

Keefe Auditorium Commission
Thursday, July 2, 2026
City Hall, Room 208
4:30 PM

The Keefe Auditorium Commission met on the above date in Room 208 of City Hall, called to order by Chairman Dennis Schneider at 4:30pm. In attendance were Shawn Smith, Dennis Schneider, Carl Dubois, Daniel O'Donnell, Alicia Gregg and Joseph Olefirowicz. Also in attendance was Amy DeRoche. Tim Cummings joined the meeting via remote connection.

Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes

Approval of Meeting Minutes of June 4, 2026. Motion by Daniel O'Donnell, seconded by Joseph Olefirowicz, to accept minutes. So Voted 5-0 with one abstaining.

MEETING OVERVIEW

Dennis distributed copies of ICON Architect's Cost Estimates and a Cost Estimate Summary for the Keefe Auditorium study. He also provided a draft presentation for the Aldermanic meeting currently scheduled for Tuesday, July 14th.

Project Financial Overview and Funding Constraints

Dennis indicated that through discussions with Alderman Ben Clemons, the project's financial feasibility hinges on a limited funding capacity primarily through a proposed TIF, with significant gaps remaining for higher-cost options.

- TIF funding projected to support up to a \$10 million bond with estimated annual tax revenue around \$700,000, translating to approximately \$1.2 million annual bond payments over 20 years at 3.75% interest.
 - This bond level covers only the lowest-cost project option, leaving a \$4 million funding gap for initial purchase and development costs.
 - Higher-cost options, including full replacement or major renovations, lack a clear funding path under current TIF projections.
 - The TIF approach represents a way to finance the project without disrupting existing city capital investment frameworks.
- Operating costs remain separate from TIF debt service, expected to be covered by a building operator, aligning with city reluctance to use asset revenue for operational expenses.
- Current maintenance of the empty facility costs the city roughly \$350,000 per year, highlighting urgency to repurpose or redevelop to reduce ongoing expenses.
- No alternative funding sources secured yet, with casino or private sector contributions considered unlikely for large sums on short notice.

Project Options and Usage Viability

The project team has developed four mutually exclusive renovation or rebuilding options, each with distinct cost, usage, and operational implications.

- Option one (minimal renovation) estimated at approximately \$16.8 million to provide basic upgrades including HVAC and bathrooms.
 - This option is deemed minimally useful but functional, supporting limited programming such as community and some performance events.
 - Pete Lolly from Spectacle Management confirmed this option can host hall acts despite limited dressing spaces.
 - It is unlikely to attract major Broadway tours or large-scale commercial events due to limited facilities and market factors.
- Higher options involve more extensive redevelopment, increasing utilization potential but also escalating costs significantly, with no current financing plans to support them.
- Phasing between options is not feasible; each represents a separate plan rather than stages of a single build, requiring full funding per choice.
- The commission agreed to present all four options as a range of choices to the board, without endorsing any one plan, emphasizing realism balanced with aspirational arts community goals.

Strategic Engagement and Presentation Planning

A carefully staged communication and approval process with the board of aldermen and city administration is critical before advancing project plans.

- Presentation to the Aldermen is scheduled for Tuesday, July 14th.
- The team plans to present a concise slide deck summarizing work to date, options with pros and cons, and financial context, keeping detailed backup materials available but not front and center.
- Coordination with the mayor's office and administration is prioritized before the board presentation to clarify TIF feasibility and financial mechanisms.
- Aldermen Clemens and Dowd are involved as key interlocutors, with Dowd hopefully assisting with discussion on TIF funding with the mayor (to avoid delays caused by Clemens' current personal circumstances).
- No formal decision is expected at the upcoming meeting; the goal is to gather feedback and gauge appetite for funding and further planning.

Next Steps and Resource Requirements

Advancing the project beyond the current assessment requires further detailed design, fundraising planning, and administrative approvals, all contingent on political and financial buy-in.

- Next design phase estimated at approximately 10% of total project cost, reflecting a substantial, year-long effort including mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and architectural work.
- Fundraising strategy development is critical but contingent on clear direction from the board and administration; engaging professional fundraisers would incur additional costs and require upfront funding.
- The commission currently lacks in-house fundraising expertise and will need to identify external partners or consultants.
- Efforts to clarify whether operating costs could be partially supported by TIF revenues or other mechanisms remain unresolved and will be addressed in future planning.
- Visual materials differentiating options by footprint and interior features will be presented to aid aldermen's understanding of the choices and their spatial impacts.

Operational and Market Realities

The project must balance aspirations for a vibrant performance venue with realistic market and operational constraints in the local context.

- The local market is unlikely to attract large-scale Broadway tours due to geographic and demographic factors, limiting potential revenue from high-profile performances.
- Smaller-scale programming and community uses remain viable across most options, supporting ongoing cultural activity while limiting financial risk.
- Operating budgets will rely heavily on fundraising, ticket sales, and rentals, underscoring the need for a sustainable business model post-renovation.
- Collaboration with experienced venue operators like Pete Ramsey's team at the Palace Theater is considered a potential long-term model, leveraging nonprofit management expertise and existing regional networks.
- Maintaining flexibility in development footprint and property use is critical to preserve future growth options and avoid constraining developers' plans.

Action Items

Dennis

- Follow up with Alderman Dowd to encourage discussion with the mayor regarding TIF and administration support for the project.
- Finalize and consolidate presentation materials by July 12th for submission to Donna Graham for printing and distribution ahead of July 14th alderman meeting.
- Solicit and incorporate comments on presentation draft from commission members by July 10-12.

Tim

- Assist in arranging meeting with mayor and administration early next week to discuss TIF feasibility.

Commission Members (General)

- Review provided ICON materials and economic data spreadsheet for accuracy and provide feedback.
- Attend July 14th alderman meeting if possible to support and observe presentation.

Next Meeting: Thursday, August 6, 2026 at 4:30pm in room 208 of City Hall.

Motion to adjourn by Carl Dubois, seconded by Shawn Smith. Meeting adjourned at 5:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Shawn M. Smith, Auditorium Commission Secretary