

LAKE CHAMPLAIN REGIONAL
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

DOWNTOWN BURLINGTON CONVENTION/MEETING CENTER

INITIAL FEASIBILITY STUDY

Pursuant to Regional Economic Development Grant
Department of Buildings and General Services
State of Vermont

September 23rd, 2014

Executive Summary:

Pursuant to an economic development grant through the Department of Buildings and General Services, the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce (LCRCC) and its affiliate, the Vermont Convention Bureau (VCB), undertook a study to determine the viability of locating a Convention and Meeting Center in downtown Burlington, VT. Although numerous studies had been conducted from the early 1990's through 2008, a number of factors have changed making the study a worthwhile endeavor. Those changes included the development of a density of hotel beds in the downtown area; an increased vibrancy in both transient and convention/meeting traffic; a decided preference among meeting planners for a downtown location and the loss of convention/meeting business due to the lack of a downtown space.

A number of stakeholders were brought to the table as part of our due diligence efforts. They included the General Managers of the three major downtown hotels; staff from the Office of Mayor Miro Weinberger and members of the staff of the Office of Community and Economic Development (CEDO) and; the Tourism Committee of the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce. Additionally, we consulted with local private sector developers with an interest in pursuing the construction and/or management of a convention/meeting center. Finally, conversations were held with a firm of national scale that develops such spaces.

The coordinating team, consisting of local hoteliers, Chamber/Convention Bureau staff and staff from CEDO reviewed five site locations. These included three sites along the Burlington waterfront one of which is under city control, a site at the south end of the downtown core in an area commonly known as the Ravine and a site located in the Cherry Street area. After an analysis of the sites factoring in criteria that included site control, development potential, permitting challenges, ingress and egress, emergency services, parking and proximity to existing hotels, the so-called Cherry Street alternative was identified as the most desirable location.

LCRCC staff also visited two convention center locations (Cincinnati & Philadelphia) to understand the relationship between hotel space and standalone convention/meeting space. These site visits, albeit to larger cities, underscored the need for the primary hotels to either be directly connected to the convention/meeting facility or to be within a two short block walking distance of the facility. Additionally, extensive research was undertaken by VCB staff of convention/meeting facilities with demographics aligned with Burlington projections.

This summary represents the results of our survey and analysis of comparable convention centers. This summary evaluated the following criteria:

- Population of the area
- Square footage of the exhibit floor space
- Ceiling heights
- Size of music festivals
- Typical floor loads
- Typical door widths
- Typical door heights
- Accepted ration for common space
- What was considered for extra meeting space
- Dinner for 1,000 in seated rounds of 10 – support space and floor plate
- Types of facilities are subcontracted
- Power requirements
- Capacity
- "Wish" list

Facilities Considered for Preliminary Review:

The following facilities were researched as part of this project. The research included website reviews, telephone calls and discussions with planners who had used the facilities.

- Connecticut : XL Center, formerly the Hartford Civic Center
- Connecticut : Connecticut Convention Center
- Delaware: Chase Center on the Riverfront
- Idaho: Boise Center
- Idaho: Ford Idaho Center
- Maine : Cross Insurance Center
- Maine : Portland Maine Convention Center
- Maryland : Baltimore Convention Center
- Maryland: Roland E. Powell Convention Center
- Massachusetts: BCEC
- Massachusetts: Hynes Convention Center
- Massachusetts: DCU Center
- Massachusetts: MassMutual Center
- Montana: Mansfield Convention Center
- New Hampshire: Verizon Wireless Arena
- New Jersey: Atlantic City Convention Center
- New Jersey: Boardwalk Hall
- New Jersey: New Jersey Convention and Exhibition Center
- New Jersey: Wildwoods Convention Center
- New York: Buffalo Niagara Convention Center
- New York: The Dome Center
- New York: The Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum
- New York: Oncenter-Nicholas J. Pirro Convention Center
- New York: Westchester County Center
- Pennsylvania: Bayfront Convention Center
- Pennsylvania: Blair Country Convention Center
- Pennsylvania: Carlisle Expo Center
- Pennsylvania: Frank J. Pasquerilla Convention center
- Pennsylvania: Lancaster County Convention Center
- Utah – Ogden: Eccles Convention Center
- Utah: Valley Convention Center
- Virginia : Fredericksburg Expo and Conference Center
- Washington: Greater Tacoma Convention and Trade Center
- Washington: Spokane Center
- Washington: Washington State and Trade Center
- Washington: Three River Convention Center
- Wisconsin: Wisconsin Center
- Rhode Island: Rhode Island Convention Center
- Rhode Island: Dunkin Donuts Center
- Rhode Island: Veterans Memorial Auditorium

Following this preliminary analysis, the following sites were identified to have the most *comparable* facilities utilizing the parameters (50,000 to 100,000 square feet and populations of 80,000 to 100,000). Each site was reviewed using basic industry criteria that would enable a developer to begin developing development cost scenarios. These sites are not listed in preferential order.

Ocean City, Maryland – Roland E. Powell Convention Center

EXHIBIT/MEETING SPACE:
60,000 sq. ft. exhibit space, 45,000 sq. ft. is column free, 15 meeting rooms approximately 1,500 sq. ft. each, six of the 15 are used for meeting space and the others for storage or rented office space

SEATING:
5,000

FLOORING & FLOOR LOAD:
Concrete floors

DOORS 16'W doors for boats, fire trucks and car.; 12, 14 and 18 ft. door heights

PARKING:
Offer free outdoor parking, they then rent it out four times a year to groups and make approximately $85,000 annually;

KITCHEN:
38,000 sq. kitchen on site; the center owns the liquor license, tables, chairs, pipe and drape which they offer complimentary to get groups to come

POWER REQUIRMENTS:
110V, 208 phase 1 and 208 phase 3 – 20, 30, 60, 80 & 100 AMPs.

NOTES:
They do a lot of cheerleading events

WISH LIST:
They wish they had 30,000 more sq. ft. of exhibit space and locker rooms

Fredericksburg, Virginia – Fredericksburg Expo and Conference Center

EXHIBIT/MEETING SPACE:
80,000 sq. ft. of exhibit hall space that can be divided into two halls with their own restrooms and box offices with three cashiers. The hall can accommodate 380 – 10x10 trade show booths, 36 total meeting and banquet rooms, 258 fixed seat lecture hall

CEILING HEIGHTS:
Ceiling heights are 30'H and slope to 26'H on the sides

DOORS:
Roll up doors 16'H x 20'W accessible at ground level for vendors; two loading docks

PARKING:
1,540 covered parking

HOTEL:
650 room hotel adjacent to the center

Albany, New York – Albany Capitol Center (under construction)

EXHIBIT SPACE/MEETING:
82,000 sq. ft.; ballroom has retractable and removable chandeliers to accommodate NCAA tournament practices, cheerleading, high school gymnastics and wrestling, 6,300 sq. feet of pre-function space, 30,000 sq. ft., multi-purpose room, in addition to administrative and storage spaces. The second floor will feature a 9,700 sq. ft. pre-function room, 9,000 sq. ft. meeting rooms, 10, sq. ft. junior ballroom

FLOOR LOAD:
150 lbs. per sq. ft.

DOORS:
Typical doors are 3'W x 9'H, with fully deployed air walls have entry points in multiples of 3'W x 9H ft. pairs

POWER REQUIREMENTS:
Power is 277/480v with step-down transformer to 120/208 is required, main service will likely be 2000 amps CT type Grid protected;

KITCHEN:
3, 500 sq. ft. kitchen

PARKING:
Three levels of parking are attached

NOTES:
They utilized a Marketing Research Company in Chicago, IL to determine needs.

Buffalo, New York – Buffalo Niagara Convention Center

EXHIBIT SPACE/MEETING:
Two rooms that are each 32,205 sq. ft., both located on the second floor, ballrooms span 12,367 sq. ft. with banquet seating for up to 1,000 guests; pre function areas extend the ballroom space by 8,800 sq. ft., 46,000 sq. ft. of flexible meeting space (21 meeting rooms), in total – 110,000 sq. ft. of flexible meeting/exhibit space, 64,000 sq. ft. exhibit space; 46,000 sq. ft., of pre-function space, 21 breakout rooms, one executive board room,

CAPACITY:
Capacity is 7,000 theatre, 3,400 classroom and 180 exhibit booths

FLOOR LOAD:
350 lbs., per square foot on the second floor

POWER REQUIREMENTS:
Six, 110 outlets, 208 – 30 & 50 amps

OTHER:
Cold water, compressed air (120psi-120 gallon reserve tank) sanitary drain at select locations, telephone access; four covered loading docks and direct drive in access with wireless and hardline capability in each; portable cell phone charging stations, 11 display monitors located throughout the facility

Edison, New Jersey – New Jersey Exposition and Convention Center

EXHIBIT SPACE/MEETING SPACE:
35,000 sq. ft. exhibit space, 15,000 sq. ft. of conference space;

CEILING:
Ceiling height is 24' to open beam and 22'6" under beam

CAPACITY:
The reception area holds 8,000, banquets can seat 6,000 – classroom 6,000, and theater can seat 7,500 and 750 10x10 exhibits. They host a variety of events, food shows, comedy, auctions and consignments.

OTHER:
Two drive in doors and 14 loading docks

Wildwood, New Jersey – Wildwood Convention Center

EXHIBITSPACE/MEETING SPACE:
260,000 sq. ft. – 75,000 sq. ft. exhibit hall that can be split into (2) 37,500 areas. 20,000 sq. ft. of ballroom and meeting space, 6,600 sq. ft. ocean front deck for pre-functions, 30,000 sq. ft. of lobby and pre-function space, flexible capacity for up to 7,000 seats in main exhibit hall

FLOOR LOAD:
125 lbs., per sq. ft. in the ballrooms with carpet, 350 lbs. per sq. ft. in the exhibit hall, 125 lbs. per sq. ft. in the carpeted meeting rooms

DOORS:
Exhibit halls have roll up doors – exhibit hall #1 = 19H x 26'1W, exhibit hall #2 = 16'H x 13'W;

OTHER:
They host the Harlem Globe Trotters, roller derby tournaments, sport cards shows, toy shows, comic shows, cheerleading national championships and barbershop conventions & shows.

Boise, Idaho – Boise Center

EXHIBIT/MEETING SPACE:
85,000 overall space, 50,000 exhibit hall, 25,000 ballroom and misc. space, largest space can accommodate; 157, 8x10 booths, 141 10x10 booths, and will be expanding this space within the next few years

CEILING:
Celling heights are 20' in exhibit hall and 12' to 14' in meeting spaces; they do meetings and events only, there is a 5,000 seat arena nearby but has bad load in and out

FLOOR LOAD:
Load capacity is infinite, 8" thick concrete slab under carpet

DOORS:
Door heights are 16'H x 12'W with the ability to drive in a school bus, semis, boats and major equipment

Tacoma, Washington – Greater Tacoma Convention and Trade Center

EXHIBIT/MEETING SPACE:
119,000 sq. ft. exhibit space, meeting rooms, space is also made up of boardrooms and ballrooms ranging from 720 sq. ft. to 50,000 sq. ft. to the largest in the exhibit hall;

FLOOR LOAD:
Loads in the exhibit hall are 250 lbs. with forklift access, south and north lobby is 100 lbs. per sq. ft. – forklifts and pallets are not permitted – they provide ¾" plywood floor cover when moving anything over 1200 lbs., ballrooms 150 lbs. per sq. ft., forklift access not permitted, all meeting rooms are 100 lbs., per sq. ft., the parking garage is 50 lbs., per sq. ft., the galleria is 100 lbs. per sq. ft.

DOORS:
Door dimensions range from 9'6" H to the highest of 15'H.

Wilmington City, Delaware – Chase Center on the Riverfront

EXHIBIT/MEETING SPACE:
43,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space, common space is 11,000 sq. ft.; a 1,600 person dinner with 8' rounds was held in the same room.

CEILING:
Ceiling heights of 28',

OTHER:
No music events are held in this facility.

Manchester, New Hampshire – Verizon Wireless Arena

EXHIBIT/MEETING SPACE:
Nine acres - the largest floor space being 18,000 sq. ft.

CEILING:
Ceiling height is 65'

CAPACITY:
They host concerts ranging from 5,000 to 11,500 people depending on the performers requirements, hockey holds 10,000

KITCHEN:
They have a full commercial kitchen run by Aramark; they do not do many food functions but can accommodate 1,000

OTHER:
Loading dock is 14'W x 14'H

Hartford, Connecticut – Connecticut Convention Center

EXHIBIT/MEETING SPACE:
140,000 sq. ft. of exhibition space, 40,000 sq. ft. ballroom, 25,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, 110 ft. glass atrium rises ten stories above a grand public plaza and tree-lined river front esplanade.

Worcester, Massachusetts – DCU Center

EXHIBIT/MEETING SPACE:
193,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space, 58,960 sq. ft. of contiguous exhibit space, two ball rooms, 11 meeting rooms (inclusive of ballrooms), two lounges, two luxury boxes, in arena, six team locker rooms, five private dressing rooms, exquisite pre-function space

CEILING:
30' in the exhibit hall, 19' in the ballroom, 14'8" in the junior ballroom, and 13'6" in the meeting rooms

FLOOR LOAD:
In the exhibit hall it is 35 lbs. per sq. ft. – ballrooms and meeting rooms are 100 lbs. per sq. ft., overhead load is 4000 lbs. per truss

POWER REQUIREMENTS:
Power; 120, 208 and 480 volt power

OTHER:
Water in and out, compressed air, voice, video CATV, telephone and data communication, satellite down link capabilities, adjustable lighting levels, eight enclosed loading bays, three access doors that provide direct entry for large semis and other equipment to the exhibit hall

CAPACITY:
14,800 seat arena,

KITCHEN:
In-house catering, permanent and portable concession stands

OTHER:
Box office, separate entrances for all exhibit halls, utility floor boxes located on 30 ft. centers, sophisticated communication and utility services.

Missed Convention/Meeting Opportunities:

The following are examples of events that we have not been able to bid on due to lack of a convention center. The reasons are noted next to each event.

1. New England Turfgrass: Trade show needed 100,000 square feet of space in one room.

2. USA Weightlifting: They require a room with a minimum of 15,000 square feet, with hotels in walking distance to the competition.

3. New England Irish Dance Teachers Association: 15,000 sq. ft., hotel rooms close by and close to downtown

4. Harmony Inc: Available square footage was too small and they needed greater ceiling heights

5. Philadelphia Church of God Retreat: Not enough floor space: 250-300 people general session with 6-8 breakout rooms with hotel rooms on property or within walking distance

6. Eastern Regional Interstate Child Support Association: 350 attendees needing two rooms to fit 350 with 30 8x10 booths and other space and 1170 overnight rooms needed peak is 275

7. New England Winter Sports Representatives: They have a Northern NE trade show each winter and have been in Manchester NH for a number of years. Not interested in the CV Expo facility (not nice enough), require more than 20,000 sq. ft., close to attractions

8. Northeastern Retail Lumber Association: Need a nicer facility than the Sheraton Expo, 20,000+ sq. ft.

9. Bulldog Club of America: Too much space needed and a total of 6-8 rooms that range from 500-13,000 sq. ft.

10. USA Fencing:
    a. Division 1 Championship & Veteran North American Cup-North American Cup - Foil World Cup - Grand Prix International - Junior Olympic Fencing Championships - Elite Championships-North American Cup - World Cup Foil - Grand Prix - Junior Olympic Fencing Championships - Elite Championships - National Championships:
        i. Cannot host any of the three event listed above for fencing due to the following: ceiling height minimum 16 feet, and fitting 12 competition areas in one room (each area is 120'x40x) with other breakout rooms.

11. National Pastime Athletics - National Pastime Athletics Cheer Region & National Championships: Could not facilitate due to needing 2268 sq. ft. with 24' high ceilings to cheer plus seating for 2000 spectators

12. USA Open and USA Nationals Table Tennis: 2000 spectators, 180,000-200,000 sq. ft., 30 ft. ceilings

13. International Jugglers Association: 15,000 sq. ft., 18'ceilings, 5 minute walk to hotels and attractions.

14. USA Weight Lifting: The American Open 2015 - 20,000 consecutive square feet with 5 breakout rooms that some of which must be able to hold 100 people

15. 2016-18 NJCAA Division II Volleyball Championship: Could not facilitate this event due to needing space for 2 regulation sized courts and seating for 1500 spectators minimum

Conclusion:

Every study since the early '90's has noted the glaring lack of a modern convention and meeting center both in the region and especially in the downtown area. The research conducted as part of this grant has reinforced those conclusions. For the first time, we have been able to identify a site that has broad based support among the business and political communities. We have determined that there have been significant lost opportunities and with those lost opportunities, foregone state and local revenue. The research behind this report has also identified the key times of the year that we should work to attract new business and the number of beds that will be necessary to service the increased convention/meeting traffic over the next decade. That information can be provided in a follow-up report.

The next steps are also very clear. Conversations need to occur between interested parties and affected/interested land owners. Design charrettes and preliminary cost estimates should follow. Those estimates must include the cost of construction and ongoing physical plant support.

At the same time, discussions need to begin to identify the operational and facility maintenance aspects of a new center as well as any partner organizations that might want to occupy space in the facility. Finally, non convention/meeting opportunities that will support the ongoing operational costs must be explored.