



Office of Mayor Miro Weinberger

MEMORANDUM

To: City Council
From: Mayor Miro Weinberger
Date: December 15, 2017
Re: *Memorial Auditorium Update*

I am writing to update the City Council on the Administration's work and plans for Memorial Auditorium. There has been significant media interest in this matter as well, and I wanted to update you before you heard our latest thinking through the press.

Memorial Auditorium has been vacant for approximately twelve months, and I understand that there is great interest in knowing the City's future plans for this important building. Since 1928, Memorial has served as a valuable assembly space for our community, and the City has been working for some time to determine how best to rehabilitate and steward this historic building for future generations to enjoy.

Recent history

In the fall of 2015, the Administration briefed the City Council on the problematic status of the building, implemented approximately \$250,000 of urgently needed repairs, began the process of removing employees and uses from the building (which was completed at the end of 2016), and advised the Council that we would start working on finding a long-term solution for the building. In 2016 the long-term planning effort was focused largely on exploring a possible joint venture with the University of Vermont (UVM) to building a facility that would have both municipal and UVM athletics use. UVM chose to remain on campus in late 2016, and for the first half of 2017 the Memorial Auditorium planning effort paused briefly as we re-evaluated options, completed the zoning for the Gateway Block, and came to a decision on New Moran (which, had it gone forward, would have created new public assembly space, thus potentially impacting the future of Memorial).

Once a decision on New Moran was made we began to turn our attention back to Memorial. In advance of the All Wards NPA meeting in September we released a statement intended to clarify the Administration's position that indicated we would begin a process in late fall to determine the building's future, building upon planBTV: Downtown and Waterfront community planning efforts, and culminating in a City Council-approved competitive RFP/RFQ process. As part of that process, I noted that the City would seriously explore a proposal that continues the historic use of the building as a publicly-owned and operated assembly space.

Looking forward

Since September we have re-engaged our consultant Jeffrey Glassberg to advance the project. This renewed effort has resulted in a refinement of the plan that we announced in September. Instead of moving directly towards a RFP process, we now intend to do the following:

- **Create an adaptive reuse plan for Memorial Auditorium to remain a publicly-owned, public assembly space.** Creating this plan will involve engaging stakeholders and the general public to determine elements of the design and program. The plan will meet historic preservation standards and include modernization elements (i.e. improved acoustics, adding air conditioning and other modern amenities).
- **Create conceptual designs, construction pricing, and financing options for this adaptive re-use plan.** To our knowledge, in recent decades the City has not completed the design, pricing and financing analysis necessary to evaluate an adaptive reuse of the building as a public assembly space. Preliminary analyses have suggested the total project cost could be approximately \$10-\$15 million, but much more work is needed to confirm this price, as well as what federal subsidies or other sources might be available to finance the project.
- **Complete this plan so that can be considered by the Council for a November 2018 ballot item.** We anticipate that the plan will include TIF funds and likely General Obligation bonding at some level. These sources would, of course, require voter approval.

The main distinction between this plan and our prior discussions is that we would complete this evaluation of a public ownership option prior to requesting proposals from third parties for other uses of the building. In this scenario, the City would only initiate an RFP after determining the Council or the public did not support the investment needed to maintain Memorial Auditorium as a 21st Century publicly-owned, public assembly space. My opinion is that Burlington needs a downtown, high-quality public assembly space, and I sense that much of the public believes this as well, so this concept will be our initial focus before spending time and resources on other options.

I look forward to discussing this matter with the City Council soon. In advance of bringing forward contracts or other actions that require Council approval, I would welcome conversations with any Councilors interested in discussing this plan in more detail.

Happy Holidays.