

## CITY OF SAVANNAH ARENA ADVISORY COMMITTEE

PROGRAMMING WORKING GROUP  
SUMMARY REPORT  
19 November 2015

### **Scope / Mission: Consider programs, activities and events that could be suitable for a new Arena.**

1. Assumptions Regarding Present Civic Center.

- A. Johnny Mercer Theater: Retained. Biggest full theater within 150 miles. Busy.
- B. Ballroom and Meeting Rooms: Retained. Accessible, quite busy with city and civic activities.
- C. MLK Jr Arena: may be retained. Outdated, but could still be useful for many local/NFP needs.

Cautions:

Inevitable competition between venues for business, and for financial support if MLK is retained: New facility has mandate to minimize operating subsidies, so should not be constrained from competing for local fill in business.

Significant capital, operating and maintenance cost implications. Facilities will inevitably compete for limited CIP funds particularly. City will be directly subsidizing two competing venues.

2. Appropriate Events-and-Activities Profile for a new Arena.

- A. Concerts. Handle 9-11,000-seat acts for which present CC is too small.
- B. Performance Events: Circus, Disney etc.
- C. Plays, Musicals. Mainly larger-scale events that exceed JMT capacity.
- D. Amateur Sports. Potential to anchor Indoor and Outdoor youth/amateur tournaments.
- E. Professional Sports. Potential for Minor League Hockey, Arena Football. MSA limits (see below).
- F. Local / Civic. Some local events will transfer, some go to other venues, some stay at MLK Arena if retained, or disappear. We note that the volume of local & civic events at Civic Center now limits its availability to other demand sectors like amateur sports.

Caution: the new arena location is isolated from established vehicle or pedestrian circulation patterns. If MLKA is retained, the new arena is denied much of the 'churn' of local event activity, a vital factor in commercial growth around it: in that sense, the activity occurring naturally around the Civic Center now would need to be artificially created and sustained for years around the new site, making design and concurrent development of the Canal District even more critical.

- G. Assemblies. If no MLKA, many graduations will want to move to Arena: bowl config very suitable.
- H. Meetings & Conventions. Arena could fit big programs; but would also need other, expensive function and service facilities, plus provisions to induce hotel development on site/nearby.

3. Potential for Selling Suites and Other Premium Space.

- A. Cheap Ticket / Late Ticket Phenomenon.
- B. Savannah's small MSA has difficulty supporting premium-access or membership-based activities.
  - 1) Savannah Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA): Bryan-Chatham-Effingham: 365k pop.
  - 2) Savannah Combined Statistical Area (CSA): MSA + Liberty-Long-Statesboro Metro: 515k p
  - 3) Savannah Designated Market Area (DMA): 17 GA, 3 SC Counties; 830k pop.

- C. Premium Level: Consider flexible, demand-driven space w upgraded finishes v. permanent hardwall suite bays. More expensive initially but payoff in flexibility.
  - D. Experience does suggest limited prospects for seasonal / annual suite sales vs. per-event rental.
4. Complementary / Supporting External Facilities and Programming.
- A. Sports Tournaments: Facilities, Programming.
    - 1) Amateur/youth sports. Pent-up demand, but hotel pricing and availability is a problem.
    - 2) Flex Open Space: useful for soccer, football, park, festivals, markets. (Daffin Park model). Caution: tournaments tend to need many concurrent fields. Temp facilities expensive.
    - 3) Basic Infrastructure: irrigation, drainage, restrooms/showers, shelters, bleacher hardstands.
    - 4) Separate Parking: on permeable surface enables flex uses such as outdoor / farmers markets.
  - B. On-Site / Nearby Development: Inducements, Master Planning. ‘Magnifier-Diversifier’ Effect.
    - 1) Lodging. Hotel site(s) within the district attracts market interest, extends tourism footprint.
    - 2) Retail. Street-level retail storefront in parking structure and exterior of the arena itself.
    - 3) Water Works – based ‘Entertainment Zone: extends stay time, circulation throughout campus.
    - 4) ‘Retail Zone’ provides area, easier permitting for small retail, food trucks at outdoor events.
5. Arena Benefits to Major Community Users.
- A. Academic (SCAD, ASU, SSU, STC, SCPSS). Factors: usability, competition, duplication.
    - 1) Invite/induce ‘satellite campus’ thinking (SCAD model).
    - 2) Create ‘homes’ for music/entertainment industry-related academic programs.
    - 3) Arena-as-Lab: teach rigging, refrigeration, turf mgmt., water treatment/conservation, LEED
  - B. Corporate. Gulfstream, JCB, GPA etc ‘endow’ academic programs, meeting or other public spaces.
  - C. Public Sector. Well-crafted local / civic access policies advised to avert political pressure.
  - D. Local Iconic Business Sectors (Aviation, Medical, Maritime Logistics, International Trade).
  - E. Neighborhoods. Incorporate them--CV, Cloverdale, Laurel Grove, Railroad etc--in site design. Include Stiles Ave in Canal District for streetscape planning, reduce ‘barrier’ perception, insure pedestrian connections to west and to nearby workforce. Caution: a Stiles flyover might be straightforward, but would reduce street-level pedestrian activity.
6. Potential for Generating Large, Incremental (Non-Competing) Convention / Other Programs
- A. Flexible Meeting / Classroom Space with upgraded finishes, lighting, HSD.
    - 1) Creates need for \$\$\$ other facilities / services: catering, conf services, A-V, production etc.
    - 2) ‘Headquartered’ programs not feasible without nearby hotels, tourism infrastructure—would be dependent on programs based elsewhere: ie, shared with SITCC, CGC, or bigger hotel(s).
    - 3) Meeting space could serve also as classroom space for resident academic programs.
    - 4) Needs imply 4—6 rooms and lobby space, approx. 6,000sf total, plus exhibit ‘box’ 25-30,000sf.
7. Venue and Community-Appropriate Sports Events, Activities, Series, Tenants.
- A. Sports:
    - 1) Facility floor should accommodate hockey, basketball, arena football, gymnastics programs.
    - 2) Caution: Ice-making plant expensive to install, maintain; conversion time inhibits event flow.
    - 3) Amateur/Touring Pro events, vs home-based pro team(s). Sustained MSA/CSA support for domiciled teams questionable. Rugrats (soccer), PBA basketball, Sand Gnats baseball lessons.

- B. Activities: Amateur sports, campus festivals, recreation, heritage tourism (Ogeechee Canal).
- C. Recurring: regional outdoor retail market, farmer's markets.
- D. Potential Tenants: minor league sports team(s); academic resident programs, public safety substation, city bureau.

Summary. The Subcommittee's tasking was to suggest activities and events suitable for a new Arena, at the selected Westside / Waterworks location. We did our work in the presence of two unanswered questions:

1. The probable range of capacities and features of the new facility within budget limits; and
2. The future of the present MLK Arena at Civic Center.

Neither of these was in our purview; but the MLK arena question in particular will have a substantial impact on the new facility's design and programming potential, as discussed above.

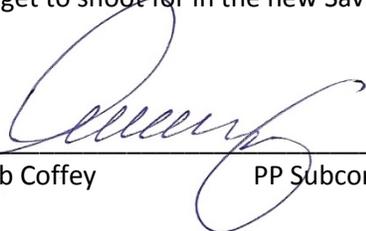
The facility's location--also not in our purview--also affects programming potential: both as to its ability to attract a suitable mix of event demand, and in integrating with the city's tourism and recreational blueprints.

The Waterworks site is quite suitable from an operator and event producer standpoint, with good road access and parking, staging-marshalling nearby, and an attractive campus: superior to Civic Center in those respects. While the venue will be designed to handle modern event production needs; and provide revenue-generating features and patron amenities, it must also do so in a setting that patrons perceive as comfortable, accessible and safe--keys to the entertainment dollar, which can often outweigh operational and infrastructure concerns.

Put another way: if we could have magically re-created the MLK arena in modern form and capacity where it is now, patrons and clients may well have asked why we didn't. Patrons typically like the Civic Center, its age and condition aside. Why they like it--their wants and needs--must also be a main focus in the new facility.

We think prospects for success--not just as an event venue, but as a community asset, hinge in part on pulling the arena campus into the city's everyday rhythms over time, by inducing and supporting activity and "traffic", casual as well as event-related, around it. Done right, the Boundary / Canal District can help achieve this, while providing the premise for real economic growth around the campus.

To summarize, Civic Center's successful mix of community-centric vitality, and high event tempo, is a worthy target to shoot for in the new Savannah Arena.

  
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