

Notes from Sarasota Bayfront 20:20 learning trip to Dr. Phillips Center in Orlando, January 25, 2016

Meeting and tour led by Katherine Ramsberger, CEO, Dr. Phillips Center and her assistant Linda Santiago

Attendees: Ali Bahaj, Tom Barwin, Mary Bensel, Steven Brown, Bharat Chandra, Virginia Haley, Dan Jordan, Alicia King, Karl Newkirk, Shantel Norman, Billy Robinson, John Simon, Anne Smith, Dave Steves, Jon Thaxton, Monica Van Buskirk, and Cathy Wilson.

Katherine Ramsberger gave the group some background on the evolution of the project. Here are some key bullet points:

- VISION-Arts for every life.
- MISSION-Inspirational, creative place where people love to be and where people love to work.
- 2700 seat amplified theater (Disney) plus a 300 seat community (or blackbox) theater (Pugh). About to build an acoustical 1500-1700 theater (Steinmetz) with movable shell and ability to transition to a flat floor.
- Three different attempts to build performing arts facility, 1980, 1992 and finally 2003 which finally resulted in the first part of complex.
- Alignment is key. It is about the purpose, not the building. Persistence and perservance.
- Stay the course. Do not let the voices for the easy way out to win. During the economic downturn, politicians tried to change plans “just to get something done” with a watered-down project but the Board resisted. Ms. Ramsberger emphasized over and over **to stay the course**.
- In the early days of seating a Board for the non-profit, they looked for entrepreneurs and business decision makers, people who are accustomed to success. Board members who don't accept failure. Worked with a small executive committee and during construction, had a larger 30 member planning board that sunset after construction. There are no ex-officios or designated seats on the Board.
- Initially they raised \$1.5 million in private sector funds for start- up of new non-profit and early planning and community engagement. Although building belongs to the city, the nonprofit board has never been subject to Sunshine although they have been very transparent in all of their activities.
- The same nonprofit now runs the facilities. They program both theaters at Dr. Phillips plus the old performing arts hall, Bob Carr. Stressed importance for the organization to control the booking of old facility so it is not in competition with new facilities.
- Project funding was 1/3 CRA, 1/3 Tourist Development Tax and 1/3 philanthropy. In the previous effort in 1990, \$15 million in state funds was secured and they were able to utilize it.
- Parking is through existing downtown city parking garages (3-5000 spaces) plus event valet for 300-500 cars. There is no parking at the theater complex.
- All three theaters were to be built at once but economic downturn's reduction in TDT meant only first 2 theaters were built. By separating, this meant \$100 million more needed for the separate 3rd theater. When times got tough, some of the arts groups did not see the big picture.
- The resident arts groups have reduced rent and calendar priority.

Ms. Ramsberger has these keys to the project:

- Have a big idea, their big idea was a financially sustainable model.
- The project must be for everyone.
- Public private partnership – would not work unless it was a private entity doing the fundraising and running the project.
- Communicate, communicate, and communicate. Focus on listening process. Established “love” leaders who then were outreach coordinators in their various communities.