



Commons Board Meeting Minutes
August 1 2013

The Commons Board met on Thursday, August 1, 2013 at 10:00 a.m. (EST) in the Council Chambers at City Hall.

Board Members present: Sherry Stark, George Dutro, Ryan Brand, Cheryl Buffo, Paige Harden, Sharon Beach, Tracy Souza

Others present: Mayor Brown, Lisa Westenberger, Jillian Keller, Jeff Logston, Ben Wagner, Tami Sharp, Heather Pope, Steve Risting

Sherry welcomed everyone and asked for approval of the Minutes from July 10th, 2013. Cheryl Buffo stated she had one correction in the last paragraph regarding the new pet policy in The Commons to read The Commons bars all pets except service animals from the building. Motion carried by consensus with the amendment.

Sherry Stark asked Lisa to update The Board on her new position as Fund Development Director with the Indianapolis Parks Foundation. Her last day with The Commons will be August 9th, 2013. Sherry thanked Lisa on behalf of the Board for managing The Commons.

Sherry noted that this special meeting is not intended to supplant regularly scheduled meetings, and the agenda was approved.

Mayor Brown clarified her comments at the recent City Council meeting that were reported in The Republic. The Commons is funded through a combination of revenue and the City's annual EDIT distribution. The Mayor had intended to propose slight increase in subsidization for The Commons in order to assist in increasing the public availability of the facility. The Commons costs \$850,000 yearly to operate and another \$700,000 in debt service. That amount is supplemented by approximately \$300,000 in revenue from the restaurants' leases and private rentals.

Mayor Brown is concerned with the imbalance between the limited space available to the public versus the cost to the taxpayers. The playground and food court take up 20% of the square footage inside The Commons and are always open during business hours. The public is paying for 80% of the facility including the debt service.

She is interested in hosting a series of free programming once a month during weekends inside The Commons. The Mayor stated if high-quality free programming was not possible for all the events, that low-cost or sponsorship programming be considered.

Mayor Brown suggested the Board should consider no longer allowing Miller-Tangeman Lobby (lobby) rentals. She said she would like to see the lobby only closed to the public for very special circumstances such as High School Prom. She noted that after looking at the impact on revenue, the estimated increase in subsidy would be \$12,000. She suggested that amount be increased slightly since no revenue will be collected during the first quarter for the vacant retail space.

The Mayor also suggested that The Commons Board consider increasing rental rates for private events such as weddings and business events in order to compete with other local venues. She repeated her concern with maximizing public use of the space.

Ryan Brand asked whether or not the \$12,000 would be structured like a scholarship. He asked if forgoing 12 events a year would come from the regular budget and the \$12,000 is used towards additional expenses for free programming. The Mayor stated it would be a revenue reduction and an increase in subsidizing. Cheryl Buffo said it is more than \$12,000 due to loss of revenue and additional rental expenses. The Mayor noted the idea is to work towards free programming. There was discussion about who would pay tech fees for Chris Crawl and others when free programming is offered. The Arts Council provides the tech crews, and Tami Sharp reported the Arts Council is currently absorbing a lot of that cost.

Sherry pointed out that the previous City Administration had clearly structured the rental policies to state that no one could use the building for free. Sherry asked if the Mayor was suggesting offering the building or lobby for free, and the Mayor confirmed that she was.

Cheryl Buffo clarified that even if there is free programming, program provider is still renting the space and offering the programming for free. She cited First Fridays as an example where the programming is free to the public but the Arts Council pays for the space.

Sherry asked if the Mayor's intention was that the City would fund the program or if The Commons staff would seek a sponsor for it. The Mayor stated, as far as the budget goes currently, forgoing the revenue was her intent. Sherry noted there would still be tech crew fees and other expenses involved and expressed concern over who would be funding those needs. Mayor Brown suggested the City consider paying for it after revenue projections are established if the fees are nominal or else find a sponsor.

Sherry asked Tami Sharp and Jillian Keller to provide information regarding the typical cost for an event to use the space not including paying the "talent" on a weekend. Tami said the prices vary depending on the type of event and suggested seeking out local events already established and inviting them to use The Commons.

Tracy Souza asked the Board to consider if the City subsidizing The Commons is still appropriate or if The Commons should be generating more revenue. She commented that the current private rental pricing is out of range for some not-for-profit organizations. Mayor Brown clarified that exploring raising rental rates was for private events only.

The Board discussed the pros and cons of renting out the lower lobby versus keeping open to the public at all times.

Mayor Brown stated the pressure is not on extreme revenue but offering value to the public for their tax dollars. Additional grant money towards the Arts Council might be needed and that she simply wanted to begin the dialogue.

The Board then discussed the feasibility and pros and cons of raising rental rates for private and “for-profit” rentals. The intent is to not undercut the private competition but to remain competitive.

George Dutro pointed out that when The Commons first considered priorities, maximizing activity and revenue were more of a focus than offering a variety of events. He suggested now that The Commons has been open for two years, offering a variety of events has become a stronger priority.

Sharon Beach suggested that events included in the potential free-programming series should not have to be decided by The Commons staff. The programming should be kept separate from the day-to-day bookings at The Commons. It was asked if this meant the City should give the Arts Council 12 free nights a year. Sharon verified the idea should be considered in order to maintain quality events. Tami Sharp mentioned The Commons should seek out organizations already establishing these types of events rather than creating something new. She encouraged seeking events already happening in the community and marketing use of The Commons partially based on its high tech sound system.

Sherry asked Sharon Beach to represent The Commons Board in interfacing with the Arts Council and The Commons staff to explore developing concepts discussed at this meeting. Sharon agreed to start the conversation.

Heather Pope reported on the vacant retail space and provided the lease signage examples to the Board. The intent is to release the RFP and marketing material on August 1, 2013. Brian Russell will put the marketing material on the website along with contacting local commercial brokers and Cincinnati, Indianapolis and Louisville brokers. Submittal deadline back to Heather Pope for Redevelopment Commission consideration is October 21 2013. George Dutro moved to authorize posting the “For Lease” sign in the vacant space inside The Commons. Tracy Souza seconded. Motion carried.

Heather said the “For Lease” sign will be put up the week of August 5th, 2013. Heather said she would have Brian Russell contact Karen Shrode to coordinate this sign with the Ivy Tech artwork recently installed in the windows of the vacant space. Heather will send a copy of the marketing material electronically to The Board. Sherry requested a motion approving the presented RFP. Cheryl Buffo moved. Paige seconded. Motion carried.

The process will be as follows:

- Release of RFP - August 1, 2013.
- Responses to RFP due by 5:00 pm on October 21, 2013
- Redevelopment Commission will open bids at 6:00 pm on October 21, 2013.
- Subcommittee will review proposals. The Committee will include representatives from the City Council, The Commons and the Redevelopment Commission.

- The Redevelopment Commission will have a public meeting after the review by The Commons Board on input for contract negotiations after the subcommittee has selected candidates.
- Presentations at a public meeting will go to Redevelopment Commission that will enter into contract negotiations.
- Assuming rent is over \$25,000, the contract will go to City Council for approval.
- The contract then goes to the potential tenant.

Heather felt contracts could be signed by January of 2014.

George Dutro voiced his objections with opening RFP bids but not announcing contents and making them public record during the meeting. He said he has discussed his objections with Jeff Logston, City Attorney. Heather Pope thanked him for his opinion.

Ben Wagner explained the revised job description for The Commons Manager position. Responsibilities now include working with the Arts Council, the Parks and Recreation program staff and the Columbus Arts and Cultural District Planning Committee to schedule programs inside and adjacent to The Commons as well as Commons facilities rentals. The job description also now includes free programming, development and assisting in developing new programs including providing free programs for the community. The position has been posted on the City website. The deadline for applications is August 7, 2013.

Meeting adjourned.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, August 14, 2013