



## Larger vision of Armory features water wall, park

**For add-on ideas, Portland Center Stage would need \$5 million in private donations beyond its \$28 million budget**

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**SCOTT LEARN**

Portland Center Stage's vision for its Armory theater in the Pearl District may expand to include a water wall inside, a water-heavy sliver park outside and state-of-the-art green building elements.

Initial estimates indicate the larger vision would add nearly \$5 million to the theater's price tag. The project, under construction at 128 N.W. 11th Ave., has generated controversy because of the public dollars invested in a building next door to some of the city's most expensive condominium towers.

Greg Ness, board chairman of Portland Center Stage, said the \$32.9 million construction cost listed on the organization's Web site was built on a "a best-case wish list."

Private donations would have to cover any expansion beyond the Armory's \$28 million actual construction budget, Ness said. That budget includes a \$4.6 million loan from the Portland Development Commission and as much as \$10.6 million in private bank loans effectively guaranteed by the city.

The theater project's designer has "absolutely suggested some very exciting things" that could turn the 1891 Oregon National Guard Armory into a unique public space as well as a theater building, Ness said.

"But having said that," he said, "we have to figure out a way to fund them."

To date, Center Stage fund-raising for the Armory project is well short of its goals. The theater group's fund-raisers have brought in \$2.9 million in private donations so far, said Edith Love, managing director. When the theater deal was cut last year, Center Stage said its goal was to raise enough money to pay off the project's \$15.2 million in publicly backed loans -- nearly eliminating the risk to taxpayers -- by the theater's opening day in fall 2005.

The fund-raising goal remains the same, officials said, although opening day has been pushed to fall 2006 to accommodate theater scheduling. Several potentially large donors are considering funding requests now, Love said.

Ness and other officials insisted that any additional fund-raising for the expanded vision would focus on donors who wouldn't otherwise contribute to the project and would not take away from raising money to retire the loans.

The Portland Family of Funds, a community investment bank that orchestrated the theater deal, hired The Felt Hat, a Portland design group, to help broaden the Armory's appeal.

The proposed green building features include a 50-foot wall of water flowing from roof to basement, terminating in a pool that would double as a 15,000-gallon cistern, plus gas turbines and solar cells to reduce the building's dependence on outside energy.

The group's ideas also include touch-screen information kiosks, a wall of video screens and a food bar featuring local and "sustainable" food. The main lobby would function as a living room, the group said, including a 64-foot-long "community couch."

Outside, The Felt Hat proposed extending the sidewalk around a portion of the building to 20 feet, making room for a park that includes a water feature, shaded seating and landscaping designed to absorb the building's rain run-off.

The Armory would showcase green building techniques and would host events from poetry slams to alternative films to rotating art exhibits. The designer also recommends extending the building's hours from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. and providing free wireless Internet access to help attract the public.

The project's architect is refining cost estimates now. Bob Gerding, a principal in project developer Gerding/Edlen Development, said private donations to pay for the improvements will have to be in hand, or he will stick to the original \$28 million budget.

"This team is trying to make this a building the city can be very proud of and get a lot of use out of," Gerding said. "But it needs to be a theater first."

Gerding said the building can reach the highest standard of the U.S. Green Building Council, a platinum ranking, without expanding the budget.

Gerding also sits on Center Stage's board, and his firm is developing the Brewery Blocks complex, of which the Armory is a part. The theater project has drawn scrutiny for the \$3.15 million price the development commission paid Gerding/Edlen for the building and for the use of tax credits intended to benefit low-income neighborhoods.

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