



MEMORANDUM

TO: James R. Hall
Parks and Recreation Department Director

FROM: Boise Depot Vision Committee

DATE: May 5, 2008

RE: Committee's Recommendations Regarding Proposed Use for Boise Depot

SUMMARY

The Committee developed a vision statement for the future use of the Depot, as follows:

The Depot is an accessible, historically-preserved and sustainable City landmark that is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood. The Depot serves as a desirable venue for special events, a showcase for the art and culture of the community and for Boise's transportation history, and a valuable component of the City's developing transit system.

Analysis of the costs to execute this vision and the need to obtain additional market research has led the Committee to recommend that the City execute a phased-in approach to implementation. The first priority would be investments in marketable facility amenities, complemented by additional market and grant research, and the production of community events.

The Vision for the Depot Committee recommends it reconvene to review the outcomes of specific recommendations set forth in this memo and determine next steps.

BACKGROUND

The Vision for the Boise Depot Committee was appointed in January 2008 to determine the best use of the Boise Depot while maintaining its historic integrity in a fiscally responsible manner. As part of this process, the Mayor had requested that the Committee consider the possibility that the building may once again serve as a railroad passenger terminal.

The Committee met on February 13, 2008 to evaluate the current use of the Depot and identify possible future uses. Subcommittees were developed to develop operating scenarios around three preferred uses: Special Events and Rentals; Transit; and Museum, Display, and Education. The Committee met again on March 6, 2008 to discuss the research and recommendations of these subcommittees:

Special Events/Rentals - The Committee recommended focusing on the facility as a niche venue marketed to rental events and meetings. The City would also produce two events annually for the public to celebrate the Depot as a city landmark, and potentially raise funds for its continued

operation. In addition, the City would continue to manage the leased space. Open hours for visits to the Depot by the general public would be staffed at least one day a week.

Transit - The Committee recommended focusing on ensuring that the use of the Depot would accommodate potential future transit uses such as Amtrak, as well supporting connectivity to the City's transit system, particularly for pedestrian, bike and shuttle users. The former Amtrak office should remain as city meeting space until such time as the space is needed again for Amtrak operations.

Museum/Display/Education- The Committee recommended that niches within the Depot be used to showcase the Depot as well as the community's heritage, art, and history. Exhibits would be designed to be easily moved if required for special events. Potential exhibits could include film about Boise's transportation history, displays relating to railroad history (including old railroad equipment, passenger cars or caboose), displays relating to transit history and future transit options, displays relating to Boise City history, artwork by local arts groups such as Plein Air Painters, Idaho Watercolor Society, and educational displays to attract K-7th grade visitors.

ANALYSIS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

City staff and two project consultants analyzed the practical, fiscal, and political feasibility of the Committee's proposed vision. This analysis indicated that the Committee's proposed use for the Depot is administratively feasible, supportive of the facility's historic integrity and of a future use as a railroad terminal, and provides the highest and best use for this City landmark.

If the entire scenario was implemented immediately, it could result in a net operating deficit of up to \$75,000 per year. One time capital costs to fully realize the proposed use could exceed \$635,000. However, the City could consider supporting operations until increased marketing of the facility could increase rental revenues, and/or phasing-in major capital improvements over time.

A complete analysis of the recommended uses is attached.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

The Committee met on April 21 to review and discuss the analysis of the proposed use of the Depot. Committee members felt that estimates for expenditures and revenues should be more conservative. Concerns were also expressed about the ability of a special events coordinator and increased marketing to significantly increase the use of the facility and related revenues until some capital improvements were made to the building.

The Committee agreed that the City should execute a phased-in approach to implementing the proposed vision for the Depot. The first priority would be investments in marketable facility amenities, complemented by additional market and grant research, and the production of community events.

Specific recommendations are as follows:

1. Utilize current Depot operating surpluses to invest in improvements to the building that will increase the marketability of the facility. Specifically, the investment in a noise absorption system (approximate cost - \$40,000).
2. Focus existing budget and any future operating surplus on marketing the acoustic improvements to the building, and the resulting desirability of the facility for general rentals for meetings, retreats, etc.
3. Produce 1-2 free community events to expand the awareness of the facility and its uses. Fund these special events through donations.
4. Conduct additional market analysis to determine the market for facility rentals mid-week and during the day including what amenities are most desirable by these users.
5. Issue a Request for Information (RFI) to solicit information from potential event and facility management contractors regarding recommended staffing, marketing and operations to reach desired objectives in a fiscally net neutral environment.
6. Involve the Department of Arts and History in identifying and pursuing grants for exhibits and educational programs for children relating to train history and the role of the Depot in Idaho's history.

The Vision for the Depot Committee would then reconvene to review the outcomes of recommendations #1-6 and determine next steps.