

Civic center directors okay altered concept

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Directors of the Rapid City Civic Center Plaza Corp. voted unanimously Monday to approve a somewhat altered design concept for the \$9.1 million sports arena and convention center complex.

While they agreed with an architectural proposal to place the three-element complex on a north-south line rather than an east-west line, they ordered designer Wallace Steele to return to his drawing board to explore the possibility of providing for four additional meeting rooms.

The extra meeting rooms are expected to cost another \$100,000 or more.

Steele told the directors and members of the Rapid City Common Council that the original design "encroached too much

on the flood plain," and moving the complex north while retaining the east-west placement would reduce the parking capacity to 2,100 vehicles.

"Flipping" the complex by 90 degrees, he said, would eliminate the flood plain encroachment and would provide parking space for 3,100 vehicles.

As now designed, the complex will feature a 1,750-seat theater-auditorium on the south end and a 10,500-seat sports arena on the north end. The two elements will be separated by a convention facility in which seven meeting rooms and a banquet room seating up to 1,500 persons will branch off a 190-foot concourse.

Steele said six of the meeting rooms will hold 75 to 80 persons while the

seventh has been designed to accommodate up to 275 convention participants.

His figures bothered several directors, and he was asked if more meeting rooms could be incorporated into the design.

"Yes, if you spent more money," he said. "There is space for extra rooms, but it's a matter of dollars and cents."

He said the rooms could be added most easily on the west side of the convention facility, possibly at the expense of a small number of parking spaces. But building costs, he pointed out, are currently pegged at \$32 per square foot.

Steele's design places the entrance to the theater on the west side of the structure and entrances to the sports arena on both the east and west sides. Exits are designed to allow for disposal "in all directions."

Earlier at Monday's luncheon meeting, directors heard the Rapid City Area Chamber of Commerce pitch for \$19,750 to supplement current funding for the operation of the Convention-Visitors Bureau and \$15,920 to pay for a new soundslide promotional program and informational brochure.

Convention-Visitors Bureau Chairman Nick Didier said promotional responsibilities for the civic center complex "would be a natural for us."

He said, "We recognize . . . that just having an excellent \$10 billion facility will not insure that conventions will be clamoring to come to Rapid City. If it sits empty, we will all be the losers."

Promotional activities must start immediately, he said, because most major

conventions are planned two to seven years in advance.

Ten major conventions a year would bring \$2.1 million into Rapid City and would generate \$42,000 from the city sales tax, Didier said.

The Convention-Visitors Bureau currently is operating on a \$27,868 budget. Bureau Director Stan Payton said an extra \$1,500 could get the ball rolling on the soundslide production, which he described as a 10 or 12-minute professionally-produced presentation extolling Rapid City as an ideal convention site.

"I am enthusiastic for having the Convention-Visitors Bureau do this," said Mayor Don Barnett, "but we also must be realistic. . . . It will be difficult to get money from the city council for promotion until the ground is broken and the civic center is under construction."

Alderman Charles Swander added that any "sizeable expenditure" should be delayed until the South Dakota Supreme Court renders a decision on the appeal of a lawsuit filed last year to stop the project. The ruling is not expected before mid September.

Directors voted in the end to recommend that the city council make \$2,000 available to the chamber of commerce to initiate promotional efforts.

In other business Monday, directors of the Civic Center Plaza Corp. heard Barnett report that the project fund stands at slightly more than \$1.5 million. They also discussed but took no formal action on a proposal to house the convention-Visitors Bureau within the confines of the civic center complex.