

CITY OF KETTERING
CITY COUNCIL
WORKSHOP MINUTES
November 12, 2024

The Council of the City of Kettering, Ohio, met in a workshop session on Tuesday, November 12, 2024, in the Deeds Conference Room, Kettering Government Center, 3600 Shroyer Road. The meeting came to order at 6:01 p.m.

Council members present included Mayor Lehner, Vice Mayor Fisher, Ms. Duvall and Mr. Sullivan. Mrs. Hall, Mr. Scott and Mr. Suddith had an excused absence.

Staff members present included City Manager Matt Greeson, Assistant City Manager Steve Bergstresser, Assistant City Manager Bryan Chodkowski, Law Director Ted Hamer, Planning & Development Director Tom Robillard, Communications and Engagement Manager Amanda Harold, Economic Development Manager Kyren Gantt and Clerk of Council Amy Hayslip.

Theatre Projects presenters were Gena Buhler, Principal-in-Charge and Vicki Infinito, Project Lead; not in attendance was Ashley Keen, SME: Venue Operations.

Mr. Sterling Abernathy and Mr. Bill Tschirhart were also in attendance.

Economic Development Manager Mr. Kyren Gantt introduced himself to City Council. Mr. Greeson introduced Mr. Bill Tschirhart who will be the new Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts Director beginning in December 2024.

Mr. Greeson commented that tonight's presentation on the Frazee study does not require any City Council decision tonight. He would be speaking to the members of Council who are not present tonight. Tonight is about questions and dialogue.

Frazee Pavilion Operational and Organization Assessment Study
Gena Buhler and Vicki Infinito from Theatre Projects presented.

Today's Discussion

Introductions
Study process
General observations
Business model review
Recommendations
Defining success

Process

Guiding Questions

Community sentiment: Are the city and residents aligned on support of the Frazee Pavilion, including the venue and programs integration into the park?

Programming: What programming and experiences are most meaningful and valuable to the community

Being competitive: How can Frazee change and improve to stand apart in brand, programming, access, and experience?

Balanced booking strategy: How should free community events, festivals, community access events and commercial/ticketed programming be distributed throughout the venue calendar?

Sustainability: Can the Frazee Pavilion improve its financial sustainability (revenue and expense models) and begin to decrease the financial risk to the City?

Community Voice

Community engagement strategy – Engaging with the community and key stakeholders was essential to ensure our analysis reflects the real-world experiences and perceptions of those directly impacted by Frazee Pavilion’s operations.

Key Project Stakeholder – Over 4,500 engaged

- Frazee Pavilion Team
- City of Kettering Staff
- Frazee Guests
- Local Kettering Community

Community Engagement: Key Themes

Strong Community Value and Sentiment

- Frazee Pavilion is **valued as a community hub, bringing people together** and providing a social gathering space.

Desire for More Diverse and High-Quality Programming

- Strong feedback requesting less emphasis on tribute bands and more variety in big-name artists.
- Community suggests **increased focus on free and community-oriented programming** to stay true to Frazee’s original mission.
- Concerns about losing quality acts to other local venues, like the Rose Music Center.

Operational Challenges and Needed Improvements

- Issues with **long concession wait times**, ADA accessibility, and customer service highlighted.
- Respondents noted **outdated infrastructure** as an area for improvement, especially seating.

Financial and Structural Concerns

- Need for more efficient management and **financial sustainability**.
- Investment in **infrastructure upgrades and new technology** (e.g., point-of-sale systems) recommended.

Positive Perception of Location and Atmosphere

- Frazee’s setting in Lincoln Park **praised for its natural beauty** and intimate environment.
- Venue’s integration with the park adds to the overall event experience.

Our Observations

Strengths

- **Dedicated** Frazee team
- Loved in the community
- Appreciative and **loyal audience** base
- Free events provide **access** to those who may not be able to attend ticketed events

Challenges

- Concessions staff and **aging F&B infrastructure**
- Operating within governmental organizational business structure
- Reliance on single vendor for lighting equipment, IATSE (production) staffing and venue production management
- Multiple **similar sized venues** within 90-mile radius.
- Growth of festivals in market area, creating new exclusivity conflicts
- Shortened season compared to competitive venues in the region

Opportunities

- Develop **stronger brand message**, with a new communication to the community of what the **“Fraze experience is”**
- Marketing services enhancements
- Business model and process adjustments
- Improvement in hiring parameters for qualified staffing
- **Concessions infrastructure** enhancements to **improve guest experience** and profitability

Business Model Assessment

Competitive landscape

Dominance of Large Promoters: Major competitors in the region partner with industry giants like Live Nation and AEG, **giving them extensive resources and influence, making it challenging for independent venues to compete.**

MEMI (Rose Music Center)

- 3 competitive venues, with support from Live Nation, increasing their control and access to tours.
- New 4,500 capacity year-round venue forthcoming
- Andrew J Brady Music Center in Cincinnati (4,500 capacity)

PromoWest Productions

- Owns MegaCorp Pavilion (Newport, KY and KEMBA Live! (Columbus, OH) with partner AEG.
- Year-round with indoor/outdoor flexibility gives them a competitive advantage in programming volume.

A competitive landscape slide was shown with a map comparing the overlap of visitors between the Frazee Pavilion and the Rose Music Center.

Visitor Overlap Analysis: Approximately 70% of visitors from both venues come from similar geographic areas.

Proximity Impact: Audience overlap is expected.

Competitive Challenge: This overlap highlights the challenge for both venues in attracting unique, distinct audiences.

Business model evolution

Opportunities for Evolution: Transform and evolve the Frazee business model to deliver quality, authentic experiences.

Three Strategic Paths: Identified paths to focus on financial sustainability, community engagement, and a balanced approach.

- **Community Driven:**
Free festivals; Free concerts; Low cost concerts; Community events
- **Bottom Line Driven:**
Corporate management; Maximize large commercial shows; Fewer community events; Fewer festivals
- **Mixed:**
5-10 major shows; Low cost concerts; More festivals; Community events

Business model evolution – recommendations

- **Path 1 (community-driven):** Eliminate due to its increased financial burden on the City.
- **Path 2 (Operator-at-Risk):** Worth exploring through RFQ, but may not be viable due to competition with commercial operators managing multiple venues in the region.
- **Prioritize Path 3: Recommend Path 3 (rebranding and mixed-use strategy)** as the most sustainable approach, balancing community engagement with financial stability.

Path 3 – Key considerations

- **Concessions Overhaul:** Improve **concessions to boost revenue**, streamline operations, and offer high-quality, fast-moving options.
- **Expand Festival Partnerships:** Work to attract **diverse festivals** (e.g., farmers markets, holiday festival, food and beverage events).
- **Evaluate Ticketed Events' Profitability:** Financial performance of ticketed events measured with **profitability matrix** including ticket fees, merchandise, and concessions.
- **Community-Focused Programming: Year-round community hub** with diverse events, free/low-cost activities, outdoor movies, local music showcases, and wellness festivals.
- **Leverage Free/Low-Cost Events:** Drive **community engagement and economic impact** with enhanced concessions to monetize increased foot traffic.
- **Maintain High-Profile Events:** Host 5-10 strategically chosen, ticketed events per season to attract sponsorship and deliver **high-quality experiences**.
- **Brand Evolution: Re-align the brand's public perception** by updating the messaging, identity, and visual elements to better align with the evolved goals.

Next Step: Defining Success

Success metrics – Season vs. single events

- Financially positive
- Community impact
- Audience development

Fundamental question... How does the connection between the Frazee and Lincoln Park reflect a broader vision for what Kettering can offer – a unique, community-centric asset that brings people together through shared experiences?

Success metrics – mixed model

- High-profile events
- Diverse events with a range of ticket prices and free events
- Multiple options for community gathering
- Economic impact

Critical Success Factors

Improved Concessions: Upgrade concessions to maximize revenue from high-traffic events.

Enhanced Marketing: Prioritize targeted marketing to increase visibility and ticket sales.

Evolved Brand Messaging: Develop updated messaging to re-align the public perception with the evolved strategy.

Implementation Plan – Developing a 5-year plan that includes:

- Immediate operational impacts (Summer 2025)
- Incremental operational and programmatic changes (2026)
- Concession and seating infrastructure investment (TBD)

Council discussion

Desired Outcome:

- Embrace and commit to the mixed model
- Direct staff to move forward with 5-year plan development

Discussion was held regarding what infrastructure upgrades would be, examples were a new point of sale process, digital menu boards, back of house technology and seating and ADA improvements.

Mr. Greeson reviewed the Council Agenda. Next workshop session we plan to present the Revenue and Fund Balances and also Comprehensive Planning update.

The City Council Workshop Meeting adjourned at 7:19 p.m.

ATTEST:

PEGGY LEHNER
MAYOR

AMY J. HAYSLIP
Clerk of Council