The Confluence Project: Collaborative Excellence

Friday, October 18, 2013

Eau Claire, Wisc. — The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Student Senate would like to announce that the Eau Claire city council will hold a public hearing about the Confluence Project at 7:00 p.m. Oct. 21 in City Hall, and act on business Oct. 22 at 4:00 p.m. The hearing is intended to give individual citizens, students and members of the Eau Claire community alike, access to a wealth of presentations lead by the council.

The Confluence Project is a collaborative effort between the UW-Eau Claire, private supporters, and tentatively, the city and county of Eau Claire to build two new buildings at the confluence of the Eau Claire and Chippewa Rivers near South Barstow Street. This space is currently occupied by several unused buildings and a municipal parking lot.

The first building will be a Community Arts Center. This state-of-the-art facility would contain three performance venues: a large theatre, a medium-sized theater, and a small "black box" venue. It will also have classroom, rehearsal, and storage spaces for costumes and props. This building will replace our existing Kjer Theater and would indefinitely meet the needs of today's students along with our music and theatre arts program. In addition, the State Theater cannot sustain its current operations. Because of the millions of dollars necessary to repair the current building to keep operating, the Eau Claire Regional Arts Council supports the opportunities presented by the Performing Arts Center.

The second building will be a mixed use development. The ground floor would have space for a restaurant and some businesses, and the upper levels would be a 300-bed residence hall to be used by upperclassmen studying music and theater. Apartment-style rooms and close proximity to the Confluence Arts Center would give these students the chance to live and learn in a unique performing arts environment along with helping to solve our current problem of overpopulation in the dorms. The Mixed Use Building would also help revitalize the South Barstow district of downtown by allowing new businesses to move into brand new storefronts.

The Confluence Project is a groundbreaking collaboration because, by combining money from the university, city, county, and private entities, the parties involved are able to get more for less. On its own, our university would never be able to build something like the Confluence. The same is true for the other contributors. If we all get behind it, the benefits will be endless: students will get a beautiful new facility to perform in; community theatre groups would get
venues tailored to their needs; the Eau Claire Regional Arts Council could bring in bigger, nationally touring shows; and the city would get new businesses in the downtown area. Even at the beginning of this multi-year project it’s clear that when we work together, everybody wins.

The UW-Eau Claire Student Senate looks forward to continued collaboration with the Eau Claire city council and community to make the confluence project a reality, and hopes discussion of a referendum will not delay talks. The members of the Eau Claire city council have done an exceptional job of reviewing all pertinent information regarding the Confluence development and are the best situated to make a decision on the project.

The Confluence Project could change Eau Claire for decades to come. With student support, we can help make that change together.

For more information about the Confluence Project, contact Student Senate Intergovernmental Affairs Director Jake Wrasse at wrassejw@uwec.edu. The Intergovernmental Affairs Commission, which represents student concerns to state and local government bodies, meets Tuesdays at 6:00 p.m. in the Colleen Bader conference room (Davies 220D) and is always looking for student input. Additional information can be found by visiting http://www.uwec.edu/News/more/confluenceprojectFAQs.htm or getting involved with area supporters at www.communityfortheconfluence.org.