

Statesman



Arts center could cost \$25 million

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If the Lakeway community wants a performing arts center in the heart of the city, the market would support it, or so the research suggests. But it would take around six years and \$25 million to make the performing arts center a reality.

The feasibility study for a potential performing arts center was presented during the Aug. 17 City Council meeting by the Lakeway Visitors Commission and consulting firm Janis A. Barlow and Associates. The study has moved on from community surveys to breaking down the hard numbers on cost and the amount of demand from the art-loving community, both locally and tourist-based. The council is interested to know how far hotel occupancy tax funds can go on such a project.

“The commission found that the right size and quality of performing arts center is feasible,” said Gary Shoemaker of the Visitors Commission. “No decisions are being made at this time, nor is the commission making a recommendation to proceed. It’s up to the council and the citizens of Lakeway to decide the future path.”

Barlow said she was surprised to find a gap in the market supply of performing arts centers in Austin – that is, an 800-seat theater, something between a small community theater of 200-400 seats such as One World Theater or Zack Topfer Theatre, but smaller than the 1,000+ seating of a major venue such as the Paramount Theatre or Lake Travis school district’s concert hall. An 800-seat theater, Barlow said, could draw audiences from an hour or more away and compel fans of the arts to stay in Lakeway overnight, bringing in more hotel tax revenue.

“The Long Center said there are 3,600 households from Lakeway in their database buying tickets,” Barlow said. “That’s very strong existing evidence of interest in the theater and performing arts. In the regional market ... there’s a potential pool of 54,000 people buying tickets on weekend nights. Ultimately, the regional market is sufficient to sustain a theater center in Lakeway.”



RACHEL RICE/LAKE TRAVIS VIEW

Arts consultant Janis Barlow presents the findings of a feasibility study on a potential performing arts center to Lakeway City Council on Aug. 17.

The facility might have an additional 250-seat theater and a 100-seat rehearsal space, Barlow said. The facility might be a total of 48,000 square feet, bringing the building of the facility to between \$18 and \$20.4 million. The rest of the expense, Barlow said, would be in land acquisition and beginning operations. A quarter of the expense would be borne by the hotel tax, local municipalities and the county, another quarter borne by state and federal agencies. Half of the expense would come from private contributions, Barlow said.

“You’d have the gamut from community performances to professional performances, hosting touring productions and generating seasonal festivals,” Barlow said. “You’d host seasonal festivals to engage tourists, but a limited, high-end kind of tourism. We would also look to exhibit films.”

Mayor Joe Bain didn’t take public comment during the meeting, saying he wanted council to figure out how they feel about the contents of the study before the city holds a council workshop and then a public forum. No action was taken.

Editor’s note: This story has been corrected to reflect the correct number of potential ticket buyers.