

WICOMICO TOURISM AND CIVIC CENTER COMMISSION MEETING
February 1, 2019
Minutes

The Wicomico Tourism and Civic Center Commission met in regular session on February 1, 2019. Chairman Delano called the meeting to order at 11:05 am. The following Board members and staff were present:

Board Members

Mike Delano, Chairman
Ed Urban
Bak Patel
Stephanie Willey
Bill Chambers
Sandy Fitzgerald-Angello
Laura Soper
Mike Getzey
Allen Brown, Chairman Recreation and Parks Commission

Staff Members

Bob Culver, County Executive
Wayne Strasburg, County Administrator
Steve Miller
Chuck Rousseau
Kevin Wright
James Simmons
Kristen Goller
Linda Lyons

The minutes from the October 15, 2018 meeting were approved as circulated.

Chairman Delano noted the positive consolidation of Tourism and Civic Center committees into one. He noted that this creates an Advisory Board that can assist the County in future planning for both tourism and Civic Center initiatives. Mr. Delano introduced the main topic of conversation, which is a possible Phase II renovation project to protect the Civic Center asset for the next 20-30 years into the future.

Mr. Miller consolidated information and discussions from previous board meetings and gave an overall presentation on a possible Phase II concept for the Civic Center. The main components of the concept were derived from the Crossroads Consulting study which was completed through the Maryland Stadium Authority in 2012.

Among many other recommendations, Crossroads noted the absolute need to improve the aging Civic Center asset "in order to remain competitive" into the future. While several of the Crossroads recommendations were addressed in Phase I, many of the larger recommendations that would protect and expand business at the Civic Center were not addressed due to funding limitations.

Recommendations from the study that were not addressed included an addition of 24,000-28,000 SF of new space (banquet / meeting / flex space) "that can serve as swing space and accommodate a variety of functions." Crossroads also noted the need for the Civic Center to remain multi-purpose and flexible in its book of business and recommended improved facility layout "to host simultaneous events."

Based on these recommendations from the Crossroads study, the Phase II concept includes a renovation of the existing Midway gymnasium space and an additional 28,500 SF of new space adjacent to the Midway space (toward the Midway parking lot).

In addition to addressing needs identified in the Crossroads study, the concept presented would attempt to achieve 3 primary objectives:

1. To protect the Civic Center asset

Mr. Miller outlined a variety of ways that additional flat space could generate event activity at the Civic Center and create an environment where simultaneous events could take place at the site. One example presented included “expanded footprint” events such as the Governor’s Challenge basketball tournament. Currently, the Civic Center houses 2 courts for this event and grosses approximately \$27,000 in concessions revenue. The proposed concept would increase play for the event from 2 courts up to 6 courts which would generate additional facility revenue and create potential for the event to further expand and include more teams. Additionally, staff could re-locate existing arena events to the new space (where appropriate) to free up the arena for additional concerts, shows, etc. The new space could also generate brand new events that were not previously in the market.

2. Leverage the Civic Center as a tourism asset

According to Mr. Miller, one of the challenges and frustrations that tourism has experienced over the years is the lack of available dates at the Civic Center, particularly during the winter months when hotel occupancies are generally much lower. While the County has been a proven industry leader in the area of sports marketing, the majority of events take place at outdoor facilities in the warm weather months. The addition of 28,500 SF of space would give the Tourism division an opportunity to replicate its success with an indoor space and provide economic activity and hotel room pick-ups during slower times of the year. According to the National Association of Sports Commissions (NASC), annual direct spending for amateur sports in the United States exceeds \$12 billion per year. One of the goals of a proposed expansion would be to increase this type of activity during shoulder seasons that would benefit the County, the region and the State of Maryland.

3. Increase Public Recreation Opportunities

As noted in the County’s 5-year Land Preservation Parks & Recreation Plan (LPPRP), “the use of Board of Education facilities is not sustainable to meet the demand of existing and future end users of indoor recreation facilities” in the County. The lack of indoor public recreation space has long-been a glaring hole in the County’s inventory which limits recreational opportunities. County residents often have to travel to neighboring jurisdictions to participate in indoor recreational activities during the winter months. The proposed expansion concept would create indoor space and increase opportunities for County residents to participate in more recreational programs and activities.

Lastly, Mr. Miller noted some of the potential financial impacts and costs of such a project. Through industry research and interviews of potential clients, the staff projected the ability to attract 18 new tourism events annually that would generate 2,800+ hotel room nights and generate an estimated economic impact of \$4.2 million/year. The County would also generate approximately \$300,000 in annual net operating revenues as a result of increased activities and ancillary revenues.

Based on industry standards the proposed concept would cost an estimated \$15-\$20 million to construct. If the project receives local and Administrative support, many funding sources would need to be sought. The following funding sources were presented: State grants, loans, County funding and utilizing the Tourism reserve and Civic Center restoration funds to possibly offset debt service on loans received.

Discussion was opened to the Commission. Overall feedback was positive. Mr. Urban commented on how the County has successfully positioned itself as a champion of amateur sports and noted his belief that an investment in youth sports marketing is recession-proof. He added that parents will travel for children. Concerns regarding parking were expressed. Mr. Miller noted there would be at least one row of parking removed with this proposed expansion and agreed that considerations would need to be given to address parking needs. County Administrator Strasburg gave an overview of the projected State of Maryland FY20 budget and noted that it would be difficult to fund this type of project without heavy support of State funds.

After lunch, a new proposed WYCC booking procedure was presented by Mr. Rousseau. The practical goal of the booking procedure would be to have clients complete a "Facility Use Application" when requesting date(s) for a proposed event (rather than reserving dates on a first-come, first-served basis). Once applications are received, a committee would follow the "New Event Checklist" which would allow for proper vetting of the event and possible prioritization for events that may generate higher revenue or overall impacts on the community.

Chairman Delano suggested to include Board members on the review board. The Commission agreed with his suggestion. Once a proposed event is properly vetted and prioritized, a contract is issued. Once signed, the contract is returned to the applicant and the event is then placed on the WYCC calendar. A security deposit is made if required. The motion to accept this process and present to Executive Culver was made by Mr. Chambers and motion seconded by Ms. Willey.

Meeting was adjourned at 12:25 pm. The next meeting will be announced.

Minutes Respectfully Submitted by

Linda Lyons