



A few, fact-based responses to common misperceptions and questions about the Sarasota Performing Arts Center

On September 6, 2018, the Sarasota City Commission approved the Bayfront master plan with a new performing arts center at the heart of the Bay Park that will become the nexus of performing arts in our region for generations to come.

Today, the Sarasota Performing Arts Center Foundation (also known as Van Wezel Foundation) is proud to partner with the city of Sarasota and the Bay Park Conservancy to bring an exciting new dream to life.

Here you'll find answers to some common questions about the project. As we move forward, we welcome your questions and feedback.

Why does Sarasota need a new performing arts center?

Why a new center, and what's wrong with the old one?

The Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, which is owned by the City, is environmentally endangered, and it cannot be renovated as a contemporary state-of-the-art performing arts center that is economically competitive within the Gulf Coast region.

- The 2017 City Climate Adaptation Plan identified Van Wezel Hall as the City's most vulnerable structure, sitting in a high-risk flood zone. Parts of the building are below the floodplain.
- Water and salt are already taking their toll on the hall, weakening concrete and damaging electrical systems. Current annual repair and remediation needs are growing.
- Per independent engineering reports commissioned by the City, the structural life of the 60-year-old building is limited, and it requires significant capital investments.
- Per FEMA, to address coastal flood zone requirements and sea-level rise projections, Van Wezel Hall needs to be raised above the base flood elevation.
- Building design no longer meets contemporary audience standards and expectations concerning such features as a center aisle, accessibility, and state-of-the-art technology.
- With fewer than 2,000 seats, the Van Wezel Hall is at a competitive disadvantage for early routing of national and international artists and Broadway tours for the future.

Why a new center, and what's wrong with the old one?

Given all the problems Van Wezel Hall faces, why build the new center on the bay?

Building a new world-class performing arts center at the heart of Sarasota's definitive Bay Park redevelopment continues the cultural legacy of Van Wezel Hall as a major presenting theater serving the Sarasota community and the Gulf Coast region.

The Foundation has invested more than \$3M in private funding to bring global expertise in advanced marine engineering, theater design, coastal resiliency, and feasibility studies to the project. As a result, the new Sarasota Performing Arts Center will have the advantage of being farther from the water's edge and on higher ground, and will use advanced engineering and proven resilience techniques to meet the challenges of the site.

About Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall

Who is responsible for running Van Wezel Hall?

The City of Sarasota owns and operates Van Wezel Hall.

Did Frank Lloyd Wright design the hall?

No. Wright's son-in-law, William Wesley Peters, designed the hall more than a decade after Wright's death.

How was the hall funded?

The hall was funded through public and private sources and named for a gift from the Lewis and Eugenia Van Wezel Foundation.

What will happen to Van Wezel Hall?

As the hall's owner, the city is responsible for its future. The hall will continue operating until the new performing arts center is completed. The city will convene a blue-ribbon committee to explore viable and financially sustainable options for use and ownership and/or operation.

Is community input on the center being sought?

Yes. The Foundation conducted two community engagement surveys in 2018 and 2020 to gauge the public's opinion of and desires for the center. More than 18,000 community members responded, and their aspirations have shaped our strategic plan. Ongoing opportunities for community engagement and feedback will be offered throughout the project's various phases.

What will the Sarasota Performing Arts Center offer?

A decade of planning and input has led to the building program with a 167,000-square-foot venue—every inch committed to accessibility and design that can be used by everyone—and will include

- 2,200-seat main stage including center aisle(s)
- 300-seat flexible performance space
- Education and lifelong learning spaces
- Multiple outdoor public performance spaces
- Technology that will allow performances to be simulcast into the park

How will the new performing arts center be more than a building?

As a financially robust, year-round civic asset, Sarasota Performing Arts Center will enhance Sarasota's reputation as a regional, national, and international cultural destination.

It will...

- Create 5,000+ jobs over five to seven years
- Generate new career opportunities for the arts & culture industry
- Drive commerce year-round to local businesses—hotels restaurants, and retail
- Anchor Sarasota as a national destination for cultural tourism.

Will parking be onsite?

Some of it, yes.

A parking study, commissioned by the city and conducted by Tindale Oliver, recommended the need for 1,000 parking spaces to serve the new center. The study included best practice models from other regional and Florida performing arts centers. The need will be met through a combination of 600 surface parking spaces across Bay Park, a limited number of spaces beneath the performing arts center itself, and an abundance of offsite parking locations within walking distance.

Shuttle services will link the performing arts center and any offsite parking areas during events and performances. Valet parking and dedicated ride/share services will be available at the center. The city is working with private entities to address additional parking.

Steering the project

What does it mean now that a partnership agreement is in place with the city of Sarasota and the Foundation?

The Foundation and the city have had a thriving cultural partnership for over three decades.

On April 4, 2022, the Foundation's partnership role expanded when the Sarasota City Commission approved the execution of a partnership agreement for the planning, financing, design, and construction of the new Sarasota Performing Arts Center.

Together, both parties have laid the necessary groundwork—surveys, feasibility studies, engineering studies, and cost estimates. The partnership leverages the city's strengths and resources, the Foundation's private philanthropic resources, and the aspirations of our community to ensure project success.

Who will own the new center?

The City of Sarasota will own the Sarasota Performing Arts Center, which the Foundation will operate as a nonprofit 501(c)3.

That joint development and nonprofit operation model is used by the most successful arts centers in the nation.

How will the architect for the new center be selected?

The Foundation is responsible for coordinating architect selection and following the city's procurement regulations. An architect selection task force will lead the public procurement selection process, which will be guided by city ordinance and Florida statutes.

How will the new performing arts center be funded?

As a true public-private partnership venture, 50 percent of the funding will be raised from public sources and 50 percent from private philanthropy. The City and Foundation staff are working with an experienced economic development advisor to identify successful financing models that have been used as best practice in these kinds of legacy cultural projects.

Public Funding. The City of Sarasota will not assess taxpayers to fund the construction of the building. The City of Sarasota will be cautious and patient to meet its 50 percent obligation and will take as much time as necessary.

Public funding sources identified by the city—with the counsel of independent economic development advisors—include:

Tax Increment Financing (TIF):	80%
State and Federal Grants:	8%
Ticket Surcharge Bonds:	5%
Penny Sales Tax:	4%
Other Available Public Funding Vehicles:	2%

Private Funding. The Foundation is leading the campaign for private funding. A national fundraising firm has conducted a feasibility study for the Foundation, confirming the feasibility of funding the project and identifying likely local and national supporters of this campaign. The Foundation board of directors has committed the first \$20M to start the campaign.

What is the TIF?

Tax increment financing, or TIF, is a proven and widely-used method of financing major civic initiatives such as the new performing arts center and the Bay Park.

The TIF for the new park and performing arts center will not raise anyone's taxes in the city or county, and it does not affect current city or county budgets.

Instead, the TIF only collects the normal annual appreciation, if any, of commercial and residential real estate taxes in the area adjacent to and surrounding the park and center. In that way, it's a mutually beneficial financing arrangement between city and county governments, local business owners, and residents who benefit most from a civic improvement project.

And whether it is saved, invested, distributed, or used to underwrite other financing, like a city bond, the revenue collected can and will only be used for the park and center initiative.

What is the budget for the new performing arts center?

The new performing arts center is budgeted at \$275–\$300 million. That figure includes all aspects of planning, design, development, permitting, construction, and equipping the center. The cost will be split between public and private financing.

How was that budget determined? Why is the center so expensive?

This project aims to meet our community's performing arts needs and aspirations for the next 75 years and to continue the legacy of excellence Van Wezel Hall established.

A performing arts center is a specialized facility requiring unique design, technology, and operational components. To ensure that the center we build delivers on our objectives, we asked international theater consultants to calculate a budget, basing their figures on the costs of other contemporary performing arts centers in Florida and the nation and accounting for inflation and the current increase in the cost of materials.

Timeline

Where are you in the process, and when will the new performing arts center be completed?

The architect selection task force is being assembled while work with financial and economic advisors, fundraising staff, and volunteer board members continues.

Proposed project timeline

2023: Architect Selection and Design

2025: Permitting and Construction

2028: Opening