

Performance Center in Asheville design gets spotlight

Public views working model; goal is to open site in 2015

by Carol Mostinger • July 29, 2010



Architect Alan McGuinn, center, explains details of the model

ASHEVILLE — Asheville got its first look Wednesday at what a proposed performing arts center downtown is shaping up to look like.

The Performance Center in Asheville board unveiled a working model of the site and other design considerations during two afternoon sessions at the Grove Arcade. The board anticipates a 2015 opening date for the center, which will be located just south of City Hall.

The event was the first in a series of community outreach efforts by the nonprofit organization, said James Baudoin, executive director and project manager. Other discussions and presentations are planned throughout the fall at the YMI Cultural Center, the Grove Arcade and the Asheville Design Center.

“We are very excited,” said Carolyn Hubbard, president of the Asheville Symphony Orchestra board. “It will give you good space, good acoustics, bathrooms and also a room to entertain before the performance.”

Bill Rawn, principal with William Rawn Associates, the Boston firm who partnered with Asheville's Calloway Johnson Moore & West on the project, said the architects intended the project “to be about connecting and not dividing the city.” The site for the center is bordered by Spruce Street, Marjorie Street, Davidson Drive and Eagle Street.

“The people in Asheville are involved in the arts unlike almost any other American city,” Rawn said. “We think it's important that (the design) responds to that.”

The initial cost estimates for the project are \$85 million, but this number could change as the design is tweaked and finalized, Baudoin said. The board raised \$4.6 million in its first phase campaign, ending in December 2007. Although private fundraising will take up a significant part of the funding, the board is also looking into public options, Baudoin said.

The initial design includes a 2,000-seat multipurpose main hall, with a smaller black box or studio theater and rehearsal space. There will also be space for classrooms, lobbies, meeting/reception rooms, catering and dining facilities and outdoor activity areas. The space is intended for use by local and regional arts organizations, as well as nationally touring groups.

Rawn envisions the center to be more than just a performance space, but a vital meeting space for the community. He sees street musicians congregating on the outdoor steps, mime and dancers performing inside the lobby.

Hubbard said she thinks the project is a good addition to the existing arts venues because “we will be able to draw higher quality of artists,” noting that big Broadway productions just can't fit in places like the Wolfe Auditorium.