

William Rawn Associates of Boston, Calloway Johnson Moore and West picked as architects for new Asheville performing arts center

Tony Kiss • November 13, 2009

ASHEVILLE — Asheville's long-planned performing arts center reached a major milestone Thursday with the announcement of architects for the downtown project.

The nationally famed William Rawn Associates of Boston will collaborate with local firm Calloway Johnson Moore and West. The venue will be built on what is now a city-owned parking lot bordered by Eagle, Spruce, Marjorie and Davidson streets, in the historic Asheville African-American business district.

“We are so excited about this location and its access to Pack Square Park (the former City-County Plaza),” said James Baudoin, executive director and project manager for the Performance Center in Asheville. No buildings will be demolished to construct the center, he said.

While some have pegged the price at \$60-\$85 million, the total cost hasn't been decided, he said. “We are going to create a master plan and define what the dollars are,” he said.

“We are not just building a performing arts center, but a mixed-use project with commercial components. We want an environment that will be open during the day with an outdoor café, informal stage, and commercial shops that will be in our total budget.”

Funding could come from commercial sources, foundations, corporations and the state “when we get back to the point where the state has money again for economic redevelopment,” Baudoin said. “We don't want to create a project that is a public burden, a public debt.”

The center could be open in 2013 or as late as 2015. “It will be the living room, right off (Pack Square Park),” said longtime local arts leader Joyce Dorr, a member of the center's board of directors.

The building's centerpiece would be a 2,000-2,100-seat performance hall used by such groups as the Asheville Symphony, Asheville Bravo Concerts, touring artists and traveling Broadway shows. Many of those programs are now held in aging Thomas Wolfe Auditorium, which cannot be easily modernized or expanded.