

To: Members of the Alexandria School Board

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I am a West End resident who is supporting the inclusion of an auditorium in the plans for Patrick Henry. I have had a career dealing with educational policy. The Arts Commission has endorsed the inclusion of an auditorium in the plans for Patrick Henry. I started my career working for a Congressman in upstate New York where I was his "money lady." My job was to go after state, federal and foundation funds for various projects for a five county Congressional District. So the proposals below are not pie in the sky but practical things that can be done to make the auditorium a reality.

PROCESS & TIMING - In terms of process some of the issues are outlined in the Letter to the Editor I wrote in today's Alexandria Gazette. Local residents wanted to bring this up much, much earlier but were thwarted at every turn. Unfortunately ACPS actively discourages local residents from bringing up issues they do not wish to consider such as the auditorium and meetings are organized and constructed so that the public only gets to comment on and offer suggestions on what ACPS wants to focus on. There are very few opportunities for the public to offer their own original ideas. To do that you have to have an open hearing process not a charrette approach.

First in terms of timing if the City and School Board get behind the idea of having an auditorium things can happen and they can happen faster than taking 3 months. This is a matter of prioritizing it and fast tracking how we get input to create a good design for the auditorium. The School Board Members have the ability to press the ACPS Planning Staff to do this and to get the Design Team to create a design that works.

AD HOC GROUP CAN HELP FACILITATE PLANS FOR AUDITORIUM - Here are some suggestions.

1. Soliciting design ideas for the auditorium from, teachers, administrators, community people and performance arts groups about elements that would make the stage and auditorium more efficient and usable.
2. To help make an auditorium, space from the black box theatre and the stage in the cafetorium could be combined with other space. Suggest that the Rec. Center video program move directly into the classroom with Rec and Arts staff working with regular teaching staff to use videos in regular class instruction such as creating historical plays to teach history, civics, literature or reciting poetry. Kids could also learn to take videos of dancers and singers, musicians, in performance.

3. Local community supporters can help to facilitate this process by gathering information which could be used for a program utilization and business plan. Issues such as:

- The potential size of the auditorium.
- How many hours a day it will be used by the school system
- How many evenings it is likely to be used for school activities by either the School System or Parks and Rec. (Perhaps the latter might like to put on a Jazzercise performance a la Jane Fonda or all of those exercise gurus who present their videos on TV.)
- How many evenings and weekends the auditorium might be available for rental by Performing Arts Groups.
- Solicit information from performing arts groups as to what elements would work best to enhance rentals of the space. These include, but are not limited to, rental prices that cover costs for using the space and facilitating scheduling.
- Work out a budget for how much it costs to pay for custodial staff to be on hand when it is rented.

CREATING A PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP TO FACILITATE SECURING FUNDS -

1. We can all work to solicit funding from private business people, foundations, federal, state and local sources of funding for buildings.
2. Establish a designated 501 c 3 which could serve as a pass through for donations from businesses and other groups. This allows potential donors to take a tax write off to fund good works while simultaneously getting a lot of nice publicity. This allows us to use the federal government tax code as a funding source. There are a number of non-profits already in place that might serve that function. Some are established by business organizations others are run by local arts organizations or school enhancement organizations. The point is we can use this approach to pass through donations.

Example - This approach was used in securing funding for a parcel of "Open Space" over on Polk Street. A developer had run into opposition from the community on plans to build townhouses on a steep plot of land. He turned it over to the City via a donation to the Nature Conservancy it was matched with a donation from the BRAC project which had taken 14 acres of open space land over at the BRAC site and had to give money to the City in compensation. Thus the City of Alexandria was not required to spend any money for the site. This involved donations in the millions for 2.38 acres of land. This is what using a non-profit as a pass through for donations can help to do.

3. The Design Team stated that there would be additional costs related to: the footings for the building, a larger roof, and the auditorium itself.

a.) Approach companies to make monetary or in-kind contributions for which

they get bragging rights. Museums do this all the time so do other arts groups. Examples:

- Ask a flooring company to outright donate the flooring for the auditorium and the stage
 - Ask a roofing company to donate roofing materials for the auditorium.
 - Ask a lighting company to donate the stage lights.
 - Ask a company to donate the curtain for an auditorium
 - Ask a company that makes the seating for such auditoriums to donate the seats.
- Although vocal teacher Dave Evans idea of reusing the current theatre seats and curtain are a good.

b.) Approach Congressman Don Beyers and former Congressman Jim Moran and ask them to help identify big donors who are likely to be interested in funding an educational project beloved by school kids, neighbors and arts groups. Especially for children who are poor and many of whom are immigrants but love their arts programs. Beyers and Moran travel in these circles and know these kinds of donors and could host such an event. If a committee of community, arts and education groups the School Board, and Council Members worked on this together we could probably get some good contributions for this effort. Note that both School Board Member Veronica Nolan and Mayor Allison Silberberg have experience in terms of having run non-profit organizations and know well how to solicit donations for worthy causes.

4. We could also use things such as Kick-starter and other on-line fund raising efforts to secure donations. A lot of these approaches work very well. Bernie Sanders has proved that this approach allows small donors to get involved in something that they like.

POTENTIAL ADD/DELETES IN ACPS & CITY BUDGET PLANS

In terms of getting in under the current budget caps this could be done by building the auditorium now and delaying the installation of the artificial playing field for the Rec Center for another budget year. Since the funding for the Artificial Playing Fields under the Parks and Rec Budget and the funding for the Auditorium are comparable funding. The funding could be earmarked for the Auditorium this year and the money for the playing fields could be put into the budget the following year. This is proposed to try to stagger the implementation plans for the site to accommodate current budget constraints. An artificial field can be put in after the building is built but the footprint needed to accommodate the Auditorium needs to be worked on now.

AUDITORIUM AND ARTS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/AND SCHOOL ENHANCEMENT-

1. The auditorium would be a permanent draw in the future both to strengthen the Arts programs in the school and as an important economic development

enhancement.

A) Strong arts programs help to attract parents with children who want to attend the school. Arts programs are a very big draw. Parents and children really like them and arts education programs greatly enhance educational outcomes. Test scores improve because skills learned in arts classes stimulate creativity and teach children to focus and work in groups. Arts programs tend to improve the attachment of children to schools and if they are in arts classes they tend to finish school and attend college in greater numbers than those who do not. Note also that this is the only elementary school in the City which offers dance instruction and from attending both the Dance Concert and the Heritage Night when children were performing it is a huge hit with the children and parents. Kids were dancing not only on stage but in the aisles. People love these arts programs and the auditorium. When petitions were being gathered outside the school several children came up and asked to sign the Petitions to Save the Auditorium. They want this kind of amenity in their school. This is coming up from the grass roots.

B) Having a venue in the neighborhood where residents could walk or bike to the school to attend an arts performance or a lecture on local history or whatever they wanted is a big draw and benefit for local residents. In places where this kind of approach has been used the value of the homes increases, the number of parents wanting to send their kids to the school increases and suddenly it is the hip, cool, interesting place to live. In places across the country where this kind of approach has been employed this is the kind of thing that can happen. It happened in DC when the theaters established themselves on 14th street.

Residents, ACPS staff, teachers and arts groups could work collaboratively together to develop a plan to offer programming for the venue which is attractive and interesting to both the parents with kids in school and to local neighbors. Here are some possible programs that might find an audience at this venue. A play, a poetry slam, movie nights, a rock band, ballet, modern dance, hip-hop, gospel, chamber music, barbershop quartets, ethnic dance groups such as Indian dancers, Irish step dancers, tango, Salsa, folk music concerts, drumming or lectures on local history, flower arranging, photography, or whatever people would like. First you make up a list of possibilities and then you ask the parents and neighbors what kind of programming appeals to them the most.

A marketing plan like this could help to make much better use of tax payers funds in a local tax paid for facility because it offers better utilization of space while also enhancing the community and providing programs people like. Note outside performance groups will not be interested in renting a cafeteria, they really, really dislike them. Its main value outside of school activities is as a meeting space.

Note there is a dearth of performance space in the West End and indeed in the city. Even finding meeting room space is a challenge the libraries are best but

they are booked well in advance. The Schlesinger Center at NOVA is too large and expensive for most groups.

The reason for locating such a venue in the West End is that this is where the majority of our population is and where population is growing because land is less expensive here.

Also having a performance facility that is in the neighborhood increases the interest of local residents, even those who do not have children because it is a benefit that they can enjoy as well.

Please, will all the powers that be, pay attention to the priorities being expressed by local community people.

Thank you for your attention.