

City of Savannah Arena Advisory Committee

Utilizations of Current Civic Center Sub Committee

Members: Chester Ellis, Chairperson, Patrick Bentley, Alisha Blakely, C. McGill Brown, Ivan Cohen, Curtis Cooper, Marilyn Jackson, Randolph Slay, Louis Wilson, Rev. Lamark Young, Dr. Kenneth Zapp, Joe Shearouse, staff and Shirley Smith, staff.

Scope/Mission: To offer advisory guidance on the utilization and future use of the Civic Center.

Recommendation: Johnny Mercer Theatre, Ballroom and the meeting rooms should be retained.

The Martin Luther King Junior Arena would be used to serve primarily locally sponsored events such as, The Black Heritage Festival, The Irish Festival, United Way Kick-Off Luncheon, the Junior League of Savannah Thrift Shop Sale, and other events sponsored by local non-profits. The new arena would be the primarily venue for concerts, major sporting events, family entertainment, the circus, and Disney on Ice. Steps would be taken to assure that the existing arena does not compete with the new arena. The existing arena could also be used as a soundstage with very few renovations required. This would make our local area more attractive to the filming industry. Serious consideration should be given prior to razing the existing arena. It would be very difficult to build any type of facility of that size again in the historic district.

Minority Position on the future of the Civic Center:

I recommend that the entire Civic Center building be removed and the City sells the land for private development of housing and local commercial businesses.

1. Preserving this structure for use by non-profit organizations which cannot afford to pay market prices for other venues does seem financially feasible for the City. The future losses would drain scarce resources needed for vital City services.
2. Downtown residents need a variety of commercial services. Most existing businesses downtown serve tourists, not residents.
3. Removal of the Civic Center may also allow for the re-establishment of the original historic squares which would attract substantial investment in downtown housing.
4. The revenue benefits for the City are obvious.

Kenneth Zapp, PhD

Attached is a list of the events held at the Civic Center Arena. Please let us know if we can be of further assistance.