

Who wants what at the Arts Center - how to pay for it?

By Debbie Carson, Staff Writer

TEMPLE TERRACE — What would the Temple Terrace Arts and Education Center have – if it could move into the downtown redevelopment area?

Community groups want office space. Meeting space. Performing space. Storage. Classrooms.

With 22,000 square feet planned for the building, there might be room enough to accommodate everyone. But how to pay for it? It's expected to cost \$7 million with about \$4.5 million raised so far.

What are the current plans for the Arts and Education Center?

The Temple Terrace City Council voted last month 4-1 to include the center in the downtown project, to the north of the Sweetbay Supermarket. The center is expected to be 22,000 square feet with the ability of expanding upward by approximately another 10,000 square feet.

The center would have a two-deck parking garage located to the north, to provide ample parking for the center's patrons.

It is expected to have a stage/auditorium, classrooms, meeting and board rooms, conference space, a concessions stand, gallery space, and perhaps more amenities.

What is the anticipated budget for the center and how would it be paid for?

Recent estimates peg the cost to be around \$7 million – once the land costs, design and construction and operational costs are taken into account.

A citizen-driven fund-raising campaign is getting under way with Dr. Mel Jurado leading the campaign. Residents and patrons of the arts are expected to pledge a good chunk of the money the city needs to build, operate and maintain the center.

Already, the Pepin Distributing Co. has pledged \$2 million for the project. The city, too, has set aside \$2.5 million in Community Investment Tax revenue to help fund it.

According to city consultants, the ideal situation would be that the city's residents and businesses raise an additional \$2 million for construction and another \$1 million for an endowment to keep the center running.

Who wants to be or could be a part of the Arts and Education Center?

Currently, city leaders are considering finding space at the center for the Masque Community Theatre, the Greater Temple Terrace Chamber of Commerce, the Toast of Tampa Show Chorus, USF Jazz Band, among others. Even Hillsborough Community College might get space at the center.

The groups could have office and meeting space, as well as a place for performances, depending on their needs.

What does Masque want out of the arts center?

Masque Community Theatre has been located to the south of the Sweetbay Supermarket in the downtown project for the last five or so years – as a temporary solution.

"It's a very nice temporary facility," said former Masque president Mary Jane Neale. "We had a home for the first time."

Masque had previously been housed at the Omar K. Lightfoot Recreation Center at Whiteway Drive and N. 56th Street, where it had room to perform but no room for storage.

The Arts and Education Center would be Masque's permanent home – it would have everything that it needs, performance space, administration space, storage space.

"We'd now have some control over our destiny," Neale said.

According to figures worked up by Toppe Consultants, Inc., Masque's rent could be \$24,000 a year. Whether that rent would include utilities is not clear.

Masque pays a token \$1 a month for rent at the former T.J. Maxx store next to Sweetbay. However, it does have to pay for utilities, including electricity, solid waste, and phones. Electricity alone has been known to hit as much as \$5,000, according to Neale.

What about the Temple Terrace Chamber of Commerce?

Cheri Donohue, executive director of the Chamber, said that it has been the Chamber's goal to be a part of the downtown area, "to be in the thick of things."

The Chamber is more than a group of businesses in Temple Terrace, Donohue said. The Chamber office serves as the city's Visitors Bureau.

And to be in the downtown project, "I think it's perfect for us," she said.

The Chamber is located near the targeted downtown project, in a ground floor office in the Bank of America building on the east side on N. 56th Street, north of Bullard Parkway.

"We have 500 square feet, if we're lucky," Donohue said. "We have no space to bring another person in."

Donohue said the Chamber would like to have office and meeting space at the Arts and Education Center, noting that the long "conference" table in the office has been known to be a workstation at one end and a meeting space at the other – at the same time.

"We're working out of a closet here," Donohue said, though she was quick to note that the Chamber has been thankful to have the space rent-free from Bank of America.

"They are our gracious host," she said.

The Chamber knows that if it were to move to the center, it would have to pay rent.

"We're preparing for that," Donohue said.

Though she said she is not aware of what rent might be, figures drafted by the consultant team, Toppe Consultants, the rent could be \$7,200 a year – or \$600 a month.

Whether that fee is accurate or palatable to the Chamber remains to be seen.

How about the Temple Terrace Arts Council?

Mary Jane Neale, the president of the council, said that the group is very supportive of the arts center.

"We need something the feed the souls of the children," she said – noting that they support all the sports projects the city has taken on but that children need more than sports.

Neale said that she hopes that the city includes space for the Arts Council to hold its meetings once a month. The group currently meets at the Family Recreation Center.

She also said that the group is supportive of the city's inclusion of space for all forms of art – performance, music, and visual, including pottery, painting and a host of other forms.

"We're interested in all the arts," Neale said.

What does Hillsborough Community College want?

Leaders at HCC have spoken with Temple Terrace city leaders about the possibility of having classroom space for part-time courses that are arts- or computer-related. Classes could include adult education, foreign languages, art, or even computer courses.

Representatives from the development team, Pinnacle/Ram, have voiced concern about the perception that HCC would be operating a full-time school at the center – a use that the developer strongly objects to.

Any uses that HCC proposes for the Art and Education Center would most likely have to be approved by the developer.

What do you think about the Arts and Education Center? Tell us on the Web

Tell us and your fellow readers what you think about the center's inclusion in the downtown project. Go to www.cnewspubs.com/opinion and click "FORUM" and leave your comments on the "Temple Terrace Arts" forum. While you're there, be sure to check out the other forums we have posted.