WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Tuesday, September 17, 2013, for the purpose of discussing the Greenbelt Theater Renovation.

Mayor Davis started the meeting at 8:02 p.m. It was held in the Council Room of the Municipal Building.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Konrad E. Herling, Emmett V. Jordan, Leta M. Mach, Silke I. Pope, Edward V.J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager; Celia Craze, Director of Planning & Community Development and David E. Moran, Assistant City Manager.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Clyde Hurst, Hurst & Associates; Mike Adams & Ben Harries, Gardiner & Gardiner; David Konapelsky, GTM Architects; Thomas X. White, News Review and many other citizens.

Mayor Davis began with introductions. She then provided a background on the prior work session. Mr. McLaughlin explained the materials included in the background booklet.

Mr. McLaughlin summarized the funding already approved for the project and listed the funds available for the project which totaled $880.000. Next, he discussed other potential sources of funding for the project. Mr. Roberts expressed opposition to using funds from Greenbelt Station covenant payments towards this project.

Next, Mr. McLaughlin described the "Greenbelt Theater - cost options" memo. He described the methodology used to develop the cost estimates presented.

Mayor Davis asked about the status of permits for the project. Ms. Craze responded that the City had expired permits and was in the process of having these permits renewed. She noted that the City had just received drawings from Pepco for the electrical power extension/upgrade.

Ms. Craze reported on meetings with Alice Mitchell to discuss deaf accommodations. She also noted that she had met with Michael Hartman, Shirley Middleton and others to discuss other accessibility issues. Ms. Craze described the firms & representatives present at the meeting and their relationship with the City.

Mayor Davis asked what was covered under existing permits. Ms. Craze responded that all the work listed in the memo was covered by permits, resulting in a 90% renovation.

Mr. Roberts asked for a breakdown of the $140,000 for the projection room. Mr. Hurst explained that there were egress issues, structural, HVAC, electrical and life safety components required.

Mr. Roberts stated that the City needed to retain the same type of HVAC system. Mr. Hurst responded that the new rooftop system being proposed would be much more efficient. There was discussion between Mr. Hurst and Mr. Roberts about the proposed rooftop HVAC system versus the current system.

Mr. Herling asked about other historic theater renovation projects and how other theaters had dealt with the HVAC issue. Mr. Adams responded that rooftop units were warranted and the roof can handle their weight. Mr. Hurst indicated that the units would not be visible from the front of the building and that this was also the most affordable option for the City.

Mr. Jordan asked about allocating costs of the electric upgrade to the other owner (Mr. Christacos) of the building. Mr. McLaughlin explained that based on the condominium documents both owners must agree to cover any cost over $10,000. He indicated this could be raised with Mr. Christacos, but there was no guarantee he would agree.

Ms. Mach asked if the $140,000 for the projection booth work was code and life safety driven and Ms. Craze responded yes. Ms. Mach asked about the auditorium renovation expenses. Ms. Craze stated that some of the auditorium expenses (like the doors, lighting upgrades, etc.) were safety related, but a significant amount was for painting & replacement of the wainscoting which are cosmetic items. It was noted that a fire alarm system was needed and these costs were spread throughout the project.

Mayor Davis asked about the duct work design. Mr. Hurst responded the plans were calling for spiral duct work. Mr. Putens asked why the duct work was being replaced. Mr. Hurst responded that current duct work was not properly sized and the layout of the duct work was not appropriate for the rooftop units.

Ms. Pope stated that in order to renovate the theater, certain items were necessary. She stressed the need to make the building functional and safe. Ms. Pope wanted to get the project started and indicated it may need to be done in phases.

Mayor Davis asked if HVAC was left undone and had to be replaced at a later date, would the theater need to be closed. Ms. Craze responded that the cost to replace it a later date would be greater than the cost to do it now due to contractor mobilization and would probably take several weeks.

Mr. Roberts stated that the existing HVAC system was made up of components that could be replaced separately.

Ms. Mach asked if there were grants for an energy efficient HVAC system. Mr. McLaughlin responded that staff was not aware of any but would look into this.

Mr. Herling wanted to know how other historic theaters had accomplished their renovation projects and mentioned a theater renovation project in Easton, Maryland. Ms. Craze responded that the City needed to deal with the HVAC units being proposed and what another theater had done was not necessarily relevant. Mr. Adams noted that removing a particular component might be required by the code and County permits. In response to a discussion with Mr. Herling, Ms. Craze noted that there were some discretionary items (finishes, terrazzo tile, etc.) that could be removed but the savings would be minimal.

Ms. Pope asked about the cost estimates and expressed concern they might increase. Ms. Craze explained that the City would enter into a contract with Gardiner & Gardiner for a fixed sum unless Council desired a different scope of work.

Mayor Davis asked about making the ticket booth accessible. Ms. Craze responded that there was no way to make the booth accessible, but there was an accommodation could be made at the concession stand by placing a ticket selling station there.

Mr. Roberts asked about the projector costs. Ms. Craze stated that $150,000 was the estimate for digital projection equipment and ADA listening technology. The City would also need to perform the $140,000 projection room upgrade, for a total of $290,000.

Mr. Jordan stated the City lacked the funding to perform all the needed work. He stated that the City needed to move ahead by taking a phased approach and suggested that the City could hold off on the HVAC system.

Mr. Putens, Mayor Davis and Mr. Herling also supported holding off on the HVAC system. Mr. Herling stressed the need to include the digital projector in the first phase of the project.

Caitlin McGrath stated that HVAC noise impacts the viewing experience. She believed the system being proposed would negatively impact that experience. She noted that theater floors are carpeted for a reason and that terrazzo floors presented a slipping hazard. Ms. McGrath stressed that digital projection equipment was needed by January and cannot wait for a later phase. She believed fundraising would be difficult due to time limitations and other constraints.

Robin Sarracino stressed that she and several of her friends were interested in setting up a fundraising program on behalf of the deaf community and were willing to help fundraise.

Michael Hartman stressed the need for carpet runners as a safety and disability access issue. He stressed the need for audio description technology for those who are blind.

Ms. McGrath stated that the theater had a platter system. She indicated that in order to show archival prints at the theater, the City needed a reel to reel projector and indicated the cost for this was approximately $8,000, but also possible that the City could get this equipment donated for free as other theaters are disposing of this equipment..

Aaron Markavitch indicated that Greenbelt could be a destination for film. He hoped the HVAC system and duct work could be hidden. He suggested that City allocate the additional $500,000 utilizing the recommendations identified by Mr. McLaughlin.

Dennis Fincham stated that the theater needed to attract more people in the community. He suggested that the theater be divided into two screens.

Peter May stated one of the reasons he moved to Greenbelt was this movie theater. He indicated that showing archival movies would set this theater apart and movie buffs would come here.

Brian Reel indicated he had done a thesis on historic theaters that are community owned. He opposed dividing the theater and cited examples. He believed that different types of projection equipment would enable the theater to attract more patrons.

Barbara Simon stated that Greenbelt was a transformative community and stated that Greenbelt had the opportunity to create a center for film and cinema. She indicated that digital projection and reel to reel were needed in phase one.

Frank Gervasi indicated that the goal should be to minimize the closure time. He questioned the cost estimates and suggested renovating one bathroom at time while keeping the facility open.

Ms. Craze explained the design of the bathroom renovations which included expanding the existing men's room and converting it to the ladies room. The ladies room would then become the mens room.

Ms. Craze further explained that the City would not have a use and occupancy permit while the theater was being renovated so the theater could not be occupied during the renovation. She also believed it would be dangerous to allow theater use during this time.

Susan Gervasi echoed that a digital projection system was needed. She questioned whether the projection booth renovation was necessary. Mr. Adams responded that based on information from the projection equipment company, electrical and HVAC upgrades were needed to accommodate the new digital projection

Justin Baker suggested that the City consult with Megan Young on the historic design elements of the theater.

John Mason stressed the need for digital projection equipment. He stated that he was a general contractor and that tenants were allowed to occupy the building while his work was underway.

Mr. Hurst indicated that rooftop units and spiral duct work has been selected due to cost and that any system can be designed to be quiet. Mr. Roberts stated that every HVAC system the City had installed since he had been on Council were lousy systems.

Mr. Jordan asked Mr. Sanchez about the average attendance at the theater. Mr. Sanchez responded that he could email attendance figures.

Ms. Mach was excited to see so many attendees at the meeting. She favored funding everything needed including the HVAC system and suggested reducing the fund balance to 11% to accomplish this. Mr. McLaughlin estimated this approach would yield an additional $500,000. Ms. Mach believed the City could recover some of the funds through fundraising.

Mayor Davis expressed concern about using that much fund balance in light of the other Capital project needs facing the City. She did want to renovate the theater and do it right.

Mr. Herling agreed with Ms. Mach's approach. He wanted to make sure that the renovations felt complete to patrons.

Ms. Craze observed that deleting the HVAC system may jeopardize the City's permit. She was a proponent of doing the project all at once because postponing it would mean waiting a significant number of years and cost more in the future.

Mr. Hartman referenced the positive impact of the theater on the other businesses in Roosevelt Center.

Mr. Baker stated that Council should consider seeking additional funds for this project and believed it would be an investment in the community.

Gwen Vaccaro suggested that Mr. Christacos should help pay for the cost of the Pepco electric upgrade and also be responsible for moving the HVAC unit blocking the projection room egress.

There was Council consensus to perform the contract administration, Pepco permit, inspection, Pepco electric upgrade, bathroom renovation and ticket booth/lobby/concession renovation at a cost of $679,000. There was further consensus to include $290,000 for the projection booth renovation and digital projection & captioning equipment. Council also agreed to include necessary, and code required auditorium elements (doors, handicapped seating, floor lighting, doors, carpet runners, etc.) at an estimate of $100,000 Council agreed to hold off on the HVAC system. The revised project total was $1,159,000.

Mr. Jordan stressed that the fundraising campaign needed to happen and encouraged Friends of the Greenbelt Theater to begin fundraising efforts.

Mr. Harries indicated that the City needed to have a functional HVAC system at the theater.

Ms. Craze stated that staff would work with the design consultants to revise the project. She indicated that staff would present a Resolution for Negotiated Purchase at an upcoming meeting and hoped to begin the project by the end of year.

The meeting ended at 11:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

David E. Moran
Assistant City Manager