

Peoria Riverfront Museum - Community Involvement

Responding to requests for financial help from several local museum-related organizations, in 2000 Congressman Ray LaHood provided leadership to form the Museum Collaboration Group (MCG), consisting of the Heartland Foundation, Illinois High School Association, Lakeview Museum of Arts and Sciences, Peoria African American Hall of Fame Museum, Peoria Historical Society and Peoria Regional Museum Society. These groups agreed to work together to create a single new museum that would maximize their ability to serve the general public throughout Central Illinois with cultural, educational and entertainment opportunities.

As the MCG begin the planning for this new museum, which was originally identified as the "Central Illinois Regional Museum," the new organization was focused on working in an inclusive environment with substantial input from the over 4,000 people who are members of the collaborative partner organizations, local elected officials and the general public.

November, 2000: To begin the planning process, the MCG selected the nationally known museum consulting firm of White Oak Associates, Inc. (WOA) to guide the process for the proposed new museum. Representatives came to Peoria to gather extensive market data and regional planning documents, and conduct interviews with 35 to 40 members of the community for a Community Needs Assessment. The Community Needs Assessment was released Jan. 31, 2001.

March 5-6, 2001: A group of Peoria community leaders travel to Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids, Mich., to visit the museums in these communities.

July 11, 2001: Peoria community representatives travel to Rockford, Ill., to visit this community's art, natural history and children's museums.

Summer 2001: WOA representatives spend the summer working on a Concept Development Plan with the purpose of defining an integrated project and providing initial planning in four key content areas: art, history, science and technology. WOA representatives interview members of the public to help solidify the Concept Development Plan.

December, 2001: Representatives from MCG visit the Exploration Place in Wichita, Kansas.

Jan. 25, 2002: John Jacobsen of WOA and Dr. Al DeSena of the Exploration Place in Wichita, Kansas, present a public forum on "The Delta Museum for the 21st Century," at Lakeview Museum. This concept of a "Delta Museum" with a facility designed to accommodate frequently changing exhibit galleries becomes a cornerstone of the plans for the proposed new museum in Peoria.

Feb. 6, 2002: WOA, along with a second consultant, John Snow, Inc. expand the planning process significantly by conducting both individual interviews as well as focus groups with visitors to the current Lakeview Museum. The purpose of these activities is to gather input from the public to be used as input as strategic decisions about the plans for the new museum are evolving.

April 18, 2002: After a series of interviews, the Lakeview Museum Board of Directors selects Ketchum, Inc. to conduct an Internal Fundraising Assessment of Lakeview Museum and a Capital Feasibility Study for the new museum.

May 29 to 31, 2002: E. Verner Johnson and Lou Sirianni of E. Verner Johnson and Associates, Inc. visit five sites in downtown Peoria for analysis and a site recommendation report. This process includes interviews with city officials and employees.

June 20-28, 2002: Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company (DPZ) holds a series of design charrettes in Peoria.

Officials from DPZ decline repeated attempts by representatives of the MCG to hold discussions regarding the status of planning for the museum project.

July 10, 2002: Community members and leaders travel to Milwaukee to visit the Milwaukee Art Museum and its addition designed by Santiago Calatrava.

August 7, 2002: E. Verner Johnson and Associates, Inc. issues final Central Illinois Regional Museum Project Site Analysis and Assessment Report with the purpose of reviewing, analyzing and prioritizing potential city-approved sites in downtown Peoria. Shortly after, the Site Selection Committee, comprised of community members and Lakeview Museum board representatives, approves the results of the report.

September 24, 2002: Peoria City Council approves a Resolution of Intent Regarding the Central Illinois Regional Museum and the Sears block.

September 20, 2002: Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company issues draft of Heart of Peoria plan. The draft identifies the Sears block as the preferred site for the Central Illinois Regional Museum project.

January 22-23, 2003: WOA begins a Theater Options Analysis and Volume I of the Strategic Master Plan. Both plans require interviews of museum colleagues throughout the country, as well as local community leaders.

February 2003: Ketchum Inc. presents the results of the Capital Feasibility and Leadership Study to the boards of Lakeview Museum and the Peoria Historical Society. This study includes the result of more than 50 interviews with members of the tri-county area.

June-July 2003: WOA presents the results of both the Theater Options Analysis and Volume I of the Strategic Master Plan.

September 23, 2003: The Peoria City Council unanimously approved a proposed redevelopment agreement between the city and Lakeview Museum (acting as the official not-for-profit representative of the MCG) allocating approximately two-thirds of the former "Sears Block" as the site for the proposed new museum.

September 2004: An Architect Search and Selection Team begins the search for an architect for both the Caterpillar Visitor Center (later named the Caterpillar Experience) and the new museum. The team consists of a number of local representatives who have knowledge of the facility design process, including David Chasco of Washington, Ill., Chairman of the University of Illinois Architecture Department.

October, 2004: WOA and D+C release an Exhibit Master Plan for the new museum. This plan lays out initial concepts for some exhibits in the new museum and provides the first storyboards of exhibit concepts. It also provides some direction for the Architecture Search and Selection Committee. This study relies on a number of interviews with local historians and educators, as well as several public brainstorming sessions.

December 21, 2004: The Peoria City Council approves a second Redevelopment Agreement for the proposed new museum. This second agreement is between the City, Lakeview Museum (again acting as the official not for profit representative of the MCG), and Caterpillar Inc. It expands the initial agreement through the inclusion of the Caterpillar Visitor Center facility and encompasses the entire seven-acre site formerly occupied by the Sears Roebuck store and parking facility. The agreement includes a requirement for some space within the development to be set aside for commercial use but it does require that a residential development be included within the project. The agreement is passed by the Peoria City Council with nine affirmative votes, one negative vote and one abstention.

January 2005: Immediately after the second redevelopment agreement was approved, the developers, both the MCG and Caterpillar Inc. staff begin a series of public meetings with the Heart of Peoria Commission.

These occurred on January 28th, February 14th

July 13th, August 26th, September 15th, October 25th, November 2nd, and finally on January 27th, 2006.

The developers asked the members of the Heart of Peoria Commission for their input as well as their priorities for the project considering that this site had been identified by DPZ as one of the most significant in the city.

November 8, 2005: The project developers present a detailed site plan for consideration by the Peoria City Council. The site plan shows the Caterpillar Visitor Center located on 2.3 acres of the site adjacent to Main Street, with the Central Illinois Regional Museum located on the 4.5 acres of the site adjacent to Liberty Street. The site plan also includes a single level underground parking deck with an entrance and exit located on Water Street. The site plan is approved by the City Council by a unanimous vote.

April 4, 2006: The project developers present the preliminary architectural schematic renderings of the site and the two facilities for consideration by the Peoria City Council. The Council approved, by a unanimous vote, with a recommendation from the Heart of Peoria Commission, the proposed elevations of the Museum Square development project.

At that same meeting, the Council also approved, by a vote of 9 in favor and one opposed, a first Amendment to the Redevelopment Agreement which allowed that the full benefit of an tax incremental financing (TIF) created by the development would be allocated to the MCG.

May-September 2006: A report resulting from a second round of audience research is released. The Theme and Visitor Research Study relied on 10 focus groups and a number of brainstorming sessions to help museum planners better understand what visitors would like to see in the museum galleries.

June - October 2006: The public is asked to choose a name for the new museum. After ideation sessions with MCG and community members, names are chosen and released to the public for vote. When the public decides they don't care for the first selections, the MCG listens to the voters and launches a second round of voting. A total of 9,387 votes are tallied to choose "Peoria Riverfront Museum."

Mid-2007: An Exhibition Search and Selection Team, consisting of public representatives of the various Museum Collaboration Group partners, is convened to help select the team of professionals responsible for the exhibition design, fabrication and installation. More than 120 firms express interest in the project, and after an extensive process, a list of four finalists are chosen. At the end of the process, two exhibit design firms are selected to oversee the exhibit design process: Roto Studio and D+C Inc.

Mid-2008: A number of brainstorming sessions and meetings are held with public representatives to help the Exhibit Design Team develop the initial concepts for the exhibits in the new museum. In the fall, new detailed storyboards are released to the public.

December 15, 2008: A report resulting from a third round of audience research is released. The Schematic Design Formative Evaluation Report will test the concepts that have been developed by the Exhibit Design Team. The research includes 12 focus group sessions with members of the public, as well as an online survey that generated more than 320 responses.

April 7, 2009: After more than eight years of planning and public involvement, Peoria County residents will vote on a referendum question asking whether a one-quarter of 1 percent (1/4%) sales tax should be assessed in Peoria County to provide the final public funding needed to build the Peoria Riverfront Museum and make The Block possible.