

# Mountain XPress

## Group vows to put Asheville performing-arts venue back in the spotlight

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**Bill Miles**, board president of The Performance Center in Asheville, was standing on a Grove Arcade balcony outside the offices of architects Calloway, Johnson, Moore and West on November 12, having just announced that the firm would be joining Boston-based William Rawn Associates in crafting a master plan for the long-discussed center.

"We do think we got the cream of the crop," said Miles, whose group was founded in 2004 in response to widely leveled complaints that Thomas Wolfe Auditorium is ill-suited to put on stage productions and symphony performances.

The organization announced in 2007 that it was seeking to build public interest in the project, which it estimated would cost roughly \$85 million. Then in 2008, Asheville City Council supported its proposal to locate the center on city-owned property on Market Street just south of Asheville City Hall.

The organization appears to have remained in the good graces of local government. Both Asheville Mayor **Terry Bellamy** and Buncombe County Board of Commissioners Chair **David Gantt** showed up to offer words of encouragement at the announcement.

The group explained that it would be launching an effort to have a master plan for the project completed by the end of 2010. Early in the year it will begin to host community meetings that will determine what sort of features should be included. This time the group is giving no cost estimate; Executive Director **James Baudoin** says a budget won't be drawn up until the master-plan design is underway.

While Rawn Associates will be the lead design firm, CJM&W will work to make sure the project is a good fit for Asheville, explained architect **Alan McGuinn**. McGuinn knows a thing or two about building community consensus. He helped shepherd the design of the Interstate 26 connector alternative 4B with the Asheville Design Center. "This is a legacy project," he said. "We need to have a conversation with the community to get an understanding of what the role of a performing arts center should be."

It is generally anticipated that the building will be a multipurpose and mixed-use facility that will create foot traffic even when performances aren't being held. And it is hoped that the center will draw more economic activity to the Eagle/Market street area. For regularly updated information on the effort, go to [www.theperformancecenter.org](http://www.theperformancecenter.org).