

FBIDC COMMUNITY FORUM

October 9, 2024

Mojalaki Country Club

Host/Sponsor: FBIDC
Facilitator: Community Matters (Kate Bishop)

SUMMARY

JO BROWN (FBIDC):

Welcome to all who have come out this evening. This is the first of many community forums that the FBIDC will be sponsoring over the coming months as it relates to the renovation project for Soldiers Memorial Hall. Tonight's purpose is to have a conversation about the design of Soldiers Memorial Hall and hear thoughts that can be shared with City Manager, Mayor, and City Council for their upcoming workshop to discuss final design approval on October 28, 2024.

Jo presented slides summarizing FBIDC role and mission (see attached)

Participants to answer questions from Franklin community audience members:

- Jo Brown, (Executive Director/FBIDC)
- Neil Cannon (Economic Development Consultant for City of Franklin)
- Judie Milner (City Manager)
- Dan Darling (Executive Director/Franklin Opera House)
- Chief Michael Foss (City of Franklin Fire Department)
- Tracy Kozak (ARCove Architects).

As the sponsor of these forums, FBIDC can propose grants and ideas to the City; however, the FDIC has only an advisory role. It was confirmed that city functions could relocate during renovations, but currently, the plan is for them to remain in Soldiers Memorial Hall post-renovation.

City Councilor's present: Ward 1: Councilor Dzujna, Ward 2: Councilor Ribas, Ward 3 Councilor Webb & Councilor Preve, and newly elected Councilor Al Warner.

DAN DARLING (FRANKLIN OPERA HOUSE/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR)

Shared with the audience, as a member of the Baha'i Faith, the quote, "The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds through commendable and seemly conduct." This is a good message to live by and is the Opera House's goal to bring unity and betterment for the Franklin community.

Dan Darling presented slides (see attached)

Discussion Summary:

- The city has approved \$6.8 million for renovations at Soldiers Memorial Hall.
- No action (to proceed with renovations, fundraising, etc.) could occur until the bond was approved or denied.
- Non-construction grants to date have been applied, hiring consultants to help determine the feasibility and strategy of renovating Soldiers Memorial Hall, marketing study for performances and community programming.
- \$3.1M of this \$6.8M construction budget is allocated for Opera House facilities, and the City is identifying funding opportunities like tax credits and grants. The community is encouraged to contribute ideas for a capital campaign, and the Opera House has applied for several small grants while acknowledging various grassroots initiatives.
- Opera House proposed a \$500,000 scope reduction from the \$7.3M original renovation estimate and brainstorm ways to achieve this without compromising safety or the hall's historical value.

Suggestions/Ideas presented by Opera House to residents in attendance:

- Minimal changes are proposed for the Grand Army of the Republic Hall (GAR Hall), except addressing occupancy safety issues.
- The primary focus is on reducing costs while still achieving the renovation goals.
- The fire curtain (exactly 20') technically meets requirements; is a new one needed?
- Interior design and finishes (directed to architect to consider)
- Could the exterior back of building be simplified?
- Discussion of elevators (architect shared that the cost difference between a freight elevator and individual elevator is minimal and if went with less costly now, would be throwing that money away in the future when needed)
- The Opera House will be moving forward with a Capital Campaign to raise additional funds to support the project.
- Opera House has applied for several small grants and will continue to apply for additional grants in the future.
- There are several community grassroots initiatives going on, including one coming up at the Congregational Church.

- The Opera House will be in Capital Campaign mode for the next 2-3 years. Thereafter, annual fundraising will continue to occur to continue to support operations.
- Dan had copies of the recent market feasibility study. One of the audience surveys indicated they would be willing to pay more than current ticket prices, would travel more than 30 miles to Franklin. The study also showed comparisons to other projects that share space with municipalities.
- Continue to provide the space for school performances and events, and Footlight Theater school shows.

SUMMARY OF OPEN DIALOGUE WITH AUDIENCE WITH QUESTIONS DIRECTED TO PANEL

- After the renovation, the building will return to being shared space between City of Franklin offices and Franklin Opera House.
- G.A.R. Hall will only be impacted by adhering to safety codes and there has been no plan for it to be destroyed. All agree and respect it as “sacred ground”. There was a suggestion to provide tours in the future.
- Some discussion about why the other options were not considered, but consensus was that the City Council voted for the full amount and to move forward with the project. Chief Foss will put together a presentation for the 10/28 workshop outlining the specifics of the safety and fire code requirements for the building to receive an occupancy and assembly permit.
- Chief Foss shared that City Council received a warning 2 years ago that they had one year to present a building plan and as of this time, there has not been one submitted. ARcove Architects was the first organization to present to the City 2 acceptable plans that met the safety and fire code requirements. Until every item on the list is corrected, there will be no assembly allowed. The other 2 options had missing items (electrical system, auto exit doors and sprinkler system) deeming them unsafe.
- The City aims to secure up to \$3.1 million to rehabilitate the Opera House in order to alleviate a potential tax burden of \$6.8 million, allowing for some flexibility with unexpected expenses. The budget includes a contingency line item that considers the building's age, usage, and market fluctuations.
- While the building is regarded as historical, certain areas are not. The architect has identified the portions that are as "character-defining features" specifically within the Opera House portion. These items present possibilities for grants, such as LCHIP rehabilitation funding. The City staff will research the requirements further.
- Architect addressed the fact that there are certain cost efficiencies. While some items could be modified or removed but may end up costing more in the end. Furthermore, the current budget is already “skinny” but will evaluate cost savings with mechanical systems (HVAC and ductwork), lighting and site work as possible reductions. Seating adjustments need to be in place to accommodate both handicap accessibility, but also current code standards for size and spacing.
- The architect shared the Soldiers Memorial Hall did not spare cost when it was built. The quality of the design, the stone masonry and the unique auditorium with the mezzanine balcony was a feat of engineering for its time.

- The elevator will benefit both the City and Opera House and while the current elevator up to the library is ½ the size of a freight elevator, it can accommodate some equipment. Having a freight elevator presents more possibilities for bigger acts, more performances allowing for more income/revenue for the Opera House.
- If the Opera House can pay \$40,000/year in rent, that is the equivalent of debt service on a \$700,000 bond.
- FBIDC will continue to explore all state/federal grants that could support the rehabilitation and renovation of Soldiers Memorial Hall.
- Future discussion to address the cost to taxpayers, the Opera House as a tenant and programming.
- Future community forum topics will include:
 - Partnership/consensus building for the project
 - Future Opera House programming
 - Final design overview
 - Fundraising efforts
- In conclusion, consensus is the focus on the positive impact the renovation of Soldiers Memorial Hall will have for the Franklin community.