

Hall

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scenario and added that under the current financial plan the city could be basically debt-free except for some minor funding.

City Manager Bruce MacLeod, who just earlier went over the financial history of the project, concluded his remarks by saying, "Now is the time to build a building. Now is the time to get the most bang for the buck."

MacLeod said between 2003 and 2008 construction prices increased by 40 percent. He said prices actually dropped by 10 percent in 2009, but they are expected to increase again in 2010 and 2011. He said under current conditions, the cost of the proposed Convention Hall is on target.

"Of the nine bids we received (June 3), six bids were within 5 percent. That's a good sign that our documents are solid, and any change-orders should be minimal," he said.

The city originally went out to bid April 30, but city council rejected all 11 bids as being too high. The city scheduled a second round of bids in May but they were postponed until June 3. The

rebate for renewable energy elements. bids received are for the actual cost of constructing Convention Hall, while alternate bids were received on what might be considered less essential elements, including a wave ceiling, audiovisual equipment, chair risers, a barrier fence for roller-skating, five wind turbines, a motor hoist for stage lighting, and two other items. MacLeod said the city has opted to purchase the lighting on its own in order to save about 50 percent.

MacLeod said the cost of the building does not include furniture, fixtures or office equipment. The lowest bid received on June 3 was for \$12.545 million, or \$392 per square foot. Add to that contingency costs and about \$750,000 in owner costs (permitting, tests, a security system, connecting to utilities, construction management, etc.) the city needs a total of \$3.15 million.

With a grant from the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority of \$1 on every \$7 needed for the project, the city anticipates a grant of \$1.5 million. The city has also made application to the state for energy grants, and is getting an \$80,000

rebate for renewable energy elements.

Aubry Kent, sports management program director, who is part of the Temple University team involved in a larger project for Cape May, estimated the new Convention Hall would generate \$550,000 annually, and perhaps as much as \$800,000 to \$1 million. Kent said there were four basic categories of revenue sources derived from Convention Hall: community use, recreation and leisure; public events; private rentals; and rents from a restaurant and retail units.

Mayor Edward J. Mahaney Jr. said he has recommended the creation of a Tourism Utility, which among other things, would manage the operations of Convention Hall. A utility would have to self-sustain.

"The purpose would be to take the burden off the taxpayers," Mahaney said.

He said the utility, which would include what is now the Department of Civic Affairs, would market the city "as effectively and efficiently as possible."

Councilman-elect Bill Murray, who is being sworn in at noon today, said he

would like to see the information provided at the meeting put on the city's website. Murray said he really needed to know from constituents how much they had changed their minds due to the new information. He asked people to email him with their comments.

However, after hearing the presentation from the city and its professionals, Paul Andrus was still in favor of scaling back the project.

"I agree it should be scaled back and demolition started tomorrow," he said.

Andrus asked if the city had considered incorporating the Beach Theatre complex into the Convention Hall project, perhaps using eminent domain to acquire that property.

Mahaney responded saying scaling back the project meant going back to the Department of Environmental Protection for a CAFRA permit (Coastal Area Facilities Review Act).

"If we demolish it, their first question would be 'Why should we give you a permit?'" Mahaney said.

He said the building remaining where it is ensures the city can keep what it has.

Additionally, Mahaney said the cost of the demolition is linked to the construction. He said scaling back the project would mean more money for a new design, \$20,000 for a new CAFRA permit, plus another six-month wait for the permit. He said a smaller building designed with no new retail space would provide none of that revenue, and the debt service and taxpayer responsibility would be higher.

"You could end up building a smaller building for more money totally on the backs of the taxpayers," Mahaney said.

Barbara Skinner said it was myopic only to look at one side of the street.

"How much would it cost to consider both sides of the street - build a smaller Convention Hall and buy the Beach Theatre?" she said.

Mahaney said the Beach Theatre complex would cost the city an additional \$10 million to \$15 million, meaning the city would have to sacrifice future capital projects.

"You can't champion every cause - we're a public entity," Mahaney said.

Bill Causey, president of the Chamber of Commerce of

Greater Cape May, urged the city to move forward with the current project saying, "We are a tourist community. We need to compete. We need something as soon as possible."

Sal Riggi, executive director of the Cape May Jazz Festival, also urged the city to move forward saying people needed to look at the bigger picture. He said the Jazz Festival brings in 15,000 visitors who spend \$3 million annually, but the festival is struggling without Convention Hall.

Bernie Haas said with a cost of \$50 to \$60 per year for the average taxpayer, about \$5 a month, the project was affordable and should be moved forward. Rev. Jeff Elliott of Cape May Lutheran Church also supported moving forward saying, "It's time to act."

"We need it now," said John Fleming. "We've already spent \$800,000 on this project."

The city has 60 days to award a contract based on the June 3 bids.

No Consensus

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closer to Beach Avenue, and the cost of the geothermal system.

Wichterman said the project reminded him of Everett Dirksen's statement, "A million here, a million there, and soon we're talking about real money."

Wichterman said while campaigning the clear majority of people he talked to wanted the project scaled down. He said he told city officials in closed session, prior to the town meeting, "It was a (expletive deleted) shame the people in town didn't know what you just told us."

Murray, who was at the

closed session meetings and the town meeting, gave out his email address and called for reaction from the public to the information provided at the town meeting.

"I've probably gotten close to 60 responses," Murray said on Monday.

He said he has not gone through all of them in detail but did respond to each. He said most of them came in on June 25, the day after the meeting, and they were still trickling in. He said he would start going through the emails more thoroughly by Tuesday afternoon.

Murray said he heard everything presented at the town meeting in closed session. He said he wanted the

city to ask members of the public if they had changed their mind about what they want to do with Convention Hall.

"People were leery about going after more money for Convention Hall. They were worried how it would affect their taxes. Then Leon (Municipal Auditor Leon Costello) said one cent and some people were saying that's not very much. If they want to go ahead with it I'm going to have to think about it seriously," Murray said.

Murray said either way he would make a rational decision. He said that was his purpose from the beginning, and he was glad to get public reaction to the new information presented at the town

meeting. He said getting 60 responses wasn't bad.

"I was hoping we would have maybe double what we had there, but it wasn't bad, considering," he said.

The bottom line, Murray said, was he hasn't made up his mind on how he will vote.

"I've got a sense there were a few people who have changed their positions. I got a feeling some folks have changed mind mainly because of what Leon Costello said," he said. "I want to base my decision as much on fact as I possibly can. At least I want people to think I did my best."

Councilwoman-elect Deanna Fiocca attended the town meeting after the hearing the information in one

closed session. She has also heard from people close to her.

"My mom, who is a very smart person, told me the morning of the meeting if the big Convention Hall went through she would sell her house and move. She came to the meeting and we left together and she had completely changed her mind," Fiocca said.

Fiocca thought the town hall meeting was a very good meeting for the general public, but it didn't tell her what she really wanted to know.

"I was looking for an estimate of the operating cost. They could have made an educated guess to the costs. You can't pick and choose the information you want to provide," she said.

Fiocca said if the building costs \$1 million a year to run, the projected revenues fall

far short.

"They" would always be in the red," she said.

Additionally, Fiocca wants to hear more about the idea of a Tourism Utility, which would operate Convention Hall.

"Would that need to be funded for the first couple of years? Would it have to be funded out of the general fund? Would it have to be funded out of taxes?" she said. "They said the Tourism Utility would need to be planned and is not something that is definite."

"But I'm a little less certain about my decision now than when I was running," she said.

Fiocca said she was not sure if she agrees with tearing up the boardwalk for the new hall. She also wanted to know if plans for a smaller structure could be ready by Oct. 1, as she suspects.

She said the public presentation put the current plan in a very positive light.

"If the figures are correct it paints a rosy picture, but the meeting still left me with more questions. I know more than I knew when I was campaigning, but I feel less certain about how I really feel. If what they say is true, it could be a great thing," she said. "I just don't want people do be dazzled by the information and the men up front in suits."



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Cases

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number of cases involved, but most were still pending court action.

In April Donohue brought the issue of sloppy record keeping to township officials. In a statement issued from the Township of Lower,

council was briefed on 12 cases dismissed in 2007 for a similar reason. The prosecutor's office then worked with the township police to set up a detailed system regarding the use of confidential informants, but the system was not followed.

Donohue said the 2007 cases did not involve documentation of confidential informants, and all township officials were fully briefed.

The county prosecutor's office is still reviewing Lambert's conduct pertaining to the cases, as well as the conduct of other higher-ranking members of the police department, but no other names have been released.

Township Manager Kathy McPherson said when the prosecutor's office completes its investigation the matter would be handed over to the township for an administrative review, and if appropriate, disciplinary action", stated Township Manager, Kathleen McPherson.

Lower Township Mayor Mike Beck said the real victims in this case are the residents of Lower Township, who have placed their trust in the Police Department to get rid of the drug problems.

"To have up to 30 cases dismissed and these individuals placed back on the street due to our actions cannot be tolerated," Beck said. "We will take the steps necessary to ensure this does not happen again."

Monzo said there is no timeline for the completion of the prosecutor's investigation but he didn't expect it to be long.



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