

Maryland Stadium Authority and Town of Ocean City release feasibility study for proposed expansion of Convention Center

OCEAN CITY, MD (December 9, 2008) - The Maryland Stadium Authority and the Town of Ocean City released a feasibility study for a proposed expansion of the Ocean City Convention Center at a work session of the City Council on December 9, 2008. The study, prepared by Crossroads Consulting Services and HOK Venue, evaluated the proposed expansion with a market analysis, provided cost estimates for several building options, and made recommendations for a short range plan to address the facility's most pressing needs.

The study also considered the market for an auditorium or performing arts facility at the convention center complex.

"The Maryland Stadium Authority is again happy to work with the Town of Ocean City on their Convention Center plans," MSA Chairman John Morton stated. "This feasibility study provides a development strategy for long range expansion options, and also recommends capital improvements for more immediate enhancements."

The study confirmed that the original expansion of the convention center in 1997 fulfilled its mission to extend the resort town's season by attracting year round visitors while serving the local community. Of the estimated 110 events held annually in the facility, 35 - 40 are conventions and trade shows, comprising the largest portion of attendance.

Based on many factors, the study recommends a moderate expansion and remodeling to the convention center to modernize audio-visual and technical amenities, provide more function space to accommodate multiple events, increase prime exhibit space now limited by obstructions in Exhibit Hall C, and building a parking garage to replace lost surface space.

Distance from the airport, lack of an onsite hotel, and the number of regional residents participating in events are all factors generating more drive-in attendees. Parking at the existing facility is currently a challenge, and should be addressed in any expansion.

While the convention center attracts events that draw from outside Maryland, its current size is cited as a significant constraint by many other meeting planners and event organizers. The existing facility does not compare favorably with other comparable facilities in available exhibit space, and the study suggests that if improvements do not take place, its utilization will be limited to state and local activities.

A survey of this market determined that more than 80 percent would consider hosting their events at an expanded, modernized convention center. Survey

respondents indicated that these attendees would be likely to extend their stay in Ocean City for one to three days beyond the length of the event, creating greater economic impact for the hospitality industry.

Based on their research, the consultants recommend that an increase of approximately 50,000 square feet of exhibit space would make the facility more attractive to convention, trade show, meeting and sporting events. A new garage with 1,000 - 1,500 spaces would be needed due to the loss of surface parking.

As part of the study, Crossroads and HOK Venue were asked by the Town of Ocean City to analyze the feasibility of a performing arts center, seating between 1,000 and 2,000, either attached to or separate from the existing facility.

Based on the market analysis, they determined that a multi-purpose auditorium with seating capacity of 1,000 - 1,300 would be more complementary to the convention center than a dedicated performing arts center. It would also be more appropriate for the kind of event-related activities associated with convention center uses. The versatility of such a facility would give Ocean City a competitive edge over similar destinations.