
Date: 10 December 2019
To: Kate Scorza Ingram Create Today
From: Alec Stoll Stages Consultants
Project: Salt Lake County Cultural Facilities Study
Re: Facilities Assessment

Stages work includes a survey and assessment of the existing performing arts facilities within the County of Salt Lake. We worked with the county and other interested parties to assemble a comprehensive list of venues for study. A selection of these venues was visited during a physical assessment tour in August of 2019. This tour provided critical information both about the venues as well as the health of the arts environment within the sector of the county. With the county's assistance, information was also gathered by phone, email, as well as a written survey for venues that were unable to be included on the tour.

The purpose of this work was to catalog and inventory the available venues, the utilization and their availability to the arts councils. The catalog of venues allows assessment of the gaps and redundancies within the existing landscape and the opportunities to grow and strengthen the County's commitment to the arts through Master Planned projects.

This memo is intended to provide guidance to the study team for the Master Plan report. It is not intended for direct inclusion into a report without further integration.

6 geographic areas of interest within the county were studied: North, The University of Utah District, East, Southeast, Southwest, and West. A total of 72 venues were evaluated, which (roughly) break down into the following categories:

- 14 Amphitheatre / Pavilion / Lawn / Park
- 14 "Black Box" / Studio Theatre / Flat Floor Multipurpose Room
- 12 Proscenium Theatre
- 5 Artist Studio / Exhibition Spaces
- 4 Arena-Seating or Thrust Theatre
- 4 Concert and Recital Halls
- 4 Dance Studios
- 4 End Stage Theatres
- 4 Lecture Hall
- 2 Film Theatres
- 2 Galleries
- 1 Planetarium
- 1 Warehouse Performance Space
- 1 Youth Media Center

Overall impressions and key learnings:

Thriving arts scene

The arts are doing quite well in the County. Each sector of the county has a diverse variety of venues and present varied works. However, population growth is a concern, as growth is quite high in the County and many of those people are arts consumers.

The arts in Salt Lake County are invariably considered a very important part of the lifestyle and cultural heritage of the area.

Accessibility to the arts and travel time

With the explosive growth in population has come growth in jobs in developing areas. These patrons, we've been told, are looking for both an evening of entertainment in the downtown core where they would be willing travel. But also, arts that are produced locally using local talent.

Seasonal use venues

One of the venue types well represented in the county is the Amphitheatre, with the highest number of facilities in the study. It's unsurprising with scenic environment and pleasant summer. However, these venues are only viable in the summer months and some shoulder weeks. These may be inexpensive venues to build, but only some performance types and productions are suitable for them. Additionally, there seems to be a high demand for quality performance venues during the colder months, when options are currently more limited and with longer travel times for patrons.

Varied performance venues but nowhere to rehearse

While the local arts councils are thriving and have generally located venues to perform, few venues include rehearsal facilities. Most venues thought that they would be able to present more works and having an easier time scheduling around high demand times of year, if performances and rehearsals could be separated. Currently most act rehearse in the same space as they perform, consuming time slots for other users.

Access for arts organizations

Many primary education facilities exist in the area with a performing arts venue. That venue is often underutilized. However, outside arts organization have a difficult time renting or utilizing these venues due to the time needed in the venue for both rehearsals and performance. This was a nearly universal sentiment from the organizations that have or do use educational facilities. Rehearsal spaces above may make these venues more accessible by reducing the necessary time onsite.



What's not included

The facilities study does not address places of worship and their attendant performance facilities. As worship is a large part of the Salt Lake Valley, this intentional omission is worth note as many private performance facilities exist that are not open to the public but still compete for attendees.

Progress since 2008

Since the study that was completed in 2008, Salt Lake County has made significant strides to meet the County's arts facilities' needs. The additions of the Hale Center Theatre and the Eccles Theatre have changed the cultural landscape at the high end. These facilities should be points of great pride for the County and it would be incredible if future projects met the level of quality of these.

The Mid Valley Performing Arts Center that is currently under construction will hopefully be the first of several projects that fill in facilities for the mid and lower tiers of performing and visual arts organizations in the valley. These facilities should be designed with design, quality, and civic pride in mind, but they must first be economical, functional, and durable. These are buildings that can only thrive if they are heavily used, and they will have to stand up to that.

Recommendations:

Consolidated rehearsal facilities

Several consolidated rehearsal facilities could be located and outfitted to draw from a wide area and also include arts organization offices. This would serve as an arts hub to comingle the various organizations and promote cross-disciplinary work as well as giving the organizations buy-in to a facility. Several organizations noted the need for administrative office space, which would be ideally located in the same building as rehearsal spaces. These facilities can be based on a master model developed by the County and customizable for the specific location or needs.

Only approximately one quarter (20 of 72) of the venues in the study had rehearsal facilities. Most of the remaining venues used valuable time on stage for rehearsals or had truncated rehearsal schedules due to lack of space.

It is important to note that a high demand for rehearsal spaces existed as part of the 2008 Master Plan survey as well, with over 50% of facilities indicating they had inadequate rehearsal space.



Consolidated arts facilities

Like the 2008 Master Plan, our recommendation for arts facilities is to build regional facilities, housing a variety of size and type venues. However, the community response to the Mid-Valley PAC project gives one pause. During our interviews, the poor response was attributed to location (the PAC is not in MY town), cost (greater than was originally billed), and cost/program cuts (user thought their needs were no longer being met by the facility). These perceptions will likely shift after the facility is open. A smaller facility, but more of them – may not meet the need, but is the communities' desire.

A rationale not to combine the rehearsal and performance facilities

There are a couple of reasons to not combine the performance and rehearsal facilities. For starters, in a combined facility, the 'face' of the building will be the lobbies and venues while the rehearsal facilities will be relegated to a secondary role. This is not desirable because while the performances are public, the rehearsals and classes are where the community really comes together.

Additionally, rehearsal and community event facilities will often be used for children's events during the day. In a combined facility, the entry to the classrooms and rehearsal facilities may be in a hard-to-find part of the building with an entrance on the side or rear. Entering through the front of the building may be difficult for unescorted children to find their way backstage for access to a rehearsal hall. Separating the rehearsal and administration building from the performance facility addresses these concerns, where children can be dropped off for classes, camp, rehearsals, etc in a similar manner to a primary education facility.

Finally, a facility dedicated to rehearsal rooms, dance studios, and classrooms can be built quite economically while a performance facility usually isn't. There are several reasons that facilities for public performance are pricey including the complicated nature of the construction, the amount of specialty equipment, and often the 'showplace' nature of the design. Appending a rehearsal facility onto a performance facility often increases the cost of the rehearsal facilities to the level of the performance venues. It never works the other way.

Fine arts exhibition space study

While not within the scope of this study, a visual arts survey should be undertaken and note the deficiencies in the exhibition inventory.

Centralized or regional Arts Councils



One of the interesting and encouraging aspects of the County's cultural landscape is the sheer number of arts organizations. While on a local level these seem to be managed by the Arts Councils, those Arts Councils appear to be only locally engaged. Existing facilities could be more heavily utilized, and resources shared if a supervisory body were created to assist individual Arts Councils in connecting needs with resources. This supervisory body could be a county wide system or a more regional incarnation. Further study would be needed.

