Press Release: February 26, 2019

Music Theatre, Symphony, Opera in full support of Century II Citizens Committee recommendation to build new performing arts center.

Tuesday morning the Century II Citizens Committee presented their final recommendation at a city council workshop to build a new, state of the art Performing Arts Center (PAC) rather than renovate Century II. Performing arts tenants who operate in Century II (including Music Theatre Wichita, Wichita Symphony Orchestra, and Wichita Grand Opera), attended the workshop in full support of the committee’s recommendation.

Wayne Bryan, Producing Artistic Director of Music Theatre Wichita, said: “We applaud the committee’s service and careful study of the complex issues surrounding Century II. We are hopeful that plans for a new building will move forward, and eagerly anticipate being part of the decision-making process to ensure that the needs of Wichita’s performing arts community are met.”

The Citizens Committee has stated at multiple community forums that there is no cost-efficient option for renovation that would also keep tenants operating through construction.

Music Theatre Wichita and the Wichita Symphony have repeatedly expressed that “going dark” for one or more seasons represents an existential threat for their organizations. Don Reinhold, CEO of the Wichita Symphony, expressed worry over this possibility, saying, “I’ve seen it happen in other communities I’ve worked in. An arts organization closes or gets moved to a ‘temporary,’ subpar location for one to three years, and when they come back the public has moved on. At best, renovation would create a tremendous uphill battle for tenants upon return to the Concert Hall.”

In addition to the possibility of going dark, another immediate concern indicates urgency in building a new performing arts center. Current discussions about plans and location of new convention space would eliminate the majority of Century II’s parking for patrons.

Although the convention conversation preceded those about a new PAC, the final report from Project Wichita’s quality of life action plan placed top priority on “a world-class facility to highlight our exceptional performing arts” as its first initiative, followed by “a state-of-the-art convention center to host local, regional and national events.”

Wichita’s arts organizations have continually defied the odds, given the ever-growing challenges of a mid-century building being used for modern entertainment. The Century II Citizen’s Committee (centuryiicitizenscommittee.com) provided a comprehensive analysis of these many issues.

The three tenants expressed great respect for the visionaries who conceptualized and built Century II, and firmly believe that today’s citizens have the chance to create a truly iconic PAC that will also meet and anticipate the community’s needs for decades to come. Alan Held, an international opera star who recently became Artistic Director of Wichita Grand Opera, said “after singing in top performance venues all over the world, I know that a first-rate performing arts center can have a transformative impact on a community. I look forward to actively helping see a vision for a new, world-class performing arts center come to fruition in Wichita.”

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