

AACTMAD Facilities Project - Questions and Answers

Why does the dance community need its own building?

The AACTMAD facilities committee is planning for the dance community's next generation. We wonder where we will be dancing in five or ten years. Up to now the growth of the dance community has been a lucky accident, but if we don't plan for the future, our future won't be as healthy. We want to pull together resources and talents of the group to create an environment that will assure the survival of the music and community we love. We think that means controlling suitable space. This was one of the top priorities that came out of AACTMAD's Long-Term Planning retreat in 2001.

Why would we build a new building rather than buy an existing building?

The committee is willing to consider any workable option. The cost of buying and rehabbing an existing building to meet our needs, however, may be much higher than constructing a new building, depending on the location. We continue to monitor what's currently available in the commercial real estate market and find that existing buildings are very expensive indeed. Think of the old Y at around \$5 million? Nice location, though...

Where would the building be located?

The committee is in the early stages of this project. We would like to have the building located within five miles of Ann Arbor and easily accessed by expressway.

Are there any precedents for this? Have any other dance groups bought or built their own building?

There are lots of examples of nonprofit arts groups that own their own facility. Specific examples in the traditional dance world include the Tapestry Folk Arts Center in St. Paul Minnesota and the Springstep Center in the Boston area. Tapestry bought a building and rehabbed it for use by a consortium of folk and traditional dancing and music groups. We are in continuing touch with that group so we can learn from their experience. Springstep built a new building that opened in September 2003.

What is the timeline for this project?

It usually takes a minimum of two to three years to make something like this happen. We are working with a sense of urgency balanced by reality. The timeline will be determined by availability of land or an appropriate building as well as our progress with fund-raising, business planning, and all the other tasks on the list. We think the project is at least a two-year project or more, depending on how things develop.

What will this project cost?

Figuring out the cost of the project is part of the work that has not yet been completed. The total cost depends on the cost of the land or existing facility, building costs depend on what exactly we build, and of course what we build will be dependent on fund raising and partnering results. It would be very premature to guess at a cost number. We naturally want to keep it economical while creating a quality result that meets our requirements.

What will be the cost to maintain the building? What will the cost be to operate it? Will it need full-time staff to keep it rented?

Figuring these things out is work that is part of the project's business plan. It's on the facilities committee's task list. The answers have not been developed at this time. Members of the facilities committee include people with substantial experience in building construction, building maintenance and operation, business planning, and finance.

What about the Grange? Would it be an alternative to have work done on the Grange building to improve it instead of buying another property?

AACTMAD's facilities committee has formally approached the local Grange organization to discuss working together to bring the building up to code and expand it for the future. The Grange has responded that it is not ready to work with us at this time. AACTMAD is counting on the existing grange building continuing to be available for dance events into the future. However, we do not control the Grange building nor can we have equity in it. One key Grange member has estimated that the building may have five more years of life, to possibly ten years, if nothing unexpected happens sooner. We believe the Grange's lot is too small to support expansion in the current location, and it doesn't make financial sense for AACTMAD to invest in a property we cannot have any equity in. While discussions about further joint efforts may continue, we are currently exploring other options.

What about the Ypsi Freighthouse?

Friends of the Freighthouse petitioned the City of Ypsilanti, which owns the Freighthouse, not to get rid of the building and to allow them to run it. They are planning a fund-raising program to replace the floor to make it acceptable for dancing. While they would welcome our participation in the fund-raising program, they have other activities programmed to use the facility on weekends. We think it's great that there will be a place to dance in Ypsilanti and that they have plenty of activities lined up to use the building. We don't think this will meet our need for a facility in Ann Arbor that will be available for our events.

How could we ever get enough money for a building?

Many nonprofits have been successful with fundraising projects. While the membership would help raise some portion of the contributions, AACTMAD is also eligible to apply for outside sources of funding. As a public charity foundation (501 (C) (3)), AACTMAD is well positioned to take advantage of outside funding opportunities that exist. Outside sources like grants are one kind of funding; another kind is donations from individuals who have the means to make significant tax-deductible contributions to support activities they like. AACTMAD's vision for a new facility includes having compatible partners, such as other non-profit organizations or for-profit companies that also need a facility and can contribute significantly and financially to this project. If you have fundraising experience, specific contacts, or partner suggestions, please talk to Gretchen Preston or Ray Bantle.

Dance attendance seems to be down overall. Why do we need our own building?

There could be many different reasons for a particular event's lower dance attendance, while some other events seem to be holding their own or growing. Each situation deserves its own analysis. However, without an active plan for the future, an organization will rise and fall with external trends and risks shrinking or dying in down times.

If we do nothing now to support the future of dancing, we can assure that dancing will not grow. And if in the future we find ourselves dancing around pillars on concrete floors in church basements with bad sound, for example, that would be one way to ensure that interest in traditional music and dance will decrease.

Many organizations have found that having their own building generates growth. But more important, building a facility is a process that will drive the dance community to assess its needs, be more visible in our community, identify compatible partners, and develop and promote programs that people value and support while advancing the organization's mission to preserve traditional music and dance and the dance community. Taking positive action in this way will give us a better foundation for growth than simply riding with the tide and seeing what happens.

How does the Facilities committee work?

The AACTMAD Facilities committee meets monthly and has these subgroups:

- Building design/architecture
- Fundraising/finance
- Acquisition
- Partnerships
- Communications - keeping people informed about progress

The committee keeps the AACTMAD Board informed at monthly meetings and the membership informed periodically as we make progress. We welcome interested members at all of our meetings. There's a lot to do.

What kinds of help does the facilities committee need? Are there ways I could help without joining the committee?

Yes! If you have interest or knowledge in any of the facilities subgroup areas, you could come to one of our enjoyable monthly meetings or just let Gretchen Preston know that you would like to share knowledge or ideas. And if you know of an organization that might be interested in partnering with us or of a person who might want to contribute money or work, we'd love to know. Don't assume we already know whatever you know: we're always glad to hear your ideas.

Is there enough money and energy among the current membership to take on this project?

We hope there is energy to support the effort and we've been encouraged by the strong interest and involvement we're seeing. All of the funds would not come from the membership. AACTMAD is a 501 (C) (3) public nonprofit foundation, eligible for outside funding (unlike a church, for example). In November 2004 we filed our first tax return; this is a big milestone that allows us to apply for outside fundraising, drawing on resources outside the AACTMAD membership.

What are the risks of owning a building and how would they be addressed?

There are risks involved in owning a building, just as there are risks to AACTMAD's future in not pursuing its long range plan to secure a dance facility for its programs and activities. Any specific plan that the Facilities committee brings to the Board will be approved and executed only after very thorough consideration by the Board. AACTMAD is now working with real estate and banking professionals who will help us estimate costs realistically and structure any agreements carefully. A well-considered business plan will very likely include professional staff to manage and maintain a new building, which is another way to minimize risk. Real estate in the Ann Arbor area has been a great investment for at least the last several decades; if we found that some time in the future the building was no longer financially viable, we could sell it with little risk of financial loss.

What kinds of organizations might want to partner with us to work on the building project?

There are many ways another organization could decide to be involved with the building project. At the simplest level, they might simply want to rent space from us after the building is completed. At a more intimate level of involvement, they might want to sign up to work with us to develop the building to meet their specific needs, making a financial commitment as well. In between, there are lots of options. Potential facilities partners do not have to be focused on traditional music and dance, nor do they even need to be nonprofit organizations. They just need to want space.

The partnering subgroup is working with our banker, realtor, and the NEW Center (a regional resource for nonprofit organizations that is based in Ann Arbor) to put out feelers to other groups and companies who might have interest. Committee members are also talking to other groups they come in contact with. It's a long-term process that starts with getting the idea out there. We are also planning a systematic survey of non-profit groups to determine space needs and find other compatible groups we might pursue as partners. Compatibility is a function of our core values as well as the group's facilities needs.

If you know of an organization that may need space for its activities, let Gretchen Preston know at gpreston@gretchenshouse.com.

Has anyone talked to Ann Arbor Recreation about the chronic need for basketball/volleyball gym space? Could we partner with them or could they be a renter?

We've talked *about* Ann Arbor Rec but not yet pursued the contact. This is an idea on the partnering subgroup's list. We've got a growing list and welcome all ideas.

How is the facilities committee communicating with the membership about this?

We have put together a number of information boards for display at dance events. The boards include the URL for the AACTMAD website (www.aactmad.org) where these questions and answers and drawings can be seen on the web plus the email address to send questions and comments (gpreston@gretchenshouse.com). We have also sent out broadcast email updates to the membership and will continue to do that periodically as we have news to report. The committee reports in person just about every month at the AACTMAD board meetings, which are open to all members, and the board meeting dates are in the Events Calendar. We notify the board and other interested people of the dates of the facilities meetings and have provided updates to be mailed with dance calendar. We have held a series of an informal brainstorming events open to all members (so far August and October 2004 and at the 2005 Dawn Dance Weekend) to answer questions and brainstorm ideas. Membership questions and suggestions are always welcome and may be sent to gpreston@gretchenshouse.com or by calling Gretchen Preston at 734-747-8138.

I still have questions and/or reactions, comments, suggestions. Who can I talk to about this?

Gretchen Preston is the chair of the facilities committee. You can email her at gpreston@gretchenshouse.com or call her at 734-747-8138. You can feel free to share your ideas and reactions with Gretchen or with any other members of the committee. The committee members include: Nelson Bacigalupo, Mike Duffy, Tim Janssen, Ray Bantle, Abby Liskow, Marge Cramton, Nawal Motawi, Greg Meisner, and Nina Scheider. (Not a complete list.)