Keefe Auditorium Commission
Thursday, August 6, 2026
City Hall, Room 208
4:30 PM

The Keefe Auditorium Commission met on the above date in Room 208 of City Hall, called to order by Chairman Dennis Schneider at 4:50pm. In attendance were Shawn Smith, Dennis Schneider, Carl Dubois, and Daniel O'Donnell. Also in attendance for a portion of the meeting was Amy DeRoche.

Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes

Approval of Meeting Minutes of July 2, 2026. Motion by Carl Dubois, seconded by Daniel O'Donnell to accept minutes. So Voted 4-0.

MEETING OVERVIEW

Chairman Schneider described a series of conversations and meetings he has had with the Mayor, Aldermen Clemons & Dowd, Tim Cummings, and others. These dealt with identifying potential financing of renovations to the Keefe auditorium. The core strategy is to use a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district to fund up to $20 million from the Elm Street property redevelopment, with tax revenues starting about 6-7 years from now.

- TIF funding mechanics and timeline were explained by Dennis, highlighting the baseline tax is currently zero and taxes will start accruing once redevelopment is complete, enabling debt service on bonds.
- The commission discussed that the actual TIF funds are not immediately available and will require political support and negotiation.
- The financial model includes an estimated $3.2 million increment from raising project costs from $16.8 million (Option One from the Icon Study) to $20 million**,** which covers equipment upgrades and seating expansion.
- The commission agreed that without TIF, raising $20 million through fundraising is not feasible due to lack of fundraising expertise on the commission.
- The TIF plan aims to minimize taxpayer impact and enable the Keefe Center project to move forward without burdening current city budgets.

Theater Operations and Utilization

The long-term vision includes running the Keefe Center as a nonprofit-operated venue with expert guidance, targeting utilization between 35 and 65 event nights annually, with a goal of reaching 100 nights eventually.

- The mayor and aldermen want assurance from theater experts that the project is feasible and sustainable before committing further.

- A theater expert panel was recommended, including Peter Ramsey**,** Pete Lawley, and Troy Siebels, all experienced in nonprofit theater management and operation.
- In discussions with these individuals, they advised that the building should be run by a nonprofit to focus on fundraising and expansion, not contracted out commercially, to ensure growth and community engagement.
- Utilization estimates came from the experts projecting realistic booking scenarios, including a mix of children's theater, concerts, lectures, and community events, with a potential to book acts requiring 750 to 1400 seats.
- As an example, the existing Performing Arts Center booking agent, Spectacle, can handle shows both for the Keefe Center and other venues, with confidence in attracting larger acts in the future.
- The commission plans to have theater experts present at public meetings to reinforce credibility and answer questions, helping to build trust and understanding among stakeholders.

Motion by Shawn Smith, seconded by Daniel O'Donnell, to establish a Theater Expert Panel comprised of the aforementioned three gentlemen, working as volunteers in support of the Auditorium Commission. (See attachment entitled "Commission Approved Theater Expert Panel" for their credentials.) This motion was approved 4-0.

Footprint and Construction Planning

The commission discussed a defined construction footprint that balances preservation of the Keefe Center with the surrounding development, focusing on longevity and expansion potential without interfering with city plans.

- The footprint extends from the back of the classroom block to Lake Street, including the existing front facade and classroom walls as boundaries.
- The front lawn should be preserved for aesthetics and city use, avoiding construction that would block the building's facade or disrupt planned public spaces.
- Parking was deemed out of scope for the theater project, with city officials confirming parking planning focuses on residential development, not theater patrons.
- The footprint accommodates all current renovation options and allows for future expansions, enabling flexibility in design and planning.

Motion by Shawn Smith, seconded by Carl Dubois, to establish a construction footprint for the Keefe Auditorium renovation. This footprint will run from the end of the former "home economics" wing, to Lake Street, to the front façade of the building, to the exterior wall of the adjoining classroom wing. (See attachment "Footprint Needed for Renovated Keefe"). This motion was approved 4-0.

Political and Community Support

The project depends heavily on political buy-in and community support, with several aldermen and the mayor involved in discussions, and a plan to present expert testimony in upcoming public meetings

Fundraising is recognized as a significant challenge; as currently constituted the commission lacks fundraising skills and will need to rely on external advocates and nonprofit structures to close funding gaps.

Financial and Operational Risks

The commission identified risks related to funding gaps, timing, and operational uncertainties but sees TIF as the most viable financial path, with contingency plans if TIF does not materialize.

- If TIF funding fails, the project would require raising the full $20 million, which is considered unrealistic by commission members due to lack of fundraising capacity.
- Operating costs are expected to be offset by rental income and fundraising once the theater is running, but initial bootstrap funding of approximately $150,000 to $180,000 is needed to build operations.
- There is uncertainty about how to structure the relationship between the city, the nonprofit operator, and debt service payments; legal and financial frameworks need to be developed by lawyers and accountants.
- The city currently spends about $500,000 per year to maintain the building in its current state, which is unsustainable without a clear operational plan.

Next Steps and Timelines

The commission anticipates the next major public and political steps around September 2026.

- The expert panel will advise the city and commission on operational models and help refine utilization projections.
- The commission will finalize and circulate the detailed footprint drawings and related construction limits to inform planning and negotiations with developers.
- Continued political negotiations and TIF advocacy remain critical to unlock funding and move the project from concept to execution.
- Public meetings will include presentations from theater experts to clarify feasibility and build support, aiming to avoid delays beyond September.

Dennis distributed copies of ICON Architect’s Cost Estimates and a Cost Estimate Summary for the Keefe Auditorium study. These documents are attached to these minutes.

Next Meeting: Thursday, September 3, 2026 at 4:30pm in room 208 of City Hall.

Motion to adjourn by Carl Dubois, seconded by Daniel O'Donnell. Meeting adjourned at 5:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Shawn M. Smith, Auditorium Commission Secretary

Attachments

(1) Credentials of Theater Expert Panel
(2) Summary of Options
(3) Footprint Needed for Keefe Renovations
(4) Utilization Potential

Commission Approved Theater Expert Panel

August 6, 2026 Meeting

Theater Expert Panel

All have agreed to assist the City / the Commission on a voluntary basis

Peter Ramsey
President & CEO, Palace Theatre — Manchester, NH
Retired in June

- 27 years leading the Palace (1998–present); announced retirement plans for 2027
- Grew a single struggling stage into a 4-venue nonprofit (Palace Theatre, Rex Theatre, Forever Emma Studios, Spotlight Room) drawing ~200,000 patrons/year
- Led the revitalization and reopening of the smaller Rex Theatre — a directly comparable smaller-venue case study
- Named Union Leader's 2025 Citizen of the Year for economic and cultural impact on downtown Manchester

Pete Lally
Founder & President/CEO, Spectacle Live (Spectacle Management)

- Founded Spectacle Live in 2012/13; now promotes and manages venues across 5 New England states
- Manages Nashua Center for the Arts — Keefe's direct local comparison venue
- 15+ years in venue management, booking, and marketing before founding his own company (Lowell Memorial Auditorium)
- Professor of music business, UMass Lowell, since 2005

Troy Siebels
Main Stage Artistic Director; former President & CEO, The Hanover Theatre — Worcester, MA
Retired in June

- Led The Hanover Theatre & Conservatory as President & CEO for 20 years (2004–2024), from pre-opening planning through its 2008 grand opening
- Grew Hanover into a 2,300-seat touring destination drawing ~200,000 patrons/year, on par with Boston-caliber productions
- Transitioned to Main Stage Artistic Director (Jan. 2025), remaining directly involved in booking and programming
- Multiple-time honoree, Worcester Business Journal Power 100 (2022, 2024)

Summary of Options ICON/Harvey Study
+
Aug 6, 2026 Commission Planning Footprint Recommendation

Keefe Renovation Options — Cost Comparison

ICON/Harvey Construction cost estimates (CSI-category based). Options 2A/2B are refined build-outs of Option 2, not separate additions.

Option	Addition Size	Scope of Additional Construction / Alteration	Project Cost	Increment vs. Opt. 1
1	No Addition	Renovation within existing footprint. Level 2 alteration. Separate-from-existing, code-minimum scope; no added lobby.	**$16.8M**	—
2	6,000 SF	Single-story addition w/ expanded lobby (integrated attic HVAC space; elec. in basement). Level 3 alteration.	**$28.8M**	+$12.0M
2A	6,000 SF	Same as Option 2 — Larger Renovation (finished backstage rebuild, larger classroom demo).	**$34.3M**	+$17.4M
2B	6,000 SF	Same as Option 2 — More Demolition (unfinished backstage reno, smaller classroom footprint).	**$32.4M**	+$15.6M
3	21,000 SF	Two-story addition (elec. in basement; HVAC on roof of new building). Level 3 alteration. Full touring-scale rigging/lighting/acoustic upgrade.	**$55.7M**	+$38.9M

Details by Renovation Level

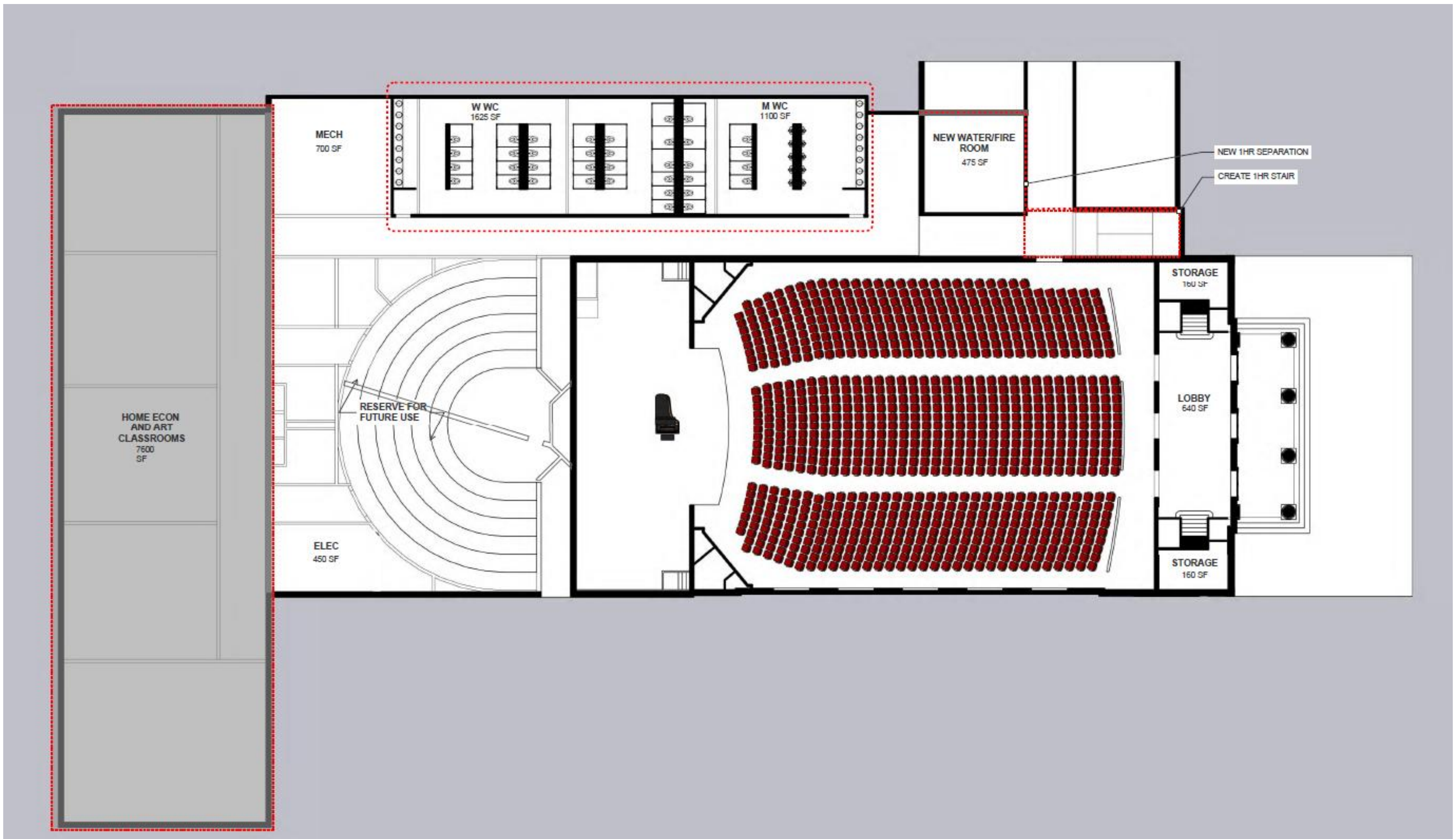
Each level after Option 1 shows what's added or changed vs. the level directly above it..

Option	Project Cost (2028 $)	Basis	Key Changes
1	**$16.8M**	*Baseline scope*	Separation of utilities and systems; new HVAC in theater/renovated spaces and 1961-space heating; abate/demo rear family classroom wing; abate/demo/renovate former WCs to storage; construct new west wall; new roof (1961 addition); new toilet rooms in existing classrooms at north corridor
2	**$28.8M**	*Added vs. Opt. 1*	New MEP/FP/FA systems (theater, addition, 1961 spaces); public restroom expansion; orchestra seating accessible top & bottom; small lobby concessions; additional backstage support; stage rigging equipment upgrade; stage lighting controls (minor); AV equipment (minor); curtains for acoustical absorption
2A	**$34.3M**	*Added vs. Opt. 2*	Demo and rebuild area behind stage; demo 2,500 SF classrooms; loading dock at west side; lighting truss; AV equipment
2B	**$32.4M**	***Changed*** *vs. Opt. 2A*	Demo 7,600 SF classrooms (was 2,500 SF); reduced backstage renovation — unfinished vs. finished space; new CMU loading dock (was: loading dock at west side)
3	**$55.7M**	*Added vs. Opt. 2*	New MEP/FP/FA systems; two-story addition; lobby with concessions; ADA seating throughout; seat replacement; new loading dock; demo stage left gallery; crossover corridor; extensive backstage support spaces; extensive stage rigging upgrade; stage lighting fixtures; lighting/house lighting replacement; AV equipment replacement; orchestra lift; lighting catwalk & followspot platform; box boom & balcony rail lighting positions; FoH rigging infrastructure & access; new/renovated control booth; orchestra-level sound mix position; orchestra shell & motorized reflector; variable acoustic system

Option 1 $16,830,615

SEPARATE FROM EXISTING AND CODE MINIMUM

No Addition. Demo West classrooms.



OPTION 1 - MINIMAL - LIMITED SCOPE IN EXISTING ENVELOPE

2028 DOLLARS

- SEPARATION OF UTILITIES AND SYSTEMS
- NEW HVAC IN THEATER AND RENOVATED SPACES AND UPDATED HEATING SYSTEMS IN 1961 SPACES
- ABATE AND DEMO REAR ART AND HOME ECONOMICS CLASSROOM WING
- ABATE, DEMO, RENOVATE FORMER WCs TO STORAGE
- CONSTRUCT NEW WEST WALL
- NEW TOILET ROOMS IN EXISITNG CLASSROOMS AT NORTH CORRIDOR

TRADE COST:	$8,534,454
MARK-UPS:	$4,930,038
SUBTOTAL:	$13,464,492
SOFT COSTS (25%):	$3,366,123
TOTAL PROJECT COST:	$16,830,615

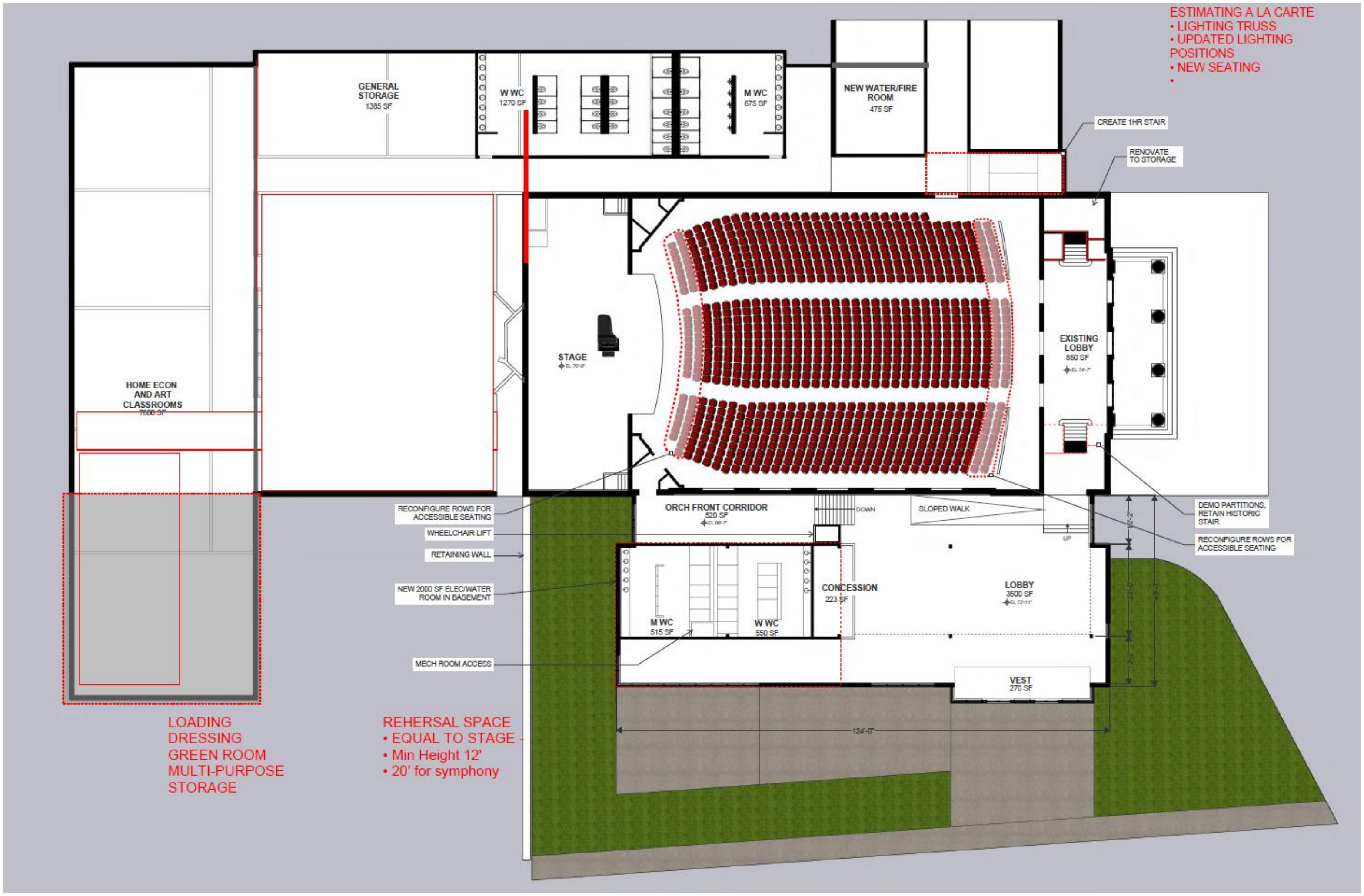
ICON Architecture

Option 1A – Add New Seats, Sound, and Lighting to Option 1

Option 1 (baseline) plus new seating, sound, and lighting upgrades — not part of the ICON or Harvey scope.

Component	Amount	Note
Option 1 — baseline (No Addition/Code minimum)	$16,830,650	*Total Construction Cost, Option 1*
+ Equipment (AV/sound/lighting proxy)	$485,112	*Option 2's Equipment line — used as a stand-in for sound & lighting upgrade cost*
+ New seating estimate	$1,000,000	*Harvey/ICON estimate*
New Total	**$18,092,514**	*Option 1 + full plans + equipment + new seating*

<u>Option 2 - $28,804,088</u>
6,000 sf Addition and more Reno



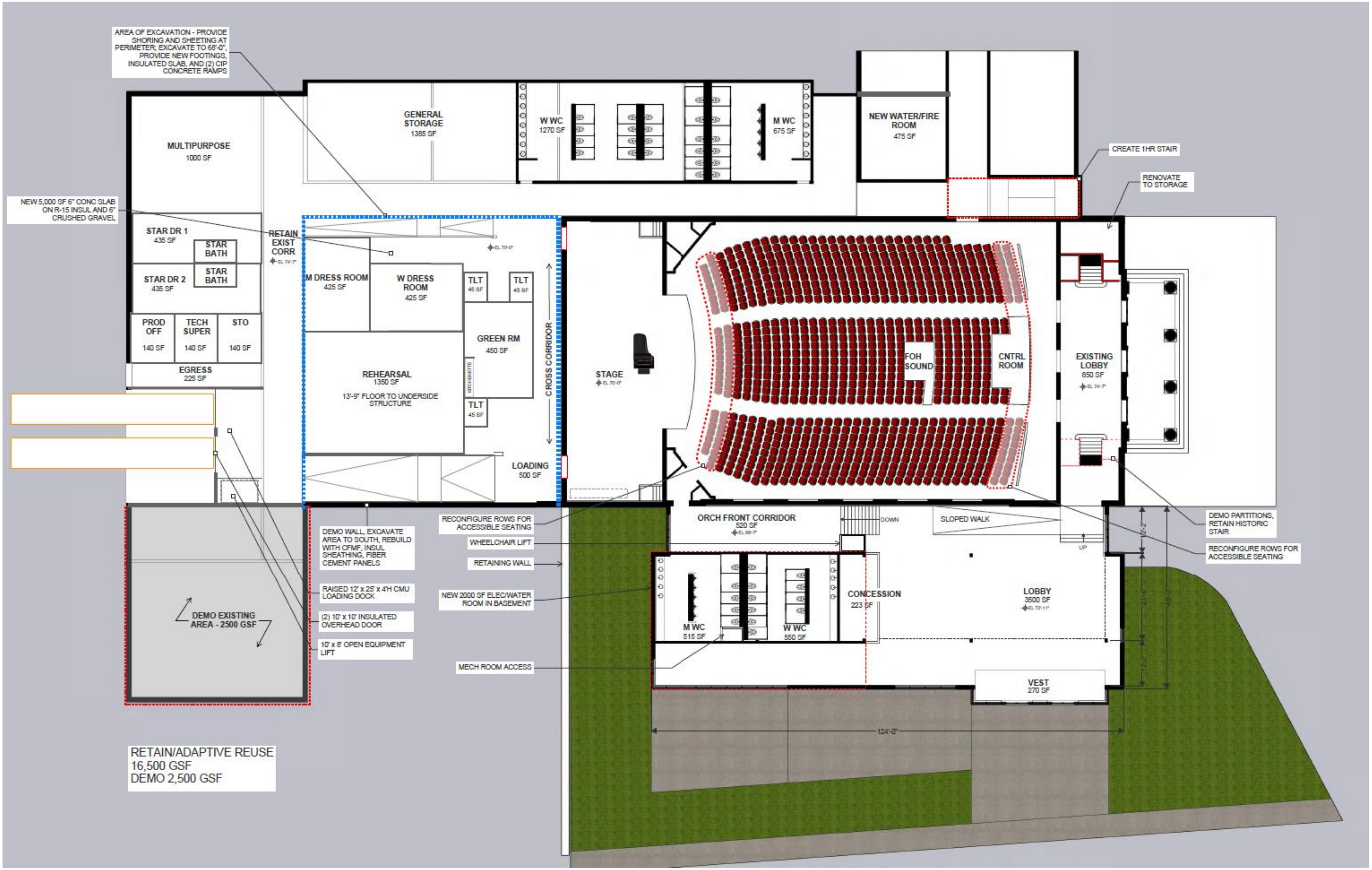
OPTION 2 - SMALL ADDITION
MINOR THEATRICAL UPGRADES

2028 DOLLARS

- SEPARATION OF UTILITIES AND SYSTEMS
- NEW MEP/FP/FA SYSTEMS - THEATER, ADDITION, 1961 SPACES
- 6,000 GSF SINGLE STORY ADDITION W/EXPANDED LOBBY
    - INTEGRATED ATTIC HVAC SPACE
    - ELEC IN BASEMENT
- PUBLIC RESTROOM EXPANSION IN EXISTING AND ADDITION
- ORCHESTRA SEATING ACCESSIBLE TOP AND BOTTOM
- SMALL LOBBY CONCESSIONS
- ADDITIONAL BACKSTAGE SUPPORT
- MINOR STAGE RIGGING EQUIPMENT UPGRADE
- MINOR STAGE LIGHTING CONTROLS UPGRADE
- AV EQUIPMENT - MINOR UPGRADE
- CURTAINS FOR ACOUSTICAL ABSORBTION

TRADE COST:	$15,004,090
MARK-UPS:	$8,039,180
SUBTOTAL:	$23,043,270
SOFT COSTS (25%):	$5,760,818
TOTAL PROJECT COST:	$28,804,088

Option 2a **$34,269,400**
6,000 sf Addition – Larger Demo AND Renovation



OPTION 2A - SMALL ADDITION LARGER RENOVATION

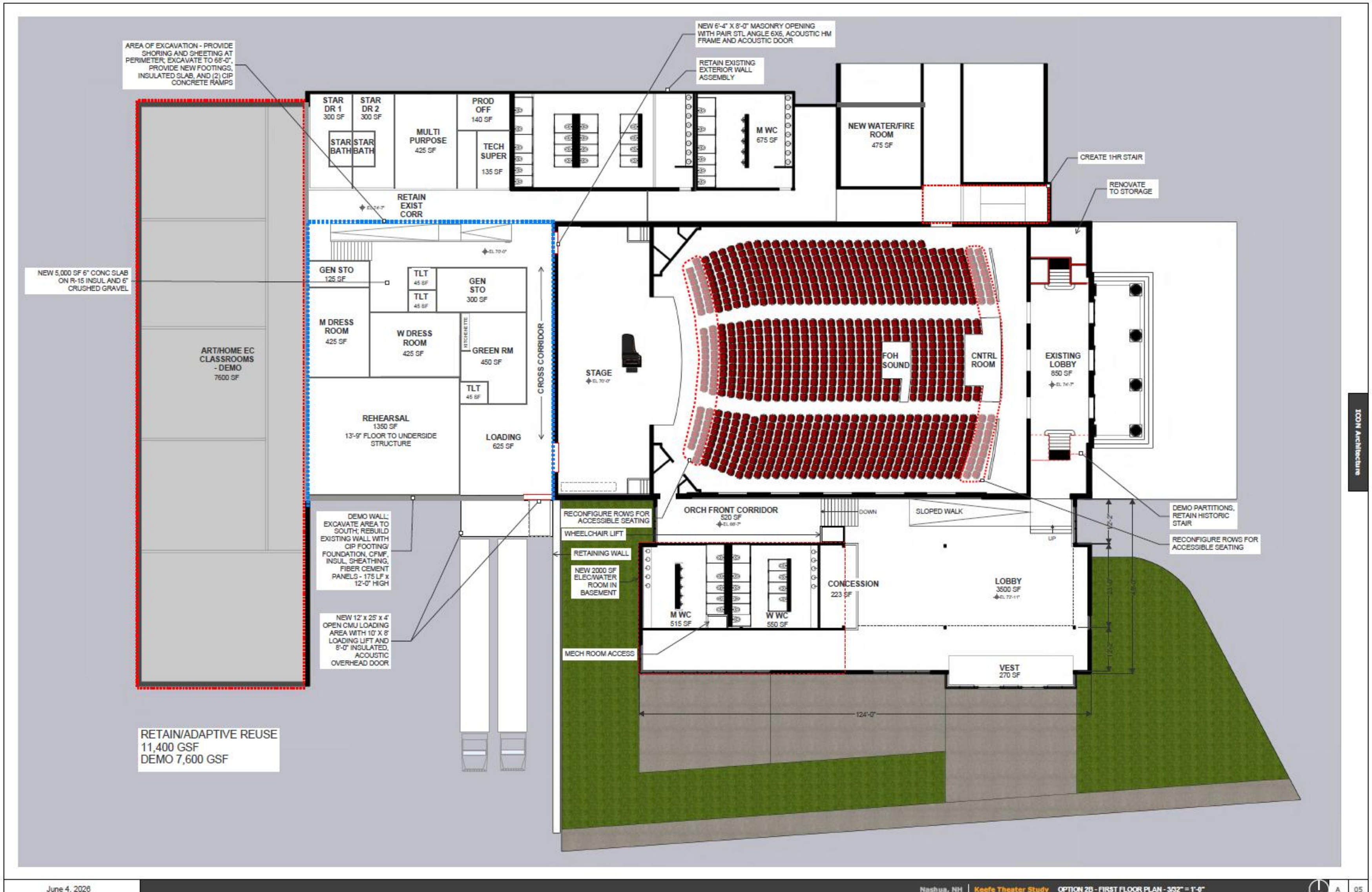
2028 DOLLARS

- SEPARATION OF UTILITIES AND SYSTEMS
- NEW MEP/FP/FA SYSTEMS - THEATER, ADDITION, 1961 SPACES
- 6,000 GSF SINGLE STORY ADDITION W/EXPANDED LOBBY
    - INTEGRATED ATTIC HVAC SPACE
    - ELEC IN BASEMENT
- PUBLIC RESTROOM EXPANSION IN EXISTING AND ADDITION
- ORCHESTRA SEATING ACCESSIBLE TOP AND BOTTOM
- SMALL LOBBY CONCESSIONS
- DEMO AND REBUILD AREA BEHIND STAGE
- DEMO 2500SF CLASSROOMS
- LOADING DOCK AT WEST SIDE
- LIGHTING TRUSS
- AV EQUIPMENT
- CURTAINS FOR ACOUSTICAL ABSORBTION

TRADE COST:	$18,116,452
MARK-UPS:	$9,299,069
SUBTOTAL:	$27,415,521
SOFT COSTS (25%):	$6,853,880
TOTAL PROJECT COST:	$34,269,401
CONTROL ROOM	$202,500
AUDIO MIX	$33,800
NEW SEATING	$1,000,000

Option 2B - $32,428,009

6,000sf Addition - Demo + Less renovation



OPTION 2B - SMALL ADDITION MORE DEMOLITION

2028 DOLLARS

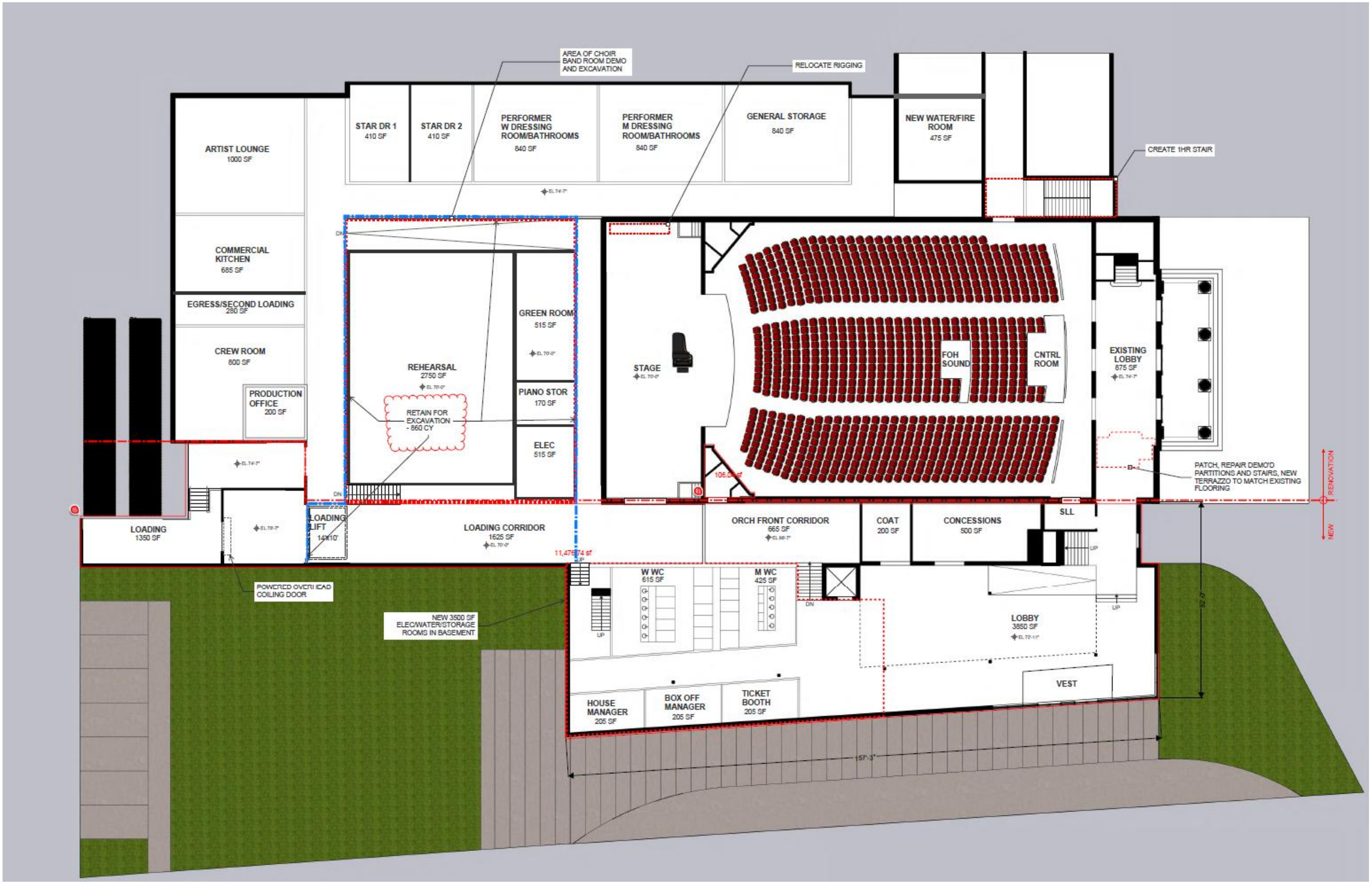
- SEPARATION OF UTILITIES AND SYSTEMS
- NEW MEP/FP/FA SYSTEMS - THEATER, ADDITION, 1961 SPACES
- 6,000 GSF SINGLE STORY ADDITION W/EXPANDED LOBBY
    - INTEGRATED ATTIC HVAC SPACE
    - ELEC IN BASEMENT
- PUBLIC RESTROOM EXPANSION IN EXISTING AND ADDITION
- ORCHESTRA SEATING ACCESSIBLE TOP AND BOTTOM
- SMALL LOBBY CONCESSIONS
- DEMO AND REBUILD AREA BEHIND STAGE
- DEMO 7600 GSF CLASSROOMS
- NEW CMU LOADING DOCK
- LIGHTING TRUSS
- AV EQUIPMENT
- CURTAINS FOR ACOUSTICAL ABSORBTION

TRADE COST:	$17,067,824
MARK-UPS:	$8,874,583
SUBTOTAL:	$25,942,407
SOFT COSTS (25%):	$6,485,602
TOTAL PROJECT COST:	$32,428,009
CONTROL ROOM	$202,500
AUDIO MIX	$33,800
NEW SEATING	$1,000,000

ICON Architecture

Option 3 - $55,743,313

21,000 Sf Addition – Touring Capable



OPTION 3 - TOURING

- SEPARATION OF UTILITIES AND SYSTEMS
- NEW MEP/FP/FA SYSTEMS
- 21,000 GSF, TWO STORY ADDITION
    - ELEC IN BASEMENT
    - HVAC ON ROOF OF NEW BUILDING
- LOBBY WITH CONCESSIONS
- ADA SEATING THROUGHOUT
- SEAT REPLACMENT
- NEW LOADING DOCK
- DEMO STAGE LEFT GALLERY
- CROSSOVER CORRIDOR
- EXTENSIVE BACKSTAGE SUPPORT SPACES
- EXTENSIVE STAGE RIGGING UPGRADE
- STAGE LIGHTING FIXTURES
- LIGHTING/HOUSE LIGHTING REPLACEMENT
- AV EQUIPMENT REPLACEMENT
- ORCHESTRA LIFT
- LIGHTING CATWALK, FOLLOWSPOT PLATFORM
- BOX BOOM LIGHTING POSITIONS
- BALCONY RAIL LIGHTING POSITION
- FoH RIGGING INFRASTRUCTURE AND ACCESS
- NEW/RENOVATED CONTROL BOOTH
- ORCHESTRA LEVEL SOUND MIX POSITION
- ORCHESTRA SHELL AND MOTORIZED REFLECTOR
- VARIABLE ACOUSTIC SYSTEM

	2028 DOLLARS
TRADE COST:	$29,823,578
MARK-UPS:	$14,771,072
SUBTOTAL:	$44,594,650
SOFT COSTS (25%):	$11,148,663
TOTAL PROJECT COST:	$55,743,313
PARKING LOT	$1,000,000
PIT PLATFORM/ ORCHESTRA SHELL	$650,000

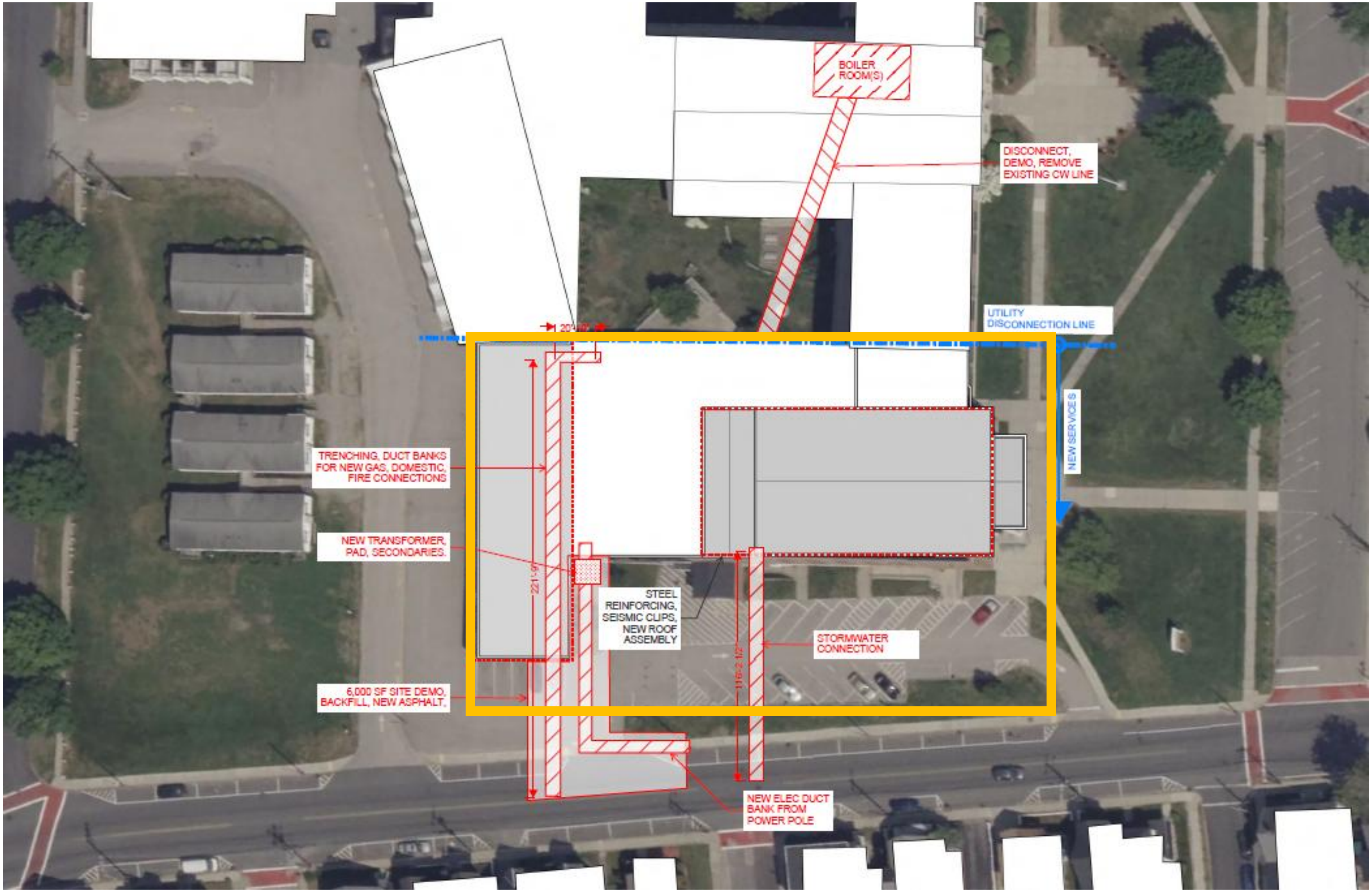
ICON Architecture

Footprint Needed for Renovated Keefe
For development planning purposes

Can accommodate any option presented

Commission Approved on Aug 6, 2026

Illustration for Commission 8/6/26 approved site footprint for planning purposes only



= Footprint needed for Renovated Keefe

Utilization Potential

Path to 100 Nights/Year – Based on Option 1a

Category	Bookings/Yr	Nights/Yr
TOTAL	**27–48+**	**31–70+**
Community theater	2/yr (3-day run)	6
Symphony NH & other ensembles	4–5 + 1–3	4–5 + 1–3
Local rentals	10–20	10–20
Co-productions	2–4	2–8
Tribute acts	2–6	2–12
Kids/children's shows	2–4	2–8
Self-produced fundraisers	4+	4–8+

Five of seven categories scale with local decisions, not national touring supply. Co-productions are a risk-sharing structure (splitting the take with a partner producer), not a distinct show type — they can apply on top of any other row.

Touring Technical Tiers — Booked Acts Only

What renovation option unlocks each booking tier, and the realistic annual booking potential for Keefe.

Technical Tier	Renovation Needed	Bookings/Yr
1 — Presentational (comedy/lecture/solo)	**Any option**	1–4
2 — Children's/Family Touring Theater	**Option 1**	2–4
3 — Orchestral (Symphony NH + others)	**Option 1**	5–8
4 — Amplified concert (tribute/basic)	**Option 1 + AV upgrades**	2–6
5 — Mid-tier headliner	**Option 1 + AV upgrades**	1–4
6 — Dance	**Option 2A/2B**	0–2
7 — Bus & truck (one-nighters)	**Option 2A and up**	2–5
8 — Commercial non-Equity tours	**Option 3 only**	1–2
~~9 — Full Equity (needs 2,000+ seats)~~	**Not Considered**	0