

ARENA DISTRICT STEERING COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, June 4, 2025

Committee Members Present:

Mayor Kelly Girtz, Committee Chair
Commissioner Allison Wright
Commissioner John Culpepper
David Bradley, Athens Chamber of Commerce
Tres Small, Classic Center Authority
Jason Leonard, Downtown Development Authority

Committee Members Absent:

Jennifer Zwirn, Classic Center Authority

Staff:

Ilka McConnell, Interim-Assistant Manager
Sarah George, Chief of Staff
John Hawkins, Interim - County Attorney

Bruce Lonnee, Planning Director
Anna Chimo, Internal Support Administrator

Visitors:

Paul Cramer, Classic Center
Jamie Childer, Classic Center

Committee Chair Mayor Kelly Girtz called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

A. Approval of Meeting Agenda

The first order of business was the approval of the meeting agenda. Tres Small moved to approve the agenda, and David Bradley seconded the motion. With no discussion, the agenda was unanimously approved by the committee

B. Approval of Minutes:

The draft minutes from April 30, 2025, were reviewed. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Tres Small and seconded by Jason Leonard. The motion passed unanimously. Clarification was provided that the minutes were still in draft form and had not yet been posted publicly.

C. Review Updated, Detailed Pro Forma

Paul Cramer and Jamie Childer provided a detailed walkthrough of the pro forma. The FY26 budget projects revenue of \$29 million, an increase from the \$16 million earned in 2019, the pre-COVID peak year. Food and beverage sales from hockey games have more than doubled initial estimates, and events held at the theater and arena are bringing increased business to the community. The projected net income for FY26 is \$6.6 million, with a net cash income of \$5.4 million after factoring in depreciation, capital expenses, and debt payments. A \$2 million reserve fund, from past Classic Center profits, is in place to help offset financial shortfalls in the early years of repayment. For FY26, debt obligations include \$464,000 for the Regions loan and \$5.2 million in bond payments, with future debt service expected to rise to around \$6.5 million annually. The committee discussed including actual financial results from the current and previous years in future quarterly updates. They also reviewed the conservative nature of projected revenue growth, estimated at 2.5 to 3 percent annually, and clarified the difference between advertising income and sponsorship revenue.

A motion was made by Commissioner Wright to accept Pro Forma and to direct future Pro Forma's to include current fiscal year and prior fiscal year actuals quarterly. Commissioner Culpepper seconded this motion. Motion passed unanimously.

D. Update on Parking Deck

The committee received an update regarding the proposed parking deck expansion. Members were informed that although engineering drawings and feasibility studies have been completed and paid for by the Classic Center Authority, the Unified Government has requested that the Steering Committee complete its planning work before moving forward with the deck's construction. Several members voiced concerns about the delay, citing current parking shortages during major events. In response, it was explained that the commission prefers to integrate parking solutions within the broader context of development planning. Clarification was also provided regarding a stair tower built alongside the arena, which some had assumed was constructed solely for the future deck. In fact, it was required by building code to provide emergency egress from the arena. Paul Cramer mentioned that the Classic Center Authority is ready to proceed with construction once given approval.

E. Finalize Development Facilitator Job Description

Interim-Assistant Manager Ilka McConnell presented a draft Request for Proposals and Qualifications (RFPQ) and distributed for committee review. Staff explained that the document would soon be posted and remain open for at least 30 days. During that time, interested firms could submit questions, and administrative staff would review applications for completeness. A scoring committee would be formed to evaluate submissions. This committee would include members from Purchasing, Legal, Finance, Risk Management, and one representative from the Steering Committee. Elected officials are not allowed to participate in the scoring process. The committee approved a motion made by Commissioner Wright and seconded by Tres Small to appoint a subcommittee composed of Jason, David, and Tres to represent the full committee in scoring discussions and nominate one member to serve on the scoring panel.

It was noted that the facilitator's role could potentially include elements of both project management and development, and the committee debated whether the facilitator could also serve as a developer. Ilka mentioned that purchasing staff clarified that under current Athens-Clarke County policies, the same entity cannot serve both roles due to conflict-of-interest concerns. The committee agreed to revisit this issue and refine the RFPQ accordingly before final posting. It was also suggested that future meetings focus on clarifying the distinction between a facilitator and a master developer, determining the responsible contracting agency, and identifying funding sources.

F. Identify Next Meeting Date

To address outstanding issues related to the RFPQ, a follow-up meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, June 10, 2025, at 10:00 AM.

G. Adjourn

Commissioner Wright made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Culpepper seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

The meeting adjourned at 11:25 a.m.