

# ***DOWNERS GROVE***

## ***Performing Arts Study Commission Final Report***

***February 2005***

*The Downers Grove Performing Arts Study Commission envisions a center for the community committed to increasing opportunities for the appreciation, education, and participation in the visual and performing arts.*

### *Acknowledgments*

*The Village of Downers Grove would like to thank the members of the Performing Arts Study Commission for their work on and dedication to this project. They have all given freely of their time and truly exemplify the volunteer spirit that makes Downers Grove an exceptional community. Village Commissioner Stan Urban is to be recognized for providing his leadership as Chairman at the onset of the Commission. Likewise, the subsequent guidance provided by Village Commissioner Martin Tully is greatly appreciated.*

*A special note of thanks is extended to staff liaison Douglas Kozlowski for his unwavering support and assistance to the members of this Commission and their good works. The Commission is also grateful to staff member Janene Cerulli for her administrative support.*

*Community member Scott Pfeiffer is to be commended for lending his time and expertise to the development of this report.*

*The Village also wishes to recognize the following organizations for exhibiting a laudable sense of community spirit by providing representatives to the Commission: Downers Grove Grade School District 58, Community High School District 99, the Downers Grove Park District, the Downers Grove Area Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Downers Grove Tourism and Events Commission, and the Downers Grove Downtown Management Corporation.*

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## **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In 2002, the question was raised as to whether a performing arts center is necessary and desirable in our community. Therefore, the Performing Arts Study Commission (the Commission) was created as an ad-hoc committee on October 7, 2003, with the following charge: *"To evaluate the need for a performing arts center in the Village; inventory current facilities available in the Village; suggest goals, objectives and uses for a performing arts center; suggest proposed location, ownership, management and funding alternatives for a performing arts center; prepare a report for the Village Council."*

To gain perspective on the past and current environment within Downers Grove regarding this issue, the Commission reviewed prior reports presented in 1992 and 1994, in addition to surveying existing performance groups within the Village and the facilities they use. Among other things, the Commission sent 20 surveys to organizations that provide performing arts presentations in Downers Grove. The survey response was encouraging, with 12 surveys being completed and returned. As of today, in the Village of Downers Grove, there are over 142 performances a year given by the 12 organizations completing the survey! In addition, the 25 locations currently being used as performing arts facilities in or around the Village were also surveyed.

Based on its present efforts and investigation, the Commission believes that a performing arts center in the Downers Grove Central Business District (CBD) would support and complement the retail district, expand the entertainment options for residents and visitors, be an arts incubator, and generally improve the quality of life for Downers Grove residents. The Commission has determined that Downers Grove has a thriving, varied performing arts community and that most groups must adapt to less-than-optimal conditions in their creative endeavors.

A new performing arts venue should be housed in a single structure within the CBD, although the Commission wants to make clear the understanding that this may not be economically feasible. However, there can be significant value associated in operating a facility that allows for a shared staff, box office, and concession space.

Assuming the properties were available, the Commission's recommendations for the location of a performing arts center are listed below in order of preference:

1. Curtiss Block Redevelopment (area bound by Washington, Curtiss, Main, and Burlington)
2. Fishel Park plus adjacent property
3. Former Hart's Garage, 939 Curtiss Street
4. Tivoli Theatre, 5021 Highland Avenue
5. Lincoln Center, 935 Maple Avenue

In that it was tasked to do so, the Commission also identified three major categories of expenditures requiring funding. These include land acquisition, building and construction, and ongoing operational costs. Of course, the likelihood of a performing arts center becoming a reality for the Village depends in significant part upon the principles of minimizing the costs for all three categories while maximizing revenues, based upon the facility design. Consistent with these principles, the Commission recommends with respect to land acquisition costs, that emphasis is given to locating the facility or facilities on land already owned by one or more local governmental units operating within the Village. With respect to building and construction costs, the Commission recommends that the Village government cause to be chartered a public charitable foundation for the purpose of raising funds, on a tax-deductible basis, sufficient to cover the costs of construction (plus a reasonable cushion for contingencies) of the performing arts facilities. The Commission does not support deliberating the use and/or merits of local taxpayer funding of construction costs, either from presently available taxpayer funds or revenues or from future tax increases, until all reasonable efforts to raise said funds in the manner herein set forth prove inadequate.

The Commission lacks the expertise necessary to properly estimate construction costs for a performing arts facility and therefore recommends that the Village consider retaining competent professionals to develop the appropriate estimates, if needed. As with construction costs, the Commission recommends that competent professionals be retained to develop a projection of the estimated operating margin. Formal management responsibility would lie with the governmental body or bodies who own the facility or facilities. In the case of a facility where the ownership of the land is divided between governmental entities, formation of an inter-governmental commission or board should be considered.



## II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In June 1992, the Downers Grove Community Services Network ("CSN") issued a report entitled *Proposal for Hotel Tax Funding of A Feasibility Study for A Multi-Purpose Community Facility for Downers Grove*. One of the goals of the CSN was to analyze and satisfy the shared interests and desires of Downers Grove residents and businesses relative to community service, cultural, performing arts, civic and social programs. The primary conclusions of the research effort conducted by the CSN centered on the documented need to develop a facility that would include a performance space and meeting rooms. The report identified specific space requirements for various facilities. The CSN recommended that the Village undertake a study to determine the scope of an economically feasible project, both as to construction and operations costs. The Village issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) in March 1993. The feasibility study was awarded to Morris Erie, Inc., in association with AMS Planning & Research Corp., Kirkegaard & Associates and Schuler & Shook.

In December 1993, Morris Erie and AMS Planning issued its Step 1 Report regarding a Community Arts Center Feasibility Study. Based on interviews of numerous community leaders, the Step 1 Report found that it was desirable to develop a facility in Downers Grove that would accommodate both performances and meetings for regional trade shows because there was no adequate facility currently in existence. Based on the nature of use being considered, the consultants strongly recommended that the facility be located in the downtown core. However, the report also recognized the economic challenges of constructing and operating such a facility and that the organizations and groups that would seek to use the proposed facility were not capable of supporting market rate rentals. In this regard, such public facilities are not moneymakers, but they are viewed as a resource and part of what makes a "village." The consultants recommended further consideration of four alternatives to develop a community arts center, the basic elements of which would include the following:

- A small theater of between 250 and 400 seats
- Theater support facilities
- Meeting spaces
- Offices for the Chamber of Commerce
- Administrative spaces

The four proposed alternatives were: (A) a stand-alone facility; (B) library addition; (C) Tivoli Development; and (D) developing a regional arts center that would include a main theater of approximately 1,800 to 2,500 seats, art gallery, ancillary spaces, and function spaces.

Morris Eire, Inc. and AMS Planning submitted the Step 2 Report regarding a Community Arts Center Feasibility Study in November 1994. The Step 2 Report examined two development alternatives: (1) A stand-alone performing arts meeting facility, and (2) renovation of the Tivoli Theatre to accommodate the same programming. However, the performing arts component of the programs developed in the Step 1 Report was explored only as a renovation of the Tivoli Theatre. No conceptual design was developed for a performing arts facility as a stand-alone project. In this regard, the Step 2 Report noted that the Step 1 Report demonstrated that the needs of the community based arts groups could be served by a smaller facility than that contemplated by the CSN Report. As such, the Step 2 Report stated that the survey of current performing arts uses had been unable to document justification for building a facility despite the perceived need. Due to lack of political support, recommendations were not acted upon in the intervening decade. Meanwhile, the population and arts programs have grown in size and diversity, as has community interest in cultural and performance events.

In 2002, the question was again raised as to whether a performing arts center is needed and desirable. Therefore, the Performing Arts Study Commission was created as an ad-hoc committee by the adoption of Resolution 2003-78 on October 7, 2003, providing the committee with the following charter:

*"To evaluate the need for a performing arts center in the Village; inventory current facilities available in the Village; suggest goals, objectives and uses for a performing arts center; suggest proposed location, ownership, management and funding alternatives for a performing arts center; prepare a report for the Village Council."*

### **III. BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

The Performing Arts Study Commission believes that a performing arts center in downtown Downers Grove will help support and complement the retail district, expand the entertainment options for residents and visitors, be an arts incubator, and generally improve the quality of life for Downers Grove residents.

- *Help support and complement the retail district:* An active performing arts center will attract visitors to the downtown area. Whether they are attending a concert or play, viewing an art exhibition, rehearsing for an event, or simply purchasing tickets for an upcoming event, a performing arts center is an attraction.

The demographic of arts and entertainment consumers shows a higher-than-average level of disposable income. Since they often include dining and shopping in their entertainment plans, stores and restaurants will benefit. This will also generate direct and indirect tax revenues.

- *Expand the entertainment options for residents and visitors:* While Downers Grove offers many cultural and entertainment opportunities, the quality and professionalism of these offerings is limited by a shortage of attractive and functional facilities. Residents and visitors may overlook Downers Grove in favor of other communities where they perceive the quality to be higher. An arts center will expand and improve concerts, art exhibitions, theatrical presentations, and other entertainment options for both residents and visitors, thereby increasing cultural and economic benefits.

- *Be an arts incubator:* As suggested above, facilities can limit artistic quality. An attractive and well-equipped facility will foster growth in existing activities, and encourage the creation and nurturing of new endeavors. An arts center should offer educational opportunities and facilities to this end. Once sufficient usage and attendance is achieved in support of existing activities, it is expected that substantial new artistic and entertainment projects will follow. Again, both cultural and economic benefits ensue.
- *Improve the quality of life for Downers Grove residents:* While quality of life may be difficult to define, few would question its importance in a community or question the contribution that growth in cultural and entertainment opportunities make to quality of life.

In the recent Village of Downers Grove *Report of the Strategic Land Use Committee*, there is considerable discussion of the concept of "smart growth." Two of the listed components of smart growth are planning for communities which "have a unique sense of community and place," and which "preserve and enhance valuable natural and cultural resources."

Downtown Downers Grove is the heart and soul of our community. It contributes a sense of place. A performing arts center will enhance this aspect of the CBD while preserving and enhancing our cultural resources.

Two quotes from a paper by William Fulton and Morris Newman entitled *The Arts and Smart Growth: The Role of the Arts in Placemaking* are instructive:

*"As communities have struggled to strengthen and rebuild themselves — and in some cases establish themselves for the first time — the arts often have become a focal point. The arts have the potential to connect people within a community in new ways,*

*to bring disparate people together, and to tap into a community's latent creativity.*

*The arts can go a long way toward reinvigorating a community's soul."*

*"...There is no question that the arts and smart growth can learn from each other and build a more powerful sense of community — whether community of interest or community of place — if they work together."*

*(See [http://www.smartgrowth.org/pdf/Arts\\_and\\_Smart\\_Growth.pdf](http://www.smartgrowth.org/pdf/Arts_and_Smart_Growth.pdf))*

The advertising and promotion of arts and entertainment events serve to create name recognition for Downers Grove and increase the awareness of our community throughout the area. This reflects positively on the image and attractiveness of Downers Grove as a place to live, visit and conduct business, and thus impacts property values, business location/retention and jobs, as well as quality of life. Long term economic benefits are also derived from this positive image and name recognition. This benefits all segments of the community.

Economic benefits also translate into increased tax revenues including sales, property, and business taxes. This kind of positive image building and name recognition is very difficult to come by, but a performing arts center, which enables arts entertainment and cultural activities, can contribute immensely to the economic development process.

#### **IV. PERFORMING ARTS COMMUNITY NEEDS INVENTORY**

The Performing Arts Commission sent 20 surveys to organizations that provide performing arts presentations in Downers Grove. The survey was comprehensive and requested detailed information regarding the following issues:

- Performances
- Rehearsals
- Sets and Stages
- Tickets
- Miscellaneous Information

The survey returns were encouraging with 12 surveys being completed.<sup>1</sup> *Currently, in the Village of Downers Grove, there are over 142 performances a year from the 12 organizations completing the survey!* A quick glance at the local arts' calendar listing indicates that there are many more performances being held throughout the community.

The following is a summary of significant findings and general information the commission has gleaned from the survey results:

- Most performances are on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and/or Sunday.
- Year-round performance space is needed
- Performances are being presented at:
  - Library meeting rooms
  - Various churches
  - Tivoli Theatre
  - School auditoriums
  - Masonic Temple
- Of the current performance spaces, four organizations stated their current space was adequate, but the following concerns were common:
  - The availability of the space was very limited, especially at District 99 and the Tivoli Theatre.
  - Cost of venue was prohibitive, especially evening performances.
  - There are significant technical, lighting, and space difficulties.

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<sup>1</sup>The organizations that completed the survey were: High School District 99, Downers Grove Music Club, Art and Soul Concert Series, Downers Grove Choral Society, West Suburban Symphony Society, Midwest Ballet Theatre, Plank Road Folk Music Society, New World Repertory Theatre, Downers Grove Concert Association, Our Town Productions, Illinois Ballet Theatre, and The Agape Ringers.

Performance Type and Number of Organizations Responding to the Survey			
Music	Theater	Dance	Combination of Music, Theater, & Dance
7 organizations	2	2	1 (HS District 99)

- Four organizations turned audience members away at the door due to lack of seats.
- Almost all organizations thought their audience could grow or they could offer more performances if additional affordable performance space was made available.
- Common needs at performance spaces were pianos (rehearsal and performance), risers, dance floor, acoustic shell, chairs and music stands.
- The typical audience size falls into three categories:
  - 0-250 seats (5 organizations)
  - 251-500 (3 organizations)
  - 501-1,000 (4 organizations)
- The Tivoli Theatre seemed to adequately meet the need for the organizations that need 500 or more seats.
- Organizations that need fewer than 500 seats tend to avoid the Tivoli Theatre due to it being too large and the economies of scale may make it too costly.
- Ten of the 12 organizations budget for performance space costs.
- A 500-seat venue seems to be the common performance space needed in Downers Grove.

## V. INVENTORY OF CURRENT FACILITIES

The Commission also surveyed the following locations currently being used as performing arts facilities in or around the Village of Downers Grove:

Gloria Dei Lutheran	First Presbyterian Church
First Congregational Church	Avery Coonley School
Immanuel Lutheran Church	St. Andrews Episcopal Church
First Christian Church	Masonic Temple
Midwestern University	Downers Grove Public Library
VFW Post 503	Indian Prairie Library
Westmont Library	Village Theatre Guild

Theatre of Western Springs	Darien Sportsplex
Community High School District 99 (North and South Campuses)	First Folio Shakespeare (at Mayslake Forest Preserve)
Fairview Village	Drury Lane Oakbrook
Crossroads Theatre	Tivoli Theatre
Lincoln Center	Ashton Place
Fishel Park Band Shell	

Many of these sites are generally utilitarian in nature, limited in availability, and must be adapted by specific performance groups based on their needs. In most cases, sound and lighting systems maybe functional at best, and need to be provided by the group themselves or are completely nonexistent. Sets and larger props often need to be scaled down and transported off site during performance runs. Most locations provide only a limited number of portable seats with poor sight lines. Costs to rent space vary greatly according to the performance space, amenities, and location.

Availability of more desirable locations is often at a premium or simply not an option. For example, Community High School District 99 auditoriums are the best-equipped local facilities. However, according to their own assessment, these auditoriums are almost exclusively booked by high school related performances. In fact, many of their own groups must seek outside performance spaces. Other venues, such as churches, must dovetail around existing church-related activities. Libraries must curtail their outside bookings by the nature of their organization and the limited space available.

The Theatre of Western Springs can be rented only during the month of July, and Avery Coonley is available only on a very limited basis. Fairview Village, Midwestern University, and VFW Post 503 do not rent to outside groups or only to groups which directly benefit their programs. (Midwestern University, for example, is only available for health care related programs.) Drury Lane Oakbrook is available as a union house on Mondays and Tuesdays (\$33 per hour each for professional sound & light crewmembers



for rehearsals in addition to a minimum \$7,200 per month rental). Masonic Temple has restricted rental availability due to the Mason's not-for-profit status. Despite the new recreation facility recently opened by the Downers Grove Park District, the Lincoln Center auditorium is still in constant use. In addition, the Downers Grove Park District owns and, on a seasonal basis, operates the Fishel Park Band Shell.

Fixed stage lighting and sound system capabilities are varied and limited. Churches and libraries typically offer no enhanced theater lighting and only a basic public address system, although some churches do have a multi-channel sound mixing board. Other sites which offer multi-channel light & sound mixing boards are: Lincoln Center, Tivoli Theatre, Drury Lane, Theatre of Western Springs, Downers Grove North and South High Schools, and Avery Coonley School. Darien Sportsplex has mercury lighting throughout the facility. Other venues offer only overhead fluorescent lighting. At the Masonic Temple, the performing group must furnish "Y" bar grids and stands.

The type of seating and number of seats available varies greatly among the facilities studied. In church sanctuaries, fixed seating is comprised of pew seating. In other church multi-purpose rooms, seating is on portable, often metal folding chairs. Area libraries, the Masonic Temple, Crossroads Theatre, and Lincoln Center offer seating that is typically portable molded plastic chairs. Non-fixed seating capacities are, of course, governed by fire code and safety regulations. Theaters which offer comfortable, fixed seating include: Downers Grove North and South High School auditoriums (approximately 1200 and 900 seats respectively), Tivoli Theatre (1,000 seats), Drury Lane (over 1,000 seats), Theatre of Western Springs (410 seats) and Avery Coonley (235 seats).

The schools and churches in Downers Grove are providing an enormous service to the community by allowing organizations to use their facilities for performing arts presentations. However, the availability of space is extremely limited since they are mainly used by church and school performances. The Tivoli Theatre also provides

organizations a local venue; however, since it has so many seats, smaller groups get lost in the space.

This Commission has determined that Downers Grove has a thriving, varied performing arts community. As shown in the brief summary above, most of these groups must adapt to less-than-optimal conditions in their creative endeavors.

## **VI. PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATION FOR FACILITY OR FACILITIES**

Ideally, a new performing arts venue should be housed in a single structure, although the Commission wants to make clear the understanding that this may not be economically feasible. However, there can be significant value associated in operating a facility that allows for a shared staff, box office, and concession space. The principal structure should include:

- A 350-500 fixed-seat theater fully outfitted with lights and sound;
- A smaller black-box theater with 125 moveable seats; and
- Three small rooms with seating for 50 to be used for classes, rehearsals, meetings, and small performances.

Amenities recommended for inclusion are: dressing rooms, storage, administrative/maintenance office, box office, coatroom, possible cable TV facilities, a catering kitchen, and lobby. Since the visual arts are an important complement to performing arts, the lobby area should also serve as an art exhibition area. A paid staff position to manage the day-to-day operations with additional personnel is also recommended.

## **VII. PROPOSED LOCATION**

The Commission feels the ideal location for a performing arts center would be in the Downers Grove Central Business District (CBD). There are many advantages to this location, the first being that the performing arts center would be centrally located within

the Village. It would also be able to take advantage of the newly built 790 car parking deck, the proximity to the Metra line, as well as its close proximity to other performing arts locations which may continue to be used for some performances. As noted in Section III, significant economic benefits would result both for downtown businesses and the Village as a whole.

Groups already staging performances in the downtown area include Grove Players at Lincoln Center and the New World Repertory Theatre at the Masonic Temple. Midwest Ballet Theatre, Our Town Productions, the Downers Grove Choral Society and the West Towns Chorus each use the Tivoli Theatre. Several theater locations within the CBD could allow the downtown to become known as a performing arts location in addition to a shopping, dining and business destination.

Another advantage of locating a performing arts center in the CBD among many arts groups is that a central office could be established and manned to support joint marketing, ticket sales and schedule coordination.

Downtown Downers Grove is already perceived and utilized as an entertainment center. Heritage Festival, the Fine Arts Festival, Friday Night Car Shows, Hospitality Sunday, and the Ice Sculpture Festival are signature events which occur in the CBD on an annual basis. In addition to these events, there are a variety of dining establishments, both an indoor and outdoor theater space, a museum, and more residential spaces to be built in the near the future. Therefore, a performing arts center in this area appears to be a natural extension of the existing entertainment and nightlife.

If the properties are available, the Commission's choices for the location of a performing arts center are listed in order of preference:

*Curtiss Block Redevelopment (bound by Washington, Curtiss, Main, and Burlington):*

This area would allow for the design of a facility that would meet the needs previously discussed in a central location within the CBD.

*Fishel Park plus adjacent property:*

This location could allow for indoor as well as outdoor performance space (i.e., a mini Ravinia type venue). Also, it could be built/remodeled to the specifications discussed previously and is located in the CBD without taking premium Main Street retail space.

*Hart's Garage, 939 Curtiss Street:*

This is a good location, close to the parking deck, with an ability to remodel according to the listed needs. A possible obstacle would be that plans are already underway to remodel this building into retail space.

*Tivoli Theatre, 5021 Highland Avenue:*

Centrally located and already viewed as an entertainment facility, it would require an addition. The biggest disadvantage would be that it's across the tracks from the parking deck. Traditionally, patrons are hesitant to cross that type of barrier when seeking parking.

*Lincoln Center, 935 Maple Avenue:*

This location already promotes some performing arts. The stage and auditorium would require major remodeling. The Park District has indicated a willingness to explore opportunities for the conversion of a portion of this facility into a functional performance space. There is room on the property for additions to the south and west sides of the building, which could allow for expansion of the existing stage and the inclusion of a private entrance/lobby, complete with an elevator. The potential also exists for expanding the current seating capacity with the addition of balcony seating.

*Masonic Temple Building, 923 Curtiss:*

The Masonic Temple is operated as a charitable organization and wishes to remain so. The Masons are unable to offer McCarvell Hall (the first floor studio hall) as a viable option for a theater facility. However, the Masons did indicate that they support the idea of a performing arts center in Downers Grove.

### **VIII. SUGGESTED FUNDING/OWNERSHIP**

Section 3(4) of Resolution 2003-78 also places the duty upon this Commission to *suggest* ownership, management, and funding alternatives for the performing arts center. Therefore, what follows are suggested approaches.

#### *A. Funding and Ownership*

The Commission has identified three major categories of expenditures requiring funding. These include land acquisition, building and construction, and ongoing operational costs. The likelihood of a performing arts center becoming a reality for the Village depends in significant part upon the principles of minimizing the costs for all three categories while maximizing revenues, based upon the facility design (the preliminary recommendation for which is discussed at Part VI.).

#### *A. (1) Land Acquisition Costs*

Consistent with these principles, the Commission recommends with respect to land acquisition costs, that emphasis is given to locating the facility or facilities on land already owned by one or more local governmental units operating within the Village. The obvious benefit of this approach is to reduce or avoid any land acquisition costs and to minimize or avoid removing from the tax rolls properties presently part of the real estate tax base.

Those local governmental units owning land within the Village most likely suitable for performing arts facilities are the Village's own Municipal Corporation, the Park District, Grade School District 58, and Community High School District 99. Considering this and the preference for a location in or near the Central Business District, the locations recommended by Part VII include the following governmentally-owned parcels: Curtiss Block, Fishel Park<sup>2</sup>, and Lincoln Center.

*A. (2) Building and Construction Costs*

With respect to building and construction costs, the Commission recommends that the Village government cause to be chartered a public charitable foundation for the purpose of raising funds, on a tax-deductible basis, sufficient to cover the costs of construction (plus a reasonable cushion for contingencies) of the performing arts facilities. The foundation would solicit funding from corporate sponsors, from interested Downers Grove residents, from other charitable foundations and trusts, including but not limited to those established by Downers Grove residents, both past and present, and from other governmental units. It is anticipated that commitments could be initially secured through the use of written pledges. Under this scenario, when the requisite amount of funds has been pledged, the pledges would be called.

Upon receipt of the required funds, the project would be constructed on governmentally owned land and the building, as an improvement upon such land, would become owned by that governmental unit. Upon the call of the pledges, if the actual funding raised fell short and the project terminated, the contributed funds would be returned to the contributors.

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<sup>2</sup>In the event the Fishel Park site, including its existing fine arts facility (i.e., the bandshell), were ultimately selected as the site, the Committee would recommend that consideration be given to acquiring property adjacent to Fishel Park upon which to locate the performing arts structure proper.

The Commission does not support deliberating the use and/or merits of local taxpayer funding<sup>3</sup> of construction costs, either from presently available taxpayer funds or revenues or from future tax increases, until all reasonable efforts to raise said funds in the manner herein set forth prove inadequate. This approach will maximize the likelihood of project approval, while avoiding the cost and uncertainty of a referendum. It is also believed that this approach will limit serious political controversy within the Village and foster a spirit of enthusiastic volunteerism among residents, a trait already widespread within the performing arts community.

To reduce building and construction costs, consideration should be given to locating the smaller, black-box theater (see Part VI) within Lincoln Center, although the Commission's preference, apart from funding concerns, as also noted in Part VI, is to have a single, central performing arts facility. The Commission understands that renovation by the Park District of Lincoln Center is contemplated and that some of the renovation of the structure (specifically energy-efficient window and lighting replacement) is presently in progress. The Commission further understands that the cooperation of the Downers Grove Park District would be required. Based upon discussions with Park District staff authorized by the Downers Grove Park District Board of Commissioners, the Commission believes that the inclusion of a black-box theater at Lincoln Center could be feasible. Use of foundation funds for the construction of the black-box theater might be attractive to the Park District in potentially reducing the amount of the District's own funds required for Lincoln Center rehabilitation. Given the Park District's possible desire to proceed with additional interior rehabilitation, questions of timing between the Village government and the Park District would need to be promptly addressed on an inter-governmental basis if this approach (i.e., placement of black-box theater at Lincoln Center) were to be followed.

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<sup>3</sup>See discussion in "Government support of 'the arts'" by Virginia Lee Owen, Associate Professor of Economics at Illinois State University in Illinois Issues, December 1977 ([www.lib.niu.edu/ipo/ii771221.html](http://www.lib.niu.edu/ipo/ii771221.html))

The Committee lacks the expertise to estimate construction costs for a performing arts facility of the type preliminarily recommended in Part VI and recommends that the Village Council consider retaining competent professionals to develop the appropriate estimates.

*A. (3) Operational Expenses*

The Commission believes that it may be possible to operate a performing arts venue on a self-supporting basis; that is, without reliance upon local tax revenues. It is believed that The Theatre of Western Springs and the Ravinia Festival both operate without local taxpayer subsidy. The Ravinia Festival Association, incorporated as an Illinois Not-For-Profit Corporation in 1936, advises on its web site (<http://www.ravinia.org/Support/Donations.aspx>) that ticket sales constitute 60% of its income and that contributions provide the remaining 40%. The Illinois Arts Council, a state funded entity, reports that it contributed \$141,800 to Ravinia during fiscal year 2000. The Theatre of Western Springs, a venue closer in scale to the Commission's vision, was incorporated in the same manner in 1950 and likewise appears to receive no local tax subsidy. Like Ravinia, it received some of its income during fiscal year 2000 in the form of Illinois Arts Council grants (\$22,500).

From a funding standpoint, the final form of the facility should be designed with a view to maximizing the operating margin or minimizing the operating loss. This implies designing<sup>4</sup> a facility that will have high rates of use that can generate rent and that can, for given professional or near-professional quality events, generate substantial ticket

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<sup>4</sup>It is plain that during the summer season, outdoor concerts are able to draw significant numbers of patrons (Ravinia (pay); Grant Park Concert Series (free)). Should the Fishel Park recommendation be taken up by the Council, the Commission has considered and recommends exploring the concept of having the larger theater structure constructed on a parcel immediately adjacent to Fishel Park with the capacity to have the rear, exterior wall, which faces the Park, fully open to permit a mini-Ravinia type venue. Such a facility would likely replace the existing, and somewhat aged and functionally limited bandshell. The Commission also suggests that as part of such a design, the retractable roof design of the Starlight Theatre at Rock Valley College in Rockford be studied and considered. Inclusion of either of these two indoor/outdoor features would certainly increase Category 2 costs but might generate a significant amount of interest, patronage and, therefore, additional operating margin that would more than outweigh the initial extra construction costs ([http://www.smacna.org/pdf/Arch\\_Best\\_Of\\_2003.pdf](http://www.smacna.org/pdf/Arch_Best_Of_2003.pdf)).



revenues while still being available to smaller, less accomplished groups within the community on affordable terms. The Commission believes that its preliminary design recommendation set forth in Part VI is consistent with this financial concept.

One significant consideration in rendering a performing arts facility self-supporting is the degree of volunteer support available to reduce staffing costs. The Commission believes that a consortium of the numerous performing arts groups surveyed could be formed to provide a pool of volunteer labor to provide at least some of the staffing requirements for a performing arts facility including operating a downtown ticket office kiosk.

The Commission lacks the expertise to actually project estimated revenues (from ticket sales, contributions and grants) and operating expenses for a performing arts facility of the type preliminarily recommended in Part VI. As with construction costs, the Commission recommends that competent professionals be retained to develop a projection of the estimated operating margin.

#### *B. Management*

Formal management responsibility would lie with the governmental body or bodies who own the facility or facilities. In the case of a facility where the ownership of the land is divided between governmental entities, formation of an inter-governmental commission or board should be considered. Day-to-day management might be contracted to a private management firm with expertise; however, it would be expected that such a firm would take advantage of volunteer services of the type described above.