

FAQs

What is the history of the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall?

- The Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall is a 1,741-seat theatre in Sarasota, Florida, built in 1969 using a seashell as the inspiration. The building was designed by chief architect William Wesley Peters, son-in-law to Frank Lloyd Wright, of Taliesin Associated Architects. The purple and lavender color scheme was suggested by Wright's widow, Olgivanna Lloyd Wright. The construction was partly funded by a bequest from local residents Lewis and Eugenia van Wezel.

Who owns the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall?

- The City of Sarasota owns the land and the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall building. The Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall operates as a department of the City and the employees are City employees.

Don't we as taxpayers fund the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall?

- No tax dollars are currently used to support the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall. It is completely self-supported through programmatic activities and philanthropy on approximately a 94% earned to 6% contributed income ratio.

What is the Van Wezel Foundation and how does it differ from the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall?

- The Van Wezel Foundation operates as a private 501(c)(3) supporting partner to the Hall but is independent from the City and the Hall. The Foundation was established in 1987 as a charitable not-for-profit organization and has directed \$13 million over 30 years in support of the Hall's educational efforts, capital improvements, and programs.

What is the Van Wezel Foundation's part in the discussion of the Hall's future?

- As part of its commitment to the continuing excellence of the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, the Foundation hired an arts management consulting firm, AMS Planning & Research, in 2014 to conduct a feasibility study. The study evaluated the Hall's current operations and facilities, and looked at options that include maintaining, improving, or replacing the current Hall as it looks toward the next 50 years.
- In partnership with the hall and the City, planning is now focused on the investment required to develop a new top quality arts and entertainment facility to enable continued success in an increasingly competitive and more demanding operating environment, and which would provide more services and amenities to the community.

Who is AMS?

- AMS Planning & Research has been involved in the improvement of the arts and entertainment business for nearly 30 years. AMS's work ranges from initial concept development and project feasibility to implementation; and includes strategic planning, operations consulting, and public policy in the arts and entertainment sector. The organization analyzes the operations of hundreds of arts and entertainment organizations across North America and is deeply involved in innovative change to help producers, presenters, artists and service organizations succeed.

What did the 2015 report showcase that suggests a new performing arts center is necessary?

- According to the research conducted by AMS and the planning study presented to the City Commission in 2016, AMS concluded that the Van Wezel is a highly successful, but ultimately unsustainable, enterprise in its current facility. Some key observations that indicated a new arts center was necessary are: the Hall's earned revenue is over 94 percent of current revenue which is unsustainable over time given competition for content and increasing costs, the main hall is over-utilized during peak season, and operations as well as patron experience suffer from significant fundamental deficiencies unique to the building's design .

What is the Van Wezel's role in The Bay project that is being talked about within the community?

- The Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall is the largest resident on the 53 acres currently undergoing master planning by the Sarasota Bayfront Planning Organization. As such, the future of the site aligns with the research conducted by AMS recommending a new performing arts facility for the future. The Van Wezel Foundation's role is to strategically plan this future alongside The Bay's vision for the 53 acres.

Why is the Sarasota Bayfront Planning Organization suggesting a new location for the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall?

- Currently, the structure is within a FEMA designated flood zone and at risk of serious storm surge damage due to the current building elevation and design. The design concepts presented by Sasaki, the SBPO's master planning firm, reflect the best location for a performing arts center on the site given environmental factors, traffic planning, potential phasing of the project, and community feedback.

Who will decide the fate of the current Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall facility?

- The City of Sarasota will ultimately make the final decision.

Why can't we just retain the building through a renovation?

- AMS research showed that bringing the existing facility up to current standards of the customer and operating expectations would require massive expense for major reconstruction. This would require the Hall to shut down operations for a time. Renovation expense is capped at \$15.5 million due to FEMA regulations, which doesn't support the amount of improvements needed for a successful future for the hall.

What will happen to all the shows already scheduled at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall?

- The Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall will remain occupied and active throughout the construction of a new performing arts center. Programmatic activities will transition to the new performing arts center after construction is complete.

Why vacate a building if it's in working condition?

- The current building does not meet future standards and limits programming growth. Though investments have been made over time, there are deficiencies in the aging building that may not be apparent at first glance. The building is vulnerable to climate impacts, exhibits wear and tear from age and salt intrusion and building systems are at the end of their useful life. The seating capacity is insufficient to remain competitive regionally, acoustics are inadequate for contemporary productions, theatrical systems require upgrades, and public spaces and amenities are not up to contemporary

standards also placing the hall at a competitive disadvantage. Programming growth and diversification is limited by insufficient performance, operating, administrative, and educational space and outdoor performance lawn amenities are insufficient for envisioned activity. With FEMA regulations limiting capital investment to 50% of appraised value, the current and future needs of hall in order to remain successful cannot be addressed adequately through renovation of the current facility.

What would a new performing arts center bring to the community?

- A new performing arts center provides more opportunities to better serve the community:
 - 1) A larger (2,250-seat) venue would be a **more competitive venue and attract** larger touring productions
 - 2) An Education Center would allow **more programs** with a **focus on Sarasota youth** and life-long learners
 - 3) Production, operation, and administrative support spaces would be **dramatically improved**
 - 4) Systems would be **state-of-the-art**
 - 5) Improved **acoustics** and **performance technology** would allow more sophisticated production
 - 6) New event spaces would **better support venue activity** and **provide rental opportunities**
 - 7) Contemporary standards would **enhance the patron experience**
 - 8) A new facility would provide an **iconic structure** for The Bay
 - 9) The venue would take **better advantage of Bay views, outdoor space,** and **other amenities** consistent with the Sasaki Masterplan
 - 10) The facility would **anchor 'The Bay'** and **serve the community for the next 50 years**