Town of Chapel Hill
VARSITY THEATRE TASK FORCE

Monday, December 17, 2018 at 8:30am
Varsity Theatre
123 E. Franklin St., Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Meeting Minutes

I.   **Opening**   **Council Members Parker and Schaevitz**
Meeting began at 8:34am.

a. **Introductions**
<u>Members Present</u>: Council Member Michael Parker (Co-Chair), Council Member Rachel Schaevitz (Co-Chair), Hardy Butler, Dan Cefalo, Justin Haslett, Emily Kass, Greg Overbeck, Sharon Rothwell, Paul Shareshian, Justin Simmons, Kaze Thomas, Don Tise, Marlon Torres, Brenda Womble

<u>Staff Present</u>: Susan Brown, Sarah Poulton, Ross Tompkins, Katie Murray (County)

<u>Others Present</u>: Katie Murray, Linnie Supal, Xilong Zhao, Kathy Atwater

b. **Public Comment**
None

II. **Business**
a. **Varsity Theatre today**   **Paul Shareshian**
<u>Background</u>: Paul Shareshian provided a presentation on the history of the building and business. Justin Simmons from LOVE Chapel Hill Church (and Task Force member) spoke about being a tenant of Varsity Theatre.

<u>Action Taken</u>: No action was anticipated or taken.

b. **Objectives**   **Council Members Parker and Schaevitz**
<u>Background</u>: An overview of the Task Force and its objectives (see below for Council charge). Goal is to return to Town Council by the end of June, 2019, with findings and any recommendations.

<u>Action Taken</u>: No action was anticipated or taken.

c. **Meeting topics**   **Council Members Parker and Schaevitz**
<u>Background</u>: Discuss proposed meeting topics, areas of needed research, and existing or potential resources.

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<u>Action Taken</u>: No action was anticipated or taken.

d. Meeting logistics   Council Members Parker and Schaevitz
<u>Background</u>: Identify which days and times work for Task Force members. Mondays at 8:30am seem to work for many. Afternoons past 2:00 good for one.

<u>Action Taken</u>: No action was taken.

III.   Adjournment
The meeting adjourned at 10:00am.

Meeting Materials:

- Council Resolution from October 24, 2018
- Handout presentation from Council Members Parker and Schaevitz
- Presentation from Paul Shareshian and Justin Simmons

Public Charge: Consider the possible use of the Varsity Theatre at 123 East Franklin Street as a community performing arts center.

Specific Charge: Determine the following:

- What would be the vision for such a venue? What types of programming would be appropriate and desired by our community?
- How would such a venue meet community needs, reflect community values, and attract a wide range of individuals to the Downtown and what would be the economic impact on the Downtown?
- What would be the costs of this conversion for both acquisition and necessary refurbishment – and how long would it require? How would these costs be paid for and what kinds of partnership(s) might be feasible?
- What would be the business model of the new entity in terms of ownership, ongoing management, and ability to be financially secure and self-sustaining?

Town of Chapel Hill
VARSITY THEATRE TASK FORCE

Monday, January 28, 2019 at 8:30am
Chapel Hill Public Library
100 Library Dr., Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Meeting Agenda

Members Present: Council Member Michael Parker (Co-Chair), Council Member Rachel Schaevitz (Co-Chair), Mandey Brown, Matt Gladdek, Justin Haslett, Emily Kass, Greg Overbeck, Sharon Rothwell, Paul Shareshian, Justin Simmons, Kaze Thomas, Marlon Torres, Xilong Zhao

Members Not Present: Kathy Atwater, Gerald Bolas, Hardy Butler, Dan Cefalo, Kameron Southerland**,** Don Tise, Brenda Womble

Staff Present: Susan Brown, Jim Huegerich, Sarah Poulton, Ross Tompkins, Katie Murray

Others Present: None

I. **Opening**   **Jim Huegerich**
   Meeting began at 8:32am.

   a. **Approval of December 17, 2018 Meeting Minutes**
   December 17, 2018 meeting minutes were approved.

   b. **Approval of Agenda**
   January 28, 2019 agenda was approved.

   c. **Public Comment**
   None

II. **Business**
   a. **Public Meeting Rules**   **Town Staff**
   Background: Town staff reviewed public meeting notice rules and basic rules of respectful meeting conduct.

   Action taken: No action was anticipated or taken.

   b. **Role of Process Facilitator**   **Jim Huegerich**
   Background: Jim Huegerich introduced himself and his role as facilitator of the Task Force meetings.

   Action taken: No action was anticipated or taken.

c. **Review Task Force Charge**   **Council Members Parker and Schaevitz**

Background: The Council charge was reviewed.

Action taken: No action was anticipated or taken.

d. **Brainstorming activities**   **Jim Huegerich**

Background: Three exercises were completed by Task Force members:
   a. Defining key terms: Downtown, community, performing arts, center/venue
   b. Question-storming: What questions do you have of the following groups around the future use of the Varsity Theatre as a performing arts venue?
      - Downtown stakeholders
      - Artists and performers
      - Community arts organizations
   c. Who and where should we consult next?

Actions taken: Notes from these exercises are included as an attachment to the meeting.

III. **Open Forum**   **Jim Huegerich**

IV. **Adjournment**

Meeting Materials:

- Notes from brainstorming activities

Next Meeting: February 18, 2019 at 8:30am Library Room A

Public Charge: Consider the possible use of the Varsity Theatre at 123 East Franklin Street as a community performing arts center.

Specific Charge: Determine the following:

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	Defining Key Terms: Task Force member small groups were asked to brainstorm what each of four key terms mean to them. The terms included "Downtown," "Community," "Performing/Arts", and "Center/Venue."	
Term	**Definition**	**Category**
Downtown	Carrboro to Henderson on Franklin St	Physical description
Downtown	-Franklin St Raleigh St to Carrboro -Rosemary Small areas of Cameron & Columbia	Physical description
Downtown	Intersection of: -Franklin St & Cameron Ave -UNC & Chapel Hill Linda's to Carrboro on Franklin St	Physical description
Downtown	Walkable from intersection of Coumbia & Franklin St	Physical description
Downtown	-Campus area -Morehead to (Weaver Street) Market -Business district -Community -Linear	Hybrid
Downtown	More urban, less residential	Attribute / Characteristic
Downtown	Where folks go to meet	Attribute / Characteristic
Downtown	Culture, business, and social activty center	Attribute / Characteristic
Downtown	Center of creativity & attractions	Attribute / Characteristic
Downtown	Open later at night	Attribute / Characteristic
Downtown	A place to feel safe & comfortable & like you can get from A to B without incident	Attribute / Characteristic
Downtown	Musical legacy	Attribute / Characteristic
Downtown	Very accessible by public transit	Attribute / Characteristic
Downtown	Center of public events - to host the community event	Attribute / Characteristic
Downtown	The economic & cultural heart of Chapel Hill Food & drinks Not enough parking The past & the future of Chapel Hill in conflict ("architecture of old and new that don't feel connected"	Attribute / Characteristic
Downtown	Vibrant but fractured Multi-use spaces Too many empty store fronts "Pockets of vibrancy with space between them" "Used to be able to park and have full day & night's activities"	Attribute / Characteristic
Community	Anyone who lives or visits here	Technical description
Community	Different ages Diferent cultures Different "likes"	Technical description
Community	Families & friends	Technical description
Community	Tourists	Technical description

Community	Carrboro All Orange Western Durham Northern Chatham Anyone that uses Downtown	Technical description
Community	Sports Famililes Students	Technical description
Community	Neighbors Coworkers Patrons/customers Businesses Access Shared experiences	Technical description
Community	A society in a physical environment with residents having diversified background living together with social interactions	Technical description
Community	Unified ecosystem of values & vision Free / government funded Visitors serving & being served by residents	Technical description
Community	-Connection -Intersection of all things art music & culture -What it can provide & support for art service "Incubation of community's talent" "Local talent as cultural export"	Attribute / Characteristic
Community	Doesn't matter if you can pay	Attribute / Characteristic
Community	Character	Attribute / Characteristic
Community	Local pride	Attribute / Characteristic
Community	-Network -Local identity & pride -Diverse talent -Perspective of local needs	Attribute / Characteristic
Community	A place to share talents (develop through classes, showcase through events, etc.)	Attribute / Characteristic
Peforming / Arts	Educational Inspirational	Attribute / Characteristic
Peforming / Arts	Publicly shared expression	Attribute / Characteristic
Peforming / Arts	Anything performed for entertainment	Attribute / Characteristic
Peforming / Arts	Live exchange of perspectives, ideas & experiences	Attribute / Characteristic
Peforming / Arts	Any live cultural event Can be free or ticketed Requires minimum of 2 people: 1 performer and 1 spectator	Attribute / Characteristic
Peforming / Arts	More live music	Attribute / Characteristic
Peforming / Arts	Live entertainment (music, plays, dance, comedy)	Attribute / Characteristic
Peforming / Arts	Stage performance Professional Non-professional	Technical description

Peforming / Arts	Dance Theater Film Live music Comedy	Technical description
Peforming / Arts	Media Spoken word Street art	Technical description
Peforming / Arts	Can be "live" (music, play) or recorded (film)	Technical description
Peforming / Arts	Music Theater Film Improv Dance	Technical description
Peforming / Arts	Creative arts programming	Technical description
Center / Venue	Gathering space, open to all	Attribute / Characteristic
Center / Venue	Accessible	Attribute / Characteristic
Center / Venue	Accessible Safe Comfortable	Attribute / Characteristic
Center / Venue	Nexus Focus Premiere destination	Attribute / Characteristic
Center / Venue	Accessible to everyone, promoting everything	Attribute / Characteristic
Center / Venue	Learn/create Gather Work	Attribute / Characteristic
Center / Venue	Intersection of people, arts, etc.	Attribute / Characteristic
Center / Venue	Creative Hive	Attribute / Characteristic
Center / Venue	-Stage Gallery Studio Workspace/place to create Sound	Physical description
Center / Venue	Name to associate type of performance	Physical description
Center / Venue	Physical Place Festivals Community Groups Private Events Rentals Receptions, Parties	Physical description
Center / Venue	Single control location. Comprehensive collection. Representation of the greater field.	Physical description
Center / Venue	Building to house performance	Physical description
Center / Venue	Enough space Good environment	Physical description

Question-storming: Task Force members were asked to document what questions they have for key stakeholder groups around the Council charge of creating a performing arts center. The stakeholder groups included Downtown stakeholders, performers/artists, and arts organization stakeholders.

Stakeholder Group	Question
Downtown stakeholders	What impact would a vibrant Downtown perofrming arts center have on your business?
Downtown stakeholders	Do biz owners understand economic impact of the arts?
Downtown stakeholders	What is your 5-10-20 year business plan?
Downtown stakeholders	Do you even want something like this?
Downtown stakeholders	Would such a venue help? Concerns about parking?
Downtown stakeholders	What do we need more of downtown and do you think this transformation can promote that?
Downtown stakeholders	Is this a profit-driven business project, or public interest-driven project?
Downtown stakeholders	Birth party and church service is somewhat away from performing arts, isn't it?
Downtown stakeholders	What do you think is missing downtown?
Downtown stakeholders	Will a town sponsored venue be equivalent to a local 506 or Cat's Cradle at incubating new talent?
Downtown stakeholders	How can the Town of Chapel Hill help local businesses adapt to/benefit from a venue space like this?
Downtown stakeholders	Where will the money come from for renovations?
Downtown stakeholders	Is the town good at managing a business?
Downtown stakeholders	Will/can the Town be attached to a venue with controversial art?
Downtown stakeholders	How are community art spaces currently performing in Chapel Hill, Carrboro, Durham, Raleigh, and Nationally?
Downtown stakeholders	Would new venue compete with existing businesses for parking?
Downtown stakeholders	What hanges need to be made to building to acccommodate all sorts of art events?
Downtown stakeholders	Is there demand for another performance space?
Downtown stakeholders	What do other downtowns have/do that you wish our downtown had/did?
Downtown stakeholders	What activities or events bring people downtown? (including UNC events)
Downtown stakeholders	What are the past, present & future strengths, weaknesses, opportunities & threats to you/your operations
Downtown stakeholders	What did you choose to do business in Chapel Hill? Why do you continue to do so?
Downtown stakeholders	For Downtown Restaurants: -Would such a venue help your business? When? Would different breeds of events be better or worse? Do you have concerns about parking? Are there collaborative opportunities

Downtown stakeholders	What demographic groups come downtown - -day -evening -weekend
Downtown stakeholders	What can you do to benefit from/partner with the Varsity space proposal (how can you work with it)?
Downtown stakeholders	What are barriers to coming downtown? (based on data not "feelings")
Downtown stakeholders	How will you make downtown feel safe?
Downtown stakeholders	Why is it not easy to go downtown?
Downtown stakeholders	What are perceived barriers to folks coming downtown?
Downtown stakeholders	What are the days/events when you see a lot of action downtown?
Downtown stakeholders	Why will people want to come here?
Performers / Artists	What days/times of day are best for your work?
Performers / Artists	Ratio of rehearsal to perforamnce (time wise)
Performers / Artists	Who is the audience for your art?
Performers / Artists	Who is your audience? -Age -Other demographics -Geography
Performers / Artists	Why here vs. Durham, Chatham, Raleigh, etc.
Performers / Artists	Why do leave Orange to work, create, learn?
Performers / Artists	Where do you create? Why Chapel Hill? What tools/resources do you need?
Performers / Artists	Do you consider yourself a "Chapel Hill Artist"?
Performers / Artists	Do you feel underserved by existing venues?
Performers / Artists	Do you feel we really need another venue for arts?
Performers / Artists	How much rent can you pay?
Performers / Artists	Do you make (enough) money from your art?
Performers / Artists	What do you need to perform?
Performers / Artists	What are your space needs? -physical space -equipment -access -light/power
Performers / Artists	Do you need office space as well as performing space?
Performers / Artists	What kind of environment is conducive to creating your art?
Performers / Artists	What do you need?
Performers / Artists	What type of venue do you need? What kind of marketing support?
Performers / Artists	What do you need to grow your art?
Performers / Artists	Do y'all still need affordable art studio space? (answer is yes. has always been yes)
Performers / Artists	What performing venue do you prefer, a garden-like nature environment, or a cozy dark room?
Performers / Artists	Wjere do you perform now?

Performers / Artists	Do you have difficulty finding affordable venues?
Performers / Artists	Would a performance center help you? What would you need it to have? Who would pay?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	How many groups are turned away by DT (campus arts venues)? What size, what are their needs?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	Can we have more classes/workshops/etc. that promote creativity etc? Closer than the ArtsCenter, for instance
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	What model(s) are self-sustaining (pay for themselves)?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	Can Town of Chapel Hill possibly reach out to more downtown venues to hold events & performances there?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	Why aren't you in Downtown? Is it all $?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	More walkable ArtWalk, studios, exhibits, public performances [140 West?]
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	Can ArtWalk be resurrected in a more contiguous manner? More walkable?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	What kinds of space needs do you have? Can you/would you pay for it? How often?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	-Who does your art look to serve? -What mediums/programs fulfill this need?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	Who is your current/desired audience?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	How large is your current audience?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	Do you consider your org. a "Chapel Hill Arts Org."?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	What is your business model/structure?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	What support do you provide -$ -other services
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	What data do you have regarding facilities?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	For those with venues, what is current demand for performance space?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	Seeking a comprehensive art center, or a performing arts center?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	How can we organize an arts venue to have opportunities for free space for artists?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	Do you feel underserved by existing venues?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	Is the physical space big enough to actually be a viable public arts venue?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	Do we really need another venue for arts?
Arts Organizations Stakeholders	Do you need new/more performance space?

Venues to Explore: Task Force members brainstormed other Downtown theaters to either visit or learn more about.	
Venue	**Location**
Carolina Theater	Durham
Golden Belt	Durham
Cary Arts Center & Coco Booth Theater	Cary
N. Davidson Arts District (NoDA)	Charlotte
Merrimack Repertory Theatre	Massachusetts
Boston Center for Arts	Boston
Michigan Theater	Ann Arbor, MI
LFK Arts Center	Lawrence, KS
Notes from the group:	
Successful & unsuccessful places and models	
What are the financial characteristics of similar successful venues elsewhere? What is an ideal mix of events?	
Can these venues succeed without subsidies?	
What physical features are necessary in terms of stage, sound system, seating flexibility, etc.? How does one accommodate "profit-making" & non-profit needs?	

Parking Lot: Issues not discussed or covered in other exercises.	
Item	**Note**
Role of local government entity & how that affects model, outcomes, etc. (good and bad)	From "Other Venues" sheet
Landscape of arts venues, especially downtown	From "Other Venues" sheet
Oversaturation of art is a good thing	From "Other Venues" sheet
Other uses (weddings, birthday parties, etc)	
Assess needs	
Sustainability	
Convene & learn from existing downtown arts venues (& include UNC, ie Forest Theater) - where are the gaps?	
Safety of Downtown	

Town of Chapel Hill
VARSITY THEATRE TASK FORCE

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Chapel Hill Public Library
100 Library Dr., Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Council Member Michael Parker (Co-Chair), Council Member Rachel Schaevitz (Co-Chair), Gerald Bolas, Mandey Brown, Dan Cefalo, Justin Haslett, Greg Overbeck, Paul Shareshian, Justin Simmons (phone), Don Tise, Marlon Torres, Xilong Zhao

Members Not Present: Kathy Atwater, Hardy Butler, Matt Gladdek, Emily Kass, Sharon Rothwell, Kameron Southerland, Kaze Thomas, Brenda Womble

Staff Present: Susan Brown, Jim Huegerich, Katie Murray, Sarah Poulton, Ross Tompkins

Others Present: None

I.   **Opening**   **Jim Huegerich**
   a. **Approval of January 28, 2019 Meeting Minutes**
      Meeting began at 8:38am. January 28, 2019 meeting minutes were approved.

   b. **Approval of Agenda**
      February 18, 2019 meeting agenda was approved.

   c. **Public Comment**
      None.

II. **Business**
   a. **Review Task Force Questions from Council charge**
      Background: Council Member Schaevitz reviewed the Council charge.
      Action taken: No action was anticipated or taken.

   b. **Review and agree on draft vision and programming statement**
      Background: Council Member Parker reviewed the notes present included in this agenda.
      Action taken: No action was anticipated or taken.

   c. **Address community needs, values, attracting wide range, and economic impact**
      Background: Jim Huegerich led a discussion around how could the Varsity meet community needs, reflect community values, attract a wide range of individuals, and affect Downtown.
      Action taken: No action was anticipated or taken.

III.   Open Forum   **Jim Huegerich**

IV.   Adjournment
        The meeting adjourned at 9:55am.

Meeting Materials:

- Notes from January 28, 2019 Task Force Meeting (summarized below)
- Materials included on Task Force website (https://www.townofchapelhill.org/town-hall/departments-services/varsity-theatre-task-force)

Next Meeting: March 18, 2019 at 8:30am Library Room A

Public Charge: Consider the possible use of the Varsity Theatre at 123 East Franklin Street as a community performing arts center.

Specific Charge: Determine the following:

1. What would be the vision for such a venue? What types of programming would be appropriate and desired by our community?
2. How would such a venue meet community needs, reflect community values, and attract a wide range of individuals to the Downtown and what would be the economic impact on the Downtown?
3. What would be the costs of this conversion for both acquisition and necessary refurbishment – and how long would it require? How would these costs be paid for and what kinds of partnership(s) might be feasible?
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Question	Notes
How would such a venue meet community needs?	Movie makers Music venue Increased perception of safety Messaging: 1. Critical mass 2. Marketing -> communications (what events and how) Increase #s Arts alliance Coordinated New planting capacity Public $: -Leadership -Feet on the ground Basic problem: safety & welcome Low hanging fruit
How would such a venue reflect community values?	Creative Sustainable Provide opportunities for marginalized to be producers (grassroots & grants & coaching) Ambassadors Accepting & inviting to all Accessibility Accommodating Affordable Diversity Authentic
How would such a venue attract a wide range of individuals?	Churches Low income 2nd language Attract & engage & retain & invest in & celebrate Crossroads Access to resources
What would the impact be on Downtown?	$ develop (economic development) Cohesiveness Communications

Town of Chapel Hill
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Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Council Member Michael Parker (Co-Chair), Council Member Rachel Schaevitz (Co-Chair), Gerald Bolas, Hardy Butler, Dan Cefalo, Matt Gladdek, Emily Kass, Greg Overbeck, Paul Shareshian, Justin Simmons, Don Tise, Marlon Torres, Xilong Zhao

Members Not Present: Kathy Atwater, Mandey Brown, Justin Haslett, Sharon Rothwell, Kameron Southerland, Kaze Thomas, Brenda Womble

Staff Present: Jim Huegerich, Katie Murray, Sarah Poulton, Ross Tompkins

Others Present: None

I.   **Opening**   **Jim Huegerich**
  a. **Approval of February 18, 2019 Meeting Minutes**
     Meeting began at 8:38am. February 18, 2019 meeting minutes were approved.

  b. **Approval of Agenda**
     March 18, 2019 meeting agenda was approved.

  c. **Public Comment**
     None.

II. **Business**
  a. **February 18, 2019 Meeting Follow up**
     Background: This meeting item was not discussed due to time.
     Action taken: Move to April 15, 2019 meeting.

  b. **Review Proposed Responses to Bullets 1 and 2 (attached)**
     Background: Council Member Schaevitz presented a draft of responses to Bullets 1 and 2 for consideration.
     Action taken: Edits were made to this language and a final version is included below.

  c. **Varsity Theatre Space Exercise**
     Background: Potential uses and adjustments to the structure of the Varsity Theatre space were discussed.
     Action taken: Katie Murray will bring a list of performing arts spaces and the audiences they serve to the April 15, 2019 meeting.

    d. Finish discussion around Bullet #2
       Background: This meeting item was not discussed due to time.
       Action taken: Move to April 15, 2019 meeting.

III.   **Open Forum**   **Jim Huegerich**

IV.   **Adjournment**
       The meeting adjourned at 9:59am.

Meeting Materials:

- Bullets 1 and 2 Summary (attached below)

Next Meeting: April 15, 2019 at 8:30am Library Room A

Public Charge: Consider the possible use of the Varsity Theatre at 123 East Franklin Street as a community performing arts center.

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Draft Responses to Council Charge

Question 1:
   a. **Question**: What would be the vision for such a venue?
   Response: The vision for this venue is that it would be a vibrant, lively place where folks go to meet and engage with the arts, that it reflects the community's values, and that it is accessible and appealing to a broad cross-section of community members and visitors of all ages.

   b. **Question:** What types of programming would be appropriate and desired by our community?
   Response: Appropriate and desirable programming for our community includes all of the traditional performing arts, such as theatre, live music, comedy, film, dance and spoken word, as well as other public performance, especially those that feature local talent or educational opportunities. [Note: We will work on honing what is possible in the Varsity space at the April 15 meeting.]

Question 2:
   a. **Question**: How would such a venue meet community needs?
   Response: The Orange County Arts Commission and the Chapel Hill Cultural Arts Commission, among others, have shown that there is a significant gap between the number of local artists and the number of accessible performing arts spaces in our area. This venue would feature a business model that contributes to bridging that gap. The Orange County Arts Commission Report ("Setting the Stage") and the International Downtown Association (IDA) report, among others, have shown that performing arts venues generate revenue ~~both through~~ such as ticket sales, concessions, rentals, grants, fundraising, and tuition ~~as well as~~ while also producing an economic impact from hotel stays, food and beverage, and parking. By attracting visitors to Downtown, this venue would contribute to the overall economy of Downtown, Chapel Hill and Orange County.

   b. **Question**: How would such a venue reflect community values?
   Response: This venue would reflect and address several key community values and goals, including:
   - **A Place for Everyone** - by developing a family-friendly, vibrantly creative environment, with a special emphasis on the arts and reaching producers and patrons that are historically underrepresented in the arts community.
   - **Community Prosperity and Engagement -** by supporting existing and new local businesses and generating increased economic development Downtown.
   - **Good Places, New Spaces -** by investing in Downtown and by balancing respect for the old with the prospect of the new.

   c. **Question**: How would such a venue attract a wide range of individuals to Downtown?
   Response: By specifically investing in and creating accessible space to local artists, this venue would tap into networks all across our community who may not otherwise have a reason to come Downtown. Ideally, with spaces like this one, and others already in existence Downtown, and with the help of the Downtown Partnership and the Visitors' Bureau, we can market Downtown as a community crossroads where there is always something fun happening. Attributes of a successful space include accessibility for patrons regardless of physical ability and ability to pay, safety, and flexibility to support a range of artistic activities. While it should be principally ~~available~~ for revenue-generating performances and possibly private rentals, it is just as important for community groups to be able to affordably reserve the space ~~at no cost~~ for homegrown performances.

d. **Question**: What would be the economic impact on the Downtown?
   Response: We will work on this at the April 15 meeting.

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Meeting Minutes

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Members Not Present: Kathy Atwater, Gerald Bolas, Dan Cefalo, Paul Shareshian, Kameron Southerland, Don Tise, Marlon Torres, Brenda Womble

Staff Present: Susan Brown, Jim Huegerich, Katie Murray, Sarah Poulton, Ross Tompkins

Others Present: Ryan Smooth, Daily Tar Heel

I. Opening   Jim Huegerich
a. Approval of March 18, 2019 Meeting Minutes
Meeting began at 8:46am. March 18, 2019 meeting minutes were approved.

b. Approval of Agenda
April 15, 2019 meeting agenda was approved.

c. Public Comment
None.

II. Business
a. Review proposed summary of findings
Background: Jim Huegerich facilitated a review of a draft of findings that included responses to each of the questions posed as part of the Council's specific charge to the Task Force.
Action taken: Edits were made to this language and a final version is included below.

III. Open Forum   Jim Huegerich

IV. Adjournment
The meeting adjourned at 10:21am.

Meeting Materials:

- Proposed Summary of Findings

Public Charge: Consider the possible use of the Varsity Theatre at 123 East Franklin Street as a community performing arts center.

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Draft Varsity Theatre Task Force Findings

Introduction:

The Varsity Theatre is located in the ~~Varsity~~ Sorrell Building at 123 E. Franklin St., currently owned by James Rumfelt. The Varsity Theatre business comprises approximately 8,000 square feet of the building including two theaters, a lobby, upstairs restrooms and assembly areas. Other businesses in the ~~Varsity~~ Sorrell Building include the Blue Horn Lounge and Light Years. The building is not actively for sale by the owner.

The Varsity Theatre Task Force was convened by the Town Council in October 2018 to address the following:

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Specific Charge: Determine the following:

1. What would be the vision for such a venue? What types of programming would be appropriate and desired by our community?
2. How would such a venue meet community needs, reflect community values, and attract a wide range of individuals to the Downtown and what would be the economic impact on the Downtown?
3. What would be the costs of this conversion for both acquisition and necessary refurbishment – and how long would it require? How would these costs be paid for and what kinds of partnership(s) might be feasible?
4. What would be the business model of the new entity in terms of ownership, ongoing management, and ability to be financially secure and self-sustaining?

Starting in December 2018, the Task Force has worked to answer these questions to serve as the basis for a recommendation going forward. The answers to those questions are presented below along with some initial conclusions derived from them.

Question 1:

    a. **Question:** What would be the vision for such a venue?
    Response: The vision for this venue is that it would be a vibrant, lively place where folks go to meet and engage with the arts, that reflects the community's values, and that is accessible and appealing to a broad cross-section of community members and visitors of all ages.

    b. **Question:** What types of programming would be appropriate and desired by our community?
    Response: Appropriate and desirable programming for our community includes all of the traditional performing arts, such as theatre, live music, comedy, film, dance and spoken word, as well as other public performance, especially those that feature local talent or educational opportunities.

Question 2:

a. **Question:** How would such a venue meet community needs?
Response: The Orange County Arts Commission and the Chapel Hill Cultural Arts Commission, among others, have shown that there is a significant gap between the number of local artists and the number of ~~accessible~~ adequate performing arts spaces in our area. This venue could contribute ~~would feature a business model that contributes~~ to bridging that gap. The Orange County Arts Commission Report ("Setting the Stage") and the International Downtown Association (IDA) report, among others, have shown that performing arts venues generate revenue such as ticket sales, concessions, rentals, grants, fundraising, and tuition and also produce an economic impact from hotel stays, food and beverage sales, and parking. By attracting visitors to Downtown, this venue would contribute to the overall economy of Downtown, Chapel Hill and Orange County.

b. **Question:** How would such a venue reflect community values?
Response: This venue would reflect and address several key community values and goals, including:
- A Place for Everyone - by developing a family-friendly, vibrantly creative environment, with a special emphasis on the arts and reaching producers and patrons that are historically underrepresented in the arts community.
- Community Prosperity and Engagement - by supporting existing and new local businesses, and generating increased economic development Downtown
- Good Places, New Spaces - by investing in Downtown and by balancing respect for the old with the prospect of the new.

c. **Question:** How would such a venue attract a wide range of individuals to Downtown?
Response: By specifically investing in and creating ~~accessible~~ adequate space for local artists, this venue would tap into networks all across our community who may not otherwise have a reason to come Downtown. Ideally, with programming in spaces like this one, and others already in existence Downtown, and with the help of the Downtown Partnership and the Visitors' Bureau, we can market Downtown as a community crossroads where there is always something fun happening. Attributes of a successful space include accessibility for patrons regardless of physical ability and ability to pay, safety, and flexibility to support a range of artistic activities. While it should be principally for revenue-generating public arts and cultural performances, and ~~possibly~~ other ~~private~~ events, based on availability~~rentals~~, it is ~~just as~~ important that community groups should also be able to affordably reserve the space for homegrown performances.

d. **Question:** What would be the economic impact on the Downtown?
Response: ~~While~~ Aa comprehensive analysis of this issue was not conducted though, ~~some~~ data ~~that were~~ assembled are suggestive:
- Based on information provided by Paul Shareshian, the Theatre's owner, the Varsity accounts for nearly 100 events per month, with about three quarters of these comprising showings of films. These events draw approximately 7,000-8,000 individuals to the Downtown monthly.
- As described below, if renovated, the Varsity T~~t~~heat~~er~~re would have no more than the current ~~could have a~~ maximum capacity of between 280-300 seats.

If occupied at a level comparable to other venues in the area it is not clear that there would be a significant increase in the number of individuals drawn to the Downtown. Thus, renovating the Theater would have unknownbe unlikely to have a material effect on Downtown businesses

Question 3:

a. **Question:** What would be the costs of this conversion for both acquisition and necessary refurbishment – and how long would it require?
Response: The assessed value of the Sorrell building housing the Varsity Theatre is close to $2,000,000. It is assumed that purchasing the theater from its current owner would be in this price range.

An initial assessment of the facility suggests that its limitations – it is long and narrow, it has a sloping floor, it has a relatively low ceiling height, it lacks obvious spaces for storage, dressing rooms, and the like, and many of its systems do not comply with current building codes – would make it difficult, if not impossible, for it to accommodate the range of programming described above.

In terms of costs, while cosmetic renovations are possible (e.g., improving the exterior of the building, including updating the marquee, and upgrading the lobby might cost about $_____), a renovation that would make it into a modern space would be expensive – ranging from at least $1,500,000 to $3,500,000– due to the limitations mentioned above and the need to make older systems code compliant.

b. **Question:** How would these costs be paid for and what kinds of partnership(s) might be feasible?
Response: Although the Task Force has not investigated this question specifically, the likely options would include local government Town funding, fund-raising through a new or existing not-for-profit, and various grants (governmental and or private).

Question 4:

a. **Question:** What would be the business model of the new entity in terms of ownership, ongoing management, and ability to be financially secure and self-sustaining?
Response: The Task Force did not thoroughly investigate this for the reasons mentioned in the preliminary conclusions belowmentioned below. However, based on information presented in the Orange County Arts Commission report "Setting the Stage," generically the business models could include:
   1. Local government Town ownership and operation (with or without an operating subsidy)
   2. Local governmentTown ownership of the facility and operation by a separate entity (either for or not-for-profit) with or without Town subsidy
   3. Completely independent ownership (with or without Town subsidy)

Preliminary Conclusions:
Based on the work conducted by the Task Force to date, the following conclusions have been reached:

- There is a clear desire and need for a community arts performance space that would meet the needs of a variety of local arts groups.~~:~~
  - ~~Accommodate both private functions and more commercial performance needs~~
- ~~Broad access to such a facility by both patrons and arts groups was viewed as critically important~~The physical limitations of the building and theaters are such that achieving the goals expressed would be difficult as well as prohibitively expensive.

- While a performance space such as has been described might provide a boost to Downtown businesses, it is unclear that~~does not appear that~~, given the current utilization of the Varsity space and its capacity, converting it to a new use would have a meaningful impact on Downtown businesses. Further research would be needed to determine potential impact.
- ~~The physical limitations of the building and theaters are such that achieving the goals expressed would be difficult as well as prohibitively expensive.~~
- It is possible that a more cosmetic approach to the Varsity (i.e., working with the current building and theater owners to upgrade the exterior of the building) might help the Downtown by providing an interesting visual focal point and improve utilization, thereby assisting Downtown businesses.

Task Force members discussed other barriers to Downtown attendance including visitors feeling safe, comfortable, and welcomed (for example, aggressive panhandling, smoking, public urination, harassing behavior on the streets and sidewalks, etc.). The cost and perceived availability of parking is an additional barrier ~~public safety and parking~~. Another issue to be addressed is improving communication and collaboration among existing Downtown businesses who desire arts programming in their spaces. These issues also need to be addressed as part of the larger conversation around Downtown vibrancy.

It is clear that the Varsity Theatre is not the appropriate location for a performing arts center as identified by this Task Force. However, there are other possible spaces for such a venue in Downtown Chapel Hill and the Task Force recommends that the Council and Town staff continue to engage and explore this issue.