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**THE VAN WEZEL FOUNDATION RECEIVES APPROVAL FROM CITY COMMISSION TO MOVE FORWARD
WITH PLANNING FOR NEW PERFORMING ARTS CENTER**
Foundation to submit revised plans for City approval in coming weeks

Sarasota, FL (September 7, 2018) – In a special session 3-2 vote on Thursday, Sarasota City Commissioners approved the redevelopment of the 53 acres along the bayfront known as The Bay and gave the Van Wezel Foundation authorization to work with city staff to develop a memorandum of agreement for the development of a new performing arts center as the centerpiece of the park project.

“We are here today standing on the shoulders of Sarasota’s leaders from past generations,” said Mike Martella, Chairman of Van Wezel Foundation. “It was their vision and will that fueled the current hall’s growth and led it to become a cultural beacon, inspiring young and old alike to think differently, attract businesses and others to our community, and provide entertainment for all tastes. We are united with that vision and seek to do the same for future generations as we look forward and partner with The Bay to make our dreams a reality.”

The Van Wezel Foundation has worked with consultants for the past five years studying the feasibility of, and developing preliminary operating plans and governance for, a new performing arts center on the bayfront. With this approval to move forward, the Foundation will continue to develop conceptual plans for the site and work with city leaders on the governance and operating model for the new center.

“This is a huge step for the cultural and educational future of our region,” said Jim Travers, Chair of the Foundation’s Strategic Planning Committee. “The Foundation looks forward to working with the City Commission and staff to provide our region with the best cultural amenities and expanded educational programming that rivals other metropolitan cities nationwide.”

Drayton Saunders and Julie Harris have been named co-chairs of the steering committee to initiate the philanthropic effort for private sector funding of the project. The current plan estimates the new performing arts center will cost \$230-270 million. The Van Wezel Foundation has committed to a partnership with public sector, the City, County, and State, to raise the funds needed of the project.

“This announcement is the culmination of a lot of hard work and incredible collaboration between a number of private partners,” said Drayton Saunders. “While this project represents a significant benefit to our city’s economy and cultural offerings, we remain committed to raise funds through private partnerships and investments. I’m incredibly excited about all that has already been accomplished and the plans to move forward with the next phases.”

Comprised of distinct facilities, the new performing arts center will include state of the art, multi-purpose venues and an outdoor performance lawn designed to host professional entertainment and cultural events for the region. A new performing arts center will ensure Sarasota remains Florida’s Cultural Cast® for the next fifty years.

For more information, go to www.sarasotaperformingartscenter.org. For press inquiries, contact Mike Marraccini at 941-914-5324 or at mcm@largeinc.com.

About Van Wezel Foundation

The mission of the Van Wezel Foundation is to create a world-class performing arts center that enriches the community, supports arts education, and inspires young minds. Please visit our website at vwfoundation.org for more information.

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