



Information Item

Date: January 15, 2016

To: Mayor and City Council
From: Karen Ginsberg, Community and Cultural Services Director
Subject: Civic Working Group Final Report and Recommendations

Introduction

The Civic Working Group (CWG), a nine member body appointed by Council, worked for almost two years to facilitate community dialogue around the future of the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium (Civic). The CWG completed its task in September 2015 and approved a report for Council, which is attached. The group's recommendations are summarized in two sections of the CWG's report, the 'Guiding Principles' and the 'Priorities for Council Consideration'. The report, recommendations, and possible next steps will be considered by Council at the meeting on February 9, 2016. Given the community's level of interest in the future of the Civic and the surrounding site, sharing the report at this time, along with an indication of staff's recommendation, provides additional time for this information to be reviewed in depth by Council and the community.

Background

The CWG held regular public meetings for over 18 months and structured the community visioning process around three public workshops. They placed a very high priority on community engagement and transparency. All of the materials developed for the CWG, or that the members of the CWG referenced during their work, including notes and video from each workshop, are available on the Civic Auditorium's website (www.santamonicacivic.org), as part of an extensive document [library](#).

Discussion

The attached report, prepared by HR&A, presents the Civic Working Group's process, findings and recommendations in detail (Attachment A). It lays out the information and the rationale that

the CWG used to arrive at its recommendations and also documents other community points of view expressed throughout the planning process.

The CWG approved the report at its final meeting on September 28, 2015, after making minor revisions. The CWG structured its recommendations to Council in two parts, consisting of a series of 'Guiding Principles' which specify parameters for the future of the Civic and the surrounding site, and a set of 'Priorities for Council Consideration,' which begin to address implementation and next steps.

Guiding Principles

The CWG developed six broad Guiding Principles that form its central recommendations to Council.

- Preserve and rehabilitate the landmarked Civic Auditorium.
- Create a vibrant cultural and community hub around the Civic Auditorium.
- Consider private land uses that support and enhance the cultural campus
- Create a flow between the Civic Auditorium site and the surrounding community
- Include open space on the site.
- Generate innovative and financially sustainable proposals for the Civic and its site

The Guiding Principles incorporate the CWG's far-reaching public outreach into both goals and limits for the future Civic and the site, and are intended to serve as a clear, but flexible framework for implementing a new mixed-use arts and cultural district anchored by a re-purposed Civic Auditorium, and reconnect the site with its surroundings for the first time since its development.

Priorities for Council Consideration

Implementation of the vision for a renovated Civic Auditorium as the hub of a mixed-use cultural district will take a sustained commitment over a number of years. In order to assist Council in formulating next steps in the process, the CWG developed a series of 'Priorities for Council Consideration' which lay out the beginnings of a possible implementation plan.

Staff recommendations

After careful consideration of the options developed by the CWG, adopted City priorities, and available resources, staff believes that the best approach at this time would be to begin implementation of the CWG's recommendations through an initial step that focuses on the Civic

Auditorium only, such as issuing a Request for Interest or a Request for Qualifications, and to make no decision about the rest of the site at this time.

This approach would allow the City to begin implementation of the vision articulated by the CWG relatively quickly with a modest investment of staff and other resources. It would defer decisions about the broader site including the addition of a sports field to a time when other planning processes have been completed and additional information is available, for example the campus development plan for improvements to the Santa Monica High School campus which is underway, the Downtown Community Specific Plan, and expansion of the field space at the Santa Monica Airport. Further, the response to a Request for Interest or a Request for Qualifications related only to the Civic Auditorium would allow the City to quantify the level of interest in investing in and operating the Civic Auditorium on the part of entertainment companies, philanthropists, and other potential partners. The restoration of the Civic Auditorium and resolution of the use or uses of the rest of the site will be a lengthy multi-year process. If Council were to direct staff to issue an RFQ for the Civic Auditorium only the process to develop and issue an RFQ, and for responses to be received and evaluated, could take nine months to a year, at which point staff would return to Council for direction on next steps.

The CWG process and recommendations, along with the staff recommendation and potential alternatives for moving forward, will be included in greater detail in the final staff report for the February 9 Council meeting.

Prepared By: Jessica Cusick, Cultural Affairs Manager