Sterling Opera House Commission

Regular Meeting

Minutes

Date: April 7, 2025

Received
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Derby, CT Town Clerk's Office

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1. **Call to Order -** The meeting was called to order at 6:13 PM.

2. **Pledge of Allegiance**.

   Commissioners and attendees stood for the

3. **Roll Call**

   Roll call was conducted with the following members present:
   Dana Florenza, Brian Coppolo, Gino DiGiovanni, Karleen Guluzzy.
   A total of four members were present, constituting a quorum.

   - Carleigh Paecht - Absent

4. **Public Portion**

   The public portion was opened, no member of the public wished to speak.
   Public portion closed.

5. **<u>Committee Update</u>**

   - The Sterling Opera House Committee, in coordination with the Board of Aldermen, selected **Steinberg Hart** as the firm responding to the RFP.
   - The Board of Aldermen approved the selection and authorized **Mayor DeMartino** to sign the contract on behalf of the City.
   - Steinberg Hart and the City's attorney worked collaboratively to develop the contract.
   - As of the meeting date, the contract was not yet finalized, though progress was reported and completion was anticipated soon.

   5-a. Nonprofit Corporation & 501(c)(3) Status

   - Paperwork for establishing a nonprofit corporation is underway.
   - Signatures are being obtained from the initial board members, including the President of the Corporation.
   - Once completed, documents will be returned to Attorney Dillon, who is providing legal services pro bono, for filing with the State of Connecticut.
   - The corporation is expected to be formally established within approximately two to three weeks, at which point additional board members with fundraising capacity or specialized expertise will be recruited.
   - Following incorporation, required governance documents will be prepared, including articles addressing the disposition of funds in the event the project cannot be completed, ensuring funds are transferred to another 501(c)(3).

- The 501(c)(3) application (approximately 42 pages) will then be submitted. Processing time is estimated between 90–120 days, with acknowledgment that federal staffing reductions may impact timelines.

5-b. Funding Challenges & Outlook

- Concerns were discussed regarding potential reductions in federal, state, and institutional arts funding, including the National Endowment for the Arts.
- Several foundations previously open to applications have paused or suspended grantmaking due to reduced investment returns.
- Individual philanthropy is also expected to decline.
- Construction cost increases and anticipated tariffs on steel were acknowledged as added challenges.
- Despite obstacles, commissioners expressed cautious optimism and noted the project timeline allows flexibility before construction begins.

5-c. Community Outreach & Public Engagement

Upcoming and potential outreach opportunities discussed included:

- St. Mary's Festival (typically the week following July 4)
- Memorial Day Parade, including potential display materials in front of the Sterling Opera House
- Participation in City of Derby 350th Anniversary events
- Additional citywide or regional events in Shelton, Seymour, and surrounding communities
- Consideration of a citywide public meeting at Derby High School to provide updates and recruit volunteers and board members

5-d. Historical & Promotional Materials

- A rare 1889 glass negative photograph of the Sterling Opera House was discussed.
- The image has been professionally inverted to allow print reproduction and may be used in future promotional materials and fundraising efforts.

5-e. Long-Term Vision & Strategic Planning

- Discussion highlighted opportunities for:
- Revitalization of surrounding downtown businesses
- Potential museum

6. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn the meeting at 6:38 pm

- **Motion by:** Dana Florenza
- **Second by:** Carleigh Paecht
- **Vote:** Unanimous in favor

Respectfully submitted by:
Jennifer Desroches