

Architects chosen for new arts center

Written by Cassie Fambro

CORNELIUS, N.C. -- Two firms have been selected to design the Cornelius Arts Center that will be constructed on just under two acres in downtown Cornelius.

The project received the green light back in 2013 when citizens approved a \$4 million bond to bolster economic growth and development downtown. The art center will be run by a 501(c)(3) and is expected to be completed by 2020. The town's goal was to find an architect who would identify the uniqueness of Cornelius and design a building that complemented the existing art culture of the town.

After a four-month search, a dozen firms were selected to submit proposals. That was then narrowed down to four, who gave full proposals of what their vision would be.

Ultimately, C Design from Charlotte and New York-based Holzman Moss Bottino Architecture were selected. The art center's Executive Director Justin Dionne told the Cornelius Town Board Monday night that the art center team is ecstatic with the choice.

"We feel really confident this is the team that will take the art center to the next level," said Dionne.

Malcolm Holzman spoke to the board as well, outlining his experience and goals for the community. His firm has done 282 performing and visual arts centers nationally, and have authored several books detailing the different projects they've designed. Holzman said the next step is a 90-day process focused on pre-design where they take feedback from citizens and officials about what the art center will need and look like. At the end of that period, there is a firm price point established for the project.

One of Holzman's specialities is "flexible spaces," which involve the ability to move seats and even stages to make theater spaces multipurpose venues. Commissioner Dave Gilroy questioned Holzman, asking him how he would focus on a community arts center versus a project that would happen in a major city. Holzman said the experience was exciting to him for just that reason.

"I have made buildings in New York and all over the country," he said. "I would never be able to do something like this." He recalled a project where a city council told him they would be thrilled if his building was a "seven out of 10."

"I think you would like to achieve a level of excellence," he said of Cornelius. "I think it will do something quite spectacular for your community." Mayor Chuck Travis, an architect, said he was thrilled about the selection as well.

"As the mayor and as an architect, this is a very exciting night for me," he said. He also pointed out that the co-architect involved, C Design, has been actively involved in the Charlotte airport project as well as various projects including Duke Energy. Rob Crain, principal of C Design, said that their local

touch will help make sure everything ties together, saying how excited they are to work with Holzman.

“He literally wrote the book on theaters and art centers,” said Crain. “We are excited to get to work.”

Holzman committed to assist with fundraising for the project as well. A \$100,000 grant from the state of North Carolina assisted in securing the services agreement.

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