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Designs for Cain Center put Cornelius arts facility in focus

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by Carrie. C. Causey

CORNELIUS – The collective vision of community members comes to life in newly approved schematic designs for the future Cain Center for the Arts.

Construction committee members worked with consultants at Charlotte-based C Design to develop a plan that draws on what residents have expressed they want, as well as what a regional arts center needs. It includes a 32,800-square-foot, two-story building with a 400-seat theater and a 1,200-square-foot-dance studio, along with classrooms and gallery space.

The Cain Center board, the nonprofit organization partnering with the town to establish and run the arts center, approved the design earlier this month. Town commissioners gave their unanimous endorsement Sept. 16.

“We are very excited about the work that has been done for the design,” Executive Director Justin Dionne said after the meeting. “We have spent the last two years working with the design team to study and listen to all of the stakeholders and communities to make sure we have a center that will serve the needs of the citizens of the Lake Norman region. There is still a lot of detail to work through on the designs, so we anticipate there could be some changes as we move more into the selection of materials, etc.”

Initial suggestions for what the center could have, which Dionne previously referred to as “pie in the sky,” have been scaled back to meet the project’s \$25 million budget. But designers make the most of the allotted space with multi-use functions.

Sliding glass doors separate the 600-plus-square-foot lower level gallery space, which has the potential to be rented out for meetings.

Downstairs also includes a box office, concessions and an 1,100-square-foot visual arts classroom, among other amenities.



Things continue to progress since Executive Director Justin Dionne unveiled the new logo for the Cain Center for the Arts in February. Cornelius commissioners recently approved its first schematic design.

Photo by Carrie C. Causey

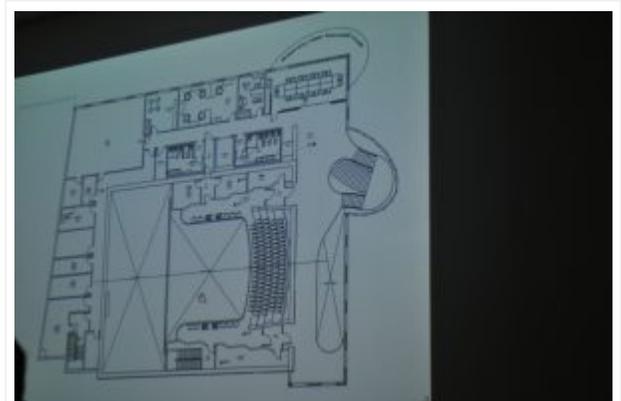
“The current classroom at the arts center is 600-650 square feet so that is almost double the space,” Assistant Town Manager Tyler Beardsley said. “We are happy to have that large of classroom.”

Performers can also take advantage of a pre-show “green room,” two dressing rooms and a staging area.

The theater’s lower level offers nearly 300 seats, and the upper level has more than 100.

“Four hundred seats seems to be the nucleus number to draw certain levels of performers,” Mayor Woody Washam said. “Some won’t come for less than that. Beyond that, you’d have to go to 800 to 900. We couldn’t get that onsite.”

The lower level orchestra section is slated to have chairs that retract so a platform can be added at stage level to host banquets or receptions for nearly 200 people.



The Cain Center for the Arts upper level is designed to have theater space, galleries, classrooms and a dance studio.

The second floor has a secondary gallery that could be used for visual arts programming.

“It’s not for your ‘dirty’ arts, but more drawing and pencil-type work than it would be for painting,” Beardsely noted.

Upper level designs include another classroom, a concession stand, office space, a boardroom, the dance studio and a warming kitchen.

Art amenities are planned for outside, too.

Public art is slated to be part of the brick-paver plaza, which can be roped off for outdoor social events or as a place for audience members to stretch their legs during intermission. Around the back of the building, a natural slope in the terrain makes the spot ideal for an amphitheater area or village green, Beardsley said.

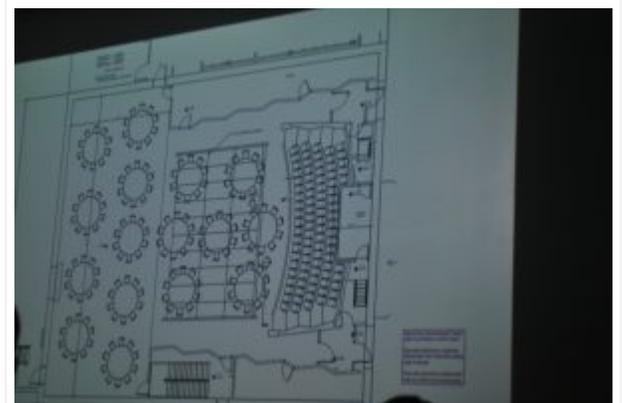
“We have a placeholder for the stage, but it’s not likely to be built (initially) in the budget,” he said. “Bands or movies can still be set up on the grass, and it can still be used as an amphitheater or as a public space.”

The design also accounts for the construction of a festival street that would be shut down for events.

“We don’t have a timeframe, but we are planning for that,” Beardsley said.

The next phase is design development followed by final construction drawings. Based on fundraising, Beardsley said, the grand opening is still targeted for spring 2022.

“Things are still fluid and can change,” Beardsley said. “We are kind of honing in (on) the design.”



The Cain Center for the Arts designers are trying to make best use of the space, like converting part of the theater seating into a platform to offer room for banquets or receptions.