

CRDA Venue Committee Meeting
APPROVED Meeting Minutes
September 10, 2021
3:00 PM

Members Present via GoToMeeting: Committee Chair Andy Bessette, Board Chair Suzanne Hopgood, DECD Commissioner David Lehman, DECD Deputy Commissioner Alexandra Daum, Andrew Diaz-Matos and David Robinson

Staff Present via GoToMeeting: Mike Freimuth and Kim Hart

The meeting was called to order at 3:01 p.m. by Chairman Bessette, who asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the June 4, 2021 meeting. Ms. Hopgood moved the motion and Mr. Diaz Matos seconded it. The minutes were approved on a voice vote.

I. **Venue Updates** -- Mr. Freimuth offered the following updates:

- a. **XL Center** – Spectra Venue Management announced that they might merge with the Oak View Group (OVG). CRDA is working to understand the repercussions of the merger, particularly as OVG does manage other venues in New England, including Webster Arena in Bridgeport. Mr. Freimuth noted that the company is known to invest significantly in facilities, which may be of help with XL renovation expenses. The merger process is expected to take approximately six to eight months.

Mr. Freimuth also noted that he continues to be involved in discussions with the CT Lottery about a sports betting facility at XL. Given Spectra's management role at the arena and their related concessions permits, they are a likely partner with CRDA on any betting facility and Mr. Freimuth has asked them to outline a proposal that would be submitted to CT Lottery on behalf of the partnership. Mr. Freimuth noted that a betting facility at XL may also include kiosks around the arena.

Events are returning to XL, with UConn Men's Hockey opening its season on October 2nd and the Wolfpack starting two weeks later. Other upcoming events include a U.S. Women vs. Canada Hockey game on October 25th, followed by the USA Gymnastics' "Gold Over America" tour on November 2nd. The facility is abiding by the City of Hartford's indoor mask mandate, however, CRDA is seeking clarification on requirements for participating athletes.

- b. **Pratt & Whitney Stadium** – UConn football opened its 2021 home season on September 4th with a loss to Holy Cross. Only 7,600 fans were in attendance, however, per cap numbers were over \$20.

Ms. Hart noted that in terms of non-UConn events, the Stadium netted significantly more revenue than expected for the two U.S. Women vs. Mexico soccer matches held in July. With the NCAA Lacrosse Championships next May and a number of other parking lot events scheduled (including a holiday light show), this fiscal year is expected to be one of the Stadium's most successful for non-football revenue.

Mr. Freimuth noted that the Stadium is close to 20 years old and the three agreements that govern its operation – the OPM/UConn lease agreement, the OPM/CRDA operations agreement and the CRDA/Spectra management agreement -- are all set to expire in 2023. CRDA believes it is critical at this time that the State undertake a comprehensive assessment of the facility both in terms of its architectural/mechanical systems, as well as its patron amenities.

An RFP for a firm to conduct such an assessment was issued in June. A Selection Committee comprised of CRDA, OPM and UConn representatives reviewed the four proposals received and a resolution authorizing a contract with the selected firm will be presented at the September 16th CRDA Board meeting.

- c. **CT Convention Center** – Mr. Freimuth noted that CRDA has recently experienced a number of event cancellations and this will impact staffing and operational expenses at the facility. Venue staff are attempting to reschedule as many of these events as possible and many groups are holding their dates. In light of these increasing COVID concerns, CRDA will not be enforcing its cancellation penalty for groups that opt not to reschedule. While some events are moving forward, CRDA understands that the pandemic is not yet over and staff feel strongly that maintaining good will with the hope that these groups will book events in the future justifies the revenue lost in eliminating the cancellation penalty.

Commissioner Lehman expressed his support for waiving the cancellation penalty but questioned the impact on the Convention Center budget. Mr. Freimuth noted while CRDA underwrites any budget shortfall, the estimated \$200k loss would be offset in part by reduced expenses in the building. In addition, the COVID relief funds approved by General Assembly for entertainment venues (including the Convention Center) are meant to cover just such losses.

II. Funding Request for Convention Center and Pratt & Whitney Stadium

Mr. Freimuth informed Committee members that the cooling towers in the Central Utility Plant that services the Convention Center, the Science Center and the Marriot Hotel are failing and need to be replaced as soon as possible, at a cost of \$2 million. In addition, with only a single elevator providing access to all floors of the Convention Center, the facility is in need of a second elevator to ensure disabled access and to increase efficiency, particularly as COVID has limited the number of patrons per car. A second elevator shaft was part of the original Convention Center construction, so only a car and elevator mechanics are required, at an estimated cost of \$1 million. Funding for the comprehensive Stadium building assessment discussed earlier in the meeting and HVAC/MEP repairs at that facility require an additional \$500,000.

After a brief discussion, Chairman Bessette offered the following resolution, which was approved on a voice vote:

Resolution: *The Venue Committee recommends that the CRDA Board authorize the Executive Director to apply to the State Bond Commission for \$3.5 Million for replacement of cooling towers and installation of a new elevator at the Convention Center, as well as a comprehensive building assessment and HVAC/MEP repairs at Pratt & Whitney Stadium at Rentschler Field.*

The next Venue Committee conference call is scheduled for **October 1, 2021**.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:38 p.m.