

Town of Camden Opera House Committee
Monthly Meeting
April 9, 2012
Tucker Room
5PM

Present: Susan Dorr, Chair; Kerry Hadley, Manager; Howard Jones, Budget Committee; Dave Morrison, Technical Director; Aimee Phelan-Deconinck, Maryanne Shanahan; Don White, Select Board Liaison; Bob Williams

Absent: Kate Bates, Raymond Brunyanski, Hal Owen

Meeting called to order by Susan Dorr at 5:02 PM.

Minutes from the Regular Meeting held on March 5th were approved.

Select Board/Budget Update

1. Don White reported that the Select Board Meeting held on April 3rd went smoothly, including the vote on the Opera House (OH) budget.
2. The only item turned down was the request for money from the TIFF Fund for business kiosks in the downtown area. He noted the lack of specificity in the presentation as the reason for the 9 against/8 for vote, and iterated that “presentation is key.”
3. Howard Jones joined the OH Committee meeting to aid in “taking the value of what the OH brings to the town and giving numbers to it.” He discussed the need for a story to present the impact that the OH has on the cultural and fiscal life of the town -i.e., if an event at the OH brought in an additional 200 people to the town, it would have an impact on all of the other businesses in the area.
4. Bob Williams suggested that the OH ask its patrons to complete a survey to gather information about the number of people who travel to see the shows that are presented there. Kerry Hadley said that the OH already has that information on many events from TicketBiscuit ticket sales reports which gathers zip codes.
5. Don noted the Downtown Master Plan would be presented at Select Board for public comment most probably in May.

Knowledge Transfer Alliance Meeting/UMO Box Office Ticketing Evaluation and Recommendations

1. Kerry Hadley reported that Brian Hodges connected the OH with the University of Maine at Orono (UMO) and graduate student Sarah Morehead in order to utilize the free consulting services of the Knowledge Transfer Alliance. They exist to aid organizations in maximizing revenues. Kerry has decided to have Sarah focus on reviewing and selecting Box Office software and create a plan for a Box Office position which would be self funded through ticketing fees. The advantage of this would be to find a service reasonably enough priced, and user friendly that the Opera House would then mandate that all renters of the Opera House use to sell their tickets through; thereby eliminating confusion and providing a one

2. stop place to purchase tickets. Sarah will provide services to the OH until the end of July. Her boyfriend, Hugh, is a web-designer and he will also provide his time and expertise to the study of the efficacy of the OH's website. Kerry brought up the question of an analysis of competitive venues and whether or not that should be part of their research for the OH. Maryann recommended the Portland Symphony's website as a model. Don noted that whatever model is used, the important thing is that the website be experiential and user friendly. Kerry noted that Sarah and Hugh would attend any committee meetings.
3. A discussion took place concerning the idea of changing from an internet-based ticketing system to an in-house system. Kerry detailed the responsibilities of the Box Office and noted that in the past few years ticket sales have grown and reached a tipping point. She said that it would make sense to change to an in-house system but that it has to be analyzed carefully before making any changes. The added expense to the renters was a concern, especially for those who are regularly scheduled to use the OH.
4. Dave suggested that the OH give renters one year to prepare for a mandate to use the new ticketing system.
5. Kerry said that changing to a new system should cost the same with a 3-4 year payback. She discussed that a budget would have to be put in place for the extra staff and purchases that would be necessary to implement and manage a new system.
6. Don noted that a "bottom line" would be necessary, and thought Dave's idea concerning the mandate would be the best way to be diplomatic to the renters and at the same time get the OH ticketing service up to a consistent and professional level.

Strategic Plan *Follow Up

1. Pat will bring the finalized Vision and Mission Statement before the Select Board as an informational presentation. The next big step is the Third Floor Renovation. Architectural plans are in place and the construction costs are estimated at \$250,000 - \$300,000. A business plan will need to be put forth as well as construction documents.
2. Kerry asked if any committee members could research other event centers regarding their meetings, and revenues brought in from those meetings.
3. Maryanne suggested contacting other event centers that are on a similar scale and offer comparable amenities to the OH to inquire about the formulae they use for forecasting.
4. Howard will contact SCORE to ask for help in the analysis.
5. Kerry noted that Pat believes we need to have in place a show of income from donations and other sources. Presently we have \$23,000.00, and Kate Bates would get the fundraising moving.
6. Susan asked if we could revive the *Friends of the Camden Opera House* to help out with fundraising efforts.
7. Don White suggested applying for 501c3 status which would allow the OH to separate from the Municipal Government, access and apply for larger funds, and raise money for the OH privately.
8. Susan requested that she and Kerry meet with Pat to discuss 501c3 status.

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Events

1. The Makem Brothers and Gordon Bock taped a compilation cd at the OH. Kerry is looking to book them for an event in the future and will see about securing copies to sell from the OH.
2. The OH is one of the designated sites for the QR Codes/History Project
3. The Opera House is presenting John Gorka on August 4th.
4. Kerry reported that, financially, we're in great shape: \$10-\$15,000.00 over our projected budget, and at 75% for expenses.
5. Kerry felt that the screen image for *Aida* was a bit dark and believed that it was due to the projector.
6. Dave suggested they experiment. He said that projecting from behind the screen would make the image much smaller, and that blacking out the windows might be a solution.
7. Susan felt that the budget for *Aida* was positive considering that there was no local media outlet for advertising the event at the time (VillageSoup had closed)

Technical Director Report

1. Dave has brought in 5-6 people with various talents to provide assistance in the technical area. One is Vince Gabriel—"Blind Albert"—a local sound engineer. Their assistance will provide much needed technical assistance to produce more shows without overwhelming current staff.
2. Maryanne suggested asking him if he would perform at the OH and barter his talents as a musician for technical support.

Susan Dorr adjourned the meeting at 6:29PM.

Respectfully submitted by:

Aimee Phelan-Deconinck