Sterling Opera House Commission Meeting Minutes

Date: February 9, 2026

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Location: Derby City Hall and Zoom

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2. Roll Call

The clerk called the roll. The following members were present: Gino DiGiovanni, Brian Campolo, Dana Florenzano, and Carlene Glossy. One member was noted as excused. A quorum was declared with four members present.

3. Approval of Minutes

No minutes were available for approval. A motion was made by Dana Florenzano and seconded by Brian Campolo to table approval of minutes. The motion carried unanimously.

4. Public Portion

The Chair opened the public portion for comments, questions, or concerns unrelated to the feasibility study presentation. Members of the public attending in person and by Zoom were invited to state their name and address for the record before speaking.

A request was made to create an agenda item to open a public hearing following the presentation. The Chair explained that the presenter would pause at intervals during the feasibility study update to allow questions and discussion after each section rather than holding all questions until the end.

There being no further public comment, a motion was made by Dana Florenzano and seconded by Brian Campolo to close the public portion. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Feasibility Study Update by Steinberg Hart

The Commission received a feasibility study update regarding the Sterling Opera House from Evan Delli Paoli, Principal with Steinberg Hart. Mr. Delli Paoli explained that Steinberg Hart is serving as the architect and lead organizer for the study, with supporting work from Webb Management Services, Stages Consultants, McLaren Engineering, and Kohler Ronan Engineers.

Mr. Delli Paoli stated that the market needs assessment, existing conditions assessment, and capital improvement recommendations had reached a point where the information was being compiled for cost estimating. He stated that the final report and cost estimate were expected to be presented at a future Commission meeting.

Market Needs Assessment

Mr. Delli Paoli summarized the market needs assessment conducted by Webb Management Services. The assessment evaluated cultural arts trends, the regional market within thirty- and sixty-minute drive times, competing venues, and likely user demand. The study found a market opportunity for a midsize venue and recommended that the primary use of the Sterling Opera House be commercial entertainment, including live music, comedy, and popular entertainment events.

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Secondary uses identified included meetings and events, curated film programming, community and nonprofit use, school-based programming, civic gatherings, and other activities that could help keep the building active between ticketed events.

The study recommended future completion of a business plan and identification of a third-party operator. Suggested next steps included building a list of potential operators, developing a targeted request for proposals, evaluating responses, establishing a memorandum of understanding between the City and an operator, and eventually transitioning to a lease agreement if appropriate.

Existing Conditions and Historic Requirements

The presentation reviewed the existing condition of the Sterling Opera House, including the exterior masonry, basement, street-level spaces, audience chamber, stage, stairways, and balcony areas. Mr. Delli Paoli stated that the City's past efforts to maintain the exterior, roof, cupola, and windows helped limit deterioration within the building.

The consultants noted that the building contains load-bearing masonry walls and significant wood framing. Much of the historic stair and railing system may be retained under the applicable existing building code, subject to reinforcement and code review. The building will require substantial new mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fire protection, and life-safety systems, including a full sprinkler system.

The study also evaluated historic preservation requirements, including the building's status on the National Register of Historic Places and potential eligibility for historic tax credits. Mr. Delli Paoli reviewed the importance of preserving historic character, using compatible materials, and ensuring that any new additions remain visually secondary to the historic building.

Proposed Improvements and Building Program

The proposed building program includes improvements to support public access, performer support, production needs, building utilities, and life safety. A modest accessible addition with an elevator was discussed to provide access to audience areas while preserving the historic roofline and minimizing the visual impact of the addition.

The proposal includes an accessible entrance, public lobby areas, restrooms, dressing rooms, green rooms, production support spaces, loading access, emergency egress stairs, and new building systems. The existing main stair would remain and be celebrated as part of the historic character of the building.

Several seating options were presented, with total capacities ranging from approximately 550 to 613 seats depending on aisle configuration, balcony tier spacing, and seating comfort considerations. The consultant noted that the final seating approach should be further reviewed with a future operator.

Stage, Platform, Acoustics, and Systems

The consultants discussed the existing stage and the difference between a full stage with a fly system and a more modest performance platform. Based on the market assessment, the preliminary recommendation favored a platform suitable for live music, comedy, popular entertainment, and smaller theatrical uses, while recognizing that a larger fly system could be evaluated as an alternate.

Acoustic considerations included exterior noise isolation, potential sound transmission from amplified events, HVAC noise control, and the choice between fixed and variable room acoustics. The presentation also reviewed proposed new mechanical, electrical, plumbing, sprinkler, and fire protection systems.

Project Phasing and Cost Estimating

Mr. Delli Paoli explained that the team is evaluating potential phasing to identify the minimum work necessary to reopen the building and begin generating activity and revenue. Phase-related considerations included the audience chamber, performance platform, accessibility improvements, emergency egress, performer support, street-level spaces, loading, and exterior equipment areas.

The cost estimate will include hard construction costs, soft costs, equipment, furnishings, professional fees, permitting, legal and miscellaneous allowances, contingencies, and escalation. The consultant stated that the final report will include recommendations, phasing information, and cost information.

6. **Public Questions and Discussion**

Members of the public and Commission participants asked questions and offered comments regarding the feasibility study, historic restoration, accessibility, seating comfort, theatrical capability, fly system options, lighting and sound positions, orchestra pit considerations, movie screenings, concessions, restrooms, operator selection, fundraising, endowment needs, potential in-kind contributions, and the future RFP process for contractors.

Questions were raised about the type of wood used in the existing structure, acoustical considerations, preservation of historic features, the possibility of theatrical performances, the need for a fly or rigging system, use of the neighboring building or exterior access areas, and how contractor qualifications for historic restoration would be reviewed.

The consultants stated that theatrical performances would not be excluded, but the preliminary recommendation is not for a Broadway-scale fly system. They indicated that alternate rigging or fly-system options could be included for further review and cost comparison. The consultants also stated that film screenings could be accommodated with appropriate portable or installed equipment. Discussion also addressed the importance of identifying an operator, developing a fundraising strategy, considering an endowment, pursuing available grants and historic funding opportunities, and preserving the Sterling Opera House as a community asset. The Chair stated that the presentation materials would be shared and posted for public review.

7. **New Business -** There was no new business.

8. **Adjournment**

The Chair thanked Steinberg Hart and the consultant team for their presentation and work on the feasibility study. A motion was made by Dana Florenza and seconded by Brian Coppolo to adjourn the meeting at approximately 8:13 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Desroches