

Technical and Infrastructure Considerations

The meeting addressed technical details critical to functional performance, safety, and compliance across options.

- **Mechanical and Structural Upgrades Common to Options**
 - All options except the new build require demolition of roofs and ceilings to install new mechanical systems.
 - Structural upgrades include seismic tie-downs and steel supports for rooftop HVAC units.
 - These base upgrades establish a mechanical and safety baseline for all renovation scenarios.
- **Accessibility and ADA Compliance**
 - Significant code compliance challenges include seating slope and ADA seating locations.
 - Option One cannot achieve full ADA compliance without modifying seating rake; options Two and Three address this with new seating layouts and lifts.
 - The commission agreed ADA compliance is mandatory and that grandfathering exceptions would unlikely be granted.
- **Loading Dock and Backstage Logistics**
 - The existing loading dock configuration limits access for large touring productions due to narrow corridors and right-angle turns.
 - Option Three proposes a new loading dock allowing simultaneous loading/unloading with direct access to the stage via a sloped corridor.
 - The commission stressed the importance of a 20-foot roll route for trusses and stage equipment without tight turns to attract touring shows.
 - Reconfigurations of backstage corridors and demolition of existing risers and classrooms are required for improved access.
- **Theatrical Systems Upgrades**
 - Upgrades include new LED-based stage lighting systems, theatrical lighting catwalks, new control booths, and sound mixing positions.

- Variable acoustics and orchestra shells are considered for symphony and classical performances but may be lower priority due to limited symphony touring presence.
- Pit lift and orchestra pit expansion were discussed but considered cost-prohibitive and low priority for community programming.

Space Retention and Future Flexibility

Discussions focused on preserving or demolishing existing spaces to balance cost, functionality, and future expansion options.

- **Gray Space (Classrooms and Band Room) Debate**
 - The commission debated whether to retain the 7,500 sq ft gray space behind the stage as a shell for future use or demolish it now to reduce costs. This is basically the old home economics classrooms area and band room and chorus room of the former Elm St. MS.
 - Arguments for retention included preserving flexibility for future expansion and maintaining real estate for theatrical functions.
 - Arguments for demolition cited ongoing maintenance and operational costs for underused space.
 - A suggestion was made to retain the gray space as reserved for future use, with a suggestion to price it as an alternate minimal construction option.
 - The commission agreed to have the architect price the alternate minimal retention option for informed decision-making.
- **Parking and Site Planning Considerations**
 - Parking is not included in current cost estimates but acknowledged as a critical future issue for community support and functionality.
 - Commissioners agreed to identify potential parking areas on site plans without pricing or committing to construction.
 - The need for parking is driven by staff, audience, and community impact considerations, but site planning and funding decisions are deferred to city planners and developers.
 - An appendix with approximate cost per parking space will be requested to inform future city discussions.
 - The commission emphasized that parking planning should not constrain theater design but be coordinated later.

Process, Timeline, and Next Steps

The meeting concluded with decisions on moving forward with estimates and scheduling follow-up work.

- **Approval to Proceed with Cost Estimation**
 - Motion by Joseph Olefirowicz to proceed with estimating the four options and to update floor plans to reflect commission comments. Seconded by Dennis Schneider. The commission unanimously approved this motion.

- The architect team will revise floor plans reflecting commission comments in parallel with the estimation process.
- The commission recognizes that floor plan updates will not materially impact conceptual cost estimates but are necessary for programming and fundraising conversations.
- **Next Meeting and Deliverables Timeline**
 - The architect team will submit drawings for pricing the following day.
 - Revised floor plans and narratives to accompany the drawings will be shared with the commission within approximately one month.
 - The next commission meeting is scheduled for May 7th, providing time for review of estimates and updated designs.
- **Coordination with Fundraising and Programming**
 - While fundraising is not addressed in this phase, the commission acknowledged the importance of future discussions around funding strategies once cost estimates and usable plans are clearer.
 - Programming considerations require floor plans to assess usability across community and touring uses, supporting engagement with potential operators such as Spectacle.
- **Commissioner Acknowledgment of Complexity**
 - Commissioners recognized the difficulty of balancing cost, usability, and scope but expressed appreciation for the architect team's detailed work and responsiveness to feedback.
 - The iterative process to refine design options and cost estimates is expected to continue as more stakeholder input and technical details emerge.

Action Items

Mark (Architect)

- Share PDF and presentation of updated design options to commission post-meeting
- Incorporate commission's feedback on retaining gray space as an alternate and loading dock circulation revisions into new floor plans
- Remove detailed parking layout, replace with notation of 'potential parking area' only in revised plans
- Deliver revised architectural and MEP narratives accompanying updated plans for review
- Submit updated plans and narratives for pricing.

Commission / Meeting Participants

- Review updated plans and narratives upon distribution in advance of next meeting
- Reconvene on Thursday, May 7, 2026 at 4:30pm to review conceptual cost(s) and updated floor plans.

Motion to adjourn by Shawn Smith. Meeting adjourned at 6:14pm.

Respectfully submitted – Shawn M. Smith, Commission Secretary