

## Century II Citizens Advisory Committee Recommendation

**Introduction:** The twelve members of the Century II Citizens Advisory Committee are proud to present the results of a year-long effort on behalf of our fellow citizens. We convened not to referee a debate about whether Century II should remain part of Wichita’s skyline – and you will see that we have not made a specific recommendation on that matter for now – but rather to thoughtfully outline a path forward for performing arts facilities that can serve our community with excellence for decades to come. We believe that the recommendations below have the right combination of inspiration, ambition, practicality and accountability to garner community support and result in a significant win for our region’s cultural and economic health. It achieves excellence and is the bold path forward, at the lowest price.

**Recommendations:** Based on its research, review of previous studies by experts, dialogue with performing arts organizations and months of public engagement, the Committee unanimously recommends the following:

- The City of Wichita build a new performing arts center on a portion of City-owned land between Kellogg Drive and Douglas Avenue, between the Arkansas River and Main Street. This facility should be a signature community asset, distinctive in design and customized to our community and the setting. It must be capable of supporting the current and future needs of performing arts organizations and offer excellent experiences for patrons.
- Within 60 days, the City initiate a request for proposal for site selection and concept development for the new performing arts facility. The firm or team selected for that project should have meaningful experience with performing arts and riverfront development projects. The following deliverables should be included in the project scope:
  - o Proposed siting for and preliminary design of a new performing arts facility that delivers on the building program outlined by Fisher Dachs Associates in 2014.
  - o Analysis of alternative use options for the current Century II facility and/or the property on which it stands. This should cover options for repurposing of the round building (including ideas gathered from citizens to date), as well as options for transforming the current site into a flexible and engaging outdoor community gathering space.
  - o An integration of this site analysis and design recommendations with the broader effort by the City of Wichita, as well as the Greater Wichita Partnership and Project Wichita, to create a comprehensive and unified plan for a vibrant, engaging city center. This new performing arts center should be sited and designed as part of a cohesive site plan for our core riverfront area. This plan should take into account a new or expanded convention center (which could share staff or capabilities with the performing arts center), engaging public gathering spaces, connectivity with developments on the west bank of the river, and other elements.
  - o A community engagement process that includes collecting further citizen input on the siting and preliminary design concepts for the performing arts facility.

- To help achieve this much-needed solution for performing arts in our community, the City Council should support community efforts to explore a possible referendum for a city- or county-wide public funding initiative. This initiative could focus on performing arts needs or be scoped wider, to address additional citizen priorities. The Committee encourages the City Council to support timely action, driving toward a referendum in spring of 2020.
- The Mayor and City Council should maintain a Citizens Advisory Committee as a consultative body through the completion of the project.

### **Background:**

**Appointment and Mission:** Mayor Jeff Longwell appointed the Committee in February 2018 to focus on a performing arts facility solution that would best serve the community going forward.

### **The Committee's Charter:**

- Evaluate the feasibility of renovating the 50-year-old facility or the possibility of building a new performing arts center.
- Assume no available operational funds or borrowing authority could be dedicated to a performing arts project.
- Recommend a path forward that will foster the community support necessary to complete this project.

### **Reports/Studies Examined:**

- *The AMS Century II Performing Arts Assessment. Building Program for Performing Arts Center Study* (Fisher Dachs Associates, May, 2014)
- *Century II Complex Renovation-Expansion Concept Design* (GLMV Architecture, Populous, Sasaki, Shelly Willis, August, 2014)
- *Century II Facility Assessment* (Populous, GLMV Architecture, April, 2016)
- *Cost-Benefit Analysis of Wichita's Performing Arts and Convention Center Product* (Convention, Sports & Leisure and AMS, July, 2016)
- Community research (focus groups and public survey) conducted by Project Wichita in 2018.
- Arts and Economic Prosperity® 5, an economic impact study conducted specifically for Wichita by Americans for the Arts, the nation's nonprofit organization for advancing the arts in America.

### **Other Research:**

- Conducted discussions with all Century II tenant organizations and users about their current and future needs.
- Studied numerous communities' Quality of Life initiatives and determinants of citizen migration patterns.
- Examined the results of select communities' approaches to reinvigorate their performing arts facilities and/or their downtown and riverfront assets.
- Reviewed news coverage and historical reports about Century II and its predecessor facility.

**Community Listening:** Over a three month period, the Committee spoke and listened to thousands of members of our community.

- Dozens of presentations covered each District Advisory Board, the Downtown Wichita Rotary Club, the Wichita Bar Association, Young Professionals of Wichita, Downtown YMCA Men’s Club, public radio’s Democracy on Tap event series, neighborhood and church groups, attendees at the 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party for Century II, and the boards of directors for the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Wichita Partnership, Music Theatre Wichita and the Wichita Symphony Orchestra.
- Email dialogue reached employees of major regional companies, large civic and education organizations, downtown tenant groups, family organizations, professional associations and more. And the committee’s website had thousands of visits and collected hundreds of email inquiries and comments.
- The committee and its work was featured extensively in the media, including coverage by all local television stations, the *Wichita Business Journal*, *The Wichita Eagle*, KMUW Public Radio, iHeart Radio, Kansas Radio Theatre, *Splurge Magazine* and others.
- The committee also helped curate a Social Media Town Hall managed by City communication staff. Hundreds of online comments and responses were gathered during that dialogue.
- A public survey tool launched at the Century II Birthday Party prompted 4,375 citizen responses, including more than 3,500 individuals who responded with specific hopes, ideas and comments about Century II, our community’s performing arts assets and the future of our core downtown area.
  - o A large majority of respondents believe it is vital for Wichita to have modern convention and performing arts facilities. More than 85% agreed that modern and functioning facilities were very important to our community and 65.5% valued having modern capabilities over keeping Century II and the Wichita skyline unchanged.
  - o Questions about renovation vs. building new facilities for conventions and/or performing arts showed that while a few individuals want the cheapest option, and some would prefer to renovate, the largest segments favor new and distinctive facilities.

It’s notable that all of this feedback was gathered without having actual renderings of a new performing arts center (or convention facility) to share with citizens. From the thousands of comments gathered in our survey, through our website and social media conversations and in direct citizen dialogue, we have heard many thoughtful, diverse perspectives, but very few proponents of ‘settling’ or stalling on this important manner. Our fellow citizens make it clear that excellence should be our standard, and action should not be further delayed.

**Findings:**

1. Performing arts are very important to our community. Citizens recognize, whether they are patrons of the arts or not, that our home-grown arts organizations are excellent and bring tremendous value to the region.

- Economic impact is only part of this, but not a small part. Music Theatre Wichita alone, as conservatively estimated by Wichita State University’s Center for Economic Development and Business Research, adds more than \$4 million to the local economy each year.
  - The most recent Arts & Economic Prosperity study affirms that the nonprofit arts and culture sector is a significant industry in the City of Wichita—one that generates \$94.7 million in total economic activity. This spending—\$43.9 million by nonprofit arts and cultural organizations and an additional \$50.8 million in event-related spending by their audiences—supports 2,841 full-time equivalent jobs, generates \$70.9 million in household income to local residents, and delivers \$9.5 million in local and state government revenue
  - Overall, our citizens want our performing arts organizations to thrive and should have outstanding facilities that allow them to do so.
2. After years of study, swift action is needed. Doing nothing or implementing small-scoped changes to Century II’s capabilities are no longer options. We have studied the issues and patched the problems; it is time for decisive movement toward a long-term solution.
  3. Only projects that enable the ongoing operation of our performing arts organizations should be considered.
    - Citizen input indicates firm support for doing no harm to these cultural institutions.
    - Research indicates that ceasing operations for even a season would be highly destructive to the organizations’ missions and long-term health.
    - Other local venues lack the capacity or capability to allow our performing arts organizations to do what they do, at the level they do it.
    - We must bridge to the future by continuing arts operations and performances in the existing facilities.
  4. Building a new facility is the best path to offering modern performing arts capabilities and maximizing long-term community benefit.
    - Based on current estimates from Fisher Dachs and Associates, constructing a high-caliber performing arts facility would cost approximately \$155 million, with an additional \$20 million for a parking structure and a yet-to-be-determined amount for site development.
    - Spaces for set building, costume design, etc., that specifically serve the unique education and product development missions of Wichita’s performing arts organizations are included in this building program.
    - Within this cost estimate, we can design and build it with excellence. The estimate allows for a distinctive design, customized to the site and our needs, and equips the facility with quality spaces, appropriate capacity, dynamic technology and other needed capabilities.
    - Research on other communities’ projects and citizen feedback here support two additional conclusions that make building a new, high-quality facility the clear choice for a project with no existing funding stream:
      - i. Citizen enthusiasm gravitates toward new, signature projects, and the appetite for pride-worthy investment in our core riverfront area is strong right now.

- ii. Private donor support for a new facility will greatly exceed donations that could reasonably be expected in support of a remodel.

5. It is unrealistic that the City could achieve a high-quality, cost-effective result by renovating Century II as the future home for performing arts.

- The first challenge for a renovation project of this magnitude that lacks a funding source would be to build the necessary community and/or donor support to execute it. The Committee has uncovered no potential leaders for a funding campaign to cover a remodel.
- Over the past 8 years, local and national teams have outlined multiple scenarios for renovation, and that work continues even today. These attempts to fit a performing arts facility with modern capabilities into Century II include one or more of these challenges:
  - i. They fail to preserve the fundamental structure or appearance of the building
  - ii. They sacrifice necessary capacity or modern capabilities and amenities
  - iii. They promise to be more expensive – short and long term – than building new
  - iv. They threaten the ongoing operations of the performing arts organizations
- Given the existing structure’s constraints, the remodel options are costly. A leading national consultancy, which was paired with the expertise of a local architecture firm, showed that building the necessary modern capabilities into Century II would take \$252 million.
- The \$252 million scenario violates the existing roofline to get the height/capacity needed. Another scenario, focused on maintaining the roofline, involves going down and into the core of the circular building to gain the spaces needed. While initial cost figures on that scenario are not yet available, the Committee cannot reasonably predict that this endeavor would, in the end, cost less than previous analyses, without compromise.
- A renovation of this scope while trying to operate in the existing performance spaces promises to be very challenging, and industry experts estimate that remodeling amidst ongoing operations can add 30 to 40 percent to project costs.
- The longer-term cost picture for the remodel option is also weighed down by the substantial space that would be left as surplus. The building program outlines needed space as about 40 percent of the footprint of the round building. This leaves open what could be a very expensive question of retrofitting and operating the excess space, long term.

6. The 2014 building program is sound, but it is vital to have continued input from performing arts organizations and other local voices as the project is sited and defined.

- The proposed building program was created by industry experts, based on both national expectations for a modern performing arts center and the unique needs of our local performing arts organizations. These elements should not be compromised.
- Even so, additional input from local arts organizations, current Century II facility managers and community representatives (from the Committee, or others) will be needed at every stage of design and project execution, to go from broad statements of need and outlines of square footage to a specific design that functions well for our community.
- In addition, whether and how the Wichita Wurlitzer, a privately owned asset, will be incorporated into a new facility has not been addressed in the existing building program.

- The Committee requests that the City's Arts and Culture Division Director oversee the formation of this core input team that would have a voice throughout the project.

**Summary:**

The Committee's recommended path forward enables our community to thrive. It acknowledges the desire by our fellow citizens to look to the future with an eye for excellence and cohesive strategies necessary to transform our core riverfront area. It affirms the value of our performing arts organizations and sets us up to remain an arts and culture leader, both regionally and nationally. At the same time, it allows for a thoughtful evaluation of the best approach to the space currently occupied by Century II, whether that is reuse of the structure or repurposing of the land as a community asset. We don't believe Century II is an adequate home for performing arts in the future, and we believe that the space currently occupied by Century II is among the city's most valuable assets. Thus, for the best future of our performing arts facilities and on behalf of our fellow citizens, we recommend this clear, bold and cost-effective path forward.