Columbus Sports & Entertainment Authority

Minutes

September 14, 2026 ● 1:00 pm

Columbus Civic Center, Hospitality Suites

400 4th St, Columbus, GA 31901

ATTENDANCE:

Voting Members Present – Andy Luker (Chair), Robert Wadkins (Vice Chair), Herma Lewis (Treasurer), Mike Welch, Jim Rutland, Gerald Miley, Morgan Moore

Voting Members Present (Virtual) - Ashley Woitena (Secretary)

Voting Members Absent – NONE

Ex-Officio Members Present – Jeremy Miles, Charles Auer, Jeff Croop

Ex-Officio Members Present (Virtual) – Holli Browder, Lisa Goodwin

Ex-Officio Members Absent – NONE

1. **Call to Order**
    - Andy Luker, Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:01 pm.

2. **Roll Call**
    - Authority Department Secretary – Zeanne Abano, Civic Center

3. **Approval of Minutes**
    - Motion to approve by Morgan Moore and second by Robert Wadkins. August minutes approved.

4. **Executive Director Search Firm RFP Update**
    - An Executive RFP committee has been formed to select a search firm for the recruitment of the executive director.
    - The committee met two weeks prior and has had two weeks before reviewing proposals.
    - Approximately 7-8 firms submitted responses.
    - Following that meeting, the recommendation is expected to come back to the Authority for consideration and a vote to enter into contract with the chosen firm.
    - Purchasing has been asked to advise on the appropriate next steps and process compliance.

5. **Civic Center Update** – *Kanise Wiggins, Interim Director Civic Center*
    - **Georgia Power/Energy Usage Update:**
        - **i.** Kanise met with Georgia Power representative to review the Civic Center's energy usage and rate structure.
        - **ii.** The Civic Center is on a Customer Baseline Load (CBL) rate that has not been re-evaluated in approximately 30 years (since original construction).

iii. New equipment installed since then includes new chillers, condensers, and LED lighting; Georgia Power wishes to reassess actual usage.
iv. Documentation provided by Georgia Power includes real-time pricing focus periods information, forms/tabs for the Civic Center to summarize equipment upgrades (LED lighting, HVAC, chillers, condensers) and installation dates, along with wattage and other technical details.
v. Current situation: the Civic Center is operating below its contracted baseline load and is being charged for usage that is not actually consumed. Credits are issued in months when usage does not reach the contracted level, but the rate structure may still be disadvantageous.

- **Air Handler/HVAC Capital Needs and Financial Update:**
  i. Previous discussions addressed replacement of 14 air handlers at the Civic Center, with an earlier estimate in the ~$4 million range. An updated quote from First Mechanical was obtained focusing on replacing four air handlers in the arena.
  ii. Current Quote: cost per air handler: approximately $490,000. Four air handlers: approximately $2 million total.
  iii. Operational impact: air handlers regulate HVAC in the arena. Current deficiencies result in heavy condensation during hockey games and other events and an inability to provide adequate heat, leading to customer complaints about cold conditions. Staff characterized the need as "dire" for air handlers.
  iv. Cost escalations and concerns: Board members questioned why the estimated project cost increased from roughly $4 million to $6 million in less than a year when comparing earlier and current quotes. Concerns were raised about the lack of detailed scope of work in the First Mechanical proposal. Board members emphasized the need for detailed, itemized proposals (similar to prior chiller replacement documentation) specifying exact equipment to be replaced, location of units, required structural work, labor assumptions and contingency factors.

- **FY26 Income Statement and Utilization/Financial Reporting:**
  i. FY26 Income Statement (pre-Audit): a year-end income statement (before final audit adjustments) for FY26 was distributed. It includes Civic Center and Ice Rink depreciation under expenses. Board members questioned reconciliation between total revenue/expense figures and the net complex figure, noting a roughly $1.9 million difference they wish to understand more clearly. Staff indicated that some items account for differences and that final figures are still subject to audit adjustments.
  ii. Liberty Theatre: the Liberty Theatre is no longer financially tied to the Civic Center; it is now under Parks & Recreation. The current income statement reflects a budget constructed prior to this shift.
  iii. Operating vs. Event Revenues: Board members requested clarification on the distinction between "operating revenue" and "other event revenue." Staff indicated other event revenue includes self-generated events such as concerts and other events. Operating revenue appears to be related to ongoing funding sources (including general operating support), but a detailed breakout was requested.
  iv. Event Profitability Questions: Board members noted that for some tenants (e.g. arena football), the income statement shows revenue (e.g. ~$152,000) that is less than reported expenses (e.g. ~$180,000), suggesting on paper that certain tenants may be costing the facility money. Staff explained that labor and building operations drive much of the event cost. The City's "last minute" culture makes staffing projections challenging; staffing is based on projected rather than actual attendance. Board members requested more visibility on concession and catering revenue contribution by event or event category to better measure net profitability.

v. Concessions and Event-Level Reporting: Staff confirmed that concessions and catering revenue is included in aggregate concession figures but is not always reflected on individual event-level summaries in a way that clearly links concessions revenue to specific events.

- **Security Costs and Operational Safety:**
  i. Board members questioned the necessity and cost of maintaining security presence in the building when events are not actively occurring. Staff mentioned that security is primarily stationed near the Box Office due to cash handling and customer interactions. They also monitor the facility for safety and unauthorized entry. Security presence has helped minimize incidents; a notable previous incident involved a homeless individual entering and injuring someone at the Ice Rink. Without security, individuals may enter through numerous doors and hide in various parts of the building, presenting safety risks. Mrs. Goodwin emphasized that security is critical for this type of facility, given its size and many access points.

- **City Use of Civic Center Facilities and Labor Cost Recovery:**
  i. The Board discussed City departments' use of Civic Center spaces and how costs are handled. At Trade Center, the City receives four free events per year; subsequent events are provided at a 50% discount. City events are typically food-and-beverage generating events, so while rent is waived, revenue is earned through catering. At Civic Center, they began charging City departments for labor City events. Departments are allowed to bring their own food and beverage, so labor is the primary cost. Typical labor costs for a four-hour event are under $250. City events include luncheons, award ceremonies, departmental training, United Way Campaign and other meetings. Most City events use hospitality suites rather than the main arena. Most events are held during business hours; after hours events are minimal.
  ii. Board members expressed concern that providing free or heavily subsidized City use, without at least covering labor and operating costs, undermines efforts to meet budget and places additional burden on the Authority to justify financial performance. There was general support for requiring City departments to cover labor costs even when space is provided at no or reduced rent. The Board acknowledged the need to balance partnership with the City with fiscal responsibility, emphasizing that the Civic Center's base rental rates are already relatively low compared to similar facilities.

- **River Dragons (Hockey) and Lions (Football) – Ticket Fee and Contract Clause:**
  i. Facility Fee/Ticketing: the Board considered a request to add or adjust a facility fee on River Dragons and Lions tickets consistent with a broader ticket fee approach. The Board indicated support for moving forward with the facility fee and the pricing structure as previously outlined in the tenants' letter, independent of contract clause renegotiations. Implementation requires that ticket builds (including dynamic pricing and per-tickets facility fees) be completed before tickets go on sale.
  ii. Contract Termination Clause (90-Day Clause): the River Dragons contract contains a clause for either party to terminate the agreement for any reason upon 90 days prior written notice. There was initial confusion over whether the Lions contract contained a similar clause; a subsequent review clarified that the River Dragons agreement is the one with the 90-day termination clause. Attorney Lucy Sheftall initially referred 180 days in email but later clarified she had reversed team names; her substantive position was that 180 days would be reasonable, provided it does not interrupt an ongoing season.
  iii. Proposal and Tenant Feedback: Kanise proposed extending the notice period from 90 to 180 days and leaving the clause in place to provide more lead time and respect for tenants. The River

Dragons representative Jeff Croop expressed concern that the mere existence of a unilateral termination clause (even at 180 days) undermines confidence and security in the lease, noting that: most sports teams do not have such clauses in their facility contracts. He would prefer the clause to be removed entirely rather than extended. A non-compete or exclusivity clause would be more aligned with standard practice.

- **Daily Operating Cost Analysis:**
    - **i.** Civic Center staff agreed to develop an estimate of daily operating costs to run the Civic Center, including Labor (full-time and part-time), power and utilities, and other recurring operating expenses. The Board emphasized the importance of understanding daily and event-level costs, both for budgeting and for evaluating the impact of events (including potential future disruptions like another pandemic). Staff will prepare a breakdown of typical daily operating expenses and report back at a future meeting.

6. **Scheduling and Next Meeting Date**
    - The next regularly scheduled meeting date (October 12) falls on Columbus Day, when City offices and facilities are closed. After discussion, the Board agreed to reschedule the October meeting to: **Monday, October 19, 2026, at 1:00 pm**. The meeting will be properly notified and posted in accordance with applicable requirements.

7. **Adjournment**
    - Meeting adjourned at 2:19 pm. Motion to adjourned made by Gerald Miley; second by Robert Wadkins.

Minutes Recorded by: Zeanne Abano, Civic Center, Authority Department Secretary

*Next meeting is scheduled for **Monday, November 9, 2026, at 1:00 pm**,*

Columbus Civic Center, Hospitality Suites, 400 4th St, Columbus, GA 31901