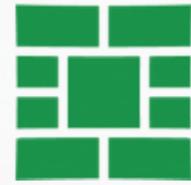


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CIVIC LEGACY PROJECT

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY



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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The 2024 Civic Legacy Project community engagement efforts were led by The Collaborative Firm with strong support from Sottile & Sottile. Over the course of five engagement events, nearly 500 comments were received. The top themes highlight a community deeply invested in the future of Savannah, with an emphasis on preserving the Johnny Mercer Theatre, maintaining the name of Dr. King, ensuring there is affordable community space (ballroom), restoring the Oglethorpe Plan, forward-thinking consideration of parking and affordable housing, increasing support for the arts, and ensuring that the future plans for the potentially restored tything and trust lots are in keeping with the character and vision of the City of Savannah.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

As the largest urban renewal project in Savannah's history, the development of the Civic Center was a controversial project from its start in 1968. While demolition of the Municipal Auditorium continued to be a topic of debate for years, it was ultimately torn down in 1971, and the Civic Center was completed in 1972. The recently completed Civic Legacy Project Cultural Landscape Analysis: History of Evolution of Civic Center Site and Jackson and Elbert Wards by Ethos Preservation highlighted the fact that the National Park Service warned that the Civic Center represented a substantial alteration to the Savannah National Historic Landmark District.

The Civic Center was updated over the years, including the addition of conference rooms in the early 2000s to retain convention business. In 2001, Economic Research Associates completed a draft site analysis for a new city arena, which reviewed the Civic Center location in addition to eight other sites. The Civic Center's location in downtown Savannah and proximity to other tourism infrastructure was rated highly; however, other concerns over parking and traffic congestion led to the site being ranked sixth overall.

In 2013, after years of public discussion on the declining use and continued maintenance concerns at the Civic Center, the City Council approved the Springfield Canal/City Lot location for a new arena on Savannah's West side. The City formed six advisory subcommittees, composed of invited local community members and City staff, to assist in the early phase of the arena project. The subcommittees included consideration for the future of the Civic Center. The subcommittees met regularly to discuss and research topics related to their area of focus. In 2016, the subcommittee for the Utilization of Current Civic Center recommended that the Johnny Mercer Theatre, ballroom, and meeting rooms be retained, and the arena be preserved for locally sponsored events. Concurrently, the Proposed Arena Feasibility Study, commissioned by the Mayor and Aldermen, advised against preserving the arena due to the substantial costs associated with renovations and repairs necessary to bring the building into compliance with development standards, including life safety and ADA compliance.

In 2018, the City of Savannah convened the Urban Land Institute's Technical Assistance Program (TAP) to consider the highest and best uses of the Civic Center site. Over a two-day period, the TAP involved a panel of professionals from outside Savannah to collect information and input through invited stakeholder interviews and conversations with city officials. The TAP also conducted a two-week online survey for public input, garnering approximately 500 total responses. The TAP concluded with a final presentation and published report. The feedback from the broader public survey included:

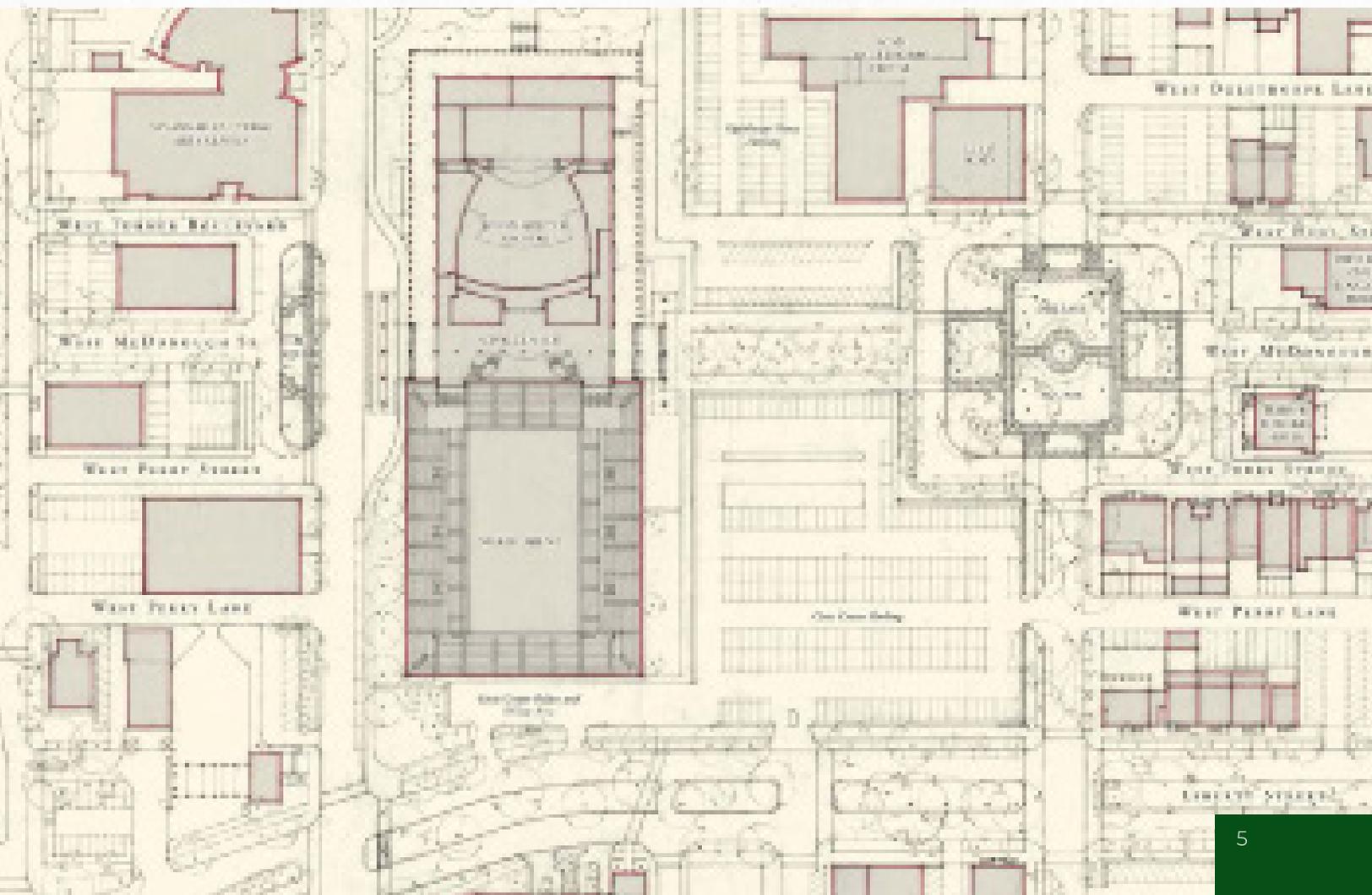
- A majority of respondents (53.92%) said preserving Savannah's National Landmark Historic District and the Oglethorpe Plan was their "highest priority."
- Respondents cited their "top three preferences" for use of the Civic Center site would be:
 1. More greenspace/park/civic space (81.18%);
 2. More arts/cultural/entertainment spaces (73.73%); and
 3. A mixed-use – residential, office, commercial and retail – space (51.76%).
- Less than half of respondents (39.80%) thought it was "very important" for the City to maintain a civic space, or some kind of venue, for these community uses.
- Two-thirds of respondents (66.67%) used the Civic Center site for "entertainment" purposes.
- Respondents had mixed feelings about whether the City should continue to offer a venue for these kinds of services: 29.41% thought it was "not important"; 28.04% thought it was "very important"; others were split between thinking it was "important" (24.31%) and "somewhat important" (18.24%). Nearly one-half of respondents (47.84%) said these services could be offered elsewhere if they were kept downtown.
- Roughly three-quarters of respondents (75.29%) lived within the City of Savannah limits.



The stakeholders feedback included a desire to maintain the historic character and "granularity" of the area, concerns about the current acoustics of the Johnny Mercer Theatre, need for class-A buildings, desire for mixed-use development, need for affordable or workforce housing, desire to see the properties back on the tax rolls, and a sense that "downtown should be for everyone, even those who do not live downtown." The following year, in 2019, the City Council adopted the ULI report recommending that the entire Civic Center complex be removed in preparation for the restoration of the Oglethorpe Plan.

In 2022, the new EnMarket Arena opened. The same year, the City Council considered a conceptual plan for the demolition of the old arena, while aiming to preserve and enhance the Johnny Mercer Theatre, community ballroom, and multi-purpose rooms; construction of a new entrance to the Civic Center along the building's south façade; development of a new municipal office building on the north side of the Civic Center to reduce the City's need for leased office space; and restoration of a larger section of the Oglethorpe Plan, including two trust lots and four tything lots lost during the development of the Civic Center. City Council provided a directive to the City Manager to study the conceptual plan and report back to them with key findings and recommendations.

Since 2022, Akustiks, LLC, conducted an in-depth assessment of the general feasibility of renovating the existing Johnny Mercer Theatre. The report found that the facility is a community asset and could be transformed to play a leading role once again in the cultural life of Savannah, while emphasizing that demolition of the Theatre would be felt by many segments of the community. The City also finalized the Cultural Landscape Analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Civic Center site, as well as Elbert and Jackson wards. This document aids in informing decisions that minimize the loss of historic fabric, maintaining the Civic Center site as a community amenity, and ensuring that future development is appropriate to the character of the Savannah National Historic Landmark District. The City is currently completing a Phase I Archaeology Assessment of the Civic Center site, as well as a comprehensive infrastructure survey of the study area, to facilitate the redevelopment of the Civic Center area. In 2024, a public engagement strategy was implemented to gain critical input from key stakeholders, as well as the public, in consideration of the future of the Civic Center site.



2024 ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

The 2024 public engagement efforts aimed to increase awareness and educate the public about the future of the site, gather public input, and collaborate with the City of Savannah to ensure the engagement efforts proceeded as an equitable, transparent, and solutions-oriented process. The main engagement techniques included a series of stakeholder focus groups, in person and virtual community-wide open houses, and extensive outward communication messaging through social media, radio, newspapers, and the City's website. Overall, more than 300 citizens participated in one of the engagement sessions and over 500 comments were received. Summary information from each of the sessions can be found below.

STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUPS

Date: April 25, 2024

Participants: 73

The Stakeholder/Focus Group sessions held on April 25, 2024, were well attended by 73 invited stakeholders from the business community, neighborhoods, acoustics/arts community, Metropolitan Planning Commission, and other community organizations. Each of the six focus groups listened to a brief presentation and then engaged with the consultant teams to share their feedback around three messaging themes of Facility, Community, and Future. Two additional stakeholder sessions were held on May 24, 2024, with the Savannah Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, and June 5, 2024, with Leadership Savannah.

The comments below represent a summary of the most frequent responses from the stakeholder focus group sessions:

"Love the concept, an impressive amount of work has been done."

"The MLK piece is very important, make this a place for gathering."

"All great cities have a performing arts spot – every city we compare ourselves to has a theater of similar size"

"The need for housing is immense – access to affordable housing, food, healthcare. I would like to see the cultural trail extended here."

"The preservation of Dr. King's name is a high priority."

"There is huge value in restoring the Oglethorpe Plan."

"Appreciate you making sure the stakeholders are involved in the process. We want the folks who are the primary users to be involved."

"Keeping the Theatre is very important to the arts and humanities scene in Savannah, and it offers an excellent mid-range size that will allow Savannah to continue to attract various groups."

"Strong covenants need to be in place to ensure housing is provided, allow for small business, and limit hotel development."

"There should be a study on what the restored lots will not be, as this is both a great opportunity and a great threat."

"There is tremendous value in having an entertainment venue downtown, specifically due to the economic impact of people coming downtown to shop and eat before and after shows."

OPEN HOUSE #1

DATE

MAY 7, 2024
6:00 PM-7:30 PM

PARTICIPANTS

155

WRITTEN COMMENTS RECEIVED

191

The May 7, 2024, community-wide Open House held in the Civic Center Ballroom was attended by over 155 people. Most attendees live in the downtown 31401 zip code, followed by 31405, 31404, and 31406. The event opened with remarks from Mayor Johnson and City Manager Melder. Participants listened to a brief presentation and then were split up via color-coded dots to visit three stations: Facility, Community, and Future. At the stations, members of the consultant teams engaged with the participants, answered questions, and encouraged written feedback to be placed on sticky notes on a flipchart. In addition to numerous verbal comments and discussions, 191 written comments were received via sticky notes.

TOP THEMES FROM THE FEEDBACK:

- Support for preservation of the Johnny Mercer Theatre
- Maintain the name of Dr. King in some capacity
- Restore the Oglethorpe Plan, in part or entirely
- Consider parking in plans
- Desire to keep and enhance community meeting spaces (ballroom)
- Advocating for affordable and mixed-income housing
- Historic preservation
- Concerns over future development on site
- Concerns about parking and transportation options



OPEN HOUSE #2

DATE

MAY 16, 2024
6:00 PM-7:00 PM

PARTICIPANTS

23

WRITTEN COMMENTS RECEIVED

10

The May 16, 2024, community-wide Open House held virtually via Zoom and attended by 23 people. The event opened with remarks from Mayor Johnson and City Manager Melder. Participants listened to a brief preservation and then were encouraged to submit comments via the chat or send additional feedback via email to planning@savannahga.gov. Ten written comments were received via Zoom chat.

TOP THEMES FROM THE FEEDBACK:

- Support for restoration of the Johnny Mercer Theatre and community ballroom
- Suggestions for deed restrictions for the redeveloped lots
- Questions about the timeline/budget of the proposed project



Public Input Events

- **Stakeholder Meetings**
Thursday, April 25: Series of sessions with representatives from the business community, Metropolitan Planning Commission, Neighborhood Associations, Arts community, and other community stakeholders.
- **Community-wide Open House**
Tuesday, May 7, from 6 to 8 p.m., Civic Center Ballroom
- **Virtual Community Meeting**
Thursday, May 16, at 6 p.m., See: www.SavannahGa.gov
- **Community-wide Open House**
Saturday, May 18, from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., John Delaware Community Center
- **Community-wide Open House**
Monday, May 20, from 6 to 8 p.m., The Armstrong Center Southside



OPEN HOUSE #3

DATE

MAY 18, 2024
11:00 AM-12:30 PM

PARTICIPANTS

31

WRITTEN COMMENTS RECEIVED

62

The May 18, 2024, community-wide Open House held at the John Delaware Community Center was attended by 31 people. Most attendees lived in the 31401 zip code. The event was run in the same fashion as the May 7, 2024, Open House with brief remarks and then participants visited three stations – Facility, Community, and Future – to engage with consultants and provide sticky note feedback. In addition to numerous verbal comments, 62 written comments were received via sticky notes.

TOP THEMES FROM THE FEEDBACK:

- Support for use of the community space (ballroom) and the Theatre
- Preservation of greenspace
- Questions over parking and accessibility
- Concern that the old arena cannot compete with the EnMarket arena
- Support for affordable housing



OPEN HOUSE #4

DATE

MAY 20, 2024
6:00 PM-7:30 PM

PARTICIPANTS

25

WRITTEN COMMENTS RECEIVED

129

The May 20, 2024, community-wide Open House held at the Armstrong Center was attended by 25 people. Most attendees lived in the 31401 and 31419 zip codes. The event followed the same agenda as the previous Open Houses with brief remarks followed by participant engagement at the three stations – Facility, Community, and Future. 129 written comments were received via sticky notes.

TOP THEMES FROM THE FEEDBACK:

- Restoration of the Johnny Mercer Theatre
- Questions regarding parking and accessibility
- Support for mixed-use and affordable housing in restored blocks
- Importance of Dr. King legacy
- Need for programming to meet community needs like after-school programs
- Fostering cultural and artistic development on site



EMAIL FEEDBACK

27 citizens and several community groups provided feedback via email to planning@savannahga.gov between May 1 and June 14, 2024. The full comments can be found in the appendix.

The main themes from the email feedback are below:

- Support for the restoration of the Johnny Mercer Theatre
- Emphasis on restoring the Oglethorpe Plan
- Suggestions for mixed-use development including affordable housing and retail
- Ideas for transforming the Civic Center into a community hub with a sports facility, educational center, and space for the arts
- Cultural preservation of the Dr. King legacy
- Concerns about parking and accessibility
- Financial feasibility of the renovation vs. demolition and rebuilding

CUMULATIVE SUMMARY

CONCLUSION

The 2024 public engagement efforts underscored the significant investment of Savannah's citizens in shaping the future of the Civic Center. The engagement process revealed diverse opinions on the Civic Center's future, reflecting a community that values both its past and its potential for future growth and community benefits. As the City of Savannah moves forward with deciding on a vision for the site, the insights gathered from this engagement will be instrumental in guiding the redevelopment efforts, ensuring that the Civic Center remains a vibrant, inclusive, and culturally rich landmark for generations to come.

PARTICIPATION

Overall, the 2024 public engagement efforts on the future of the Civic Center saw over 300 people participate and resulted in nearly 500 comments. Downtown residents in the 31401 zip code participated the most, followed by 31405, 31406, and 31419. A visual representation of the breakdown of percentage of participants for the top zip codes is shown below.

PUBLIC INPUT SUMMARY

The cumulative themes resulting from the community feedback include:

DESIRE FOR COMMUNITY SPACES AND EVENTS:

There is strong support for maintaining or enhancing community spaces like the Johnny Mercer Theatre and community ballroom for events, performances, and gatherings. This includes support for more community-focused programming at the site.

MAINTAIN THE DR. KING LEGACY:

Continuation of the recognition of the legacy of Dr. King is strongly supported across the community and, notably, a top priority for the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance. Many individuals expressed a desire to amplify the recognition of the King name to encompass a larger area rather than just the arena.

TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING DISCUSSION:

Questions about parking, traffic flow, and alternative transportation options arise frequently. Some advocate for underground parking or prioritize pedestrian-friendly urban design.

HOUSING CONCERNS AND ADVOCACY:

Affordable housing is a recurring theme, with a focus on mixed-income housing and concerns about housing availability and affordability. Some advocate for repurposing space for housing rather than offices or commercial buildings.



PUBLIC INPUT SUMMARY



RESTORATION OF THE OGLETHORPE PLAN:

Restoration, in part or entirely, of the Oglethorpe Plan is a priority for many participants, including connectivity of streets which were impacted by building the Civic Center as well as potential restoration of one or more squares as detailed in the original Oglethorpe Plan.

CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND ARTS SUPPORT:

There's a strong emphasis on preserving the cultural heritage of Savannah including support for the arts, theatre, and community events. This support extends to preservation and restoration of the Johnny Mercer Theatre, as indicated by the majority of comments.

GREEN SPACE AND URBAN PLANNING:

Preservation of green space, the creation of parks, and sustainable urban planning are important to many contributors. This includes advocating for bike lanes, public transport, and minimizing the impact of new developments on the environment.

SKEPTICISM OF DEVELOPMENT PLANS:

Some participants express skepticism or opposition to the specific development plans, preferring more community involvement or alternative approaches to redevelopment.

APPENDICES

EMAIL FEEDBACK

PUBLIC COMMENTS

ADDITIONAL STAKEHOLDER SURVEYS

- **2023 DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION SURVEY**
- **2024 DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION SURVEY**
- **ALDERMAN LEGGETT'S SURVEY**

Bridget Lidy

From: Cory Highland <acoryhighland@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 21, 2024 8:26 AM
To: Planning; Mayor Johnson
Cc: Robert P Helms; Detric Leggett; Alicia Blakely; Carol Bell; Estella Edwards Shabazz; Bernetta Lanier; Linda Wilder-Bryan; Nick Palumbo; Kurtis Purtee; Jay Melder; Heath Lloyd; President Dna; Eric Curl; elasseter@savannahnow.com
Subject: Fwd: [Caution - External Email] An alternative to the Mercer Theater

Dear Sirs/Madams:

As a native Savannahian who attended multiple events in the Civic Center, including playing basketball there many times, I have fond memories of that building, as well as the Johnny Mercer Theater, which I still enjoy. That said, I support the email below from Mr. Robert Helms concerning the future of the Civic Center and Johnny Mercer. It's time to restore the Oglethorpe Plan while providing a new, medium-sized entertainment venue to serve all of Savannah.

Thank you.

--

A. Cory Highland
211 East York Street
Savannah, GA 31401
(646) 361-4659
acoryhighland@gmail.com

From: Robert P Helms <rphelms1@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 20, 2024 2:10:42 PM
To: Planning <Planning@Savannahga.Gov>; Mayor Johnson <VJohnson01@Savannahga.Gov>
Cc: Detric Leggett <DLeggett@Savannahga.Gov>; Alicia Blakely <ABlakely01@Savannahga.Gov>; Carol Bell <Carol.Bell@savannahga.gov>; Estella Edwards Shabazz <EShabazz@Savannahga.Gov>; Bernetta Lanier <BLanier@Savannahga.Gov>; Linda Wilder-Bryan <LBryan@Savannahga.Gov>; Nick Palumbo <NPalumbo@Savannahga.Gov>; Kurtis Purtee <KPurtee@Savannahga.Gov>; Jay Melder <Jay.Melder@Savannahga.Gov>; Heath Lloyd <hlloyd@Savannahga.Gov>; President Dna <president@savannahdna.org>; Eric Curl <eric.curl@savannahagenda.com>; elasseter@savannahnow.com <elasseter@savannahnow.com>
Subject: [Caution - External Email] An alternative to the Mercer Theater

I have been asked to consider whether there might exist a feasible and cost effective alternative to the renovation/reconstruction of the Johnny Mercer Theater currently planned by the City of Savannah.

After considerable thought and consultation with friends, I think it would be possible to locate a new theater in one of several sites already owned by the City thereby freeing up the entire Civic Center site for redevelopment based on the original Oglethorpe Plan. Selling off the Civic Center site for residential or commercial uses would raise in the neighborhood of \$80 million and would add substantially to the tax base of the City. Sales could be structured such that the uses of the lots are deemed to be commercial even if the owners are non profit. In effect buyers would be forced to agree in advance that such property constitutes unrelated business property subject to property and other city taxes.

What are the important objectives of the renovation or replacement of the Mercer Theater?

1. Build a 1,800 to 2,400 seat theater with good acoustics and site lines, suitable not only for philharmonic events but also other events not suitable for the Enmarket Arena.
2. Include a ballroom and other ancillary spaces to replace the ballroom on the 3rd floor of the Mercer Theater.
3. Minimize the disruption to city life associated with the construction period.

Are there other potential sites for a new theater?

I understand the City owns at least 4 plots of land that could be used for a new theater. In addition, the removal of the I-16 flyover would free up additional plots for redevelopment. Potentially the most attractive of the available sites is the parking lot on MLK located between the Visitor Center and SCAD's Clark Hall. A new Mercer/MLK theater could be constructed on this site fronting on MLK.

Attached as Exhibit 0 is a Google Maps picture of the parking lot in question. Exhibit 1 is a photo overlay of the Mercer Theater (minus its colonnades) onto the parking lot and Exhibit 2 is a similar photo overlay of the theater portion of the Gaillard Center on the parking lot. If there is a need for other spaces, the building could be extended deeper into the parking lots.

By constructing a new theater on this site and keeping the existing Mercer Theater complex in operation during construction, city life will suffer minimal disruption.

The elephant in any consideration of the redevelopment or replacement of the Mercer Theater is the cost of the alternative chosen. We have been told that the model for the renovation project would be to do something similar to that done in 2022 to the now named David Geffen Hall of Lincoln Center in New York City. The issue is that the renovation of Geffen Hall cost \$550 million, an astronomical sum by any criteria.

Another renovation project cited is the redevelopment of the Gaillard Center in Charleston, completed in 2012 for a reputed cost of \$142 million. The Enmarket Arena, with its larger seating capacity and requirement for multiple uses, is reported to have cost about \$150 million.

One of the problems in discussing any redevelopment of the existing Mercer Theater is that the type of reinforced concrete construction used has generally not aged well. Not only have such buildings become stained over time by rain and weather but many, perhaps all, develop leaks which result in rusting rebars and a weakened structure. These structural problems are one of the reasons that most large athletic stadiums of the era have been replaced with new builds and not renovated.

It seems likely that similar problems will be discovered when construction begins on a renovation of the existing Mercer Theater. It is practically certain that unexpected problems (asbestos, non-conformity to current building codes, etc.) will be discovered driving construction costs up meaningfully.

Remodeling works from a cost perspective where a large chunk of the costs involved are in the envelope of the building which remains largely unchanged between old and new. As described in the material presented by the City, the plan is to insert a whole new building within the outermost shell of the Mercer. In effect, only a thin layer of the existing building will be retained. Perhaps this is cost effective but there is an equal or greater chance that it is not.

At the very least I think the City should cost out the construction a new Mercer/MLK Theater fronting on MLK Boulevard for comparison to the cost of renovating the existing theater. If the new construction cost, on a net basis after deducting the capital raised by selling off the entire Civic Center area, is less than the estimated cost of renovating the existing theater, then the alternative of a new build becomes both feasible and cost effective.

Exhibit 0 - parking lot

Exhibit 1 - Mercer Theater inserted into parking lot

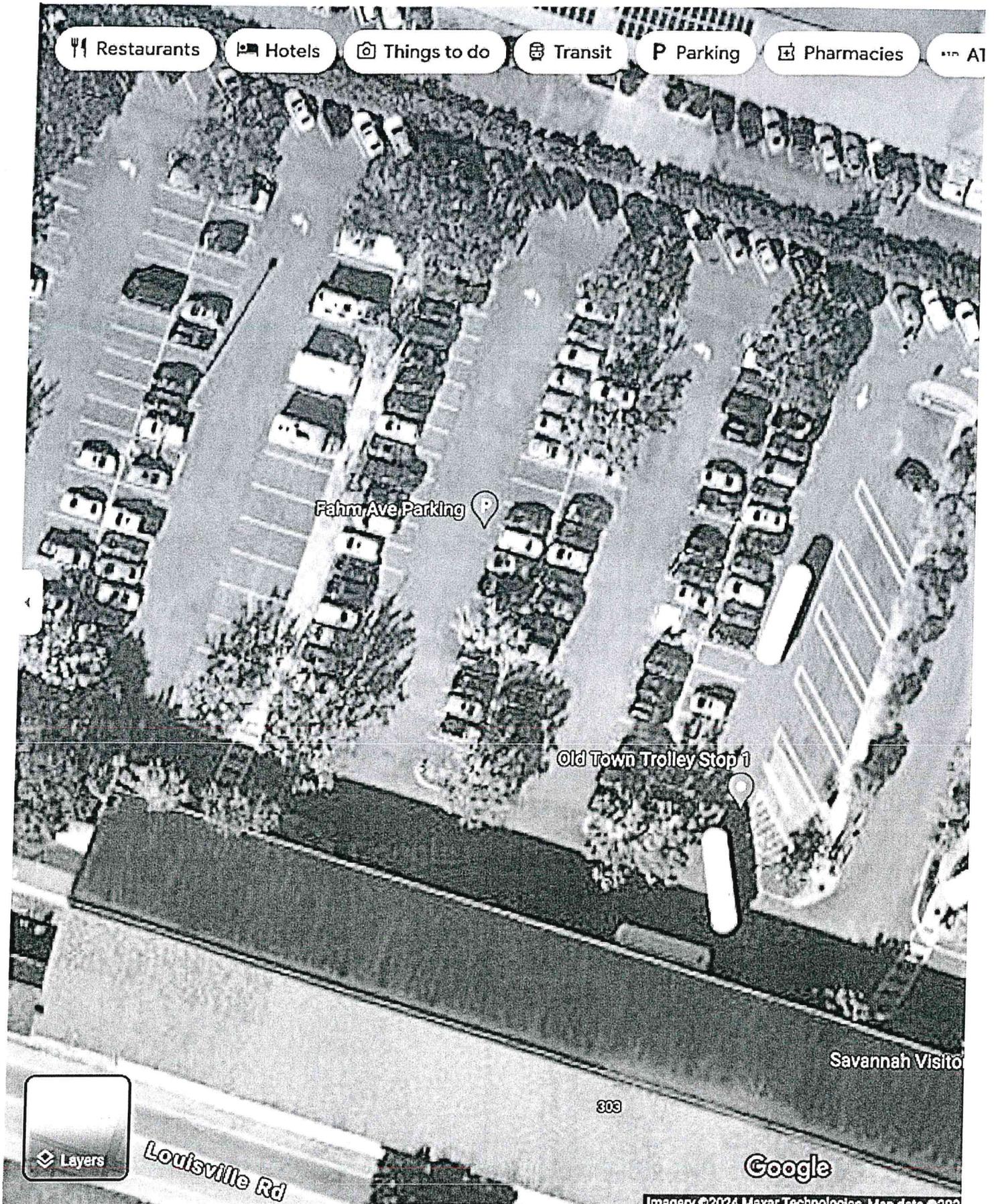
Exhibit 2 - Gaillard Theater inserted into parking lot

Respectively submitted,

Kind regards,

Robert & Tru Helms
244 East Oglethorpe Ave
Savannah, GA 31401
Robert: +1-912-441-1912
Tru: +1-912-713-4882
rphelms1@gmail.com
tru.helms@gmail.com

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🍴 Restaurants

🏨 Hotels

📷 Things to do

🚗 Transit

P Parking

🏪 Pharmacies

ATM

Fahm Ave Parking



Johnny Mercer
Civic Center



Old r.

Savannah Visito

303

Layers

Louisville Rd

Google

Imagery ©2024 Maxar Technologies, Map data ©202

- ☰ Restaurants
- 🏨 Hotels
- 📷 Things to do
- 🚗 Transit
- P Parking
- 🏪 Pharmacies
- ⋮ AT



Fahm Ave Parking

303

Louisville Rd

Google

Imagery ©2024 Maxar Technologies, Map data ©2024

Bridget Lidy

From: Robin Williams <robinwilliams1@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 20, 2024 5:41 PM
To: Nick Palumbo; Bret Bell; Bridget Lidy
Subject: Re: [Caution - External Email] Civic Center Info Session tonight
Attachments: Johnny Mercer Theatre-Elbert Square Restoration_Williams_20v24.pdf

Dear Alderman Palumbo, Mr. Bell and Ms. Lidy,

I've been unable to attend the public information sessions regarding the Johnny Mercer Theatre this month due to conflicts with my teaching schedule. I've compiled a report of sorts that challenges the accuracy of the design proposal from Sottile and Sottile in the hopes that a more thorough and probing analysis of the opportunities the saving of that theatre can have for also restoring more of the Savannah Plan, especially Elbert Square, than the Sottile and Sottile report suggests is possible. See my public feedback contribution attached.

As a past member of the downtown overlay ordinance revisions committee that reshaped the Chadbourne Guidelines many years ago, the HDBR for seven years and the HPC for four years, as well as the author of numerous academic studies of the Savannah Plan and co-author of a forthcoming book (being published by UGA Press next year) on the history of the city's plan and its impact on shaping the city's architecture, I would be very interested in being involved in an active way in any committee or task force working on this project.

Sincerely,
Robin Williams

On Mon, May 20, 2024 at 2:03 PM Nick Palumbo <NPalumbo@savannahga.gov> wrote:
Hi Robin,

Yes indeed you can send it to me and Bret. Definitely send it to Bridget Lidy as well. She is acting as the "convener in chief" for the Civic Center input and your letter matters a great deal!

Please send it to us and good luck with grading!

Nick

PS - regarding your assessment I completely agree with you

[Get Outlook for iOS](#)

From: Robin Williams <robinwilliams1@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 20, 2024 12:40:40 PM
To: Nick Palumbo <NPalumbo@Savannahga.Gov>
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Civic Center Info Session tonight

Hi Nick,

The final public info session for the Civic Center / Johnny Mercer Theatre is tonight at Armstrong. I have previously shared my observations with you that the theatre can be retained AND Elbert Square restored. I believe Christian Sottile's proposal is too restrained and hesitant in this regard.

Is there an advantage to attending the session tonight and sharing my perspective somehow? If so, what is the best way for me to do that? I can bring a drawing but I can't foresee how I'd share it.

If instead I could send it to the city c/o you or Bret that would certainly be more efficient for me (given how much finals grading I have to do).

Regards,
Robin

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May 20, 2024

To: Alderman Nick Palumbo; Chief of Information and Public Affairs Bret Bell; Director of Planning and Urban Design Bridget Lidy

From: Robin B. Williams, Ph.D., Chair, Architectural History, SCAD; past HDBR and HPC board member; author, *Buildings of Savannah* (2016); co-author of forthcoming book, *Learning from Savannah: Elastic Urbanism in Historical Perspective* (UGA Press, expected 2025)

Re: Support for preserving the Johnny Mercer Theatre and recommended adjustments to proposal from Sottile and Sottile

Overview:

I am writing in enthusiastic support of the preservation of the Johnny Mercer Theatre as part of the redevelopment of the Savannah Civic Center site. I also support the removal of the MLK Jr. Arena, parking lots and other components of the Civic Center complex, as I outline below. Restoring the city’s urban plan is a high priority but needs to be weighed against the value of the Johnny Mercer Theatre. As I explain below, more of that plan can be restored than the Sottile and Sottile proposal suggests, particularly Elbert Square and the eastern portion of Montgomery Street that would skirt it.

Reasons to Retain the Johnny Mercer Theatre:

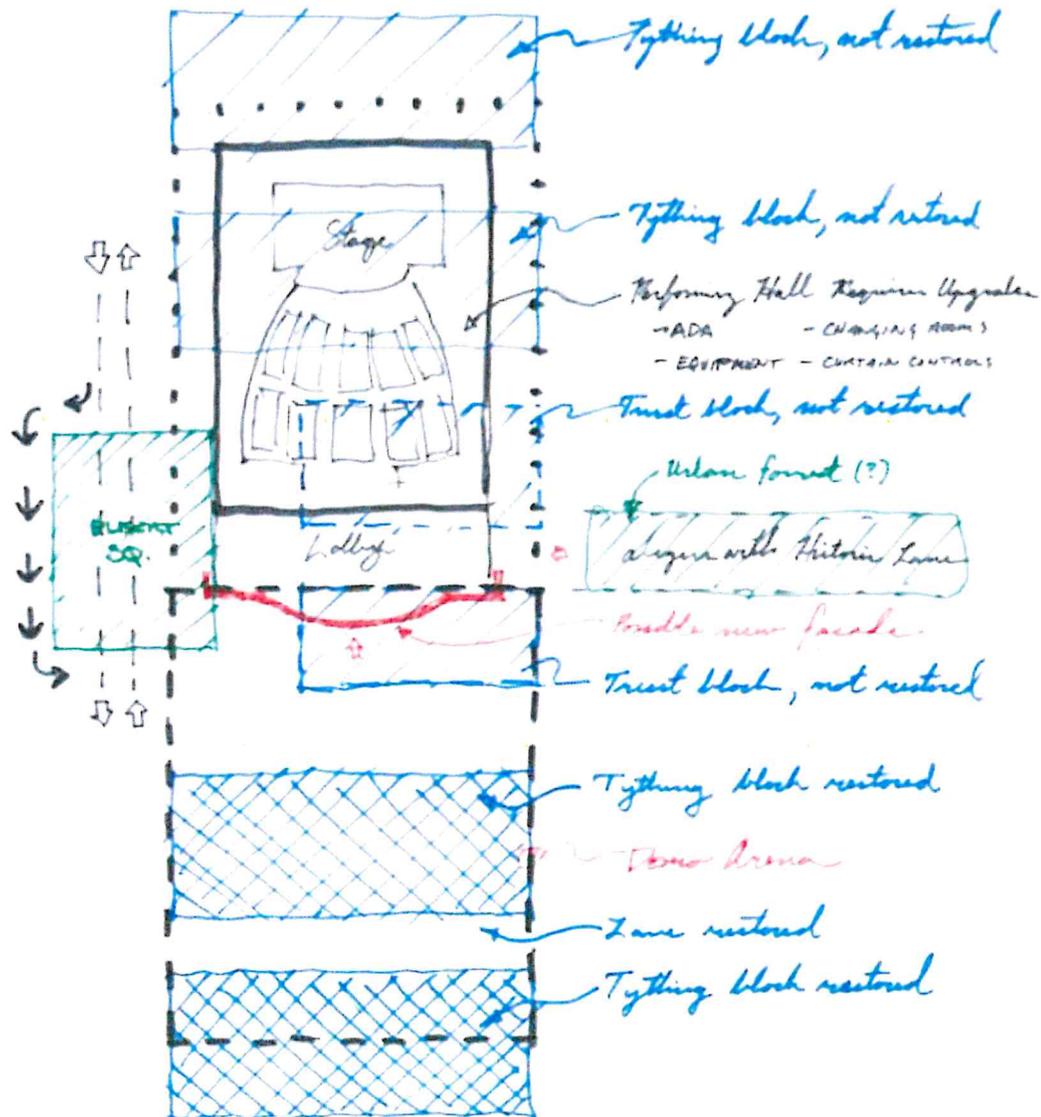
- would provide a publicly available and high-quality performance venue for local and visiting performing arts groups (the three other theatres – Savannah, Trustees and Lucas – are privately controlled), especially if the acoustics were restored
- has a prominent location within the downtown plan that would be difficult, if not impossible, to replace elsewhere in downtown
- is structurally sound
- possesses one of the largest stages in the Southeast:

		proscenium	stage	seating
JOHNNY MERCER THEATRE	1971	60 x 30	107' 8" x 71' 4"	2,524
North Charleston Performing Arts Center	1993	60 x 25	106 x 42'	2,341
Fox Theatre, Atlanta	1929	40 x 26	83 x 26'	4,500
Martha and John M. Rivers Performance Hall, Charleston Gaillard Center	2015	52 x 35	64 x 40?	1,800

Problems with the ULI Assessment:

As part of its 2018 “Savannah Civic Center Redevelopment” analysis, the Urban Land Institute included a discussion of the Johnny Mercer Theatre on page 21. Their study inaccurately states that retaining the theatre “would return only four of the original tything blocks to the urban fabric, leaving Elbert Square unrestored and six other blocks not restored”. Even using their

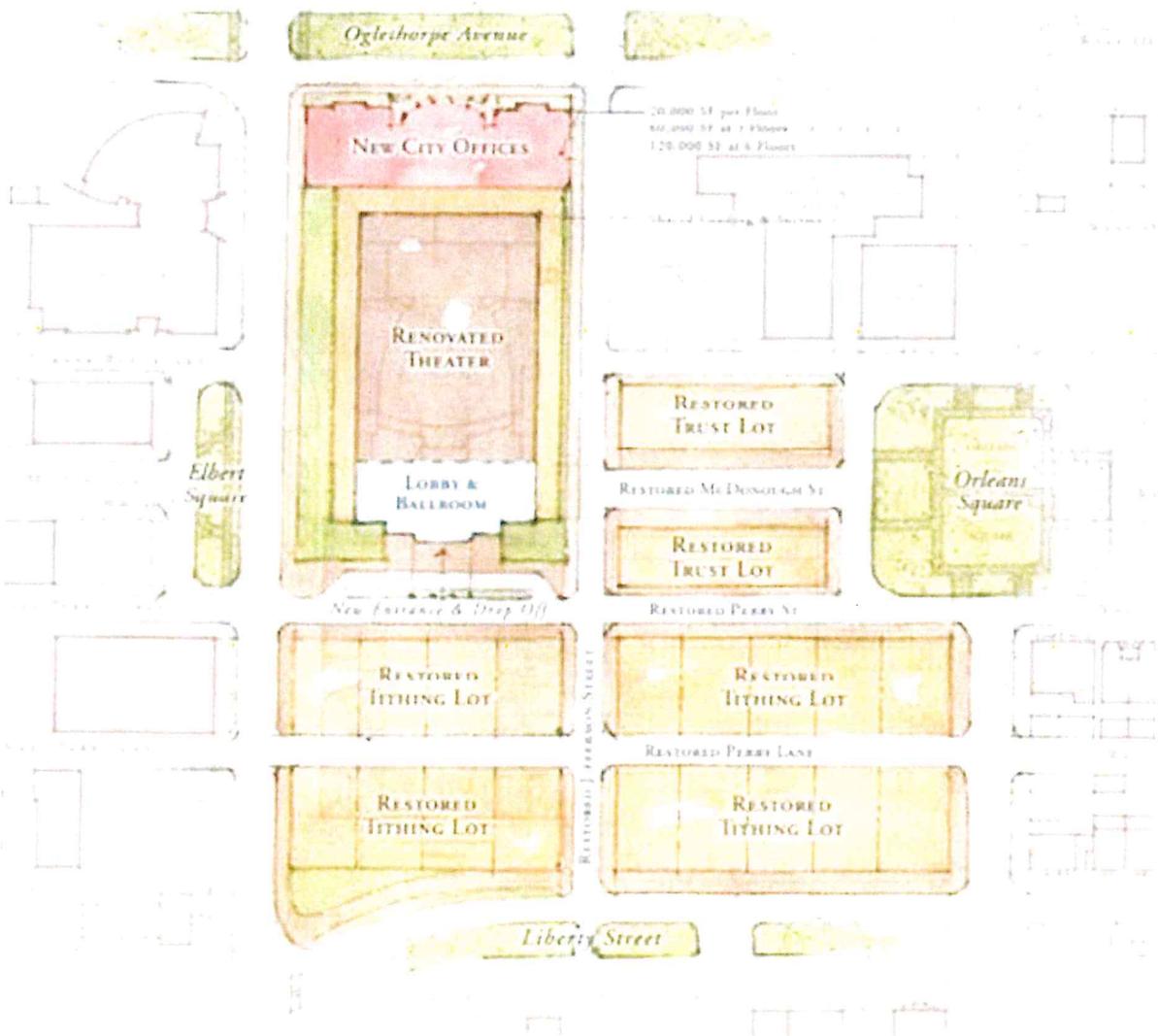
own diagram it is clear that only four blocks (the two tything blocks in the northeast corner of Elbert Ward and the two eastern trust lots of Elbert Ward) would be impacted by the theatre, not six. Their diagram, however, is misleading and inaccurate. It shows the western wall of the theatre touching the eastern edge of Elbert Square, when in reality that wall aligns with the western edge of the two trust lots (see my diagram below for comparison). It also shows the western arcade aligned with the zero lot line on the east side of Montgomery when in reality it is set back at least 20 feet.

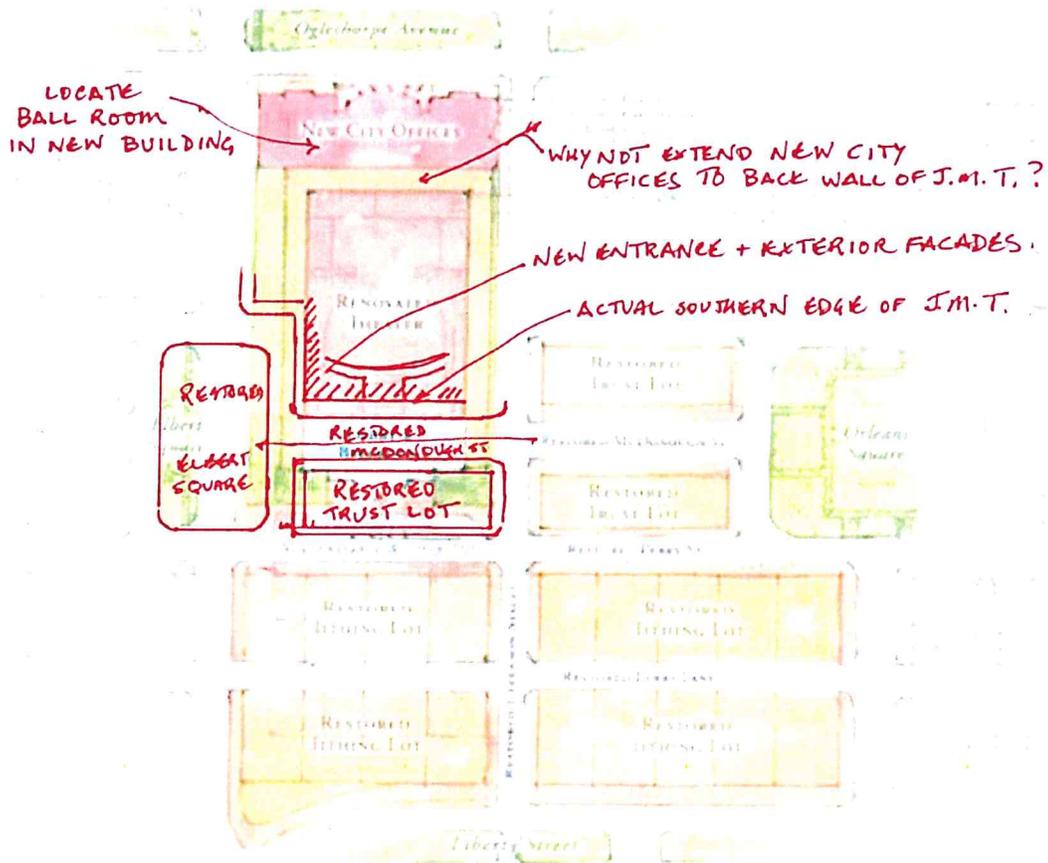


Sketch of façade

Problems with Sottile and Sottile's Proposal:

The site plan of the restored Johnny Mercer Theatre crafted by Sottile and Sottile exaggerates the east-west width of the theatre and sets the west wall too far west (though not to the same degree as the ULI report diagram). The Sottile and Sottile plan evidently retains the east and west colonnades. As a result, their proposal does not restore Elbert Square. Their report also locates the south wall of the theatre slightly too far south instead of aligning with the north zero lot line of McDonough Street. In meeting with Christian Sottile, he identified two main reasons for retaining the lobby space: 1) to preserve the two staircases; 2) the south wall of the theatre cannot be altered, thereby requiring the lobby to occupy the segment of McDonough Street between the trust lots.

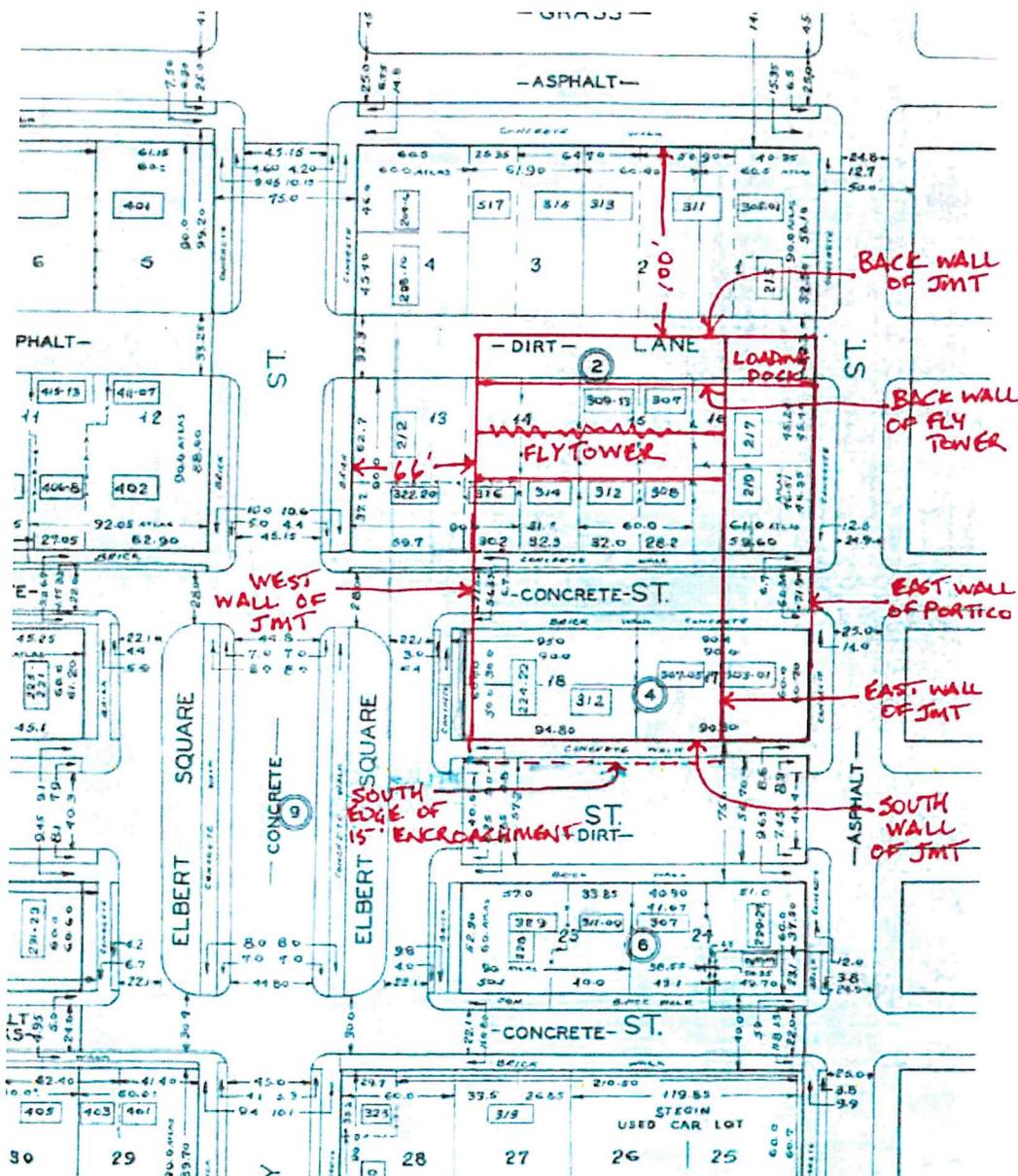




Alternative Opportunities for Integrating the Johnny Mercer Theatre and Restoring the Savannah Plan:

It is imperative to secure an accurate survey of how the theatre relates to the Savannah Plan. Using an analysis of Google Earth imagery, it is clear that there are opportunities for repurposing the site not addressed in the Sottile and Sottile plan (see cadastral image with theatre superimposed):

- the west wall of the theatre aligns with the western lot line of the northeast trust lot in Elbert Ward and is roughly 66 feet from the eastern zero lot line on Montgomery Street
- the south wall of the theatre aligns with the north zero lot line of McDonough Street



Opportunities:

- 1) restore Ellis Square – by demolishing the western arcade of the Civic Center back to the theatre’s outer western wall as far north as the north side of Hull Street, there would be sufficient room to restore Elbert Square, the east part of Montgomery Street around the square and even the sidewalk.
- 2) Fill the 66-foot-wide area flanking Montgomery Street west of the west wall of the theatre with back stage/ green-room spaces for performers by removing the remainder of the western arcade and exterior walkway (and second-floor offices); I’m told such spaces are currently inadequate at the theatre.

3) Reconsider the lobby space defined by Sottile and Sottile, which occupies the McDonough trust street segment. If the south wall of the theatre could be shifted northward into the theatre space (an option that should be seriously explored and not just take the word of Sottile and Sottile that it cannot be altered), combined with an encroachment into McDonough Street comparable to the 15-foot encroachment granted to the Perry Lane Hotel, there may be space for a new lobby AND the restoration of McDonough Street AND the south trust lot.

4) Shift the ball room spaces to the proposed city building at the north end of the theatre fronting Oglethorpe Avenue.

Benefits:

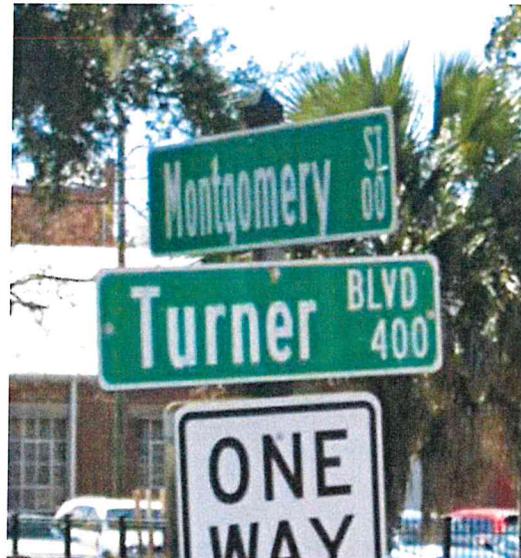
Restoring Elbert Square will help win over some opponents to keeping the theatre, who believe restoring the Savannah Plan is the most important objective. In their position, the squares are the most important components. Including the restoration of Elbert Square would go a long way to placating some of the opposition.

Reducing the footprint of the lobby by cutting into the theatre and encroaching on the McDonough corridor could potentially allow even more of the Savannah Plan to be restored – namely, the southeast trust lot in Elbert Ward and most of the McDonough trust street segment.

Making better use of the adjacent land between Montgomery Street and the western edge of the theatre for support spaces for the theatre.

Supplemental Opportunity – Restore West Hull Street Name:

Restore the name of West Hull Street between Montgomery Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. At some point in the late 20th century, the one-block street segment of Hull Street west of Montgomery was renamed (probably unofficially) as Turner Blvd, since it aligned with that street west of MLK Jr. Blvd. and was disconnected from the rest of Hull Street to the east of the Civic Center. Restoring the name “Hull Street” to this one block would be a subtle but important step in restoring the Savannah Plan, knitting this long-forlorn piece of the plan with the rest of downtown and divorcing it from the unplanned blocks west of MLK Jr. Blvd, from which it is now disconnected by the central median in that street.



Bridget Lidy

From: sadler@myhsf.org
Sent: Monday, May 20, 2024 5:16 PM
To: Bridget Lidy
Subject: [Caution - External Email] HSF statement on Civic Center

The Board of Trustees of Historic Savannah Foundation unanimously agrees that the Oglethorpe Plan should be restored. We believe the city should remove the Arena at The Civic Center– while finding some way to honor the history of this building. The Johnny Mercer Theater should remain in place in order to give the community time to thoughtfully assess the future of the Theater site. For example, one alternative could be to construct a theater similar in size and use on the current site of the I-16 Flyover and former site of Savannah’s Union Station.

Any new buildings constructed on the lots should be in accordance with the Oglethorpe Plan and the original lot structure. This proposition provides for over two thirds of the site to be restored to the Oglethorpe Plan in the short-term, and a plan for all of the site to be restored over time while restoring nearby areas of the Landmark District.

Susan Adler, MA
CEO & President
Historic Savannah Foundation
912-233-7787
912-856-0323 (cell)
www.myHSF.org

Join us and become a member of HSF

We save buildings, places, and stories that define Savannah’s past, present, and future.

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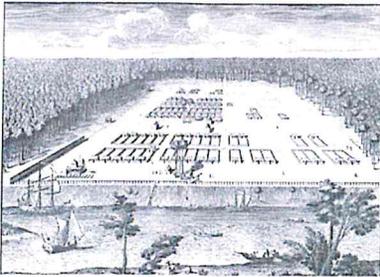
Bridget Lidy

From: James Hundsrucker <jhundsrucker@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 20, 2024 11:49 AM
To: Planning
Cc: Detric Leggett; Mayor Johnson; Jay Melder
Subject: [Caution - External Email] OPC Recommendation for Civic Center Redevelopment

Greetings Planning:

Attached is an image of OPC's latest newsletter, (May 4, 2024), with the recommendation as the City deliberates on the next best steps for the Civic Center site. Same newsletter can be found on our [website](#).

With gratitude,
Jim Hundsrucker
Director, OPC



In this newsletter, we focus on the City's proposal to redevelop the Savannah Civic Center site and refurbish the Johnny Mercer Theatre. The City's proposal stands in opposition to its obligation to fully restore the Oglethorpe Plan across the entirety of the Civic Center site. We offer our main recommendation and explore considerations supporting that recommendation, as well as other concerns about the proposal.

OPC's Recommendation:

The Oglethorpe Plan Coalition, Inc. recommends demolishing both the Arena and Johnny Mercer Theatre and re-establishing the Oglethorpe Plan across the entire Civic Center site. This includes restoring the streets and Elbert Square, as well as restoring the individual tithing lots and trust lots.

Legal Considerations:

- The City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance requires the restoration of the Oglethorpe Plan under Section 7.8.10 (a). The City is not exempt from this provision.
- The Ordinance's provisions that define allowable street layout and height and mass of infill buildings must be followed.
- The Ordinance is the product of years of negotiations and public input.
- It also incorporates previous understandings with the National Park Service and protects our National Historic Landmark status.
- The Oglethorpe Plan is what makes Savannah unique and a draw to visitors from around the world.

Economic Challenges:

- The City is seeking design and planning input before knowing even rough estimates of the cost of various proposals. When all costs are considered, it may be clear that restoring the theatre does not make economic sense.
- The City is forgoing substantial revenue if it does not sell the entire site. Tithing lots and trust lots with teardowns have sold for up to \$2 and \$7 million, respectively. The site has 26 tithing lots and 4 trust lots. Of these, 8 tithing lots and 1 trust lot are at the theatre site. See graphic below.
- The 2018 [study](#) by the Urban Land Institute, a highly-recognized land use expert, supported the restoration of the Oglethorpe Plan, and this recommendation was initially supported by the city government.
- The current proposal to build a large office block and restore the theatre would generate new parking demands and probably force the construction of a large and unsightly parking facility, also at an additional cost to taxpayers.
- To the extent that additional municipal offices are needed, they should be located out of the high-priced downtown to areas where both access and parking are easier to manage. One option is to locate new offices adjacent to those on the Westside.

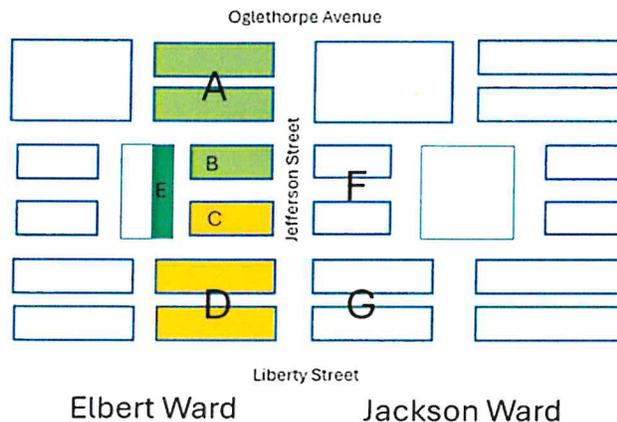
Community Preferences:

- It is not clear that the City's proposal reflects the desires of the community in which it is located nor the wishes of the people paying for it.
- The majority of downtown residents, including taxpayers who would bear a substantial portion of the cost of the proposal, have not been supportive of it.
- The stakeholders from the tax-exempt arts community do not bear the costs, so it is somewhat questionable to claim "public support" for a theatre by citing responses from entities that will not have to pay to refurbish it.
- Restoration of the Oglethorpe Plan would benefit both residents and tourists by reuniting the historic district and the historic west side of Savannah.
- It would also put the site back on the tax rolls.
- Restoration of the Oglethorpe Plan allows multiple uses including mixed-income housing.

Governance Concerns:

- The City must maintain full transparency in this process.
- "Visioning" sessions must be for open discussion, not enforcing predetermined plans.
- Conflicts of interest must be avoided. No consultant used to guide the planning process should be permitted to participate in the execution of any proposals passed by the City.
- The City must provide access to the list of all vendors, contractors, consultants and anyone employed by the City to plan or execute this project.

Locations of Square, Tithing Lots and Trust Lots To Be Restored and Their Current Uses



- A. Eight tithing lots at theatre site
- B. One trust lot at theatre site
- C. One trust lot at arena site
- D. Eight tithing lots at arena site
- E. Elbert Square, east half at combined site of theatre and arena
- F. Two trust lots used for parking
- G. Ten tithing lots used for parking

Invite Us to Your Event for a Discussion of Hot Topics in the District

The OPC would be glad to come to your event, be it a neighborhood association or other community group, to share our concerns and hear your views about the state of the historic district. Please reach out to us at opc.preservation@gmail.com.

Monthly Oglethorpe Plan Coalition (OPC) Volunteers Meeting

The OPC is a volunteer group, and we want you! Please contact us at opc.preservation@gmail.com if you would like to get involved. We will have a meeting on Sunday, June 2, at 7PM. Please contact us at the above email with your contact information if you are interested in attending. Capacity is limited.

Facebook

Oglethorpe Plan Coalition, Inc., c/o Andrew Jones, 324 E Broughton St, Savannah, GA 31401, USA

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Bridget Lidy

From: andrewjonesnyc@aol.com
Sent: Monday, May 20, 2024 9:29 AM
To: Planning
Cc: Mayor Johnson; Detric Leggett; Jay Melder
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Civic Center Redevelopment - Please Demolish the Mercer Theatre and Restore the Oglethorpe Plan (Petition Attached)

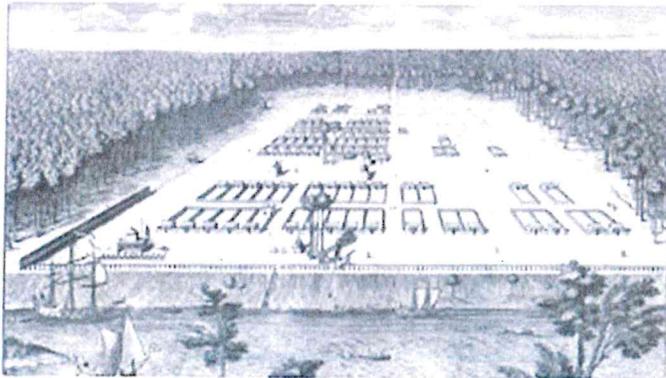
Dear Planning,

Please support the restoration of the Oglethorpe Plan across the entire Civic Center Site. This request is supported by over 200 signatures on the CHANGE.ORG petition at <https://chnq.it/bxtp7L9VVg>

Respectfully,

Andrew Berrien Jones
(646) 248-2050

Demand the Restoration of the Oglethorpe Plan at Savannah's Civic Center Site



Started May 14, 2024

Why this petition matters



Started by [Andrew Jones](#)

Restoring the Oglethorpe Plan across the entire Savannah's Civic Center site is an important initiative that the City must undertake now.

The Oglethorpe Plan is what makes Savannah unique. It is a masterpiece of urban planning and still works today, almost 300 years after it was designed. It has international significance, having been influenced by the city planning principles of the great Roman architect Vitruvius, whose works Oglethorpe had studied.

Many of us who treasure the historic City of Savannah believe that what makes Savannah truly unique is its Oglethorpe Plan – the pleasing pattern of streets, lanes and squares dating as far back as 1733. The Oglethorpe Plan is not just a blueprint; it is the heart and soul of Savannah.

The 20th century Civic Center site did not adhere to this historic plan and represents the worst of 1960s urban renewal, bulldozing multiple blocks of historic buildings and street patterns. This act of destruction was an attack on the character of the city, disrupting its aesthetic harmony and undermining our city's rich historic and cultural identity.

The City of Savannah should take action to restore the Oglethorpe Plan across the entire Civic Center site, including all the original streets and lanes and the lost square. By doing so, it would reestablish the unique urban landscape that is central to our identity.

On the other hand, renovating the outdated Johnny Mercer Theatre represents an expensive short term solution. There are a multitude of locations within the City where a new theatre could be built which would serve the City better over the long term.

This petition requests our local government to honor Savannah's historical legacy by restoring the original Oglethorpe Plan in its entirety at the Civic Center site in time for Savannah's 300th birthday in 2033 and to locate the theatre in a more appropriate location.



Share this petition in person or use the QR code for your own material.

[Download QR Code](#)

217

Signatures

500

Next Goal

217 people signed this week



Andrew, you have helped a **petition** gain momentum.

Your impact is just getting started. Contribute today to support turning your signature into a victory.

[Support Change](#)



[Demand the Restoration of the Oglethorpe Plan at Savannah's Civic...](#)

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Bridget Lidy

From: elonwea@gmail.com
Sent: Friday, May 17, 2024 9:09 AM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Savannah Civic Center Planning

Hello,

My name is Brittany Dorsey and I've been a native to the Savannah low country area since I was 12 years old. I attended Effingham County Middle and High School and went to Georgia Southern for my undergraduate degree.

My parents still live in Effingham, and I now live on Wilmington Island and Savannah has always had a special place in my heart.

As a "good kid in high school, I found outlets for socializing however I could and that normally meant coming to Savannah for the movies and the mall. Sometimes to the Savannah Civic Center for the occasional festival, concert or event.

As a now 37 year old with my own child, I still see a huge need for constructive, recreational outlets for kids, especially teenage and college age kids. Our city has lost so much community with the high-turnover of inhabitants and few places to congregate for community-wide events.

I would love to see the Savannah Civic Center turned into a multi-sport complex, allowing space for sports events (like the Savannah Derby teams) and a climbing gym.

I had many friends who played roller derby and I personally volunteered at the Savannah Climbing Co-op for over a year when it was still open. I know that with SCAD and Armstrong along with Savannah's military population, that these sort of recreational activities build a strong sense of community within the city for those who might otherwise "just be passing through" and also decrease the amount of raucous behavior that often accompanies having "nothing else to do but party."

I understand that office buildings could also be a useful purpose for the Savannah Civic Center arena, but hope that my suggestion will be taken into consideration as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to give feedback and participate in our city's development.

Sincerely,
Brittany Dorsey

Sent from my iPhone

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Bridget Lidy

From: Brenda Marshalok <brendatalk@yahoo.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 16, 2024 11:01 AM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Civic Center

My husband and I would recommend leaving the center as is until a solid vision for transition to a better contribution to the public can be achieved.

Sent from my iPhone

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Bridget Lidy

From: Kat Clark <kat@savannahmusicfestival.org>
Sent: Thursday, May 16, 2024 4:29 PM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] The Future of the Civic Center

Good afternoon,

I wish to express my feelings on the future of the Civic Center as an employee of a performing arts organization and as a lover of performing arts in general.

It is vital that the Civic Center and the Johnny Mercer Theater remain and be restored to their former glory or greater. So many wonderful, iconic performances have happened in that space, and to tear it down would be an immeasurable loss to the Savannah community.

Savannah already has too few performance venues, even with the new Enmarket arena. It is also the only venue of its size in the area, which makes it perfect for some of the larger acts that we present at Savannah Music Festival, such as The Avett Brothers and Jason Isbell (both festival alums).

Building a new venue would be astronomically expensive, so renovation is the only solution.

That building has so much potential, and with some TLC, it can once again be a place that Savannahians and visitors alike will be excited to visit.

Please save the Johnny Mercer and Civic Center!

Thank you for your consideration.

All the best,
Kat

KAT CLARK
Development Manager, Major Gifts

SAVANNAH MUSIC FESTIVAL
MARCH 27--APRIL 12, 2025

200 East St. Julian Street Suite 601, Savannah, Georgia 31401
office (912) 234-3375 ext. 105 mobile (864) 201-9690

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Bridget Lidy

From: Denise F. <dflojo@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 14, 2024 2:10 PM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Civic Center Redevelopment feedback

My thoughts on the Civic Center Redevelopment Proposal:

As a Downtown resident I would like to see:

1. The Johnny Mercer Theater restored as proposed. We NEED the 2500 seat theater retained and refurbished so we don't lose the ability to have shows that are that under 2500. The other theaters that are around Downtown have only 1200 seats and are under the control of SCAD, and not fully available to the public.
2. The existing Arena should be demolished, and along with the parking area, returned to as much of the Ogelthorpe plan as possible while retaining the theater.
3. Workforce housing with some other forms of housing should be put on the reclaimed lots. NO highrises, but multi level townhomes and apartments that are for our Downtown workforce and other homeowners and fit with the character of the surrounding neighborhood. In order to gain workforce housing here, a developer could get a tax abatement or other incentive to comply. Workforce housing applicants must show proof of employment within a two mile radius to apply for this housing, with priority going to those who do not own a vehicle and must walk, bike, or use public transportation to get to their job.
4. Along Ogelthorpe there should NOT be a tall office building but rather as much underground parking as is possible, along with 2-3 stories above ground of commercial space for restaurants/retail space that can service the theater and surrounding areas.
5. All buildings that are constructed in this redevelopment should have a covenant that will not allow any "not-for-profit" University/College to purchase them for their use and remove them from the tax rolls in the future.

In conjunction with this project, SCAD's request to double the adjacent building "O-House" capacity with less parking should not be allowed. This increase in density will directly impact that area, especially with the parking situation. Student's have no need for cars with all the SCAD buses but are not discouraged by SCAD from bringing a car when there is already limited availability for parking in our City.

Sincerely,
Denise M. Flojo
Mercer Ward Resident
Member & Board Member of the
Downtown Neighborhood Association

Bridget Lidy

From: Stephen A Edwards <edwardssa@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 14, 2024 9:55 AM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Civic Center

I feel strongly that the City Council should stand by its commitment to follow the recommendation of the Urban Land Institute in its 2018 Report.

--
Stephen A. Edwards
404-934-0975 (c)

128 West Taylor St.
Savannah, GA 31401

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Bridget Lidy

From: Rose Lee <ouiser53@comcast.net>
Sent: Monday, May 13, 2024 6:41 PM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Civic Center

I feel the city needs to save the Johnny Mercer Theatre! Charleston South Carolina has a beautiful theater hall for classical functions etc. Why demolish the theater part when the arena could be demolished and improvements be made to the Johnny Mercer Theatre could be refurbished to have special and classical performances perform. I beg the city please do not destroy this beautiful theatre!!!!

Rose Mary Lee
Savannah Native

"If we ever forget that we are One Nation Under God, then we will be a nation gone under."

Ronald Reagan

Sent from my iPhone

Rose Mary Lee

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Bridget Lidy

From: JOSEPH J LUMPKIN <joseph.lumpkin@comcast.net>
Sent: Saturday, May 11, 2024 1:11 PM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Future of the Savannah Civic Center

Thank you for the opportunity to allow citizens to offer suggestions on the future use of the Savannah Civic Center. It's position in the historic district in Savannah would be very useful to future generations.

As you know, Savannah and the low country has a very rich history and has hosted many historically significant events to the diverse cultures that make up the City of Savannah. I think it would benefit our City and generations to come to convert the Civic Center into a National Historical Museum, highlighting the history and contributions of native Americans, African Americans and civil rights leaders from past decades. The educational value of highlighting our unique stories and history will benefit those who hunger for the lessons that the past teaches us, and for a nominal fee, could benefit the City of Savannah financially. This National Museum can highlight the history of the foods, music and arts that the coastal region is known for, as well as the truths we have learned from the colonial and revolutionary periods.

I take pride in being a part of a city that shows love, compassion and thoughtfulness to all of its citizens and visitors. I think it our duty to share that pride with those who come to visit and learn about America's Hostess City of the South.

Bishop Moses Lewis
The Church of Christ Holiness Unto the Lord, Inc.
1101 Stiles Avenue
Savannah, GA 31415

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Zarina Davis

From: JUDITH DINEHART <dinehart@aol.com>
Sent: Friday, May 10, 2024 2:06 PM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Civic Center

Hello

I'm writing to express my opinion on the future of the Civic Center. I think the Center needs to be preserved because of the mid range seating capacity. However, both the Johnny Mercer Theater and the Arena need to be completely overhauled with new sound systems and updated interiors.

Sincerely,
Judith Dinehart
5010 Spartan Drive
Savannah 31404
912-604-7036

Sent from AOL on Android

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Zarina Davis

From: Rebecca Rolfes <rrolfes2022@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, May 10, 2024 9:33 AM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Future of the Civic Center

We attended the open house this week. I appreciate the free flow of information but it did make it hard to hear comments, questions and answers. The post-its were interesting but I prefer something more official.

We live two blocks from the Civic Center on Jefferson. It is a blight on the neighborhood and an insult to the Oglethorpe plan--but you already know that.

Our vote is to tear the whole thing down, restore the square fully and use the money from the sale of the land to build a new theater and office building somewhere else. Who is going to buy a house with a 2000 seat theater in the backyard?

This way, the city could build a theater that is already state of the art acoustically which I don't think the Johnny Mercer will ever be. And plan for parking. We definitely do not want a parking lot or another parking structure. You're revitalizing the area out Louisville Rd. Build it there--accessible to downtown but not in the historic district.

You are correct that this is a once-in-a-generation decision. Get it right.

Thanks,

--

Rebecca Rolfes
Savannah

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Zarina Davis

From: Joan Levy <joansonjones@yahoo.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 9, 2024 5:21 PM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] re-doing the Civic Center

Dear Planning Department,

I have lived in Monterey Ward some 37 years and own an apartment house on East Jones Street, so feel I should have some voice in this matter.

Even though I was unable to attend Tuesday night's meeting, I would like to express my thoughts here.

I feel the arena needs to be demolished and rebuilt providing needed City offices such as Water, Trash, and other Utilities that serve the downtown public. The Johnny Mercer is a right-sized badly-needed venue that should be retained and redesigned to improve acoustics and update its features. The parking lot is a little oversized but serves to good purpose.

Joan Levy
17 West Jones Street

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Bridget Lidy

From: djv murphy <djvmurphy@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 8, 2024 5:34 PM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Civic Center

If you're counting votes, I would hope that you save the existing Civic Center and update it to current codes. Secondly, do not tear down Johnny Mercer theater. We don't need another office building or SCAD dormitory in that area.

Dennis murphy
245 Lincoln Street
Savannah, GA 31401

Author's Website On Amazon https://www.amazon.com/djv-murphy/e/B004UMTQQ8%3Fref=dbs_a_mng_rwt_scns_share

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Bridget Lidy

From: DianeKenny <kennysrock@aol.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 8, 2024 9:50 AM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Future of Civic Center and Johnny Mercer Theater, comment

May 8th 2024

Dear Mayor Van Johnson, and member of City Council, Savannah Georgia and Planning Commission:

I heard on our local WSAV and online that Savannah is looking for input into the future of the Civic Center, and Johnny Mercer Theater. We have lived in Beaufort, SC for thirty-nine years, and our son lives in Savannah. We thoroughly enjoy the Johnny Mercer Theater and the intimacy of a smaller more comfortable theater. Although the new Enmarket arena is perfect for large events, Johnny Mercer Theater lends itself to lesser and more comfortable experiences. I would urge the City Council to **keep the Civic Center** as it is, where it is, and renovate the stage and seating, *thus a much more cost-effective way than rebuilding*. The location is perfect for dinner out in Savannah and enjoying good musicals, concerts and shows. We urge City Council to keep the Civic Center and Theater, invest the money in new seating, carpet, and stage renovations. We love our visits to Savannah, and the highlight is always a show at Johnny Mercer Theater.

Sincerely yours,

Diane and Michael G Kenny,

(843) 812-9876 (cell)

kennysrock@aol.com 1301 North Street BEAUFORT SC 29902

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Bridget Lidy

From: Marc Briere <marcbriere25@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 8, 2024 7:54 AM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Community meeting

Hi,

I am a downtown homeowner and I attended the community planning session at the Mercer theater last night. Just a word to say that it was very informative and well planned. I applaud the thinking that has been going on and the option that was presented.

It is obvious that the theater needs restoration and should be preserved. It is a great community asset and fills a need for a facility of that size.

Restoring what we already have makes more sense than building a new facility that would obviously be much more expensive.

The recovered lots should be reserved for housing according to the original plan and not allow any short term rentals, new hotels, other commercial buildings or structured parking.

It seems to me that the parking needs should be appropriately met by using the currently underutilized Liberty street garage across the street.

Looking forward to the future development of the plan.

Sincerely,

Marc Briere.
305 Berrien St.
Savannah

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Johnny Mercer Theater Savannah
Benjamin P. Ritzert (1914-1992) Architect AIA
First Savannahian to be President of AIA Georgia

May 7, 2024

“Built by the greatest generation of Savannahian for Savannah.”

Civic Projects of Benjamin P. Ritzert

- 1) Button Gwinnett Memorial-Colonial Cemetery
- 2) Washington Guns Pavilion-Bay Street
- 3) Orleans Square-Barnard Street
- 4) Johnny Mercer Theater-West Oglethorpe

Johnny Mercer Theater was designed in the late 60's.

- 1) “Form follows function” basic design principle.
- 2) Part of the Urban Renewal of downtown Savannah in the early 70's to increase interest in that section of the city.

Architectural Style & Construction:

- 1) New Formalism- (Edward Durrell Stone pioneered the style)
- 2) Popular style for civic buildings in the 60's & 70's.
- 3) Design elements include symmetrical elevations, usually built on a podium, classical style columns & colonnades, modern materials stone, glass & steel, with heavy projecting roof slabs.
- 4) Known buildings in that style. Kennedy Center Washington DC, Lincoln Center New York City, The Forum Los Angeles, Lockheed Credit Union Marietta, GA.
- 5) It is impossible to duplicate this kind of construction with current cost & building techniques.

The Future:

- 1) If renovations are done there must be a financial plan to maintain the theater to its renovated state.
- 2) A board to be established to maintain and monitor the use and conditions of the Theater.
- 3) It should be available, so all Savannahian have access and use of the facility.

Zarina Davis

From: Tami Mickle <tsmick@bellsouth.net>
Sent: Monday, May 6, 2024 10:02 AM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Fwd: Input for Civic Center

>
> Good morning,

> I've had a unique perspective watching the downtown and surrounding communities grow to love ice skating the past two years and wanted to share my thoughts. I will also attend the Open House this week and would like to share this idea to the community.

>
> All the different roles I've played through skating has brought me to this...as a skater, parent of a skater, coach, working on the production side of TV as a director at ESPN, ABC Sports and ground floor of IceNetwork streaming service for skating. Through all my professional career I remained a coach sharing the love of ice skating!

>
> The final piece of the puzzle has been running the skating school at Ghost Pirates Ice the last two seasons. The passion, joy and enthusiasm I've seen each day has assured me this city could benefit from including a facility moving forward. Not many downtown city areas could make this happen..another jewel to Savannahs charm, presence and one of the few family activities inside the city. I know it's a long term vision, but I see it clearly even now.

>
> * VISION

> Community space to be seasonal ice skating during school year then off-season use for Arts events, concerts(think Rockefeller Center in NYC) a gift the local community. I know the council has visited the Sandy Spring city center. It has had a seasonal rink in their common space the last two years.

>
> *PARTNERS

>
> *City of Savannah: providing community common space included in new plan.

>
> *Ghost Pirates Ice: provide staffing, beginner classes and operations, use as a building ground for future competitive hockey/figure skaters. Non compete with new Pt Wentworth as DT could provide a space for all Ghost Pirates Special events, Holiday skating shows, community charity events. Weekly Adult skate, Date night partnering with DT restaurants, Homeschool midday skates, Teen nights, Coffee and Donuts AM sessions, lunchtime exercise. All the "fun" recreational events a full time training facility can't always provide, not to mention Pt Wentworth being a bit of a drive for the DT and Midtown communities, that have grown to enjoy skating!

>
> *SCAD: Each new season provide a new art design to be added UNDER the ice and surrounding area, revealed at the beginning of each season. Note..this was inspired by a news story I saw of SCAD community work painting some of the school playgrounds and parks. SCAD students have also been a high percentage of my coaching staff and large group of our regular skaters. SCAD could easily have a collegiate skating team with the number of accomplished skaters that already attend. Without this DT location, I don't think that would happened in the future. They could certainly grow teams in both hockey and figure skating, then use the full time facility to train.

>
> *School Board and all schools: All Savannah kids have the opportunity and access to a new experience by regular field trips around 4/5th grade, just like the Kindergarten trip to Oatland Island. Introducing all to the ice sports, then engaging

Zarina Davis

From: Larry Koch <koch.larry@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, May 5, 2024 8:29 PM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Future of the Civic Center

The concept plans for the restoration of the Johnny Mercer Theater and the demolition of the MLK Jr. arena look good. And I like the restoration of Orleans Square. However, we will end up with a huge theater and no parking. What do we do about parking?

Thank you.

Larry Koch

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Bridget Lidy

From: Christian Sottile <csottile@sottile.cc>
Sent: Thursday, May 2, 2024 4:07 PM
To: Diane Parker
Cc: Bridget Lidy; Michael Hightower
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Re: Friends of Johnny Mercer- Johnny Mercer Theatre fate!

Dear Diane,

Thank you very much for your message. I am copying in Bridget Lidy, who is leading the planning process with the City of Savannah, as well as Michael Hightower who is leading public engagement.

Your interest and connection with the theatre, as well as the relation to Johnny Mercer, is certainly an important element to have connected with this input process.

I am sure that we can get together, as we will have multiple sessions coming up to gather input -

With best regards,
Christian Sottile

Sottile & Sottile
Savannah, GA 31401
10 West Taylor Street
(912) 234 5510 Ofc
(912) 441 0932 Cel
csottile@sottile.cc

From: Diane Parker <dccparker1@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 1, 2024 12:43 PM
To: Christian Sottile <csottile@sottile.cc>
Subject: Friends of Johnny Mercer- Johnny Mercer Theatre fate!

Hi Christian.

You may recall I sit on the St. Vincent's 1845 Board and serve as the Chair for the Nun Run. In addition, I'm the President of the Friends of Johnny Mercer, Inc.

I know you have collaborated with my cousin, Bob Ciucevich- owner of Quatrefoil Historic Preservation. We all share a passion for saving our history. Bob and I take the fate of the JMT to heart as Johnny is our 1st cousin once removed (Johnny's mother was my father's aunt).

The FOJM would like a seat at the table to discuss the fate of the Civic Center and JMT. I don't know how we were excluded from the "stakeholders" meeting. I previously reached out to several City officials to no avail. As an organization whose sole purpose is to perpetuate Johnny's legacy, we support saving the JMT. We would like to see a new facade and an infusion of dollars to upgrade the sound and aesthetics of the interior. I have read a summary of the Sotile Plan and agree with your proposal.

As a frequent concert goer taking in shows at the JMT, Enmarket, and other venues, I recently saw John Mellancamp at the JMT. I was appalled at the pure neglect of the building: desperate need of a paint job, lights burned out, stair treads that were shoddy, and bathrooms that truly are stuck in a time warp. I took photos to catalog the sadness. Mellancamp sounded extraordinary only because he brought with him over 15 speakers/amps for the stage. This is absolute disrespect to my cousin Johnny.

My fellow board members and I would be more than delighted to meet with you prior to the May 7 Open House to discuss strategy.

Thank you for all that you do.

Diane
President
Friends of Johnny Mercer, Inc.
<https://friendsofjohnnymercer.org/>

Diane Ciucevich Parker
Dccparker1@gmail.com
9123984906

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Bridget Lidy

From: Thomas L. Hart <revtlhart@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 1, 2024 1:54 PM
To: Bridget Lidy
Subject: Re: [Caution - External Email] Re: Invitation

Hi Ms. Bridget

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to attend the meeting on the Civic Center. It was very informative. I spoke with the Ministerial Presidents. These are the concerns that the ministers and clergy have:

1. Where will the name of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. be place? Dr. King's name MUST BE PRESERVED AT ALL COST!
2. Where will the portrait of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. be placed? The artist was a NATIVE SAVANNAH. He recently passed about 3 years ago. Can a marker be placed near the portrait?
3. If possible, can the MLK ARENA BE PRESERVED? A solution proposed by the ministerial presidents:
Make the MLK ARENA a smaller venue. Add space for conference rooms, ballrooms, meeting rooms, etc.
4. How many minority contractors, engineers, architects, etc. are involved in the process?
5. The ministerial presidents want to have a meeting with you, Lida Coleman, City Manager, Mayor and Alderman either individually or collectively ASAP.

If you need the emails and phone numbers of the ministerial presidents I have it. Can't wait to talk to you.

Thomas L Hart

On Friday, April 19, 2024 at 08:26:40 AM EDT, Bridget Lidy <blidy@savannahga.gov> wrote:

Excellent. Look forward to working with you on this project.

Have a wonderful weekend.

Bridget Lidy

O: 912-525-3097

C: 912-429-3364

From: Thomas L. Hart <revtlhart@yahoo.com>
Sent: Friday, April 19, 2024 8:02 AM
To: Bridget Lidy <blidy@Savannahga.Gov>
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Re: Invitation

YES I WILL ATTEND

Thomas L Hart

On Thursday, April 18, 2024 at 03:58:24 PM EDT, Bridget Lidy <blidy@savannahga.gov> wrote:

Greetings.

The City of Savannah is inviting both of you to participate in a preliminary work session to discuss the future of the Savannah Civic Center site on **Thursday, April 25 from 5:00PM to 6:00PM**. The meeting will be held at the Savannah Civic Center, 301 West Oglethorpe Avenue, Bryan Room. During the session, we will review the project background, provide updates on the site, and obtain feedback regarding the future of this facility. Discussions will also focus on the arts, land uses, building community and community building, and public space. Members of

Your participation in this event is valuable and will assist the City as we plan for additional citywide public engagement over the next few months.

Please respond to this email to let us know if you will be able to attend this meeting.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you.

Bridget Lidy, AICP

Director

Planning and Urban Design

blidy@savannahga.gov

Bridget Lidy

From: James Hundsrucker <jhundsrucker@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, June 10, 2024 5:37 AM
To: Planning
Cc: Detric Leggett; Mayor Johnson; Alicia Blakely; Carol Bell; Bernetta Lanier; Linda Wilder-Bryan; Nick Palumbo; Estella Edwards Shabazz; Kurtis Purtee; Jay Melder; Heath Lloyd; Bates Lovett; Clerk of Council; Christian Sottile; Bridget Lidy
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Civic Center: Perspective on Options

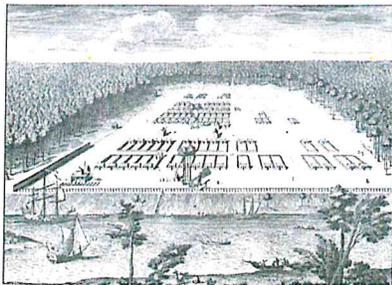
Greetings Planning:

Attached is OPC's latest newsletter, (June 7, 2024), with an updated perspective on the options presented to City Council for the Civic Center Development Project. Same newsletter can be found on our [website](#).

With gratitude,
Jim Hundsrucker
Director, OPC

Oglethorpe Plan Coalition, Inc.

June 7, 2024



We Savannahians are witnessing a sustained degradation of the very qualities that make our Downtown Historic District unique and a national treasure. Ever more inappropriate development is proposed every few weeks. We at the Oglethorpe Plan Coalition, Inc. are dedicated to addressing these threats and protecting the Downtown Savannah National Historic District.

In This Issue:

Updated Perspectives on the Savannah Civic Center Development Project

Street Talk

- HDBR Rejects Inappropriate Addition to 201 West Jones Street
- 17 East Perry To Be Restored
- City Council Rejects Zoning Change at SE Corner of E Broad and Gwinnett

E Bro Project Begins Outreach

Monthly Oglethorpe Plan Coalition (OPC) Volunteers Meeting

Invite Us to Your Event for a Discussion of Hot Topics in the District

Updated Perspectives on the Savannah Civic Center Development Project

In our last newsletter dated May 4, (available on this site), we set forth the OPC's view on the optimal plan for the development of the Civic Center site, recommending a full restoration of the Oglethorpe Plan across the entire site.

For those who agree with this position, you can make your voice heard by signing the petition at <https://chnng.it/YFDdKK2h4I>, now at almost 300 signatures.

The City, which plans to make a decision by resolution June 27, has updated its 3-options for the development of the site here: <https://www.savannahga.gov/DocumentCenter/View/30494/FINAL-PRESENTATION-FOR-SAVANNAH-CIVIC-LEGACY-20240523>.

The first option is to restore the arena and the Johnny Mercer Theatre (JMT). The second is to demolish both. In the second proposed option, the City has incorporated our recommendation (in the May 14 petition cited above) to build a new theatre. The third option is to demolish the arena and restore the JMT.

Three issues have emerged from the ongoing discussions and presentations concerning the development of the Civic Center site:

- The City's *cost analysis* of the alternatives is incomplete and overstates the cost of Option 2, demolishing the entire site and building a new theatre (on nearby city-owned property).

- Unlike Option 2, Option 3 would cause *permanent harm* to the Oglethorpe Plan.
- Option 3 will have a *limited shelf life*, necessitating a future capital spend to develop a new theater, making Option 2 the most cost effective option.

Cost Analysis:

In comparing the cost of maintaining the JMT in its current spot (Option 3) versus building a new theater (Option 2), the City overstates the cost of the new theatre at \$210 to \$230 million. By comparison, the Gaillard in Charleston, SC purportedly cost in the range of \$140 million. The City also understates the cost of renovation. The renovation of the Geffen Theatre in New York cost approximately \$550 million. Most real estate professionals will state that it is cheaper to build new than to renovate. We believe the cost of option two, after subtracting \$80 million for the land sales, is closer to a net \$60 million. An additional 40 million dollars income is projected by the city in the form of tax revenue over the next 40 years if JMT removed and land freed for private development.

Additionally, no provision has been made in the calculation of the cost of maintaining the JMT in its current location for the parking required to support the theater. Like the JMT itself, any municipal parking (whether lot or garage) occupies valuable real estate, and the loss of such revenue should be included in any cost comparison.

Permanent Harm:

Option three includes the possibility of building a new 120,000 sq. ft. municipal office building to hide the north façade of the JMT. To do so, the City would build on the public green space along Oglethorpe Avenue.

This option not only removes the legitimate titling lot from private sale and future tax revenue, but also bulldozes the magnificent line of live oaks that form an essential gateway link into the historic district.

This proposed office building is intended to be a permanent structure thereby doing irrevocable damage to Oglethorpe Avenue. It drastically expands the stretch encroachment of new oversized buildings that dominate the Oglethorpe Avenue entrance to the Historic District.

Limited Shelf Life:

The option to keep the JMT overlooks the limited “shelf life” inherent in the renovation of the JMT. The City's consultant admits that the exterior shell of the JMT will not last more than 50 years regardless of the extent and cost of interior renovation. Therefore, at some foreseeable point in the future, the City will be forced to demolish the JMT and build a new theater. While “up to 50 years” may seem a long time, the present value of the then cost of a new build theater will still be a very large number and a significant additional cost that must be factored into the decision being made now.

One way to evaluate this additional cost is to calculate the present value cost of building a new theater in 40-50 years, assuming that theater would cost about \$150 million in current dollars and that the interest rate differential between inflation and money market interest rates is 3% per annum. That present value calculation results in approximately \$40 to \$46 million of additional cost. This means that the lifetime cost of Option 2 (\$60 million) is substantially lower than the cost of Option 3 (\$130 - \$166 million) and is also much lower than Option 1 when the present value of eventually replacing both the arena and theatre is taken into account.

Since the cost estimates for Option 3 are likely higher and much less certain than Option 2, and since Option 2 represents less disruption to city and community life, Option 2 is clearly the prudent choice.

Given that a new theater will eventually be required, it seems wasteful not to address that issue today and build a new theater designed to endure for a century or more.

Street Talk

In addition to large projects, the OPC also monitors changes to individual structures in the Historic District and its perimeter. Below is a recap of some notable items:

HDBR Rejects Inappropriate Addition to 201 West Jones Street.

On March 13, 2024, the Historic District review Board (HDBR) reviewed a proposal for a new addition to the rear of 201 West Jones Street at Barnard Street. The three-story addition obscured

approximately a third of the building visible from the street, involved the destruction of original features of the building, and overwhelmed the original structure. Interestingly, the building was featured in the 2018 Report by the National Park Service as an example of the historic pattern of townhouse-garden-carriage house that should be preserved.

The HDBR rejected the application. Two months later, on May 8, the applicant presented a modified version of the addition, not addressing all of the concerns of the HDBR. The OPC, which had spoken against the original proposal, spoke against the modified version as well. Surprisingly, the HSF spoke in favor; nonetheless, the HDBR once again rejected the design for much the same sound reasons it had previously.

17 East Perry Proposed To Be Restored.

As reported in a prior newsletter, the OPC spoke against a proposal to alter the facade of 17 East Perry, a fine 1850s dwelling in a transitional Greek revival/Italianate style. In particular the OPC objected to a proposal to remove portions of the original cast iron balcony railings that remained as window guards on the ground floor windows. In its presentation, the OPC also provided images of comparable homes with their second story balconies intact.

The HDBR agreed with the OPC and rejected the application, and in response the owner took a new approach, opting to restore the building to its original look and adding back the missing portions of the cast iron balcony. The OPC applauds this effort.

City Council Rejects Zoning Change at SE Corner of E Broad and Gwinnett

After months of a successful campaigning by neighborhood activists, on May 9th, City Council denied Forum Group's rezoning application at the SE-corner of Gwinnett and East Broad. The zoning change was to create a Small Planned Development to erect a massive four-story apartment building of approximately 185 units and one commercial space atop underground parking. Exceeding the size of one of the City's largest buildings, the Juliette Gordon Low Federal Building, by 19,000 sq. ft., the single building would have required the sale of one parcel and 600 E Gwinnett Lane owned by City of Savannah. Six historic buildings that contribute to the Eastside Historic District (EHD) would have been demolished. EHD has no local historic district protections

since being established nationally in 2002. Bethel AME Church (1876) sat on this site until its demolition in 2021.

MPC's Planning Commission voted 12-to-1, November 7, 2023, to deny the rezoning. Afterwards, the City Manager and Staff worked with the applicant on a new design. City Council, on March 28, 2024, unanimously remanded the changes back to Planning Commission for review. In late April, the Planning Commission approved the project subject to 13 conditions and modifications. The applicant appeared willing to comply with all but one of the recommendations, which was a reduction in density. The project was not seen as economically feasible otherwise. City Council reversed the decision of the Planning Commission, noting the complexity of the conditions.

The surrounding neighbors organized and spoke-out at every opportunity over the 15 months since the project became public. Additional information on the project can be found on Forsyth Park Community Alliance's website.

[\[https://fpcsavannah.com/e-broad-%26-e-gwinnett-proj\]](https://fpcsavannah.com/e-broad-%26-e-gwinnett-proj)

E Bro Project Begins Outreach

On May 15, members of the OPC presented a new initiative entitled the E Bro Project at a privately hosted event, which focuses on the optimal way to develop East Broughton Street from Lincoln to East Broad. This stretch of Broughton is very different from the western end of the street and is characterized by small historic structures and boutique businesses. With the proposed sale of the Acura Car Dealership building at the corner of Habersham Street, development of this area is imminent.

At the meeting, stakeholders from Warren and Washington Wards met to discuss this new approach. The stakeholders in this project include residents, property owners, businesses, preservation groups, other community groups, developers and the city.

The scope of the project includes everything from the choice of sidewalk and streetlight design to the shape and scale of new structures to be built on empty lots. If you would like to volunteer time to the E Bro Project, please reach out to us at opc.preservation@gmail.com.

While this project is focused on East Broughton Street, it is about more than Broughton Street. The project also acts as a

pilot for neighborhood stakeholders to determine the nature of future development in their neighborhood. It is meant to create a new paradigm. The current process of being passive, waiting for the City or developer to present a plan and then react to it, always puts us on the defensive. We need to change the paradigm.

Monthly Oglethorpe Plan Coalition (OPC) Volunteers Meeting

The OPC is a volunteer group, and we want you! Please contact us at opc.preservation@gmail.com if you would like to get involved. We will have a meeting on Sunday, July 7, at 7PM. Please contact us at the above email with your contact information if you are interested in attending. Capacity is limited.

Invite Us to Your Event for a Discussion of Hot Topics in the District

The OPC would be glad to attend your event, be it a neighborhood association or other community group, to share our concerns and hear your views about the state of the historic district. Please reach out to us at opc.preservation@gmail.com.

Facebook

Oglethorpe Plan Coalition, Inc., c/o Andrew Jones, 324 E Broughton St, Savannah, GA 31401, USA

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Bridget Lidy

From: Deborah Glenn <dpglenn123@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, June 7, 2024 12:41 PM
To: Sharon Wanda Aikens; louwisea@msn.com; Eliot Joanna Angell; Danielle Barboza; Michael Chaney; Lynda DeLoach; Brian Judson; patrick com; kareemmcmichael@gmail.com; 86openfood@gmail.com; djv Murphy; renee.rubens@symphonyofleavestea.com; Gwen Frazier; kinte kintetaylor.com; Deborah Glenn; Charles Bogle; HALL-HOUSTON ANDREA; rivertracker@gmail.com; Stuart Miller; Maggie Willett
Cc: amy@savannahphilharmonic.org; info@savannahphilharmonic.org; Bridget Lidy
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Fwd: An Important Update on the Proposed Civic Center Theater Restoration Plan
Attachments: image001.jpg; 2024.04.25 CAC Civic Center.pdf

Hello Amy Williams
Bridget Lidy & CAC Commissioners,
If you haven't seen this video, take a peek and weigh in with your thoughts: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evJLOA9EFu4&ab_channel=SavannahPhilharmonic
This is a timely call to action for all of us to talk to our Alderpeople/persons in Districts 1-6 before Thursday, June 27th when City Council votes on a forward plan. As the neighbors to this Civic Center we really need to all weigh in and make sure this vote supports both theaters and all our best community efforts toward growth.

Number one for our CAC Center is we desperately need parking garages to be built in our City of SV Theatre District as we have 2 theaters, our CAC 338 seat Ben Tucker and the 2500 seat Civic Ctr Theater. That is nearly 3,000 seats meaning up to 1500 to 2000 cars coming into this area! We have many events, classes and activities in our beautiful City CAC building and zero parking garages and as additional City buildings are be erected on all sides of the CAC building the concentration of people and traffic coming in to utilize all the arts and courts related services is increasing exponentially,

This growth does not even factor in out-of-town visitors and the impact of continuing expansion of hotels and tourism drawing folks into our historic and congested residential downtown areas which was also strongly voiced by residents at the Thursday 2024.04.25 meeting. It is hard enough for local residents, both in the higher income housing on the squares, etc with no off street parking to the lower income housing in the various adjoining complexes, as parking spills into all of these home/residential areas causing considerable disturbances, night and day to these residents.

See related emails below re 2024.04.25 meeting and CAC Concern document.

From: Deborah Glenn <dpglenn123@gmail.com>

Date: Thu, Apr 25, 2024 at 8:44 PM

Subject: Civic Center Meeting

Hello Commissioners, Thank you to Andrea Hall-Houston, Lynda DeLoach, Patrick Kelsey and Steven Morgan for attending the Civic Center Stakeholders Invitational meeting this evening. With nearly a 1/3 of our Commissioners showing up we had the highest number of attendees from any of the groups that attended. We were also the only organization that provided an agenda prior to today's meeting, shared with other organizers and now part of public record. This same agenda in paper copies was also shared

with the local news reporter who attended the meeting to fact/information gather. Yours in Volunteering,
Deborah

From: **Bridget Lidy** <blidy@savannahga.gov>
Date: Wed, Apr 24, 2024 at 2:37 PM
Subject: RE: [Caution - External Email] RE: Civic Center Invitation
To: Deborah Glenn <dpglenn123@gmail.com>

Greetings. Many thanks for sharing this document. We will enter into the public record. Looking forward to a great discussion tomorrow.

Thanks again. **Bridget Lidy** O: 912-525-3097 C: 912-429-3364

2024.06.07 Note: This same public record "document", CAC agenda, is reshared below to share with your local Alderpeople/persons in the next 2.5 weeks prior to the City Council 2024.07.27 vote. Thank you, Deborah Glenn

From: Bridget Lidy <blidy@Savannahga.Gov>
Date: 4/18/24 11:50 AM (GMT-05:00)
To: dpglenn123@gmail.com
Subject: Civic Center Invitation

Greetings Deborah Glenn,

The City of Savannah is inviting you as the chair of the Cultural Affairs Commission to participate in a preliminary work session to discuss the future of the Savannah Civic Center site on **Thursday, April 25 from 5:00PM to 6:00PM**. The meeting will be held at the Savannah Civic Center, 301 West Oglethorpe Avenue, Bryan Room.

During the session, we will review the project background, provide updates on the site, and obtain feedback from you regarding the future of this facility. Discussions will also focus on the arts, land uses, building community and community building, and public space.

Your participation with this session is valuable and will assist the City as we plan for additional citywide public engagement over the next few months.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thanks.

Bridget Lidy, AICP, Director, Planning and Urban Design, blidy@savannahga.gov O: 912-525-3097 C: 912-429-3364 F: 912-525-1562



Thank you for reading this far and this is an important impact moment for our Commission and directly related to our mission as volunteer Commissioners using our might and insight to move the arts/culture forward with the overall interests of all 6 districts, CAC and our city's arts growth.

Please feel free to contact myself and Danielle B, with input so we can organize an action/meeting in the next two weeks to move forward with unity prior to this important city vote. And if any former Commissioners, or friends, are also interested in moving the City's needle towards designating this an Arts District, creating the needed parking to enjoy such an district please forward this information and voting date.

Yours in volunteering, Deborah Glenn,

----- Forwarded message -----

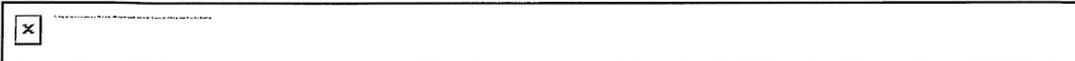
From: **Savannah Philharmonic** <info@savannahphilharmonic.org>

Date: Thu, Jun 6, 2024 at 2:00 PM

Subject: An Important Update on the Proposed Civic Center Theater Restoration Plan

To: <dpglenn123@gmail.com>

[View as Webpage](#)



Dear Friends,

Please take a moment to watch this special update on the proposed restoration of the Civic Center Theater from Savannah Philharmonic Executive Director, Dr. Amy Williams.

Thank you for your ongoing support!



#SAVPHIL



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Office: 912-232-6002

Savannah Philharmonic | 1515 Abercorn Street | Savannah, GA 31401 US

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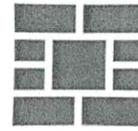
--

*Deborah Porter Glenn, MS, CTA Certified Coach
City of Savannah Cultural Affairs Commission
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https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEn5lz6YOIZEngEgl_Dugow

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The City of Savannah Cultural Affairs Commission

Notes on Civic Center Renovation - Five Goals from CAC:

- 1. Keep the Johnny Mercer Theater – 2500 seats.**
Keep the 1972 exterior arches architectural design as part of theater/city history.
Renovate interior of building, carpets, more restrooms, concession areas, etc.
Build new ADA complaint entrances on both sides of the building for the JM theater.
- 2. Remove/Tear down the Arena Area – Demolish it.**
The arena needs to be removed and a multi-story parking garage installed, 1500 cars.
JM Theater seats 2500 + Ben Tucker Theater seats 358 seats = 3000 people & cars!!!!
There is a shortage of parking in the area for all events at both theater venues.
- 3. Replace the removed city squares to original Oglethorpe plan of 1733-1850.**
The City needs to honor the original historic local Oglethorpe square design plan.
The City needs to replace Elbert Square in full and McDonough square in full.
The City needs to redirect traffic around both Civic Center and CAC to events, parking
- 4. The City needs to keep, honor & renovate Green-Space park next to JM Theater.**
All parks and green spaces are key to city happiness, health, clean fountains, etc.
There are several building that utilize this space, CAC, SCAD Dorm, JM Theater.
This is space is too narrow to build on & creates balance existing natural designs.
- 5. The City needs to build an income producing, multi-story, large parking facility.**
There is little to no parking in this area for two theaters with about 3000 seats.
There is little to no parking with the new courthouse buildings going up in area.
There is little to no parking for locals, visitors coming to utilize all these City buildings.

Notes for Meeting: Thursday, April 25 from 5:00PM to 6:00PM, Savannah Civic Center, 301 West Oglethorpe Avenue, Bryan Room. Bridget Lidy, AICP, Director Planning and Urban Design
blidy@savannahga.gov O: 912-525-3097 C: 912-429-3364 F: 912-525-1562

CAC Notes: <https://www.savannahga.gov/949/Cultural-Affairs-Commission>

Next Meeting: Cultural Affairs Commission Meeting

Wednesday, May 8, 2024, 6:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

Savannah Cultural Arts Center, Ben Tucker Theater

201 Montgomery Street, Savannah, GA 31401

The public is invited to attend the Cultural Affairs Commission meetings.

If you would like to join the meeting, please send an RSVP by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, May 7, 2024.

Commission: Deborah Glenn, Chairperson, Danielle Barboza Vice Chairperson.

Savannah Cultural Arts Center - Ph: (912) 651-6783

201 Montgomery St., Savannah, GA 31401 <https://www.savannahga.gov/500/Cultural-Resources>

Bridget Lidy

From: skip lamb <lambskip@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 30, 2024 11:26 AM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Savannah Civic Center

I would favor demolition of the arena and redevelopment of the arena and parking spaces and the Oglethorpe Avenue space, complete renovation of The Johnny Mercer Theater, and restoration of the Oglethorpe Plan as possible.

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Bridget Lidy

From: Susan Lamb <sblamb@me.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 29, 2024 2:17 PM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Johnny Mercer Theater

I wish to express my desire for the Johnny Mercer Theater to be saved and brought back to its former state. The arts organizations have expressed this preference and we need to pay attention to their needs.

Sent from my iPhone

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Bridget Lidy

From: Elizabeth Hollis <elizabethhollis3@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 28, 2024 11:39 PM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Save the Johnny Mercer Theatre

The Johnny Mercer Theatre is a community treasure which should be renovated and saved as an outstanding venue for live entertainment, theatre, and concerts in Savannah.

It is recognised as one of the biggest performance stages in the south east and is a favored facility for out-of-town performance groups as mentioned by the director of the Columbia (SC) Ballet. He addressed the audience prior to the beginning of a performance by listing the many unique attributes of our theatre. We should be proud and be ready to protect the special features we already have. Other performances have used this gem when needing a facility with a tall fly tower. Musical performances are graced with the orchestral pit with hydraulics. When new, the acoustics were top of the line. Having them restored and updated will be more cost-effective when compared to a complete replacement.

The ballroom and meeting spaces indeed offer more opportunities for a large variety of gatherings in the community.

Elizabeth Hollis
811 Whitaker Street
Savannah, GA 31401

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Bridget Lidy

From: Robert P Helms <rphelms1@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 28, 2024 8:12 AM
To: Planning; Mayor Johnson
Cc: Detric Leggett; Alicia Blakely; Carol Bell; Estella Edwards Shabazz; Bernetta Lanier; Linda Wilder-Bryan; Nick Palumbo; Kurtis Purtee; Jay Melder; Heath Lloyd; David McDonald; Eric Curl; elasserter@savannahnow.com
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Re: An alternative to the Mercer Theater - follow up

Hi,

I have been following the public discussion concerning the future of the Civic Center complex with interest and have some additional thoughts and comments.

I understand that the City is leaning towards a renovation of the Johnny Mercer Theater along the lines of the Eastman Theater in Rochester on the basis that this represents the “prudent choice”, presumably because it is the least expensive option. A quick review of the Wikipedia entry on the Eastman Theater indicates that it was renovated first in 2004 and then had a larger renovation in 2004-2010. There is also this photograph of the Theater:



The exterior of the Eastman Theater is an excellent example of early 20th century neo-classical architecture and was/is worth saving. The Mercer Theater, by contrast, does not speak of Savannah and is more a cheap man’s version of New York City’s Lincoln Center.

There is no photo of the Johnny Mercer Theater in the Wikipedia entry on the Savannah Civic Center. Here is a photo I took of the Johnny Mercer Theater:



The Theater is dominated by the huge block of uninteresting brick and the colonnade looks out of place and out of proportion. The only way to hide that brick fly tower is to put a large office building as close as possible to it. If we have to hide something, why are we trying to keep it?

The Eastman Theater was renovated twice within a 10 year period and, based on the history of the Geffen, the Gaillard and other projects, 10 years may be said to be the norm. So the second, and very important, question is: does Savannah really want to go through a 10-year renovation of the Johnny Mercer Theater?

As I have said in my previous letters, I am very skeptical of the cost estimates and time lines put forward on renovation projects, particularly renovation projects of concrete buildings. The proposers, including architects, engineers, etc., have a vested interest in being optimistic about the costs and how quickly things can be completed. Then when they run into problems, those problems are “unexpected” and the cost and time overruns “necessary”. In effect the renovation project becomes an employment license for years. In this context, it is worth noting that none of the renovation projects cited as models include actual costs in their promotional material. Here is the statement on the Eastman Theater:

“The opening of the Eastman East Wing in December 2010 was the culmination of a multi-year construction project and the realization of George Eastman’s original plan for the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester.

Since 2004, the Eastman School has completed a project that included stage and hall improvements in Eastman Theatre and the addition of a new building with state-of-art-rehearsal, performance, and teaching spaces. With the completed renovation of the new Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre, and the opening of the spectacular new Eastman East Wing, the Eastman School of Music celebrates its great legacy and continues its evolution as a leader in preparing students for a changing music environment.”

Perhaps this lack of clarity is an oversight, but perhaps not.

The two major advantages of a two-step process where a replacement theater is built before the Johnny Mercer Theater is torn down are:

- (1) no disruption to city life while the theater construction process is ongoing; and
- (2) much greater certainty that the construction time-lines and costs will be substantially as projected at the beginning of the process.

Respectfully submitted,

Kind regards,

Robert & Tru Helms
244 East Oglethorpe Ave
Savannah, GA 31401
Robert: +1-912-441-1912
Tru: +1-912-713-4882
rphelms1@gmail.com
tru.helms@gmail.com

On May 20, 2024, at 2:10 PM, Robert P Helms <Rphelms1@gmail.com> wrote:

I have been asked to consider whether there might exist a feasible and cost effective alternative to the renovation/reconstruction of the Johnny Mercer Theater currently planned by the City of Savannah.

After considerable thought and consultation with friends, I think it would be possible to locate a new theater in one of several sites already owned by the City thereby freeing up the entire Civic Center site for redevelopment based on the original Oglethorpe Plan. Selling off the Civic Center site for residential or commercial uses would raise in the neighborhood of \$80 million and would add substantially to the tax base of the City. Sales could be structured such that the uses of the lots are deemed to be commercial even if the

owners are non profit. In effect buyers would be forced to agree in advance that such property constitutes unrelated business property subject to property and other city taxes.

What are the important objectives of the renovation or replacement of the Mercer Theater?

1. Build a 1,800 to 2,400 seat theater with good acoustics and site lines, suitable not only for philharmonic events but also other events not suitable for the Enmarket Arena.
2. Include a ballroom and other ancillary spaces to replace the ballroom on the 3rd floor of the Mercer Theater.
3. Minimize the disruption to city life associated with the construction period.

Are there other potential sites for a new theater?

I understand the City owns at least 4 plots of land that could be used for a new theater. In addition, the removal of the I-16 flyover would free up additional plots for redevelopment. Potentially the most attractive of the available sites is the parking lot on MLK located between the Visitor Center and SCAD's Clark Hall. A new Mercer/MLK theater could be constructed on this site fronting on MLK.

Attached as Exhibit 0 is a Google Maps picture of the parking lot in question. Exhibit 1 is a photo overlay of the Mercer Theater (minus its colonnades) onto the parking lot and Exhibit 2 is a similar photo overlay of the theater portion of the Gaillard Center on the parking lot. If there is a need for other spaces, the building could be extended deeper into the parking lots.

By constructing a new theater on this site and keeping the existing Mercer Theater complex in operation during construction, city life will suffer minimal disruption.

The elephant in any consideration of the redevelopment or replacement of the Mercer Theater is the cost of the alternative chosen. We have been told that the model for the renovation project would be to do something similar to that done in 2022 to the now named David Geffen Hall of Lincoln Center in New York City. The issue is that the renovation of Geffen Hall cost \$550 million, an astronomical sum by any criteria.

Another renovation project cited is the redevelopment of the Gaillard Center in Charleston, completed in 2012 for a reputed cost of \$142 million. The Enmarket Arena, with its larger seating capacity and requirement for multiple uses, is reported to have cost about \$150 million.

One of the problems in discussing any redevelopment of the existing Mercer Theater is that the type of reinforced concrete construction used has generally not aged well. Not only have such buildings become stained over time by rain and weather but many, perhaps all, develop leaks which result in rusting rebars and a weakened structure. These structural problems are one of the reasons that most large athletic stadiums of the era have been replaced with new builds and not renovated.

It seems likely that similar problems will be discovered when construction begins on a renovation of the existing Mercer Theater. It is practically certain that unexpected problems (asbestos, non-conformity to current building codes, etc.) will be discovered driving construction costs up meaningfully.

Remodeling works from a cost perspective where a large chunk of the costs involved are in the envelope of the building which remains largely unchanged between old and new. As described in the material presented by the City, the plan is to insert a whole new building within the outermost shell of the Mercer. In effect, only a thin layer of the existing building will be retained. Perhaps this is cost effective but there is an equal or greater chance that it is not.

At the very least I think the City should cost out the construction a new Mercer/MLK Theater fronting on MLK Boulevard for comparison to the cost of renovating the existing theater. If the new construction cost, on a net basis after deducting the capital raised by selling off the entire Civic Center area, is less than the estimated cost of renovating the existing theater, then the alternative of a new build becomes both feasible and cost effective.

Exhibit 0 - parking lot

Exhibit 1 - Mercer Theater inserted into parking lot

Exhibit 2 - Gaillard Theater inserted into parking lot

Respectively submitted,

Kind regards,

Robert & Tru Helms
244 East Oglethorpe Ave
Savannah, GA 31401
Robert: +1-912-441-1912
Tru: +1-912-713-4882
rphelms1@gmail.com
tru.helms@gmail.com

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🏨 Hotels

📷 Things to do

🚗 Transit

P Parking

🏪 Pharmacies

ATM

Fahm Ave Parking



Charleston
Division
S Division



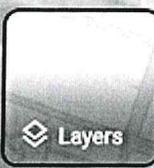
Savannah Visito

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Louisville Rd

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Johnny Mercer Civic Center

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Bridget Lidy

From: debbie kearney <dakearney@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, May 26, 2024 4:56 PM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Support Johnny Mercer theater

As a long-term user of the Johnny Mercer theater, I am writing in support of preserving the theater. It is historic and, as I understand it, was state of the art when built and can be updated to current state of the art. I also understand that it was built to a high quality standard which is worth preserving.

Another reason this theater is important for our community is it's size. There's not another venue of its size in our area, which is significant in bringing certain artists to Savannah.

I also understand that many of the arts/music organizations in Savannah are supportive of preserving the theater.

Over the years, we have participated in so many wonderful musical, dance, and theater events at the Johnny Mercer Theater. Please work to retain this important facility for the citizens of this part of coastal Georgia.

Thank you,
Deborah Kearney
Tybee Island, GA

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Bridget Lidy

From: Thomas Hollis <tgh84@aol.com>
Sent: Saturday, May 25, 2024 3:25 PM
To: Planning
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Save the Johnny Mercer Theater

Dear Mayor Johnson and Members of City Council:

The Johnny Mercer Theater should be saved and updated. It has so many positive features that would be very costly to replicate. It has one of the biggest stages in the southeast, a very tall fly tower, an orchestra pit with hydraulics, and acoustics that can be restored to their state-of-the-art original condition. On top of all of that is the fact that it is a profitable venue of a unique size. The ballroom and meeting spaces in the building are also important assets. Please save and renovate the Johnny Mercer Theater.

Sincerely,
Thomas Hollis
811 Whitaker St.
Savannah GA

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Bridget Lidy

From: Anna Habersham Wright <factorswalk@earthlink.net>
Sent: Wednesday, May 22, 2024 11:35 AM
To: Robert P Helms
Cc: Planning; Mayor Johnson; Detric Leggett; Alicia Blakely; Carol Bell; Estella Edwards Shabazz; Bernetta Lanier; Linda Wilder-Bryan; Nick Palumbo; Kurtis Purtee; Jay Melder; Heath Lloyd; President Dna; Eric Curl; elasseeter@savannahnow.com
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Fw: Fwd: An alternative to the Mercer Theater

Dear Sir/Madams,

I also agree with Mr. Helm's letter and Mr. Highland's endorsement below.

Over the last 8 generations my family has consistently lived on or adjacent Barnard Street, including in the Bulloch Habersham house.

My grandmother Francis Meldrim Jones grew up on Elbert Square.

My parents DR David McCord Wright and Caroline Noble Jones Wright joined Walter Hartridge in his efforts to save the Pulaski Square neighborhood when the railroad yard closed. They bought 128 West Jones St. in 1965, and my great aunt Sophie Meldrim Shonnard bought a house across the street to prevent the area being sold as one large block. Pulaski Square then became HSF's flagship project. My grandfather's first cousin Anna Hunter was instrumental in establishing Historic Savannah.

It is tragic to see the historic district smothered and split by traffic, parking demands, large institutional buildings, hotels and dormitories. Mr. Helm's plan frees the Civic Center site for mixed use residential and commercial. This would not only restore the tax base, but would increase security by expanding a stable residential population. It would also give the city the 100 plus year world class facility we all want, while expanding the historic street plan and architectural scale that brings the tourists in the first place.

As a retired member of the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland and the Royal Institute of British Architects, I would suggest the city avail of an international architectural and urban design competition to maximize the design options at the minimum of cost.

Sincerely yours, Anna Habersham Wright

126 West Taylor Street

Savannah, GA 31401

(912) 257 3902

Begin forwarded message:

From: Cory Highland <Acoryhighland@gmail.com>

Date: May 21, 2024 at 8:49:32 AM EDT

To: Robert P Helms <rphelms1@gmail.com>

Cc: planning@savannahga.gov, Mayor Johnson <mayorjohnson@savannahga.gov>, Detric Leggett <DLeggett@savannahga.gov>, Alicia Miller Blakely <ABlakely01@savannahga.gov>, Carol Bell <Carol.Bell@savannahga.gov>, Estella Edwards Shabazz <EShabazz@savannahga.gov>, Bernetta Lanier <BLanier@savannahga.gov>, Linda Wilder-Bryan <LBryan@savannahga.gov>, Nick Palumbo <NPalumbo@savannahga.gov>, Kurtis Purtee <KPurtee@savannahga.gov>, Jay Melder <Jay.Melder@savannahga.gov>, Heath Lloyd <hlloyd@savannahga.gov>, President Dna <president@savannahdna.org>, Eric Curl <eric.curl@savannahagenda.com>, elasseter@savannahnow.com

Subject: Re: An alternative to the Mercer Theater

Sorry, I didn't send Robert's email with mine a few minutes ago, below. Thank you.

Dear Sirs/Madams:

As a native Savannahian who attended multiple events in the Civic Center, including playing basketball there many times, I have fond memories of that building, as well as the Johnny Mercer Theater, which I still enjoy. That said, I support the email below from Mr. Robert Helms concerning the future of the Civic Center and Johnny Mercer. It's time to restore the Oglethorpe Plan while providing a new, medium-sized entertainment venue to serve all of Savannah.

Thank you.

--

A. Cory Highland
211 East York Street
Savannah, GA 31401
(646) 361-4659
acoryhighland@gmail.com

On Mon, May 20, 2024 at 2:10 PM Robert P Helms <rphelms1@gmail.com> wrote:
I have been asked to consider whether there might exist a feasible and cost effective alternative to the renovation/reconstruction of the Johnny Mercer Theater currently planned by the City of Savannah.

After considerable thought and consultation with friends, I think it would be possible to locate a new theater in one of several sites already owned by the City thereby freeing up the entire Civic Center site for redevelopment based on the original Oglethorpe Plan. Selling off the Civic Center site for residential or commercial uses would raise in the neighborhood of \$80 million and would

add substantially to the tax base of the City. Sales could be structured such that the uses of the lots are deemed to be commercial even if the owners are non profit. In effect buyers would be forced to agree in advance that such property constitutes unrelated business property subject to property and other city taxes.

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2. Include a ballroom and other ancillary spaces to replace the ballroom on the 3rd floor of the Mercer Theater.
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Are there other potential sites for a new theater?

I understand the City owns at least 4 plots of land that could be used for a new theater. In addition, the removal of the I-16 flyover would free up additional plots for redevelopment. Potentially the most attractive of the available sites is the parking lot on MLK located between the Visitor Center and SCAD's Clark Hall. A new Mercer/MLK theater could be constructed on this site fronting on MLK.

Attached as Exhibit 0 is a Google Maps picture of the parking lot in question. Exhibit 1 is a photo overlay of the Mercer Theater (minus its colonnades) onto the parking lot and Exhibit 2 is a similar photo overlay of the theater portion of the Gaillard Center on the parking lot. If there is a need for other spaces, the building could be extended deeper into the parking lots.

By constructing a new theater on this site and keeping the existing Mercer Theater complex in operation during construction, city life will suffer minimal disruption.

The elephant in any consideration of the redevelopment or replacement of the Mercer Theater is the cost of the alternative chosen. We have been told that the model for the renovation project would be to do something similar to that done in 2022 to the now named David Geffen Hall of Lincoln Center in New York City. The issue is that the renovation of Geffen Hall cost \$550 million, an astronomical sum by any criteria.

Another renovation project cited is the redevelopment of the Gaillard Center in Charleston, completed in 2012 for a reputed cost of \$142 million. The Enmarket Arena, with its larger seating capacity and requirement for multiple uses, is reported to have cost about \$150 million.

One of the problems in discussing any redevelopment of the existing Mercer Theater is that the type of reinforced concrete construction used has generally not aged well. Not only have such buildings become stained over time by rain and weather but many, perhaps all, develop leaks which result in rusting rebars and a weakened structure. These structural problems are one of the reasons that most large athletic stadiums of the era have been replaced with new builds and not renovated.

It seems likely that similar problems will be discovered when construction begins on a renovation of the existing Mercer Theater. It is practically certain that unexpected problems (asbestos, non-conformity to current building codes, etc.) will be discovered driving construction costs up meaningfully.

Remodeling works from a cost perspective where a large chunk of the costs involved are in the envelope of the building which remains largely unchanged between old and new. As described in the material presented by the City, the plan is to insert a whole new building within the outermost shell of the Mercer. In effect, only a thin layer of the existing building will be retained. Perhaps this is cost effective but there is an equal or greater chance that it is not.

At the very least I think the City should cost out the construction a new Mercer/MLK Theater fronting on MLK Boulevard for comparison to the cost of renovating the existing theater. If the new construction cost, on a net basis after deducting the capital raised by selling off the entire Civic Center area, is less than the estimated cost of renovating the existing theater, then the alternative of a new build becomes both feasible and cost effective.

Exhibit 0 - parking lot

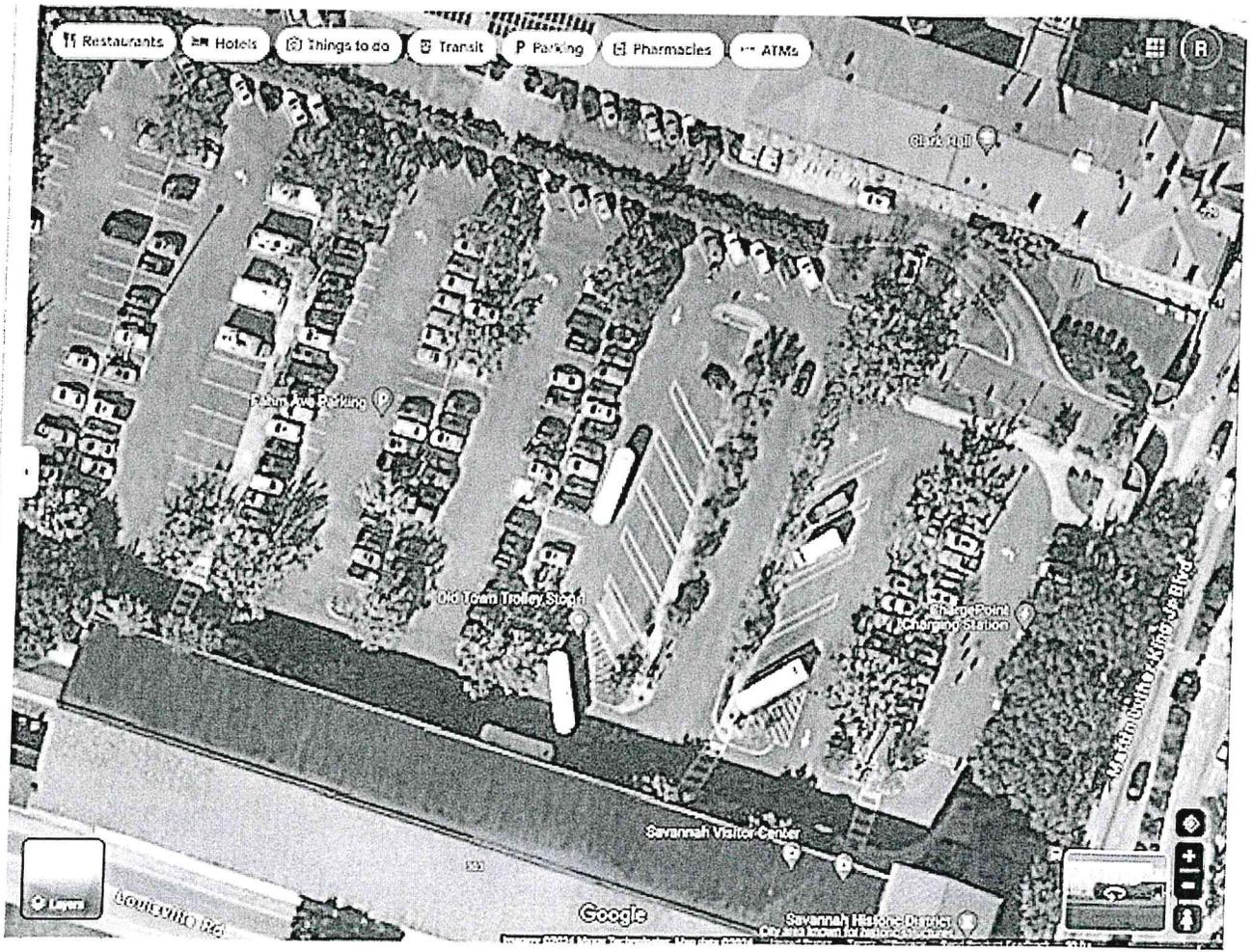
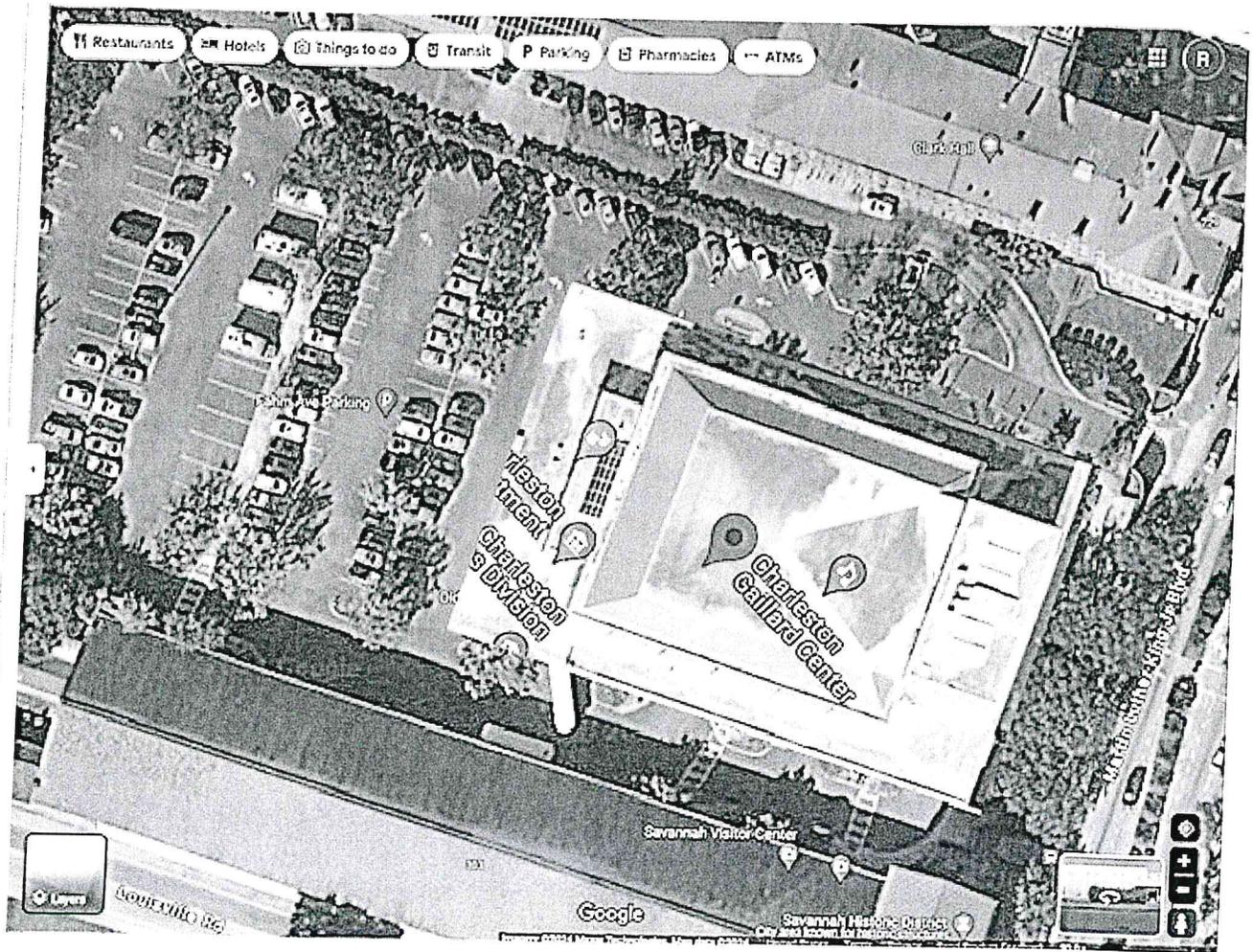


Exhibit 1 - Mercer Theater inserted into parking lot



Respectively submitted,

Kind regards,

Robert & Tru Helms
244 East Oglethorpe Ave
Savannah, GA 31401
Robert: +1-912-441-1912
Tru: +1-912-713-4882
rphelms1@gmail.com
tru.helms@gmail.com

--
A. Cory Highland
211 East York Street
Savannah, GA 31401
(646) 361-4659
acoryhighland@gmail.com

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Bridget Lidy

From: Robert P Helms <rphelms1@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 21, 2024 6:08 PM
To: Planning; Mayor Johnson
Cc: Detric Leggett; Alicia Blakely; Carol Bell; Estella Edwards Shabazz; Bernetta Lanier; Linda Wilder-Bryan; Nick Palumbo; Kurtis Purtee; Jay Melder; Heath Lloyd; David McDonald; Eric Curl; elasseeter@savannahnow.com
Subject: [Caution - External Email] Re: An alternative to the Mercer Theater

Hi,

Several of my friends to whom I sent the previous email have scolded me for not including links and sources for the estimates included therein. But before I provide those, I should start with a couple of general observations:

- The Mayor has said "that costs are not top of mind for most residents. The City has multiple options for non-general revenue funds, such as enterprise funds or the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, to be able to "move in whatever direction" the City needs to once a decision is made." This suggests that the City need not accept a less than good alternative just because it is cheaper.
- There are competing interest groups, notably those that want to keep the Mercer for sentimental reasons or because they cannot conceive of anything better versus those who think that this is a great opportunity to come up with a project that satisfies all groups. I myself fall into a third group of those that think that renovations of concrete buildings rarely work and always cost more than anyone dreamed. The phrase "lipstick on a pig" comes to mind.
- The ancillary spaces of the Mercer such as the ballroom were originally included as an afterthought and it shows. A new theater complex could be designed with such spaces in mind and provide a better experience than is possible in the Mercer.
- One of the reasons given for a redo of the Mercer is that the Mercer is so ugly that the City is justified in putting a five-story office building on Oglethorpe to hide that end of the Mercer. If the City needs more office space downtown, the City owns the Board Of Education building on Oglethorpe and Bull and the SCCPSS just put out an RFI looking for potential buyers. Unlike the Mercer, the old Savannah High building was built with stone and brick and the exterior is both attractive and in reasonably good shape. From an architectural perspective, this is one of the better buildings in Savannah and should be retained by the City if possible.

SOURCES AND LINKS:

VALUE OF CIVIC CENTER REAL ESTATE:

SALES COMPS

Trust lot at 4 permitted stories: Lincoln Street Parking \$16 M on 4/26/22 (tear down - 2 trust lots, 33,106 SF)
<https://qpublic.schneidercorp.com/Application.aspx?AppID=1094&LayerID=27085&PageTypeID=4&PageID=10981&KeyValue=20004%2027001>

Tithing lot at 6 permitted stories: 220 E. Bryan \$6M on 4/27/22 (tear down - 3 tithing lots, 14,113 SF)
<https://qpublic.schneidercorp.com/Application.aspx?AppID=1094&LayerID=27085&PageTypeID=4&PageID=10981&Q=751796231&KeyValue=20004+17004>

ASKING PRICE

Tithing lot at 3 stories: 402 E. Broughton asking \$6.5M now (tear down - 3 tithing lots, approx 15,000 SF)
This link is for only for 2 of the 3:

<https://qpublic.schneidercorp.com/Application.aspx?AppID=1094&LayerID=27085&PageTypeID=4&PageID=10981&Q=1940622202&KeyValue=20004+42012>

As a general matter, tear downs tend to be more valuable than land with protected historic buildings and land with no structures tends to have the most value.

Based on the height map: <https://www.thempc.org/docs/lit/hist/maps/SHheight2022.pdf>

The Civic Center complex has
4 trust lots at 4 stories
13 tithing lots at 5 stories
13 tithing lots at 4 stories

So an estimate of \$7 million per trust lot and \$2 million per tithing lot is in line with recent sales and offerings which is the basis for the estimate of \$80 million for the whole.

There has been a significant runup in Savannah real estate values since 2020 and an estimate of \$16 million for the entire parcel is very out of date.

INFORMATION ON DAVID GEFFEN HALL:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Geffen_Hall

INFORMATION ON GAILLARD CENTER:

<https://gaillardcenter.org/about-us/our-story/>

The \$142 million cited was the budgeted cost of the proposed Gaillard renovation but I have been unable to find a cost for the actual completed renovation. Their website carefully avoids any reference to a final cost. The lack of clarity suggests that the final cost may have increased.

INFORMATION ON ENMARKET CENTER:

<https://www.enr.com/articles/55169-award-of-merit-sports-entertainment-enmarket-arena#:~:text=First%20funded%20by%20a%20city,masonry%20accompanying%20expansive%20glazed%20curtainwall.>

The cost of the Enmarket appears to be \$165 million.

The bottom line is Savannah deserves a better plan from the City. A two-step approach, which includes the immediate development of a new theater and the development of a master plan for the entire site, should be adopted by the City. Phase 1 would develop the non-Civic Center portion of the plan. After the new theater's completion, the Civic Center area would be developed according to the Oglethorpe Plan returning a large area to the City tax rolls.

Respectfully submitted,

Kind regards,

Robert & Tru Helms
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On May 20, 2024, at 2:10 PM, Robert P Helms <Rphelms1@gmail.com> wrote:

I have been asked to consider whether there might exist a feasible and cost effective alternative to the renovation/reconstruction of the Johnny Mercer Theater currently planned by the City of Savannah.

After considerable thought and consultation with friends, I think it would be possible to locate a new theater in one of several sites already owned by the City thereby freeing up the entire Civic Center site for redevelopment based on the original Oglethorpe Plan. Selling off the Civic Center site for residential or commercial uses would raise in the neighborhood of \$80 million and would add substantially to the tax base of the City. Sales could be structured such that the uses of the lots are deemed to be commercial even if the owners are non profit. In effect buyers would be forced to agree in advance that such property constitutes unrelated business property subject to property and other city taxes.

What are the important objectives of the renovation or replacement of the Mercer Theater?

1. Build a 1,800 to 2,400 seat theater with good acoustics and site lines, suitable not only for philharmonic events but also other events not suitable for the Enmarket Arena.
2. Include a ballroom and other ancillary spaces to replace the ballroom on the 3rd floor of the Mercer Theater.
3. Minimize the disruption to city life associated with the construction period.

Are there other potential sites for a new theater?

I understand the City owns at least 4 plots of land that could be used for a new theater. In addition, the removal of the I-16 flyover would free up additional plots for redevelopment. Potentially the most attractive of the available sites is the parking lot on MLK located between the Visitor Center and SCAD's Clark Hall. A new Mercer/MLK theater could be constructed on this site fronting on MLK.

Attached as Exhibit 0 is a Google Maps picture of the parking lot in question. Exhibit 1 is a photo overlay of the Mercer Theater (minus its colonnades) onto the parking lot and Exhibit 2 is a similar photo overlay of the theater portion of

the Gaillard Center on the parking lot. If there is a need for other spaces, the building could be extended deeper into the parking lots.

By constructing a new theater on this site and keeping the existing Mercer Theater complex in operation during construction, city life will suffer minimal disruption.

The elephant in any consideration of the redevelopment or replacement of the Mercer Theater is the cost of the alternative chosen. We have been told that the model for the renovation project would be to do something similar to that done in 2022 to the now named David Geffen Hall of Lincoln Center in New York City. The issue is that the renovation of Geffen Hall cost \$550 million, an astronomical sum by any criteria.

Another renovation project cited is the redevelopment of the Gaillard Center in Charleston, completed in 2012 for a reputed cost of \$142 million. The Enmarket Arena, with its larger seating capacity and requirement for multiple uses, is reported to have cost about \$150 million.

One of the problems in discussing any redevelopment of the existing Mercer Theater is that the type of reinforced concrete construction used has generally not aged well. Not only have such buildings become stained over time by rain and weather but many, perhaps all, develop leaks which result in rusting rebars and a weakened structure. These structural problems are one of the reasons that most large athletic stadiums of the era have been replaced with new builds and not renovated.

It seems likely that similar problems will be discovered when construction begins on a renovation of the existing Mercer Theater. It is practically certain that unexpected problems (asbestos, non-conformity to current building codes, etc.) will be discovered driving construction costs up meaningfully.

Remodeling works from a cost perspective where a large chunk of the costs involved are in the envelope of the building which remains largely unchanged between old and new. As described in the material presented by the City, the plan is to insert a whole new building within the outermost shell of the Mercer. In effect, only a thin layer of the existing building will be retained. Perhaps this is cost effective but there is an equal or greater chance that it is not.

At the very least I think the City should cost out the construction a new Mercer/MLK Theater fronting on MLK Boulevard for comparison to the cost of renovating the existing theater. If the new construction cost, on a net basis after deducting the capital raised by selling off the entire Civic Center area, is less than the estimated cost of renovating the existing theater, then the alternative of a new build becomes both feasible and cost effective.

Exhibit 0 - parking lot

<parking lot as is.jpg>

Exhibit 1 - Mercer Theater inserted into parking lot

<Mercer on parking lot.jpg>

Exhibit 2 - Gaillard Theater inserted into parking lot

<Gaillard on parkingh lot.jpg>

Respectively submitted,

Kind regards,

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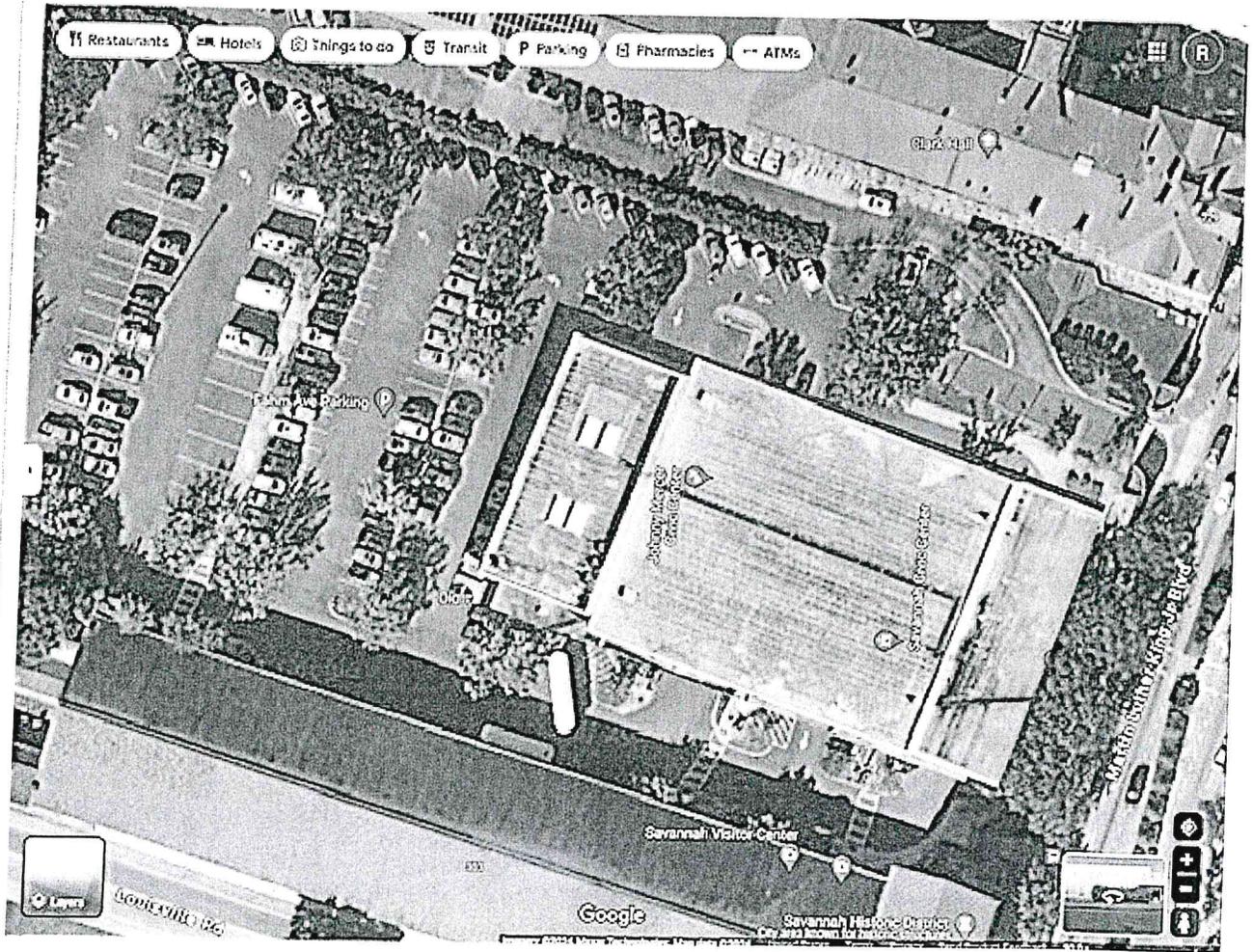


Exhibit 2 - Gaillard Theater inserted into parking lot

Written Comments during Public Meetings

Session Date	Station (Facility/Community/Future)	Comment
7-May-24	Future	We enjoy events at the civic center
7-May-24	Future	Great project, building a theatre would be a lot more expensive, full support
7-May-24	Future	Good for people of Savannah with small events
7-May-24	Future	Would love a permanent place to perform, theatre would be perfect
7-May-24	Future	The nature of the town without many office buildings is great
7-May-24	Future	FFA supports future civic center
7-May-24	Future	keep theatre use remaining space for savannah plan
7-May-24	Future	No STVRS, No Hotel Rooms on new residential lots
7-May-24	Future	HOUSING, HOUSING, HOUSING
7-May-24	Future	INCLINE SOME DENSITY, NOT JUST SF
7-May-24	Future	Affordable housing not retail space
7-May-24	Future	MIXED INCOME HOUSING ON NEW ROADS
7-May-24	Future	Would love a permanent place to perform, theatre would be perfect
7-May-24	Future	The theatre should be preserved and restored as it is a historical monument for the town top priority
7-May-24	Future	Keep theatre. Restore Arena. Downtown is for the community to walk and enjoy events/shows
7-May-24	Future	No Parking, instead develop public transport and bike lanes.
7-May-24	Future	Keep green space
7-May-24	Future	Science center and children's museum
7-May-24	Future	HOUSING, HOUSING, HOUSING
7-May-24	Future	HOUSING, HOUSING, HOUSING
7-May-24	Future	Restore oglethorpe plan
7-May-24	Future	Keep theatre.
7-May-24	Future	keep theatre and build parking facility
7-May-24	Future	this theatre fills a need and a niche that wouldn't come otherwise
7-May-24	Future	move theatre to parking lot to restore square
7-May-24	Future	underground parking plan
7-May-24	Future	public buildings=homeless increase. housing = safer community
7-May-24	Future	I DO NOT LIKE THE NEW OFFICE SPACE PLAN
7-May-24	Future	The nature of the town without many office buildings is great
7-May-24	Future	Where would event parking be located? Major concern
7-May-24	Future	Residential will not work if theatre remains
7-May-24	Future	TIMELINE???
7-May-24	Future	WE NEED THE JOHNNY MERCER VENUE
7-May-24	Future	CONCERNED ABOUT THE GREEN SPACE TAKEN AWAY FOR THIS
7-May-24	Future	BIG NO to more government buildings
7-May-24	Future	Concerned about loading dock relocation
7-May-24	Future	This is a pedestrian community, we need more homes and less offices
7-May-24	Future	why is this not a questionnaire? This feels insincere
7-May-24	Future	NO OFFICE, LEAVE SPACE OPEN
7-May-24	Future	NO HOTELS
7-May-24	Future	NO OFFICE, LEAVE SPACE OPEN
7-May-24	Future	no hotels, no big city offices, no private management
7-May-24	Future	Outdoor amphitheatre/green space
7-May-24	Future	underground parking plan
7-May-24	Future	More greenspace
7-May-24	Future	replace parking lot to ease housing/traffic crisis
7-May-24	Future	NEED MORE HOUSING
7-May-24	Future	Walk space for dynamic tourism
7-May-24	Future	Less parking
7-May-24	Future	Add greenspace
7-May-24	Future	SCAD PARKING
7-May-24	Future	No theatre
7-May-24	Future	Affordable workforce housing
7-May-24	Future	No office building
7-May-24	Future	Restore McDonough street
7-May-24	Future	City taxes have increased in the past 5 years. NO OFFICE NO THEATRE
7-May-24	Future	Add bike lanes and racks
7-May-24	Future	restore elbert square
7-May-24	Future	no hotels, no big city offices, no private management
7-May-24	Future	add new park and public green space and underground parking
7-May-24	Future	MIXED INCOME HOUSING ON NEW ROADS
7-May-24	Future	restore elbert square
7-May-24	Future	ballroom with up to date infrastructure
7-May-24	Future	keep theatre
7-May-24	Future	more green space to cool down the city
7-May-24	Future	childrens dance recitals. celebrities, church plays
7-May-24	Future	if office space is needed, use arena, not theatre
7-May-24	Future	focus on historic preservation restoration
7-May-24	Future	Restore oglethorpe plan
7-May-24	Future	No office building
7-May-24	Future	mixed use building
7-May-24	Future	Affordable housing 80% ami or less
7-May-24	Future	underground parking, establish buildings that pay taxes,
7-May-24	Future	civic center and ballroom remain the same
7-May-24	Future	restore theatre for vitsl community use
7-May-24	Future	green space for pickleball tournaments
7-May-24	Future	keep theatre
7-May-24	Future	housing, housing, housing
7-May-24	Future	no to low income housing
7-May-24	Future	no new housing
7-May-24	Future	parking
7-May-24	Future	city offices space should NOT be included in this project
7-May-24	Future	keep it all
7-May-24	Future	this project is a violation of section 7.8 (10a). restoration of oglethorpe is the option
7-May-24	Facility	Keep theatre
7-May-24	Facility	restore elbert square
7-May-24	Facility	no offices, protect historic district
7-May-24	Facility	will the building be compatible with the environment
7-May-24	Facility	no more office spaces

Written Comments during Public Meetings

7-May-24	Facility	theres is a need for JMT to remain
7-May-24	Facility	theatre needs to be renovated or replaced
7-May-24	Facility	keep building and parking forever
7-May-24	Facility	keep arena
7-May-24	Facility	restore theatre
7-May-24	Facility	science center? childrens museum?
7-May-24	Facility	appropriate backstage for performers
7-May-24	Facility	remodel DO NOT DESTROY
7-May-24	Facility	commercial kitchen for catering
7-May-24	Facility	housing for low and middle income
7-May-24	Facility	keep thetrea keep green space remodel sqaure
7-May-24	Facility	KEEP ARENA! ICE SKATING CLASSES ONLY HERE
7-May-24	Facility	Arena pop up businesses?
7-May-24	Facility	Keep theatre
7-May-24	Facility	Keep theatre
7-May-24	Facility	no office space, restore town
7-May-24	Facility	consult with IATSE 320 we have info that will help
7-May-24	Facility	expand theatre
7-May-24	Facility	Establish line of communication with stage workerds
7-May-24	Facility	rooms for art events
7-May-24	Facility	can't support something without cost estimates since we pay taxes
7-May-24	Facility	keep theatre its needed
7-May-24	Facility	more grocery stores
7-May-24	Facility	do we need more buildings where homeless can set up camp
7-May-24	Facility	teardown theatre
7-May-24	Facility	follow u.l.i plan
7-May-24	Facility	make theatre a world class center for major cities to perform
7-May-24	Facility	don't prioritize parking
7-May-24	Facility	explore keeping the arena
7-May-24	Facility	savannah NEEDS a performing arts center
7-May-24	Facility	keep flyover to make traffic flow
7-May-24	Facility	housing units need to be implemented in the plan
7-May-24	Facility	tear down thetre
7-May-24	Facility	LEGACY MATTERS!
7-May-24	Facility	keep theatre
7-May-24	Community	No More Office Space Downtown
7-May-24	Community	There's been effort to restore other squares, why not this one?
7-May-24	Community	improve theatre, add housing
7-May-24	Community	online surveys please
7-May-24	Community	historic plan needs to be respected
7-May-24	Community	community=people. housing is people
7-May-24	Community	keep theatre, add affordabled housing
7-May-24	Community	no office space please. more green space needed
7-May-24	Community	only beautiful buildings
7-May-24	Community	cars ARE NOT community. Do not design around cars
7-May-24	Community	design around people
7-May-24	Community	we want our green spaces
7-May-24	Community	parking for residents and theatre are 100% needed
7-May-24	Community	restore oglethrope plan
7-May-24	Community	garden an outdoor greenspace
7-May-24	Community	keep theatre it is vital community use
7-May-24	Community	DO NOT DESTROY OUR ALMAMATER
7-May-24	Community	Restore the arena
7-May-24	Community	arena should be art center
7-May-24	Community	green space
7-May-24	Community	pop up businesses site
7-May-24	Community	bulldoze the theatre
7-May-24	Community	render the legacy of savannah
7-May-24	Community	indoor communal space is needed
7-May-24	Community	no office building
7-May-24	Community	any new builds should be "savannah style"
7-May-24	Community	mixed income community
7-May-24	Community	sell the whole site add housing
7-May-24	Community	housing of various sizes
7-May-24	Community	event venue for community
7-May-24	Community	no office building
7-May-24	Community	art venue for the arts
7-May-24	Community	leave the culture alone
7-May-24	Community	performing arts hall is needed. preserve the culture of the city
7-May-24	Community	opposed to this proposal
7-May-24	Community	no lodginq
7-May-24	Community	the theatre name should remian
7-May-24	Community	restore oglethrope plan
7-May-24	Community	housing is most important. People over parking
7-May-24	Community	partial restoration to the squares
7-May-24	Community	housing and retial in repurposed square lots
7-May-24	Community	keep the theatre and civic center together.
7-May-24	Community	we need a theatre
7-May-24	Community	traffic WITHOUT the flyover would make traffic more than the nightmare it is
7-May-24	Community	no office building
7-May-24	Community	restore square to allow for middle income housing
7-May-24	Community	support the civic center
7-May-24	Community	100% on board with keeping the theatre
7-May-24	Community	keep civic center in tact
7-May-24	Community	housing
7-May-24	Community	needs to be affordabilty contract on housing
7-May-24	Community	tear it all down and create a mixed use space with majority mixed income hosuing
7-May-24	Community	little green spaces and indoor timid spaces
7-May-24	Community	we need to be able to LIVE HERE not land developers taking our culture
7-May-24	Community	keep theatre
7-May-24	Community	historic plan is good for our small businesses

Written Comments during Public Meetings

7-May-24	Community	downtown parking necessary, space needs to be repaired not demo
7-May-24	Community	you ask "what do you want to see" when you already have a plan..
7-May-24	Community	keep culture for kids events and community outreach
7-May-24	Community	theatre is needed, restoration makes the most sense
7-May-24	City Table	Save the theater; valuable asset with the fly tower, hydraulics, etc. The sound should be brought back to what it was when it was originally designed.
7-May-24	City Table	Restore Elbert Square
7-May-24	City Table	Savannah is a pedestrian city and should stay that way.
7-May-24	City Table	Have an international competition for the design of the area; make it open-ended for what's proposed (height, mass, Oglethorpe Plan).
7-May-24	City Table	Engage professionals for a top-quality economic analysis of the site.
7-May-24	City Table	Convert the arena to a recreational facility with workout rooms, banquet hall, and breakout rooms.
7-May-24	City Table	Tell SCAD that the City will pay the taxes, want to keep it for our historical heritage (PILOT)
16-May-24	Chat comments	A lot more to consider including the future potential; There is no need for City COuncil to rush a timeline.
16-May-24	Chat comments	So we have agreed that the Civic Center needs to be demolished. The downtown area needs parking and I was wondering if a parking structure could be apart of this plan.
16-May-24	Chat comments	The mayor had said he wanted to make a decision at the end of May
16-May-24	Chat comments	What is the next decision to be determined?
16-May-24	Chat comments	I believe that the theater and ballroom should stay. If renovations were made on these structures how long would it take.
16-May-24	Chat comments	Based on the 3 options - Where can we submit additional feedback?
16-May-24	Chat comments	Have a finance plan been prepared for each option
16-May-24	Chat comments	Is there an estimate cap on the budget of this lengthy project?
16-May-24	Chat comments	Will any deed restrictions be placed on the restored residential areas?
16-May-24	Chat comments	Thank you!! Serious & Transparent.
18-May-24	Future	Transportation that is accessible to our public transportation
18-May-24	Future	Retain greenspace where office space is being proposed
18-May-24	Future	keep greenspace on oglethorpe side
18-May-24	Future	Parking
18-May-24	Future	Draw off SKATING RINK FOR COMMUNITY USE
18-May-24	Future	Need ADA Parking
18-May-24	Future	Ballroom used for a lot of events!
18-May-24	Future	Ballroom expansion is needed
18-May-24	Future	NO MILLION DOLLAR TOWNHOMES!
18-May-24	Future	NO OFFICE SPACE ON OGLETHORPE
18-May-24	Future	loss of current activities at arena is a concern
18-May-24	Future	new arena-not accessible to kids (only by car and don't take cash)
18-May-24	Future	no complaints
18-May-24	Future	outdoor performance space
18-May-24	Future	create ways in which low wealth in the neighborhoods have same access
18-May-24	Future	lean into local art
18-May-24	Future	concerns about loss of parking
18-May-24	Future	artistic space- all should be welcome
18-May-24	Future	remove arena
18-May-24	Future	hybrid housing, affordable and market rate would be groundbreaking
18-May-24	Future	keep greenspace on oglethorpe side
18-May-24	Future	parking capacity
18-May-24	Future	arena torn down is good
18-May-24	Future	restaurants inside theatre lobby
18-May-24	Future	enlarge ballroom
18-May-24	Community	Jury is out on future community build as we have already improved tremendously
18-May-24	Community	Keep the theatre and lose the arena, relocate theatre to mlk
18-May-24	Community	Art gallery for old arena, arts district on mlk
18-May-24	Community	inviting artists
18-May-24	Community	cultural panel classes
18-May-24	Community	save the theatre
18-May-24	Community	oppurtunity for city to highlight black history, boom arts and cultural perspective
18-May-24	Community	restore streets from enqinal plan
18-May-24	Community	oppurtunity to create a master plan keeping the theatre and creating workforce housing
18-May-24	Community	collaboration with SCAD or local schools
18-May-24	Community	Local spots only on new lots
18-May-24	Community	Public health center
18-May-24	Community	Important to retain MLKs presence
18-May-24	Community	How can we be sure that MLK performing arts district is the district? signs? etc?
18-May-24	Community	Secure parking space, restaurant space inside affordable housing, outside theatre
18-May-24	Community	A cultural aspect needs to be retained
18-May-24	Community	Build this up as an arts area
18-May-24	Community	make sure community to use theatre (affordable)
18-May-24	Community	education center, after school programs, volunteer oppurtunities, indoor greenhouse, shopping
18-May-24	Facility	A civic auditorium (the theatre) must be retained (arena can go)
18-May-24	Facility	Before pushing for "cashless" facilities, consider community members without ID/ CREDIT CARD ACCESS
18-May-24	Facility	Have artist space in the rooms upstairs NOT OFFICES
18-May-24	Facility	The city should retain control of the buildings not private corps
18-May-24	Facility	The new arena takes precedent over the old arena
18-May-24	Facility	The old arena can't compete with the new market
18-May-24	Facility	Respecting "the space" in the facility
18-May-24	Facility	Community needs an education center. After school programs?
18-May-24	Facility	Where would events such as "back to school" go if no arena? Must be large space to accomodate needs
18-May-24	Facility	Liberty gARAGE CLOSES TOO EARLY! Cars end up in car jail overnight
18-May-24	Facility	Is the arena not viable for use?
18-May-24	Facility	Bring back workforce housing with parking underneath, subsidies, provisions to help attain
18-May-24	Facility	Outdoor performance space? solves greenspace and performance needs
18-May-24	Facility	Places for hospitality workers to live and walk would be a game-changer
18-May-24	Facility	If skating rink is moved to EnMarket, how do close residents access cashless facility?
18-May-24	Facility	Savannah is an artistic city, can it be used in a new way?
18-May-24	Facility	Save theatre but work with you have to save money
18-May-24	Facility	facilities are utilized because they are affordable for non profit use
20-May-24	Facility	Savannah Cultural Arts Center is NEARLY USELESS because it has NO PARKING (eldely, handicap,others) are NOT goign to walk from the other side of the old civiv center. The north side of rh old civic center should be a parking deck.
20-May-24	Facility	Inside JMT Lobby

Written Comments during Public Meetings

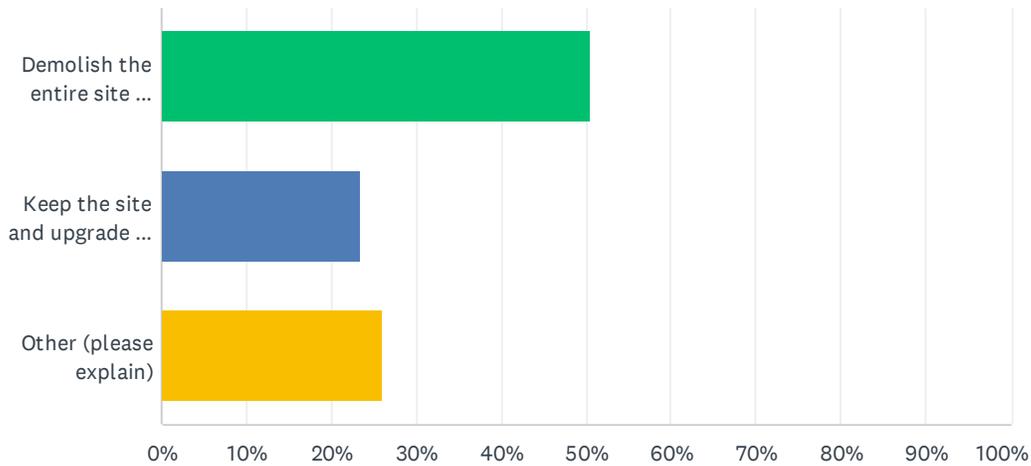
20-May-24	Facility	Create a small space to serve as a museum of Johnny's Heritage & musical influence..(interactive space)
20-May-24	Facility	Renovate theatre for Picmonic shows
20-May-24	Facility	Partially restore Elvis Grid
20-May-24	Facility	Develop activities into residential area.
20-May-24	Facility	Restore the Johnny Mercer Theatre
20-May-24	Facility	Underground parking under the newly created lots around the theatre
20-May-24	Facility	Revitalize the arena for use: 1. youth activities, 2. educational activities
20-May-24	Facility	Retain JMT and renovate it. The lobby and ballroom
20-May-24	Facility	Restore Jefferson St, Perry St, and Perry Ln
20-May-24	Facility	Mixed use and affordable housing in restored blocks.
20-May-24	Facility	NO HOTELS NO SCAD
20-May-24	Facility	NO HOTELS Underground Parking
20-May-24	Facility	The Oglethorpe Plan is no longer relevant to the present city demographic. Just as demolishing the union station disenfranchise a certain population.
20-May-24	Facility	Returning the surrounding Civic Center areas will do the same, keep the civic center and put the funds into a science museum.
20-May-24	Facility	Oglethorpe plan may have been useful for the initial area-- but today it would only serve to half of the city and disenfranchise others.
20-May-24	Facility	Maybe also a recreation/community center in restored blocks.
20-May-24	Facility	Possibly some underground parking to compensate for lost spaces and public transit connections
20-May-24	Facility	Architecture of new buildings to mimic Civic Center arches at top
20-May-24	Facility	The Johnny Mercer Theatre needs to be saved and restored to its original attributes
20-May-24	Facility	Out of town performers have come to perform at the theater. It is a treasure.
20-May-24	Facility	The Johnny Mercer Theatre at the MLK JR Center
20-May-24	Facility	Legacy is not just in a name. That's just brown nosing
20-May-24	Facility	I witnessed a Bait & Switch
20-May-24	Facility	Overview presentations said there are over 3 options of what to do with the Civic Center. Yet in facility- were told arena is not
20-May-24	Facility	Keep the JM theatre upgrade the lobby and ballroom, demolish the old arena
20-May-24	Facility	Maintain current St for future residential use
20-May-24	Facility	My concern is that as a municipal/public project that thus project serves the residents of Savannah/The commercial/tourist transit interest.
20-May-24	Facility	Keep the theatre- but renovate it as a performing arts center. Richard Cheon
20-May-24	Facility	On recreated lots, could hotels and apartments be prevented from living and operating there?
20-May-24	Facility	Keep and update the theatre with its many positive features.
20-May-24	Facility	Rename remainder Civic Center without the arena for MLK
20-May-24	Facility	A display or exhibit about the legacy of the area; old city auditorium, MLK, Johnny Mercer, current CC etc
20-May-24	Facility	Underground parking Restored streets with mixed use development and affordable housing. NO HOTELS OR SCAD
20-May-24	Facility	Arena could be used for high school sports
20-May-24	Facility	Arena NOT Profitable
20-May-24	Facility	For 50 years this area is where everyone graduates, but it'd be prohibitively expensive to rehab, its not unique anymore.
20-May-24	Facility	This feels like a bait & switch
20-May-24	Facility	So much history here, particularly with the JMC restore the streets
20-May-24	Facility	Keep the Theatre- but renovate it as a performing arts
20-May-24	Facility	Pictures dont include area
20-May-24	Facility	We need something for people who live here year round not hotels or SCAD
20-May-24	Facility	Is there a way to still utilize the arena (floor) for event rentals that 2nd and 3rd floors cannot hold or seat comfortably?
20-May-24	Facility	(this was agreed with) "Allow my wife and I to re-open our AirB&B in vicotry heights before more hotels - Mark Livreen
20-May-24	Facility	Mark Longreen District 3 thinks the restoration of Oglethorpe plan and removing and Re---- civic center that we have remarked (sounds great)
20-May-24	Facility	As noted in the presentation... Savannah's downtown is the regions downtown
20-May-24	Facility	Do something Tasteful with the theatre rehab, it tells a story
20-May-24	Facility	Shallow slope makes it hard to see stage
20-May-24	Facility	No one person or group or zipcode has "dibs" on the fate of the JMT/Civic Center. We are ALL stakeholders.
20-May-24	Facility	If we keep the theatre please consider parking situation
20-May-24	Community	Jury is Out on future community build up for this section due to ewe have improved tremendously already in this arena.
20-May-24	Community	Keep the theatre and lose the arena Rename the theatre to MLK
20-May-24	Community	Cultural Panel Classes
20-May-24	Community	Opportunity for city to highlight black history from a arts and cultural perspective.
20-May-24	Community	Opportunity to create a master plan keeping theatre and creating workforce business.
20-May-24	Community	Art Gallery for old arena arts district MLK ... Debut
20-May-24	Community	Inviting Artist
20-May-24	Community	Show the theatre
20-May-24	Community	Restore the streets from the original plan
20-May-24	Community	Collaboration SCAD or local schools
20-May-24	Community	local spots on new lots
20-May-24	Community	public health center
20-May-24	Community	secure parking space, residential space inside, affordable housing, outside theatre
20-May-24	Community	Make sure community can use theatre (affordable)
20-May-24	Community	Education center
20-May-24	Community	Afterschool Programs
20-May-24	Community	Volunteering opportunities
20-May-24	Community	Indoor greenhouse
20-May-24	Community	shopping outlets
20-May-24	Community	Important to retain MLK's presence
20-May-24	Community	How can we be sure that the MLK performing arts center signs etc
20-May-24	Community	A cultural aspect needs to remain
20-May-24	Community	Build this up as an arts area - public art
20-May-24	Future	Parking Capacity
20-May-24	Future	Area torn down is good
20-May-24	Future	Have CAT an intern part of this process
20-May-24	Future	In honor of restaurants inside the theatre lobby
20-May-24	Future	Enlarge the ballroom
20-May-24	Future	Loss of current activities at arena a concern
20-May-24	Future	New arena not accessible to kids (only by car) DONT TAKE CASH
20-May-24	Future	No complaints like the plan
20-May-24	Future	Colliseum / outdoor amphitheatre
20-May-24	Future	create ways in which low wealth communities in the surrounding neighborhoods
20-May-24	Future	Lean into local art new ideas for the future
20-May-24	Future	concerns about loss of architecture

Written Comments during Public Meetings

20-May-24	Future	Artistic space, all should be welcome
20-May-24	Future	remove arena
20-May-24	Future	Hybrid housing affordable and market rate would be ground breaking
20-May-24	Future	Mix of market rate and affordable housing
20-May-24	Future	Mixed use housing MTW a subsidy attend for affordability
20-May-24	Future	Retain green space where office buildings proposed
20-May-24	Future	Transportation that is accesible to all public transportation
20-May-24	Future	Keep the greenspace on Ogogethorpe side
20-May-24	Future	Draw of ice skating downtown esp for city youth
20-May-24	Future	parking
20-May-24	Future	Need ADA parking
20-May-24	Future	More accesibility to enmarket patios
20-May-24	Future	Transportation NOT JUST Art EVENTS
20-May-24	Future	No office on Oglethorpe
20-May-24	Future	NO million dollar townhomes!
20-May-24	Future	Ballroom expansion is NEEDED
20-May-24	Future	Ballroom is used for a lot of events
20-May-24	Future	A Civic auditorium must be retained ---> Johnny Mercer Theatre (Arena on go)
20-May-24	Future	Before rushing for cashless facilities consider thr community that may not have ID/Credit Card/etc for access
20-May-24	Future	Have artist space in the rooms upstairs not offices
20-May-24	Future	The city should retain control of these trees (no private sites) too many assets lost in 2018/2019
20-May-24	Future	The odd arena cant compete with market
20-May-24	Future	The new arena takes precedent over old arena
20-May-24	Future	Respecting "The space" in the facility
20-May-24	Future	Community needs an educational center,
20-May-24	Future	Afterschool Programs
20-May-24	Future	The Facilities are utilized becasue they are affordable to rent for non-profits etc.
20-May-24	Future	Save the theater but work with what you have you save money
20-May-24	Future	Small screen in balroom
20-May-24	Future	Savannah is an artistic city. Can it be used in a new way artistcally? Can it be re-imagined
20-May-24	Future	When would events such as "Back to School" happen if arena goes away? There needs to be a large space to accomodate needs
20-May-24	Future	Is the arena an absoutle must for use?
20-May-24	Future	What are the hurdles for public use of the ballroom?
20-May-24	Future	Savannahians often feel they are being displaced.
20-May-24	Future	Liberty Garage closes too early. Car ends up locked in "Car Jail" overnight
20-May-24	Future	Bring local workforce housing
20-May-24	Future	possibly w/ parking
20-May-24	Future	Provisions are keep it attainable
20-May-24	Future	What about an outdoor performance space..greenspace and performance needs
20-May-24	Future	Places for hospitality workers to live around ..walk to work would be a game changer
20-May-24	Future	If the skating rink is moved to Enmarket how to close residents access a cashless facility
20-May-24	Future	Arena tear down is good
20-May-24	Future	Save the theater
20-May-24	Future	Museums, art district, canvasses, rotating murals

Q1 What do you think should happen to the entire Civic Center site?

Answered: 303 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Demolish the entire site and start from scratch	50.50% 153
Keep the site and upgrade the facility for better use	23.43% 71
Other (please explain)	26.07% 79
TOTAL	303

#	OTHER (PLEASE EXPLAIN)	DATE
1	Do a major redo on th4e Johnny Mercer, a la Gaillard Center in Charleston, making ot a world call performance center of ~2000 seats. Pay for this with a 2% motel/hotel tax.	5/15/2024 7:51 PM
2	keep only the Johnny Mercer Theater	5/15/2024 2:26 PM
3	Keep theatre	5/15/2024 8:49 AM
4	A hybrid of the two but definitely restore the adjacent square and Oglethorpe plan with all housing.	5/15/2024 4:50 AM
5	By maintaining and upgrading the Johnny Mercer Theater & demolish big the arena.	5/14/2024 3:55 PM
6	Repurposing for better use of public space for visitors and residents of Savannah	5/14/2024 1:18 PM
7	Demolish and return to squares, trust and tything lots	5/14/2024 11:41 AM
8	Demolish all but the Johnny Mercer Theater and return the rest of the area to the Oglethorpe Plan including Elbert Square. Renovate the exterior of the Johnny Mercer Theater to match the desired historical context. Establish additional green space such as a green corridor between Orleans and Elbert, around the Mercer Theater.	5/14/2024 10:35 AM
9	I am in favor of restoring the Oglethorpe plan but would like to know more about saving just the Mercer theater - but not including any new parking garages etc. If it is cost prohibitive I would be interested in building a nice performing arts center somewhere else.	5/14/2024 10:32 AM
10	Keep the Johnny Mercer Theater & demolish the rest.	5/14/2024 10:13 AM
11	I would like to see plans for a demolish and start from scratch vs. keep the site and upgrade. How can one decide without a comparison and potential funding costs.	5/14/2024 9:36 AM

Downtown Neighborhood Association Member Survey FUTURE OF THE SAVANNAH CIVIC CENTER

SurveyMonkey

12	Keep only the Johnny Mercer and demolish the rest of building	5/14/2024 7:55 AM
13	Create a new square for Johnny Mercer	5/14/2024 6:26 AM
14	Return site to the Oglethorpe plan	5/13/2024 11:27 PM
15	Use it for shelter for the unhoused	5/13/2024 10:10 PM
16	Keep the civic center building and build free housing in the parking lot area	5/13/2024 9:38 PM
17	Keep the theater but demolish the Civic Center.	5/13/2024 9:35 PM
18	Oglethorpe Plan build the theater somewhere else	5/13/2024 9:34 PM
19	Office and underground parking garage. Keeping the site and upgrade the building for the community and all the tourism.	5/13/2024 7:34 PM
20	Demolish all and replace streets ,lanes and square to Oglethorpe plan	5/13/2024 4:13 PM
21	Restore at least one of the lost squares!	5/13/2024 3:36 PM
22	Keep the Johnny Mercer Theater	5/13/2024 3:34 PM
23	I am in favor of restoring the original square and getting rid or tearing down the Civic Center	5/13/2024 2:21 PM
24	Explore keeping Johnny Mercer Theater. Demolish parking lots and civic center arena.	5/13/2024 2:14 PM
25	Want to explore what it means to restore just the Mercer theater. I am not interested in keeping the parking lots by the civic center.	5/13/2024 2:06 PM
26	Only demolish the civic center and parking lot.	5/13/2024 11:47 AM
27	Keep Mercer and restore Oglethorpe plan	5/13/2024 11:42 AM
28	I prefer demolishing the arena, upgrading the Johnny Mercer Theater, and restoring the original street design to the extent possible (i.e., removing the parking lot and creating new lots for residential/commercial buildings).	5/13/2024 11:12 AM
29	I would like the civic center demolished, the square restored and the Johnny Mercer Theatre improved and renovated. Savannah needs an auditorium of that type and size.	5/13/2024 10:42 AM
30	Am not that concerned. Will trust city council's decision. Just don't put another city office building there. Johnny Mercer theater or green space.	5/13/2024 10:16 AM
31	keep the theater get rid of the arena no office building fronting Oglethorpe.	5/13/2024 10:09 AM
32	Keep the Johnny Mercer Theatre and upgrade. Build a small Johnny Mercer Museum near the Theatre with a nice walkway connecting them... Bring the bronze of Johnny Mercer from City Market to the location and rebuild a nice square with trees, bushes, lots of benches and some tables for people to sit and relax and enjoy the site.	5/13/2024 9:31 AM
33	Keep and upgrade the JM theatre and demolish the rest.	5/13/2024 9:21 AM
34	Tear down the MLK Jr Arena	5/13/2024 8:36 AM
35	Return the site to its original design as a city square with green space.	5/13/2024 8:33 AM
36	Turn into stalls for an open market. Could set up different types of vendors by section...arts & crafts, food, local farms, etc... A good model is the Time Out "mall" in Lisbon, Portugal. This provides a climate-controlled area for year round use.	5/13/2024 8:24 AM
37	I would not keep the arena.	5/12/2024 10:50 PM
38	If there are portions that are representative of this related period of architecture that could be incorporated into the new vision that would ideal thought restoration of the Oglethorpe's original plan should be at the core of all we do and build upon in the Landmark District, IMO.	5/12/2024 5:18 PM
39	keeping JMT would be acceptable; otherwise, demolish the who site and restore historic nature. NO GOV'T OFFICES, NO PARKING LOTS	5/12/2024 4:23 PM
40	We need a concert hall larger than Lucas but smaller than Enmark. I think keeping it & refurbish makes more sense. The land would end up being used for another hotel or more condos. We need a concert hall that size!	5/12/2024 3:47 PM

41	Demolish arena and renovate Mercer Theater.	5/12/2024 3:43 PM
42	Keep the Mercer Theater because of the perfect size for a concert. The arena that was built is not acoustically built. It was built for a sports team.	5/12/2024 2:14 PM
43	Original square	5/12/2024 2:01 PM
44	?	5/12/2024 1:49 PM
45	Keep the Johnny Mercer Theatre and restore Elbert square.	5/12/2024 1:42 PM
46	Keep the Johnny Mercer Theater	5/12/2024 1:05 PM
47	Demolish entire and restore historic city plan. Prepare the site for private development with carefully thought-out controls.	5/12/2024 12:42 PM
48	Keep the Johnny Mercer Theater. Demolish the Civic center and restore original streets and lots where possible	5/12/2024 12:18 PM
49	Keep the Mercer Theater, tear down the civic center, and build out residential to better reflect the community and neighborhood aspect of downtown.	5/12/2024 11:08 AM
50	Keep and upgrade the theater and demolish the arena. Make parking for theater larger in the site of the demolished arena.	5/12/2024 11:06 AM
51	I would demolish the building and re-establish the square. With what SCAD is doing to the historic district we should try to preserve some part of it	5/12/2024 10:46 AM
52	I actually like the City's plan, because we need a symphony theater and the buildings now and recently being built in the Landmark District distract from our unique architectural heritage.	5/12/2024 10:42 AM
53	Keep the theatre, redevelop the remainder of site with according to original plan. Retail on street level with affordable units above. Luxury housing is NOT needed as there is already enough inventory.	5/12/2024 10:22 AM
54	Demolish the arena, maintain & upgrade the theatre & expand parking lot with enough spaces for people attending the theatre.	5/12/2024 9:41 AM
55	Restore Oglethorpe Plan and restore Johnny Mercer theater.	5/12/2024 9:32 AM
56	Demolish Civic Center and keep/update theater. Remove large surface parking. Do not waste reclaimed space for office buildings or under used community spaces like the Cultural Arts Center or the space adjacent to the Enmarket Arena.	5/12/2024 9:08 AM
57	Demolish except for the JM theater	5/12/2024 7:06 AM
58	Demolish everything but keep the Johnny Mercer Theater and upgrade it.	5/11/2024 9:14 PM
59	knock down the arena and restore the square. Keep the theater and upgrade it	5/11/2024 8:27 PM
60	keep Mercer for the SavPhil use and demolish the rest	5/11/2024 5:21 PM
61	Johnny Mercer stays and the land that is currently the Civic Center demolished and returned to the original Oglethorpe Plan	5/11/2024 4:48 PM
62	include a venue like Johnny Mercer	5/11/2024 4:47 PM
63	The arena should be demolished and used for better purposes.	5/11/2024 4:06 PM
64	Demolish entire site and rebuild according to the Oglethorpe Plan. If possible build a new theater. There should be NO city office building; that is a boneheaded use of this valuable and historic property -- as well as a loss of tax revenue.	5/11/2024 4:02 PM
65	This should be a historical structure and should remain in place. Fix it up, it's a classic theater that is strongly needed here for theatrical events here in Savannah. It was my first introduction into philharmonic concerts and a much better place than the arena for concerts and theatrical events.	5/11/2024 3:59 PM
66	Create the Johnny Mercer Amphitheater with an emphasis on historic square styled aesthetics.	5/11/2024 3:55 PM
67	Demolish and revert to Oglethorpe Plan	5/11/2024 3:55 PM

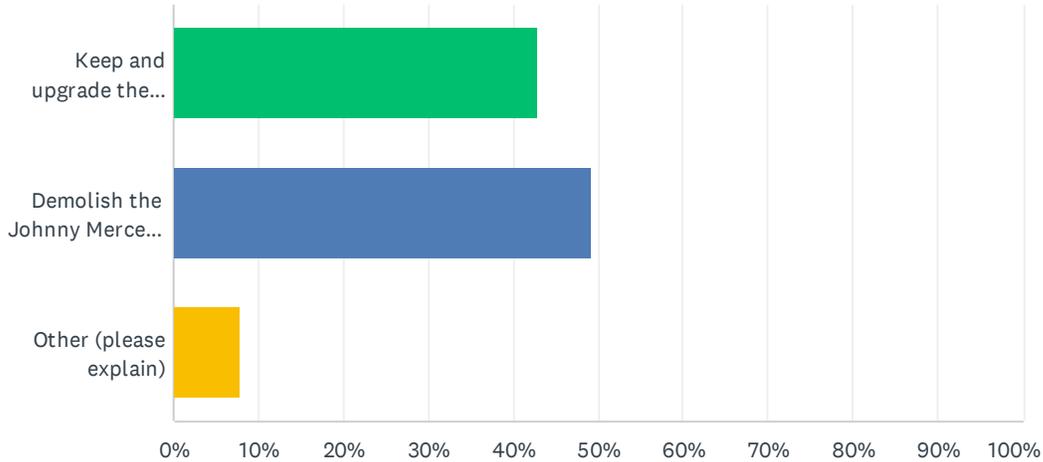
Downtown Neighborhood Association Member Survey FUTURE OF THE SAVANNAH CIVIC CENTER

SurveyMonkey

68	Please see below.	5/11/2024 3:48 PM
69	Demolish the arena and keep the Johnny Mercer Theater.	5/11/2024 3:48 PM
70	Follow the recommendations of the ULI report.	5/11/2024 3:47 PM
71	Preserve The Johnny Mercer Theater, work to reimagine it	5/11/2024 3:46 PM
72	Go back to Oglethorpe plan.	5/11/2024 3:34 PM
73	I want oak trees planted and a square created with homes around it. Let the city build offices somewhere outside of the downtown area like maybe where savannah mall is currently. Keep the johnny mercer theater and remodel it.	5/11/2024 3:25 PM
74	Demolish everything but the Johnny Mercer Theater. No municipal or city offices.	5/11/2024 3:24 PM
75	I would like to see the lost square reestablished. Whatever they have to do to reestablish the lost square in its original location.	5/11/2024 3:22 PM
76	Keep the Mercer Theater. Do not build City offices on the remainder of the site.	5/11/2024 3:21 PM
77	Replace the square per the Oglethorpe plan design	5/11/2024 3:19 PM
78	keep the theater	5/11/2024 3:17 PM
79	Demolish the existing entire structure and sell off the land to create more housing and neighborhood/pedestrian-friendly space.	5/11/2024 2:34 PM

Q2 Do you think the Johnny Mercer Theater should be kept or demolished?

Answered: 303 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Keep and upgrade the Johnny Mercer Theater	42.90%	130
Demolish the Johnny Mercer Theater	49.17%	149
Other (please explain)	7.92%	24
TOTAL		303

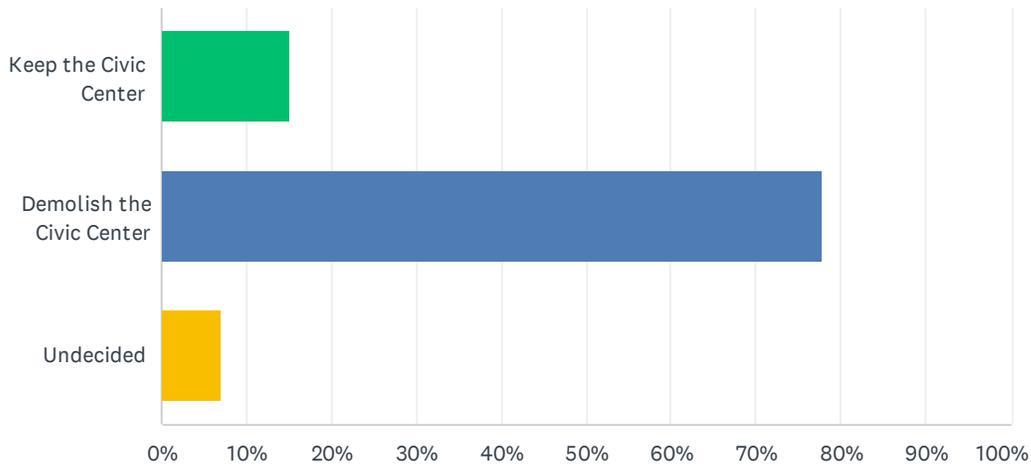
#	OTHER (PLEASE EXPLAIN)	DATE
1	This size venue is needed and it's probably less costly to renovate. It's ugly though.	5/15/2024 4:50 AM
2	Upgrade both interior and exterior, with the exterior redesigned to match the historic context.	5/14/2024 10:35 AM
3	Interested in learning more about the cost - whether it is beneficial or money would be better spent starting from scratch in a new location.	5/14/2024 10:32 AM
4	All we have seen is the first choice with no price comparison. I am definitely in favor of a downtown theater acoustically excellent for music and other events that would have about 1800-2000 seats.	5/14/2024 9:36 AM
5	Build a museum to honor Johnny Mercer with a restaurant and bar and underground parking and bring the Johnny Mercer Bronze from City Market and move it to the Johnny Mercer new square... add trees, bushes, beautiful landscaping, benches and some tables with benches for people to enjoy!	5/14/2024 6:26 AM
6	The theatre needs a complete overhaul, especially for sound and acoustics	5/14/2024 2:18 AM
7	Only upgrade it IF it's possible to improve the acoustics, otherwise -- tear it down and rebuild a better one.	5/13/2024 10:46 PM
8	Leave it alone	5/13/2024 9:38 PM
9	Rebuild a new Johnny Mercer Theatre	5/13/2024 4:13 PM
10	Not sure about J.M. Theater as the size allows for certain types of performers that won't work for the EnMarket or Old Savannah Theater. There is a need for that size theater but still would	5/13/2024 2:21 PM

like to see the original Ogelthorpe Plan restored

11	I want to understand the costs involved - I like the idea of a downtown arts concert/orchestra center that I can walk to - however if the costs are prohibitive to restore then perhaps another option.	5/13/2024 2:06 PM
12	The cost of upgrading a theater that does not meet the current and future needs of the community is a waste of taxpayers money	5/13/2024 1:31 PM
13	I wish you could keep it but being where it is would make it so we cannot go back to the Oglethorpe plan. With Savannah being on the map like we are it might be time to upgrade the theatre anyway.	5/13/2024 11:50 AM
14	On the basis of location, parking and costs to renovate, if the data justifies the need for the theatre space then it along with City municipalities, should be supported but also relocated. The Landmark District can not be everything to everyone; the stakeholders need to discern what is essential for the future of the Landmark District. From there, all decisions should be guided. The lack of long term vision is destroying what is a national treasure - it's about more than just Savannah or Chatham County or even the state. We are mere caretakers for future generations - just as others have done for us. Without the Landmark Designation and the residents and other stakeholders investing in it, how can Savannah's rich history, survive much less thrive?	5/12/2024 5:18 PM
15	could go either ay on the JMT. If keeping improve greatly.	5/12/2024 4:23 PM
16	Keep the Mercer. See above. The size is perfect. Arena is too big, Cultural center is too small. You can walk to the Mercer Theater safely from anywhere downtown. Ample parking, too.	5/12/2024 2:14 PM
17	?	5/12/2024 1:49 PM
18	Build new right capacity venue out in Enmark Arena co-utilizing some of the parking and adjacent landscaping. Include new city office complex in same area.	5/11/2024 5:35 PM
19	include a venue like Johnny Mercer in the master plan	5/11/2024 4:47 PM
20	Build a new theater of comparable size after demolishing the entire site.	5/11/2024 4:37 PM
21	Keep the Johnny Mercer and go back to the original acoustic plans. This venue is a perfect catch-all for artists that may not be able to sell the Enmarket Arena or have scheduling conflicts.	5/11/2024 4:06 PM
22	See above.	5/11/2024 3:55 PM
23	See above.	5/11/2024 3:22 PM
24	Replace the square per the Oglethorpe plan design	5/11/2024 3:19 PM

Q3 Do you think the Civic Center should be kept or demolished?

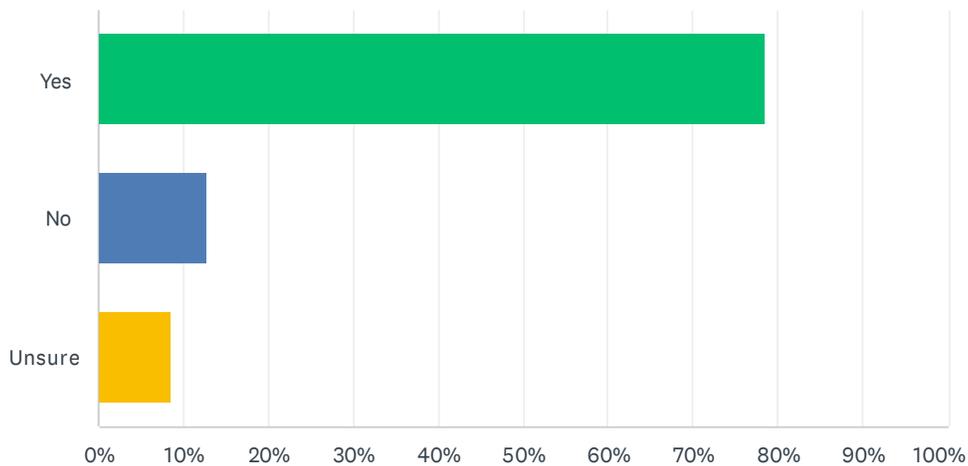
Answered: 303 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Keep the Civic Center	15.18%	46
Demolish the Civic Center	77.89%	236
Undecided	6.93%	21
TOTAL		303

Q4 Would you support a city initiative to revert to the Oglethorpe Plan and restore Elbert Square? Elbert Square is one of two lost squares, represented by a small grassy area today. It is located on Montgomery Street directly across from the Westside entrance to the Civic Center. The square was named for Samuel Elbert, planter and Revolutionary soldier. In 1969, the "Flame of Freedom" was placed here but subsequently moved to Liberty Square in front of the Courthouse. The square was laid out in 1801. {Source: <https://www.savannahga.gov/Facilities/Facility/Details/Elbert-Square-173>}

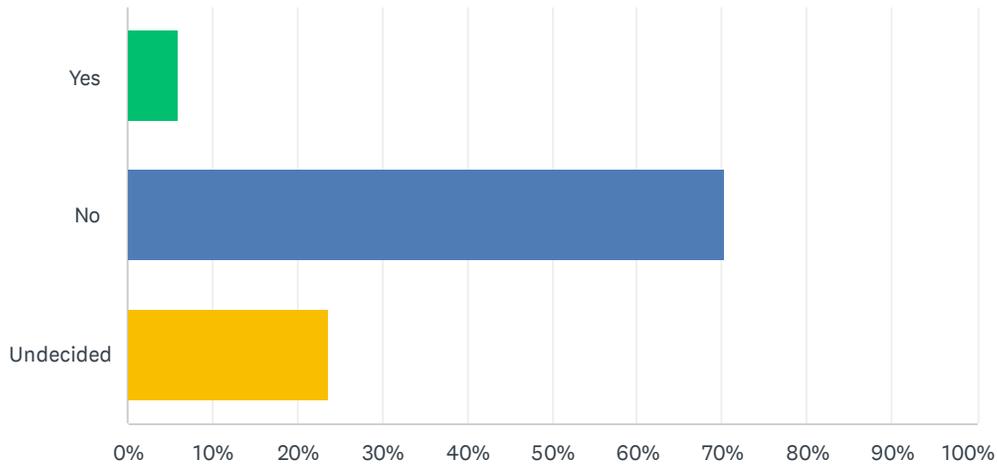
Answered: 303 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	78.55% 238
No	12.87% 39
Unsure	8.58% 26
TOTAL	303

Q5 Regardless of the future developments at the current Civic Center site, do you believe that a City of Savannah municipal building should be constructed along Oglethorpe Avenue?

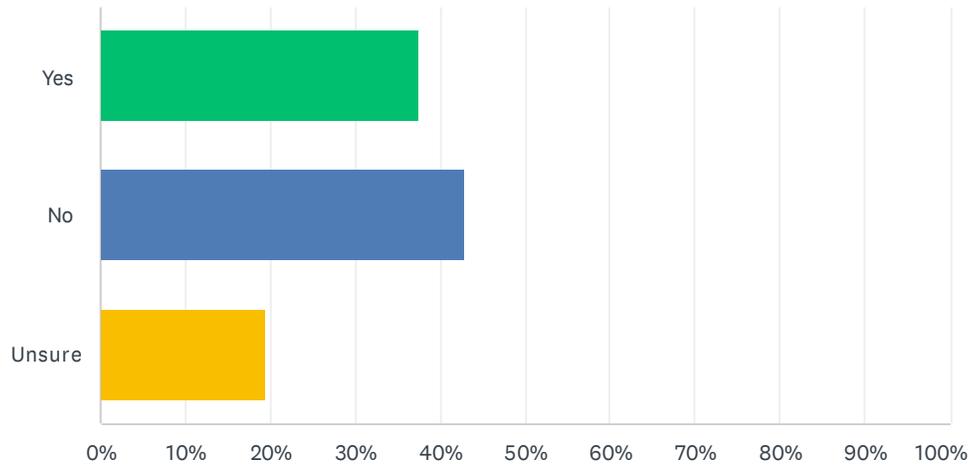
Answered: 303 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	5.94%	18
No	70.30%	213
Undecided	23.76%	72
TOTAL		303

Q6 Would you support the implementation of a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) to fund the construction of a new Johnny Mercer Theater at a different location?

Answered: 303 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	37.62%	114
No	42.90%	130
Unsure	19.47%	59
TOTAL		303

Q7 If you have comments regarding the Civic Center site, please share:

Answered: 142 Skipped: 161

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	NO MORE SPLOST- they never go away!! Find the money or don't under take the project!	5/15/2024 2:26 PM
2	upgrade the civic center. The construction of it was well done, let us see possibilities for it.	5/15/2024 1:32 PM
3	Reestablish the grid and the square. Consider the site for a new theater, but also consider other sites in midtown or the Southside. The cultural arts center for instance, would have better served the community if it weren't located so far downtown.	5/15/2024 1:11 PM
4	I like the idea of restoring the square	5/15/2024 12:46 PM
5	Please do not tear down. Please improve only.	5/15/2024 11:18 AM
6	Civic Center needs to go. Along with elimination of I-16 overpass, a great new residential/retail corridor will open up. Love to save JM, but need to know costs. Opposed to using Historic Savannah to house new public services. Many other places.	5/15/2024 10:59 AM
7	The Civic Center and the Johnny Mercer Blvd are important assets to the community. We need to keep them and renovated them.	5/15/2024 10:55 AM
8	I think the Johnny Mercer theater has historic value of its own and I believe it has been determined that the acoustics can be brought to state of the art. I support keeping and renovating it and providing adequate parking.	5/15/2024 8:49 AM
9	A once in a lifetime opportunity to right a disastrous demolition of the Oglethorpe Plan-restore it!	5/15/2024 6:57 AM
10	This is a once in a century opportunity to do what is right. Restore the plan. Do not sell the property and lease it with an expiration so there is long term revenue from this public property.	5/15/2024 4:50 AM
11	It seems that if we took the money we pay to lease space in Savannah and use that money to upgrade a building the city owns it would be a good investment that will pay dividends in the long run. We could even use the additional savings to upgrade more buildings that are city owned or provide more free options for Savannah Businesses.	5/14/2024 7:52 PM
12	The Johnny Mercer Theater should be kept and restored due to its ideal size and many features not found in most of the state.	5/14/2024 4:18 PM
13	Keep the Johnny Mercer Theater due to its many attributes not found in other theaters in Georgia. Restore the acoustical system back to its original level of high quality which was replaced by one of inferior qualities.	5/14/2024 3:55 PM
14	Our city needs more for residents and visitors.. an aquarium, planetarium and/or (children's) museum would be a huge draw for those living in and visiting Savannah.	5/14/2024 1:18 PM
15	Government offices should NOT be built on property which could return to the tax roles. Build housing, not hotels or vacation rentals. Oglethorpe Plan should be reinstated.	5/14/2024 12:01 PM
16	The Civic Center is ugly, too large, has an LED flashing sign. The area needs to be returned to squares and trust/tything lots	5/14/2024 11:41 AM
17	Sell the lots . I would like tax payers to buy the lots and rebuild the missing square.	5/14/2024 10:56 AM
18	The site should be used to re-create the original square so that Savannah's "Landmark" status is not further threatened.	5/14/2024 10:40 AM
19	I am in favor of full restoration of the original Oglethorpe plan - however would be interested in learning how the Mercer Theater could be fit within this plan in addition to restoring the square and residential townhomes. I would not like to see hotels or large buidings - we need to preserve the feeling of historic downtown in scale and appearance. Townhouse or single home residential and restaurants etc...	5/14/2024 10:32 AM

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20	I think a poor job has been done in laying out the options--both what they would provide at what cost. Lucas is SCAD controlled and only 1200 seats. Enmark Arena is not a good venue for a number of entertainment options. We need a world-class performing arts hall in the historic downtown district to accommodate both local and traveling entertainment options.	5/14/2024 9:36 AM
21	It's imperative we restore the Oglethorpe Plan in this location for many important reasons: Our NHLD status is threatened, increase in tax base, tourism based on historic architecture/plan. Ridiculous to waste this prime real estate on a City bldg as well as a theater where parking is already a huge issue. Build a theatre in a location that needs investment (near arena?) and provide adequate parking!	5/14/2024 9:26 AM
22	A City of Savannah municipal building at the Civic Center site makes no sense. It would preclude the tax generating use of a portion of the property, reduce the space available for housing, increase the traffic load in the area, and be visually incompatible with the character of the area. The city would be better served, and at lower cost, to have a new building out of the historic core of the city.	5/14/2024 8:57 AM
23	Restore Oglethorpe's Plan. Make every transaction transparent-including who is awarded the parcels of property for to purchase. Make it fair for all to purchase. Only sell the property to locals. No speculation. Land division should also be according to Oglethorpe's plan in 60' - 30 - 20 - 15 increments. No hotels. No government (municipal building). Reserve the trust lots for significant public buildings designed via a competition of architects (teamed with a local). Build local.	5/14/2024 8:51 AM
24	Whatever happens, parking, traffic, and SCAD's proposed dormitory expansion on Oglethorpe need to be considered. There is also the possibility of a 110 room hotel being built at Liberty and Tattnall without any captive parking that could add to the existing congestion.	5/14/2024 8:18 AM
25	Would be great to see the town plan restored	5/14/2024 8:00 AM
26	Build a new one on President St near downtown in District 3	5/14/2024 6:26 AM
27	Please try and reuse the johnny mercer but don't replace one ugly building with another ugly building which seems to happen with civic buildings here. Buildings can't be low bid and monumental. Johnny Mercer should be kept by city but managed by a professional management company that will minimize taxpayer cost and maximize best use. Keep mid century character defining features as Savannah does not retain examples from this era.	5/14/2024 3:18 AM
28	Add more green space (restore the square) and add housing for service industry/tourism industry employees.	5/13/2024 10:46 PM
29	Should be paid for by income tax and capital gains tax on the rich, not sales tax or anything that would hurt the poor.	5/13/2024 9:38 PM
30	Build. Affordable. Housing.	5/13/2024 9:36 PM
31	The Civic Center has outlived its' usefulness. This is a chance for the City to come up with a plan that will make the best use possible of this space for the citizens of Savannah. This is also a chance to create something attractive and functional. My fear is that it will take years to improve the site given the City's track record. I am thinking about the band shell in Forsyth Park as an example	5/13/2024 9:35 PM
32	Original Oglethorpe Plan no theater on site , no municipal building on the site , no new taxes	5/13/2024 9:34 PM
33	A small municipal building for citizens to get services downtown should exist. Savannah still needs some semblance of downtown being Savannah..... We miss when we could everything downtown and not drive.	5/13/2024 7:44 PM
34	Since the office buildings were sold on Johnson Square. There's a need for office space and underground parking at this site. Not in the Forsyth Park area and residential area of savannah.	5/13/2024 7:34 PM
35	We thought that the plan to return the Civic Center site back to the original square was the best plan for the historic downtown. Any new theater should be build out near the Enmarket Arena where traffic circulation and parking are much better accommodated.	5/13/2024 7:27 PM
36	revert to the Oglethorpe Plan and restore Elbert Square. Uses within the site should be private, i.e., commercial and/or residential properties that pay property taxes, not tax-exempt or governmental buildings.	5/13/2024 5:55 PM
37	1. Remove the Civic Center facility in its entirety. Find a perimeter location for the Johnny	5/13/2024 5:15 PM

Mercer Theatre and design a facility of similar capacity but with better staging and acoustics. 2. Re-establish the lost section of Oglethorpe plan for affordable residential housing and retail structures at the scale of the east side of Montgomery Street (2 stories and three stories) 3. Retail buildings should traverse Montgomery Street, Oglethorpe Street, and Liberty Street with vehicular service to buildings behind and no customer parking. A screening landscape would create a transition to multi-unit residences. 4. Housing facing Jefferson Street would re-establish a residential scale. Lanes would be used for utilities, access to parking, and services (trash, water & sewer, electrical distribution). 5. Utilities under the Civic Center site are too complex to develop underground parking without substantial cost. 6. Rental rates of housing should be in the \$1,200 to \$2,400 range.

38	We need a theater the size of the Johnny Mercer Theater. I support either renovation or construction of a new theater to replace the current one. Either on site or at a different location.	5/13/2024 4:57 PM
39	I'd like to see Elbert Square restored and the rest of the site used for middle-income housing geared to those who want to live and work downtown. A limited amount of retail space designed to serve residents instead of tourists would be a welcome change to see in the final design.	5/13/2024 4:42 PM
40	I don't feel either building has much value and support the removal, allowing for restoration of the lost square. I am not sure about a municipal building - not opposed, but not sure it makes the most sense for such a valuable location.	5/13/2024 4:42 PM
41	Who's paying	5/13/2024 4:22 PM
42	City paid good money for a professional study and recommendation for the site and results was demolish all and return square and streets and lanes to Oglethorpe plan.....DO IT	5/13/2024 4:13 PM
43	It's not a pretty building but it's a great intimate concert venue that just needs TLC. Please don't tear it down. Renovate!	5/13/2024 2:47 PM
44	location is very convenient for many residents to walk	5/13/2024 2:19 PM
45	The majority of the square should be returned to the Oglethorpe Plan, with majority residential townhouses on square.	5/13/2024 2:14 PM
46	I believe that the majority of the original Oglethorpe plan should be restored. If it is practical to save the Mercer theater then that would be best. The remaining portion of the property should revert to original plan with townhouse residential and small restaurants which reflect the look of historic downtown Savannah. No large hotels or tall buildings.	5/13/2024 2:06 PM
47	And let's move the proposed new city building away from such valuable property- how about near Park and Tree or Traffic Engineering?	5/13/2024 1:31 PM
48	If the city insists on renovating the current Mercer theater, than have the Arts Community, wealthy donors and those using the facility fund the work (i.e., surcharge on every ticket sold, naming rights, etc)	5/13/2024 1:28 PM
49	The presentation was very informative but my concerns after the discussions were namely: parking for the theatre, cost to refurbish theatre vs building a new state of the art facility, confusion over taller building (municipal vs business offices vs retail). At this point I am thinking it would be easier to just move this programming elsewhere (near new arena) and restore the squares which helps to fuel more tourism, generate more property taxes and local spending and aids in a safer downtown! But dollar figures would help in the decision making immensely!	5/13/2024 1:20 PM
50	Restore the square, tithing, trust lots, and streets to original and develop with structures of the same style as the surrounding area - NO hotels, NO STVR's. Develop with housing and retail that pays property taxes (so no SCAD.)	5/13/2024 1:16 PM
51	In restoring the Oglethorpe Plan, rezoning and restrictions should be put in place to NOT allow STVRs, hotels, or tall structures inconsistent with the Oglethorpe Plan. Immediate work should begin on a phased approach to redevelopment so that the Mercer Theater could be retained while some portion of the site becomes redeveloped and later the Mercer Theater is demoed during a phase two development. Also begin work on a future Mercer Theater to be built out by the Enmarket arena utilizing the same parking lots already in place or planned.	5/13/2024 12:25 PM
52	I grew up in and with Historic Savannah. My mom worked there. My grandparents were founding members. I lived on West Gaston Street in the 1960s and '70s, and I remember with	5/13/2024 12:00 PM

sadness when house upon historic house, plus an original square, were razed or moved to build the Johnny Mercer Theatre. Though its links to the actual Johnny Mercer and other native Savannahians are real and deep, the theatre was a bust from day one: terrible acoustics, ugly decor, and not even a good, much less great, example of mid-century modern architecture. I am a HUGE fan of the MCM aesthetic, and I hate that we've lost the Johnny Harris Restaurant and so many 20th-century gems over the last few decades. Alas, the Johnny Mercer Theatre is NOT one of these gems. So why not hire a Savannah architect, ideally a woman and/or person of color, to create a TRUE Savannah icon with stellar acoustics? We have a world-class music festival; we deserve a world-class music venue that can host discerning audiences larger than can fit into the Lucas or Trustees.

53	It should go	5/13/2024 11:42 AM
54	The city insisted that the developer of the police parking lot follow the Oglethorpe Plan and complete the lost Oglethorpe Lane. I see no reason for it not to insisting on recapturing the Elbert Sq. and putting the rest of the land back on the property tax ledger. You have an opportunity to add back to the historic district and financially improving the treasury.	5/13/2024 11:38 AM
55	With the new Enmarket Arena, the Civic Center arena is now obsolete. However, the Johnny Mercer Theater fills a need that cannot be met by other concert venues in the City for artists that may not be able to sell out the Arena but have larger audiences than the Lucas or Trustees can hold. It would surely be cheaper to upgrade the existing building in its current location than to start from scratch. If the streets are restored, that will create additional street parking, so losing the parking lot will not be a disaster, parking-wise (and the Liberty and Robinson parking garages will still be there to relieve that burden). Restoring those streets will also allow for more residential and commercial growth in that space and the planting of more trees, which that part of downtown sorely needs. It would also be great if the upgraded Johnny Mercer Theater could become the permanent home of the Savannah Philharmonic (as it used to be for the Savannah Symphony). I appreciate that the City is trying to make the best of this truly once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make dramatic improvements that will benefit the City and its residents for decades to come. It is frustrating to hear complaints about the City's plan without proposed alternatives--complaining just for the sake of complaining is just a nuisance.	5/13/2024 11:12 AM
56	Renderings presented at last weeks meeting were wonderful. Emphasize housing to be built in lots that would be restored by demolishing the civic center.	5/13/2024 10:58 AM
57	I am just curious on what are the reasons for possibly renewing or demolishing? Are there any ideas on what has been a thought of discussion on what to do with the lot if demolished? I love to travel and have seen many Time Out markets in cities such as New York, Lisbon, Dubai. Barcelona has a market but not time out but similar with lots of artist displays and local food stands However, a new Civic Center on the same lot would be fine with me.	5/13/2024 10:57 AM
58	The Landmark District has been steadily compromised over the past 20 years as developers have been given free reign to build structures that are not compatible with their surroundings. Some elected officials are under the false understanding that the District is no longer listed as "threatened" by the NPS. That is absolutely not the case. Why in the world would the City proactively further erode it? I believe missing this opportunity to restore 7 acres of the Oglethorpe Plan would be an irresponsible economic and historic decision. And to hold public meetings and plan to vote immediately thereafter without any cost estimates is not only fiscally irresponsible but puts the community in the position of stating position without the benefit of all of the information. I understand and support the need for a mid-size theatre but there is no reason it needs to be at this site. The City has been investing in the West side of town to revitalize it. Another event venue in that area would help facilitate the addition of amenities to the area and the two venues could share a new parking garage that provides an adequate number of spaces. It is totally counter intuitive to add to the already unsustainable parking nightmare for the residents and for that matter visitors. Another building to house City staff should be built in that area to alleviate the need for offices. This would be more convenient for staff and again add more density to the area. The City should demolish the site, restore the Oglethorpe Plan and enhance the much needed tax revenue.	5/13/2024 10:41 AM
59	Great chance to restore Oglethorp's original plan and strengthen our city's historic nature.	5/13/2024 10:29 AM
60	Johnny Mercer in town is a great cultural asset to the city and distinguishes it from other small "bedroom" towns. I think its location is perfect for locals and travelers. I do think enmarket has offered a better option for big events/conventions. While I think the restoration of the ogelthorpe plan is an admirable goal, I don't think but a few locals feel strongly that not having	5/13/2024 10:11 AM

it weakens the charm or history of the Oglethorpe plan. I do think a redesigned Mercer should be designed to better fit into the style of the town.

61	on President St. in 3rd District	5/13/2024 9:31 AM
62	The theatre, as an entertainment venue for locals and tourists (many of the latter who are without transportation), should remain in the downtown area...so "walkable". A municipal building is used by residents with transportation, all of whom need parking places for their vehicles. Why not construct a municipal building elsewhere? Its capacity is needed (smaller than Enmarket, larger than District Live), but it could be upgraded for both functionality and aesthetics.	5/13/2024 9:21 AM
63	I don't think the city will spend as much as necessary to upgrade the Johnny Mercer. I don't think the residential property will be desirable because there will be a 2000-seat theater in the backyard. And there will be no parking. Restore the square, spend the money earned from the sale of the land to build a new theater on the west side, state of the art acoustics, and parking.	5/13/2024 9:12 AM
64	Restore the square to its original configuration.	5/13/2024 8:54 AM
65	I live a block away on Perry. I can't park as is. Where is the parking going to be? Where would the loading and off loading be?	5/13/2024 8:45 AM
66	See cmts in #1 above	5/13/2024 8:24 AM
67	Bring back the square as much as possible (more than the 1/2 that is there right now)	5/13/2024 8:23 AM
68	Restore the Oglethorpe plan	5/13/2024 6:24 AM
69	Please bring back Elbert Square! Build Federal-style housing and shops around the Square.	5/12/2024 11:50 PM
70	Given the current state of stupidity of elected official- a dorm will be built by scad, pay no taxes and continue to live off the tax payers.	5/12/2024 10:29 PM
71	The civic center should have been demolished and the new arena should have been built on the site. We now have an arena not connected to the entertainment district. Make it a public green space again at this point	5/12/2024 9:50 PM
72	I understood when the complex was first built there was an agreement with historic assn to return to Oglethorpe plan return the lost square once civic center and Jonny Mercer were demolished	5/12/2024 6:08 PM
73	It would depend on the data that supports the need for a modernised Johnny Mercer Theatre - do we know if all our current Arts facilities have been exhausted? Apologies if this data is known, available to substantiate and I've overlooked	5/12/2024 5:18 PM
74	Do not put gov't offices, cheap hotels, parking lots or gov't housing on this site. The Fairground is an excellent place for hundreds of low and moderate income housing units.	5/12/2024 4:23 PM
75	Don't make the same mistake again, it was wrong in the beginning to eliminate the squares. Don't perpetuate the wrong, this is a opportunity to upgrade Savannah to the historic position that it was previously.	5/12/2024 4:03 PM
76	I think the current location is an excellent one with parking. The arena could be torn down but Mercer theatre kept & refurbished. Remember old is what Savannah is & so many houses have been restored. I live in one that is 1855. Again, we need a concert hall the size of Johnny Mercer. Philharmonic concerts are already sell out at the Lucas.	5/12/2024 3:47 PM
77	Compromise is the key. Restore Elbert Square and renovate the Mercer Theater. DO NOT build a municipal building on the green space. Oglethorpe has become a major entry point to our City.	5/12/2024 3:43 PM
78	It is evident from today's SMN articles that the city is utterly incapable of rising to the aspirations stated by Jay Melder, particularly a positive "civic legacy." WHY? Jay Melder claims that the "city are not real estate developers. It plans for the long term." However this verges on irresponsible misuse of community assets, particularly if decisions made in secret between vested interests. The mayor is threatening the entire population of Savannah with increased taxation to an unlimited extent. If the voting populace rejects a local option sales tax, then the city will raid the other city projects already in progress or planned (drainage improvements, affordable housing, business grants etc. etc.). Instead of addressing or reducing the existing excessive parking demands on the historic district, the city is recklessly	5/12/2024 2:29 PM

maintaining a "parking exempt zone" and proposing to increase demand by 1) maintaining a 2,300 seat theater while removing all the existing theater parking 2) building a new 120,000 square foot city office building, inaccessible to the citizens of the city, with no parking at all provided. 3) considering permitting the expansion of a SCAD facility from 300 to 700 beds while reducing parking from 85 to 75 spaces NOTE: All three of the above uses are totally tax exempt The city is introducing a high density of institutional overdevelopment of this critical part of the historic district that is totally incompatible with with the results of tourism surveys that show the main draw is walking the streets and squares of the city admiring the beautiful historic houses and gardens. The proposed use is also in direct conflict with the quality of life of our residents. The city is conducting secret negotiation with SCAD to almost double the size of their dorm at 201 West Oglethorpe AVE to meet SCAD's and SCAD's only "long term needs." These are utterly incompatible with proposed adjacent residential housing and a misuse of city assets to support a non tax paying entity. What other secret negotiations are in progress? The city has allowed and encourages so many hotel rooms, dormitory rooms and STVR's that the population of the city is becoming predominantly transient. All three of these uses destroy the residential neighborhoods into which they encroach with noise, traffic, and excessive demand on city services. The city has reduced the issue of respecting and maintaining our National Historic Landmark status to restoring a few of the original streets (but not Elbert square, and now with SCAD illegally bridging lanes) while ignoring all the many contributing factors enshrined in our ordinances, i.e. orientation, height, mass, proportion, appropriate hierarchy of use etc. The city has selected the local "arts community" for special status, over both the residents of the city, and the international arts community that loves and visits Savannah, not just for its street plan, but for the entire ensemble. The city admits that it already has ample local arts community facilities but needs to fill its 2000 surrounding hotel rooms. It proposes increasing the hotel tax to pay for the theater thereby justifying the construction of more hotels. Both the architect and the acoustics consultant admit the limitations of the existing structure of the Johnny Mercer Theater and its short shelf life regardless of money thrown into its restoration, stating a maximum of 50 years. The architect claims the old arena is seismically unsafe which would make one suppose that the theater is as well, as they were both built under the same codes. The city has made a series of decisions regarding the Convention Center, the Enmark Arena, the new City Arts Building etc. that are short sighted and have led to the present destructive proposals and disenchantment with city competence and openness. The city is refusing to investigate the provision of a brand new regional auditorium in a more accessible location not in the historic district, possibly outside the city itself. This could draw on the resources of surrounding counties and even the state. It would enable the construction of the very "100-year" "world-class" facility the city claims we should have. The new proposal to keep the old arena is a natural result of the utter lack of benefit and huge expense to the residents of this city of any of the current proposals. It is also a horrified response to the proposed permanent damage of our National Historic Landmark District.

79	We can't keep the squares that we have clean and policing the street people that hang out there, doing drugs and sleeping and using it as a bathroom. I don't understand your #3 question. If you mean the Civic Center arena - you can demolish that.	5/12/2024 2:14 PM
80	You don't build a city office building on the most expensive ground in savannah. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to restore the street grid. Undo the mistakes of the 1970's now or be remembered for repeating them.	5/12/2024 1:33 PM
81	While we do need a mid sized venue the JMT is not it. The amount of money to referb it and then actually upkeep it would be worse then building a new theater somewhere in the area that didn't interfere with the square and trust lots. Honestly we should demolish the whole thing. Restore the square and the trust lots in accordance with the historic rules of the historic section.	5/12/2024 1:15 PM
82	Follow the ULI plan.	5/12/2024 1:01 PM
83	The public desperately needs realistic cost estimates to make any sort of decision. Based on the details for the less expensive of the two renovation scenarios detailed in the Akustiks report, the cost of keeping the Mercer would almost certainly be \$100 million or more. There would also be two years of downtime. That seems a very high price to pay for an end product that would not allow for the restoration of Elbert Square.	5/12/2024 12:44 PM
84	Single family homes and affordable housing would be good, along with some compatible neighborhood mixed use. No hotels or high traffic and parking generators.	5/12/2024 12:42 PM
85	It is UGLY! Get rid of it!	5/12/2024 12:30 PM

86	I would support a parking facility rather than an office building behind the theater. Extremely important to restore Oglethorpe plan where possible and practical.	5/12/2024 12:18 PM
87	This is a rare opportunity to recapture Oglethorpe's vision for Savannah. Let's take full advantage of it!	5/12/2024 11:54 AM
88	If a new Mercer Theater is to be constructed it should still be in downtown directly, not outside of the the area.	5/12/2024 11:08 AM
89	Municipal buildings should be outside the downtown city historic area to improve access for employees and maintain the historic character of the city.	5/12/2024 11:06 AM
90	I am certain that any residential construction on the site will not contribute to the Historic Landmark District because money and politics will result in compromises similar to what happened when the Cultural Arts Center was built.	5/12/2024 10:42 AM
91	def NO more office spaces...retail okay	5/12/2024 10:39 AM
92	No office building or hotel needs to be placed at this site.	5/12/2024 10:33 AM
93	Montgomery street between Liberty and Broughton street already have too many municipal buildings that add nothing to the community feel after hours and on weekends. They have an overwhelming presence and separate they community they occupy. A much more preferable location is the nearby city owned lot on Elbert Square between Montgomery and MLK, eventually it will have a prominent presence on a hopefully restored square, the shorter front masses will better respect the scale of the city and will not create yet another barrier to the community. The property on the North side of the civic center is an asset to the community, open space that is well treed. It helps offset the loss of Elbert and Liberty Squares. It should be upgraded as outdoor public space with benches and art. I do not support shoehorning a large municipal build in this location.	5/12/2024 10:22 AM
94	We absolutely do not need more city/government buildings in the historic district. We have too many properties not paying property taxes and this needs to be addressed. We need legislation to make the landmark historic district capped for adding more non revenue generating properties. The valuation of the land the civic center is currently on plus the any cost to refurbish would be far more expensive than restoring the Oglethorpe plan which was part of the Palladian movement of architecture; and SHOULD be restored. The sale of the tithing and trustee lots would provide the revenue to build another civic center without more taxation. Additionally the zoning ordinance requires it be restored and the city government doesn't have the authority to not adhere to the zoning ordinance.	5/12/2024 10:21 AM
95	Restore the downtown to the Oglethorpe Plan with historically accurate building architecture. Downtown is not a good location for a "Civic Center" type structure. I don't even see the need for the facility. Seems most major conventions are held on Hutchinson Island and with expansion going on there it seems a better location for events and associated parking. Improved ferry service across the river is all that's necessary.	5/12/2024 10:10 AM
96	Every show I've seen at the Mercer theater sounded absolutely terrible. I can't understand why anyways to save this theater, especially considering how old and energy inefficient it probably is	5/12/2024 10:01 AM
97	The City needs to commit, now, to building housing here, specifically targetted towards (and attainable to) people who actually work downtown.	5/12/2024 9:57 AM
98	We need a grocery store, dry cleaners etc for the neighborhood and restore housing and some mixed use commercial space.	5/12/2024 9:54 AM
99	Municipal buildings should be located outside of the downtown area in the future. This will allow employees more space for parking and not further change the character of the downtown. area.	5/12/2024 9:41 AM
100	See #1.	5/12/2024 9:08 AM
101	The tithing lots should be restored and then conduct hearings on their intended multiple uses... primarily multi-unit (not private) housing and lower level retail.	5/12/2024 8:16 AM
102	Back to original plan	5/12/2024 7:18 AM
103	Leave it.	5/12/2024 5:50 AM

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SurveyMonkey

104	Need to see accurate cost evaluation: tear-down and start new vs renovation.	5/11/2024 9:10 PM
105	We need to revert to the Oglethorpe Plan and redevelop this area for residential / commercial use. This land needs to come back on the tax rolls. We DO NOT need a commercial public building on this site. There are plenty of other areas in the city that can be developed if that is really necessary. Follow the plan adopted and agreed to in 2019.	5/11/2024 7:25 PM
106	Community focus, bring in better music acts, a museum with local artists that are not SCAD related. A place for all folks to learn, cooking, open space with community gardens.	5/11/2024 6:49 PM
107	The city should tear down the entire complex arena, Johnny Mercer theater and parking lot, and restore the original Oglethorpe plan including Elbert Square.	5/11/2024 6:38 PM
108	If the city truly needs office space why not preserve and update the Gamble Building next to city hall? Expensive? Yes, but would show the city is actually concerned about preservation of historic buildings.	5/11/2024 6:36 PM
109	No city or county building. Mercer is a perfect fit between the too small Lucas and the too large Enmark but needs sound upgrade.	5/11/2024 6:35 PM
110	Civic centers time is passed and it should go. But Savannah desperately needs a theater the size of the Johnny Mercer that can handle modern Broadway touring companies as well as concerts in more intimate local than the new arena. The Mercer theater would need a total gut job similar to what was done in Charleston. But I think more investment and thought should go into radically improving the exterior to make it a better fit for the neighborhood.	5/11/2024 6:01 PM
111	Current city council should not be undoing plans approved by previous councils, which were based on independent studies. The site is unattractive and new residential areas are much needed and would beautify the city. Plus there is the benefit of bringing the City back to the original Oglethorpe plan.	5/11/2024 5:38 PM
112	We should also oppose the recent announcement about the SCAD dorms on Oglethorpe. Oglethorpe Lane should be recaptured (eminent domain) by the City, and dorms built on the remaining land. I included this since it is adjacent.	5/11/2024 5:37 PM
113	Keep it and parking lot	5/11/2024 5:08 PM
114	use splost to rebuild and modernize Johnny Mercer. if you are building a Municipal building, put it where access and parking are easy.	5/11/2024 4:47 PM
115	Restore the Oglethorpe Plan in time for its 300th birthday in 2033.	5/11/2024 4:39 PM
116	Redevelopment should promote mostly private property ownership so that property owners pay real estate taxes.	5/11/2024 4:37 PM
117	Tear it down completely, restore the square!	5/11/2024 4:30 PM
118	We do need a theater like the Johnny Mercer downtown I don't care for the new arena for music at all. The sound is terrible even in the \$\$ seats	5/11/2024 4:17 PM
119	I like the idea of a bed tax on the tourism industry to support a new theater. Such a tax should also apply to short term lets with, hopefully, a large penalty if the STVR operators cheat on the tax.	5/11/2024 4:15 PM
120	This is a rare opportunity to undo pass bad decisions	5/11/2024 4:12 PM
121	Build new theater on round house train property to include unfinished children's museum. Create an entertainment campus for young and old. The city owns property all around this site for parking and would encourage more development on MLK.	5/11/2024 4:09 PM
122	FIX IT UP AND MAKE IT STAY WHERR IT IA FOR ALL FUTURE GENERATIONS TO ENJOY.	5/11/2024 3:59 PM
123	City has to consider tax consequences of new construction and renovation vs income from lot sales before doing an about face.	5/11/2024 3:59 PM
124	While I think the ideal situation is to demolish the civic center and keep the theater, I am worried what the city will construct in its place.	5/11/2024 3:57 PM
125	A scenic ampitheater matched closely with the original Oglethorpe plan and limited parking supported by local shuttle services would satisfy both locals and tourists.	5/11/2024 3:55 PM

Downtown Neighborhood Association Member Survey FUTURE OF THE SAVANNAH CIVIC CENTER

SurveyMonkey

126	If you were to sell the entire Civic Center site, the money received by the city would more than pay for a new auditorium and new offices for the city. It could be a big win-win for everybody.	5/11/2024 3:52 PM
127	My mild opposition to a City building is from reluctance to add another "empty a 5 pm" building to an area with a lot of them. I'd prefer development that extends the hours of the site with amenities such as residences, retail and restaurants. Back to #6: I would support a SPLOST if the Mercer absolutely has to be rebuilt.	5/11/2024 3:48 PM
128	We need a theater of that size in Savannah. The location is convenient for dining prior to events. The Enmarket arena is too large for many of the acts that come to Savannah and the theater is often used and is profitable for the city.	5/11/2024 3:48 PM
129	Johnny Mercer attended the opening of the theater and was honored by it but the building esthetic failed it.	5/11/2024 3:46 PM
130	Don't take away amenities for the community downtown. Leave the theater, it's the only one we have that isn't privately owned by SCAD. The enmarket arena is NOT a theater. We do not want a theater outside of downtown. Keep our only theater. Upgrade it. Add Green areas around it to make up for the square that is lost. Add UNDERGROUND PARKING. NO TO PUBLIC OFFICE SPACE. Put it that out near the enmarket	5/11/2024 3:43 PM
131	I think there needs to be more planning input from the community instead of the city council pushing through what they want. This is a large piece of property in a prime location of the historic district. The projects deserves more consideration and respect	5/11/2024 3:43 PM
132	Current site does nothing to draw people to that area. Most everyone is impressed by the history of Savannah and residents and visitors. Having the civic center there as it is has no value to attract citizens.	5/11/2024 3:41 PM
133	Love this local and walkable facility	5/11/2024 3:31 PM
134	We need a fresh start by reviving the Oglethorpe Plan.	5/11/2024 3:29 PM
135	Demolish. Consider a theater at the I-16 flyover site after the flyover is removed. Could add upper stories there for a municipal building. Entire civic center site should be restored to Oglethorpe Plan and privately developed with the entire site back on property tax rolls. City should hire independent firm to assess cost/benefit differential over ten years between those two plans.	5/11/2024 3:28 PM
136	City offices should be located in city center, not in highest cost most northern real estate.	5/11/2024 3:24 PM
137	Development should include recreating Elbert Sq and building private housing to return to the tax base which in turn will repay for the development. Rebuild a new Johnny Mercer theatre in proximity to the arena on the west side	5/11/2024 3:21 PM
138	Follow the City plan minus the office building. The projected office building location could be underground parking and 2 to 3 stories of restaurant and retail above ground.	5/11/2024 3:18 PM
139	The city office building should be built in the Arena District to facilitate development which was promised residents. Housing should be built on all land available downtown.	5/11/2024 3:17 PM
140	We should return the Square where the Civic Center is to its original plan. If doing that they can keep the Johnny Mercer theater and update it I would be for that. If they cannot return the Square then demolish the whole thing.	5/11/2024 3:17 PM
141	We are going to miss a once in a lifetime opportunity to restore the Oglethorpe Plan and waste millions of dollars if we keep the existing structure. Sell off the land, restore the square...funds raised from the sale will easily fund an even better Mercer Theater as well as a Municipal building. And the ideal place to put both of these things is on the west side to continue to bridge downtown and the Enmarket Arena. Furthermore, an ideal place to build these things would be where the flyover is located...	5/11/2024 2:34 PM
142	Follow the Urban Land Institute plan.	5/11/2024 10:43 AM

Q8 Please enter the zip code of your primary residence.

Answered: 303 Skipped: 0

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	31419	5/16/2024 10:35 AM
2	31401	5/16/2024 10:34 AM
3	31404	5/16/2024 10:30 AM
4	31401	5/16/2024 9:59 AM
5	31411	5/15/2024 11:13 PM
6	31401	5/15/2024 7:51 PM
7	31401	5/15/2024 2:43 PM
8	31401	5/15/2024 2:26 PM
9	31419	5/15/2024 1:32 PM
10	31401	5/15/2024 1:11 PM
11	31405	5/15/2024 12:46 PM
12	31401	5/15/2024 11:18 AM
13	31410	5/15/2024 10:59 AM
14	31410	5/15/2024 10:55 AM
15	31410	5/15/2024 10:26 AM
16	31404	5/15/2024 10:13 AM
17	31419	5/15/2024 8:49 AM
18	31401	5/15/2024 8:49 AM
19	31401	5/15/2024 8:44 AM
20	31401	5/15/2024 6:57 AM
21	31401	5/15/2024 4:50 AM
22	31405	5/14/2024 9:09 PM
23	31406	5/14/2024 8:26 PM
24	31404	5/14/2024 7:52 PM
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26	31404	5/14/2024 4:44 PM
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31	31401	5/14/2024 1:48 PM
32	31401	5/14/2024 1:22 PM
33	31406	5/14/2024 1:18 PM

Downtown Neighborhood Association Member Survey FUTURE OF THE SAVANNAH CIVIC CENTER

SurveyMonkey

34	31401	5/14/2024 12:55 PM
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36	31401	5/14/2024 12:01 PM
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67	31419	5/13/2024 10:10 PM
68	31404	5/13/2024 9:38 PM
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Downtown Neighborhood Association Member Survey FUTURE OF THE SAVANNAH CIVIC CENTER

SurveyMonkey

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Downtown Neighborhood Association Member Survey FUTURE OF THE SAVANNAH CIVIC CENTER

SurveyMonkey

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145	31401	5/13/2024 8:23 AM
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Downtown Neighborhood Association Member Survey FUTURE OF THE SAVANNAH CIVIC CENTER

SurveyMonkey

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184	31401	5/12/2024 12:21 PM
185	31401	5/12/2024 12:18 PM

Downtown Neighborhood Association Member Survey FUTURE OF THE SAVANNAH CIVIC CENTER

SurveyMonkey

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222	31401	5/11/2024 9:14 PM
223	31401	5/11/2024 9:10 PM

Downtown Neighborhood Association Member Survey FUTURE OF THE SAVANNAH CIVIC CENTER

SurveyMonkey

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259	31401	5/11/2024 4:12 PM
260	31401	5/11/2024 4:09 PM
261	31401	5/11/2024 4:09 PM

Downtown Neighborhood Association Member Survey FUTURE OF THE SAVANNAH CIVIC CENTER

SurveyMonkey

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296	31401	5/11/2024 3:21 PM
297	31401	5/11/2024 3:19 PM
298	31401	5/11/2024 3:18 PM
299	31401	5/11/2024 3:17 PM

Downtown Neighborhood Association Member Survey FUTURE OF THE SAVANNAH CIVIC CENTER

SurveyMonkey

300	31401	5/11/2024 3:17 PM
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302	31401	5/11/2024 2:34 PM
303	31401	5/11/2024 10:43 AM

Civic Center Re-Development Membership Survey



Civic Center Re-development Survey

Very brief - 3 Question Survey

We received 159 responses

Along with an additional

92 comments

**We provided and encouraged open comments
in the comment section**

SAVANNAH

DOWNTOWN
NEIGHBORHOOD
ASSOCIATION



Question #1

Do you support the construction of a City Government Office Building on Oglethorpe Avenue as presented in the city plan?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
NO	89.31%	142
YES	10.69%	17



Question #2

Do you support the retention and renovation of the Johnny Mercer Theater?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
NO	65.41%	104
YES	34.59%	55



Question #3

Should the Downtown Neighborhood Association continue to push for and support for the ULI Study as originally developed and adopted by City Council in 2019?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
NO	10.69%	17
YES	89.31%	142

Review of Comments:

Identified 13 recurring themes:

1. Stated support for following the Oglethorpe plan
2. Comments pointing out that new City office buildings should be located outside the historic district
3. Stated support for restoring the lost squares
4. Stated support for returning the land back to the Tax Base
5. Comments questioning the need for additional City office buildings
6. Stated support for the ULI Plan
7. Comments indicating concern regarding Savannah's Landmark status

Review of Comments:

Identified 13 recurring themes within 92 comments:

8. Comments questioning where the parking would be for a retained Johnny Mercer Theater and/or new City office building
9. Stated support for banning hotels/STVRs in the redevelopment plan
10. Stated support for retaining a renovated Johnny Mercer Theater
11. Stated support for demolishing the Johnny Mercer Theater
12. Stated support for restoring the “Historic Look” of the site as a gateway to the City
13. Stated support for affordable housing in the redevelopment plan

Example Comments:

Stated support for following the Oglethorpe Plan:

(mentioned in 32 out of 92 comments)

- “Once in a lifetime chance to restore the Oglethorpe Plan.”
- “This land should be returned to the Oglethorpe Plan”
- “The Oglethorpe Plan is essential to retaining Landmark Status”
- “You either believe in maintaining the historic value of the City with the Oglethorpe Plan or you don’t”
- “The entire Civic Center area should be demolished and returned to the Oglethorpe Plan”

Example Comments:

Comments pointing out that new City office buildings should be located outside the Historic District:

(mentioned in 20 out of 92 comments)

- “There is no reason to congest the downtown area with more city offices when there is plenty of less “prime” city owned real estate outside of town”
- “We definitely don’t need a city office in this prime area”
- “Develop the Canal Area for government”
- “Relocation of government offices has been very successful in other cities”
- “Putting a new tax exempt city office building on the most valuable land in downtown is the definition of insanity”

Example Comments:

Stated support for restoring the lost squares:

(mentioned in 14 out of 92 comments)

- “Believing in the [Oglethorpe] Plan means building on that original plan by restoring the lost squares”
- “Elbert restored. Orleans once more faced by Trust Lots”
- “restoring the squares will help to return Savannah’s Historic District to a position of strength with the US Parks Service”
- “restore the lost squares”
- “Elbert Square should never have been cut and it needs to be restored”



Example Comments:

Stated support for returning the land back to the tax base:

(mentioned in 14 out of 92 comments)

- “New residential and commercial properties replacing the Johnny Mercer and Civic Center....will add additional value to the property tax base”
- “This area of town is too valuable to house non-tax paying government offices”
- “adding tax paying residential property to the City creates new and important revenue rather than keeping this property tied up as non tax generating”
- “Far better to enhance the aesthetic and tax base of the City”
- “The City will benefit from High Taxes on the entire Civic Center area which should be returned to residential use.”

Example Comments:

Comments questioning the need for additional City Office space:

(mentioned in 12 out of 92 comments)

- “Why would we put a government building which would be empty after 5 PM and not support downtown economic growth?”
- “We don’t need more office space”
- “And as for building a City office building downtown, the question is Why?”
- “More office buildings is not the way forward”
- “If the City needs this new plan perhaps a straightforward discussion with the public explaining the case for this new plan is the appropriate way forward”



Example Comments:

Stated support for the ULI Plan: (mentioned in 10 out of 92 comments)

- “I support the ULI Report”
- “I absolutely think the ULI Plan agreed upon by the previous administration is the best alternative”
- “Development should be just as the ULI Plan recommended and as discussed with city residents and adopted by City Council in June of 2019”
- “In my view, the only legitimate plan is the one that has already been developed with significant public input and adopted by the City Council in June 2019.”
- “I was so disappointed to hear that the original plan from 2019 was discarded after all the time, money and effort was put toward the plan that had the backing of so many”
- “To have paid for the 2019 study and to disregard the results also does not make sense.”

Example Comments:

Comments indicating concern over regarding Savannah's Landmark status:

(mentioned in 7 out of 92 comments)

- “Landmark District is in dangerous spot and could lose designation if this continues.”
- “Savannah is in danger of losing it’s Historic designation due to the desire of investors to “improve” the city by creating increased traffic.”
- “Developing the land according to the Oglethorpe Plan and restoring the squares will help to return Savannah’s historic district to a position of strength with the US Park service.”
- “The Oglethorpe Plan is essential to Savannah retaining Landmark status. More office buildings and a lousy theater with horrible acoustics is not the way forward.”
- “The Landmark District is already listed as threatened status with the NPS. This would send a signal that the city places no worth on that designation, one that draws visitors from all over the world.”



Example Comments:

Comments questioning where the parking would be for a retained Johnny Mercer Theater and/or new City Office Building:

(mentioned in 7 out of 92 comments)

- “I didn’t see any provision for parkingfor an already busy area”
- “The question is Why? It will make parking and traffic worse”
- “providing no parking for the proposed theater and offices (causing retention of the surface parking at the expense of housing and Oglethorpe Plan restoration).”
- “Most government employees have cars which they are now driving into downtown and exacerbating the parking and traffic problems.”
- “Help build up the arena area by putting the office building there – free parking for employees.”

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Example Comments:

Stated support for banning hotels/STVRs in the redevelopment plan:

(mentioned in 6 out of 92 comments)

- “I’m not in favor of more luxury development, vacation rental units or hotels in that area”
- “I am not in favor of hotels or STVRs being allowed.”
- “No more big box hotels should be built in the Historic district.”
- “The site redevelopment should also be precluded from STVR licensing”
- “No hotels or office buildings. Green Space!”

Example Comments:

Stated support for retaining a renovated Johnny Mercer Theater in the redevelopment plan:

(mentioned in 18 out of 92 comments)

- “I support the Barrett Report calling the Johnny Mercer Theater a community asset.”
- “a upgraded JM Theater is a plus for the local area but parking must be considered.”
- “We need a good symphony hall and performance stage in the downtown area.”
- “The renovation of the Mercer with a more appropriate and attractive entrance makes more sense than demolition”
- “The Jonny Mercer Theater is a landmark for Savannah.”



Example Comments:

Stated support for demolishing the Jonny Mercer Theater:

(mentioned in 18 out of 92 comments)

- “Spending tons of money on the Johnny Mercer is a tremendous waste.”
- “I absolutely think that the ULI plan agreed upon by the previous administration is the best alternative by having new residential and commercial properties replacing the Johnny Mercer”
- “Trying to fix the Mercer is pouring good money after bad.”
- “The entire Civic Center should be demolished...Of course the Savannah Philharmonic and Music Festival would provide a positive spin on the retention and renovation of the Mercer. It’s like asking kids if they would like to go to the candy store.”
- “The Mercer, bad architecturally and acoustically. Should be razed.”



Example Comments:

Stated support for restoring the “Historic Look” of the site as a gateway to the city:

(mentioned in 5 out of 92 comments)

- “Current area is an unattractive introduction to the city.”
- “We need to restore that “historic” feeling whenever possible.”
- “improve one of the gateways to our city.”
- “truly important to maintain Savannah’s historic character.”
- “Beautifying a major entry from highway 16 into this historic city will welcome visitors far more graciously than the current eye sore”

Example Comments:

Stated support for affordable housing in the redevelopment plan:

(mentioned in 5 out of 92 comments)

- “I support an effort to create the “missing middle” housing opportunities on the restored version of the Oglethorpe Plan. But I am concerned the working class tenants targeted will miss out. It’s too tempting for developers to go after those ridiculously high rent apartments these days.”
- “secondly, to develop affordable housing units”
- “We need the diversity of incomes to balance the tourists and locals.”
- “A mixture of affordable and fair market housing of 3 stories or less.... Would allow those who work in the district to live within walking distance to jobs would eliminate “commute” ...traffic.”
- “We need actual workforce housing.”

THANK YOU!!!!!!

To everyone who took the time to complete this survey!!!

And especially to those that provided comments!!!!

The comment section of our surveys are of great value to your board and enable us to clearly represent our members' views to our City Council and the City Staff.

Alderman Leggett's Survey

Alderman Detric Leggett conducted a survey and, on Friday, June 21, 2024, provided the following breakdown of the survey results:

- Restoration of the entire site: 20% (52 people out of 263)
- Demolishing the MLK Arena and preserving Johnny Mercer Theater: 35% (92 people out of 263)
- Keeping both the Arena and Theater with upgrades: 45% (119 people out of 263)