

WHEN TRAILS ARE WET: Bike features can be anywhere. Between spring showers, Jack Cummins, Tucker Shaffer, and Sam Brethauer sent it on their bikes around town. PHOTO BY LYDIA STERN

Council okays looser alcohol rules for events

"It's not illegal but it's pretty edgy"

[BY MARK REAMAN]

A couple of events this summer will have a taste of Las Vegas or New Orleans, and that has raised the eyebrows of the town attorney.

The One World music event, to be held on Elk Avenue after the Fourth of July parade, and the Ride-the-Rockies gathering in June will both allow people to wander the main area of town with an alcoholic drink in hand.

There will be a designated liquor permit area but there will not be any major fencing delineating that area. Instead, volunteers and security will man entrance and exit points to keep people from wandering too far with their beers. Alcohol bought on Elk must stay on the street and alcohol bought in a private business must stay in the establishment. Think of it as a giant beer garden instead of just a half block at Third and Elk.

The Crested Butte Town Council discussed the situation on Monday, May 18 and was supportive of the suggestion to open up the liquor rules. Aside from the special What-ever USA party last September, a few other events last year had successfully implemented such an operation.

But town attorney John Belkin warned the council of the greater risks associated with the idea.

"It's not illegal, but I have talked to lawyers with extensive liquor regulation experience and this is relatively unique," he said. "Not having a fence was an issue. They didn't think it was advisable to not have a fence. The town's insurance company feels no fence is not advisable. Can you do it? It's not illegal but it puts the town, the applicant, the people in there in a position of risk."

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Center for the Arts and Biery-Witt planners partner on vision for future

"We believe in what each other is doing"

[BY ALISSA JOHNSON]

With a new Center for the Arts planned in Crested Butte and the Biery-Witt Center planned as a performing arts and event center in Mt. Crested Butte, it doesn't take long to uncover questions in the community.

Does the upper end of the valley need two facilities? Are the two organizations duplicating services? And how will they raise enough funds to build both?

A 13-member task force—including staff and board members from both organizations, representatives from the towns of Crested Butte and Mt. Crested Butte as well as members from the community at large—has been meeting since January to answer those questions. Some of them have been meeting weekly.

It has been a long and involved process, and much remains to be examined. But task force members agree there is a demonstrated need for both facilities, each organization will continue its fundraising efforts, and there are opportunities to work together when it comes to operations, marketing and serving their respective audiences.

Opening the books

With the help of Grand Junction-based facilitator Illene Roggensack of Third Sector Innovations, the task force combed through each organization's business documents. They looked at facility designs, business and operating plans, and fundraising campaigns—a move that isn't common in the world of business, nonprofit or otherwise. But according to Bill Ronai, co-president for the Mt. Crested Butte Performing Arts Center (the legal entity raising funds for the Biery-Witt Center), it was necessary.

"We looked at the respective business plans and went through them line by line, including their assumptions, to satisfy to ourselves that the assumptions were not unreasonable," Ronai said.

"That was a big transition," Center for the Arts executive director Jenny Birnie agreed. "I was impressed we did that. We learned over time that we definitely need two facilities."

In addition, the task force examined planned programming for each facility in order to understand where they might be duplicating services. What they found was very little overlap, due in large part to filling different needs for different audiences.

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Stand Down



Sage Burner

TOURISM FORECAST: The Chamber of Commerce presented predictions for upcoming summer tourism in Crested Butte at the Mallardi Theater on Wednesday, May 13. Expect it to be busy this summer.

PHOTO BY LYDIA STERN

Future of the Arts buildings

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Birnie and Ronai pointed out that a significant portion of the Center for the Arts programming focuses on community-based programs such as art classes, music lessons, and K-12 school programs.

In contrast, the Biery-Witt Center will focus on conferences, weddings, and events.

Woody Sherwood, executive director for the MCBPAC, explained, "The Center for the Arts is really a community based organization," meaning that it primarily serves full- and part-time residents of the community. "At the Biery-Witt Center, over half of the planned programming is events and conferences, so it's really an externally driven program."

It makes sense, therefore, that the Center for the Arts will stay in Crested Butte and the Biery-Witt Center will be in Mt. Crested Butte, where it will be adjacent to the valley's larger hotels and accommodations.

Both facilities are expected to be around 30,000 square feet, depending on final design and fundraising. The Center for the Arts will have a performance venue that seats 260 compared to its current capacity of 210, but will also include classroom and rehearsal space—Birnie says it will meet the needs of not only the Center for the Arts but also local nonprofits that turn to the organization for meeting and performance space.

The Biery-Witt Center will be designed to accommodate groups of up to 500 for conferences and conventions as well as the Crested Butte Music Festival.

Growing, year-round demand

When it comes to sustaining two facilities year-round, members of the task force agree the need is already here. Not only have several studies confirmed the viability of having two facilities in the com-

munity, but demand for arts and events programming is on the rise.

According to Birnie, the Center for the Arts saw a 26 percent increase in attendance between 2013 and 2014. Off-season programming is also growing. The Crested Butte Film Festival, which takes place at the end of September, tripled its attendance in three years. Dance has more than doubled enrollment in recent years, and a film shown during this year's spring break saw incredible attendance as well.

"I sometimes think there is a misconception that locals aren't an economic driver," Birnie said. Arts programming is in demand year-round, not only during tourist seasons or when second homeowners are in town.

According to David Clayton, mayor of Mt. Crested Butte, the Biery-Witt Center will fill existing conference and events needs as well. When the Gothic Building was demolished and when the Club Med theater and performance space (now the Elevation Hotel and Spa) was reconfigured, the valley lost venues that could seat 300 to 325 people.

And yet the need for a large meeting space hasn't gone away. Crested Butte Mountain Resort has just booked a 500-person group for next fall, Clayton said, and weddings and groups are a growing market in the valley.

"The demand is there now, so we really need to be able to deal with it," Clayton said. Add population growth to the mix—Colorado is projected to double its population in the next 30 years—and Clayton says building both facilities will meet current needs and help Crested Butte stay ahead of the curve.

Looking for efficiencies

Next up for the task force and the boards of directors for each organization is to look for ways to work together. Center for the Arts board member

Don Haver explained that a task force subcommittee is looking at whether pooling resources and staffing will provide opportunities that may not exist separately. In other words, would sharing aspects of leadership positions, staffing, marketing and program support help provide better programming for the community?

"And if someone calls the Center for the Arts for a rental facility that would be better met by a space at the Biery-Witt Center, can we be set up for that?" Haver explained.

How that collaboration will come to life is a long way from final. A strategic plan outlining the options will go to the boards of directors for both organizations early this summer, including the steps to make them happen.

"We are in the talking phase and bringing options to the boards," MCBPAC's Sherwood said. "We're looking for the best ways to optimize the existence and use of the two facilities."

In the meantime, both organizations will continue to fundraise, adhering to a set of best practices in order to respect each other's efforts. According to Birnie, after one year of fundraising the Center for the Arts has raised more than \$3 million and hopes to double that by this fall in order to break ground next spring. The total fundraising goal is \$15 million.

Sherwood said that the current commitments total \$18.4 million with about \$8 million to be raised in order to hit the funding goal, based on current construction estimates.

A lot of work lies ahead for both organizations, but the members of the task force say the added work of collaborating and involving the community has been critical. They've done more than confirm the need for two facilities.

As Clayton said, "We can now say, 'Yes, we believe in what each other is doing and what they are doing is correct and right.'"

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