

Status Notes of Exhibition Center Developments by Walt Rugland

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The last status report was February 10. Since then, we have made progress on several fronts. Much of this has been appropriately covered by the Post-Crescent. The PC February 9 front page article (which presented the facts) was followed February 12 with more subjective analysis, a picture, and reference to even more on the PC website. Additionally, on February 17, I was on the PC Newsmakers streaming video session with a condensed synopsis in the paper February 20. FOX11 provided an update on February 19 (available on its website). Coverage followed in the PC with the Tourism Breakfast story February 28. Our website (www.fcexhibitioncenter.com) is up and running and has links to many of these and other prior items.

Today, the design and finance teams met again at Boldt. The focus of the session was on required space other than the 30,000 square feet of open, column-free space for exhibits. These preliminary discussions are meant to serve as a basis for design decisions as well as to enable a zeroing-in on cost estimates (which will vary with design decisions). Going forward, underground parking and office space will not be considered as design options.

Current design directions move the structure eastward to the bottom of the west hill in Jones Park, creating around 90 parking places on the west side. The balcony has been removed and more storage near the loading dock added. While the designs reduce square footage attributed to support functions, the total space for support – including the skyway and the hotel connection – is approximately 30,000 square feet, which is twice the target in the Coalition report.

Christine Shafer is leading a team that will take the design concepts to a group of regional convention planner/sponsors for their critiques. This will help in the next step to get into some specifics that will affect final cost estimates.

On January 25, I presented an overview of the Coalition report to the Outagamie County Property and Airport Committee. I was asked to return in early March for further discussion if, by that time, there was agreement with the hotel. We have obtained the agreement in principle with the hotel, but the County Committee meeting for March 8 has been cancelled. I hope to be on the Committee agenda at the April 26 meeting. We are scheduled for the City Council Community and Economic Development Committee agendas on both April 25 and May 9.

We are continuing to present concepts to various groups that express interest. On February 9, I attended a meeting of the Appleton Redevelopment Authority at which there was extensive discussion. On February 24, Karen Harkness and Dave Willems met with the Fox Cities Chamber Economic Development Partnership. The future schedule includes Appleton Downtown, Inc., Appleton Kiwanis and Appleton Downtown Rotary.

A near-record crowd of close to 200 at the February 25th Annual Tourism breakfast heard consultant Bill Geist provide some objective thoughts about the hits and misses of convention center developments. His conclusions indicated that with the addition of an Exhibition Center facility, as proposed, the Fox Cities would be on its way to being a successful regional player.

The FCEC Advisory Council (individuals interested in helping with committee work as well as advocacy) continues to expand. Current members are Jay Schumerth, Christine Schafer, Kathy Voigt, Mark Benke, Mike Van Thull, Curt Detjen, Rick Knight, Lynn Hagee, John Burgland, and Dana Thorpe. Additional volunteers are welcome; call me or Dave Willems.

Without question, this effort has generated thought and discussion about the benefits of an Exhibition Center for the Fox Cities. It is important that a majority of our concerned and thoughtful neighbors understand the benefit and impact of our quest. I hope that with transparency we can reduce the comments that reflect a lack of understanding of the positive positioning we, as a community, can create with the addition of a full-service convention capacity. As we move toward public discussion at the

Outagamie County Board and the Appleton Common Council, constituent input and advocacy will be important.

Keep in mind that the reason for an Exhibition Center is to assist the CVB and its partners to bring new dollars and their economic impact to the Fox Cities while retaining existing visitor spending. Fox Cities Exhibition Center, Inc.'s job is to get it built!