

CITY COMMISSION AGENDA MEMO
April 28, 2009

FROM: Lauren Palmer, Assistant City Manager

MEETING: May 5, 2009

SUBJECT: Adopt Flint Hills Discovery Center Comprehensive Master Plan

PRESENTERS: Lauren Palmer, Assistant City Manager
Guy Hermann, Museum Insights
Gerry Hilferty, Hilferty & Associates
Brad Nederhoff, Verner Johnson & Associates, Inc.

BACKGROUND

On June 17, 2008, the City Commission approved a contract for museum consulting services with E. Verner Johnson and Associates, Inc. (now Verner Johnson, Inc. – VJI), of Boston, Massachusetts, to develop a master plan for the Flint Hills Discovery Center. VJI's partners in the project include Museum Insights (museum planning), Economic Stewardship (feasibility and market analysis), and Hilferty & Associates (exhibit design). VJI is providing museum planning and architectural guidance.

The consulting team has made five trips to Manhattan since July. In addition to meeting regularly with the Steering Committee on-site and via conference calls, they held several public input meetings and conducted a series of one-on-one and small group interviews with more than thirty project stakeholders including Advisory Group members, South End neighbors, directors of comparable facilities, City Commissioners, former Attractions Committee members, and Kansas State University faculty. In total, the team has interacted with over 100 stakeholders.

On February 24, 2009, a City Commission work session was held to review the Draft Flint Hills Discovery Center Comprehensive Master Plan. Following the work session, the consulting team met with the Steering Committee to react to the feedback received and make final adjustments.

DISCUSSION

The Plan includes eight sections: (1) Program Plan, (2) Space Needs Plan, (3) Architectural Concept, (4) Sustainable Design, (5) Interpretive Concept and Storyline Matrix, (6) Operating Budget Projections, (7) Capital Budget Projections, and (8)

Implementation. The report also includes Appendices that summarize the process and public input received to date. A complete hard copy of the Master Plan was provided to City Commissioners on April 16, 2009; therefore, only the Executive Summary is attached to this memorandum. A complete copy of the plan is also available on the City's website at www.ci.manhattan.ks.us/discoverycenter.

The Discovery Center is about much more than the prairie. It will inspire people to celebrate, explore, and care for all of the unique facets of the Flint Hills, including history, ecology, and current events. The Discovery Center will not be a curatorial museum in that it will not house a collection of static artifacts. Rather, it will include a series of dynamic and interactive exhibits that provide hands-on learning opportunities. The proposed Discovery Center Master Plan identifies four primary audiences:

1. *Flint Hills Tourists* who come to the area for a variety of reasons and are looking for unusual experiences. These include conventioners, K-State students and families, and sports fans.
2. *Flint Hills Residents* who are looking for fun activities to do with family and out-of-town guests. For this audience, the Discovery Center will become a community gathering place for special events.
3. *Children in Groups* such as school classes, youth groups, after-school programs, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, summer camps, etc. The Discovery Center will appeal to children because it combines fun and learning.
4. *Short-term Residents* who will use the Discovery Center as a way to discover and connect with the local community. These include K-State students and soldiers stationed at Fort Riley.

Many of these potential visitors are already visiting Manhattan for other purposes, but the Discovery Center can be a draw to encourage them to explore more of the region and, in turn, invest more tourism dollars.

The Discovery Center will offer a wide range of programming designed to meet the needs and expectations of each of its potential audiences. The major components include core exhibitions, temporary exhibitions, educational and public programming, and visitor and community services.

Core Exhibitions: From the K-117 entrance into Manhattan, visitors will immediately be attracted to a cylindrical tower and an Outdoor Exhibit Area with a green roof. Exhibit elements will work in concert with the building architecture and exterior landscaping to suggest the forms and textures of the tallgrass prairie. Walls along the exterior ramps leading up to the green roof replicate the layers of the Flint Hills and provide interpretive and climbing opportunities for visitors. Inside visitors will enter the tall, cylindrical lobby space accessible on multiple levels with natural light streaming through the glass. LED light strands cascading overhead will create an active light show that changes colors. Visitors may ride a glass elevator up to an observation deck for 360 degree views of Manhattan. The central exhibit space is a multi-story, domed space that will house a wide variety of engaging exhibits and activities to help visitors explore the ecology, environment, and natural and physical science of the Flint Hills.

Temporary Exhibitions: The Discovery Center will have temporary exhibition space that will house a constant rotation of exhibits on a range of topics to keep local visitors coming back to see what is new. These exhibits might include traveling Smithsonian exhibits, Flint Hills research being conducted at KSU, work from local artists, or theme exhibits such as contemporary cowboys, native Americans, or history of Kansas flooding.

Educational and Public Programming: Educational programming will be offered for students and the general public in the form of lectures, workshops, and performances. School-age programs will be curriculum based and offer after-school and summer options in addition to attracting traditional field trips. Programs for adults and families may include special holiday themed programs, lectures or demonstrations tied to current exhibitions, classes and workshops to teach skills related to history and ecology, and outreach programs to retirement homes, local civic/service organizations, or other groups. The Discovery Center will be a hub for festivals, performances, and other public events. It will host outdoor activities such as canoe trips, bicycle tours, hikes, and walking tours.

Visitor and Community Services and Special Events: These elements help generate revenue and attract people who may not otherwise visit the Discovery Center. The Discovery Center store will have a rich array of merchandise and specialty items that relate to the Flint Hills experience. The Discovery Center will offer a unique venue for corporate meetings, receptions, community celebrations, birthday parties, musical performances, and more. A catering kitchen and cafe will facilitate these types of events.

City Administration has researched options for proceeding with the next phase of work to design and construct the Discovery Center. It appears that the best option is a construction management approach that combines the exhibit designers with the architecture/engineering and specialty consultants into a cohesive team. This approach is similar to design-build in that a construction management firm would join the team early to coordinate all construction aspects of the project, thereby giving the City cost savings input throughout the process. The difference is that under a design-build approach, the construction firm is typically the lead. For a museum, the creative components (architecture and exhibits) are unique to the project and are fundamental to the design; therefore, the architect serves as the lead under a construction management approach. As with design-build, under construction management a significant portion of work will be competitively bid to subcontractors.

Because of their effective work to date on the Master Plan and their familiarity with the community and the exhibit concepts, the Steering Committee recommends continuing to work with VJI and Hilferty for the design and construction phases of the project. City Administration requests authorization to seek a proposal from VJI and Hilferty and to negotiate a scope of services. At a later date, a contract for these services would be presented to the City Commission for consideration. If the contract is approved, VJI would assemble the engineering and specialty consultant team and negotiate sub-agreements. VJI will seek proposals to select local firms to fill roles as appropriate. VJI will also assist the City in the selection process for a construction management firm.

Finally, if the Master Plan is approved, City Administration intends to move forward with hiring an Executive Director for the Discovery Center. This position is budgeted for the current fiscal year. An Executive Director would become a public face for the Discovery Center in the community. A key objective for this individual would be to coordinate a public information and marketing campaign for the project. This may include public speaking engagements, coordinating on-site programming opportunities, establishing a formal Friends of the Discovery Center group, developing a website, etc. The Executive Director will also begin work on developing the Capitol Campaign as well as Corporate and other grant support.

FINANCING

The Master Plan outlines three potential operating budgets based on moderate, potential, and possible attendance projections. The annual public operating subsidy for the facility is expected to include a hotel/motel visitor bed tax increase of approximately \$200,000 leaving a projected balance of up to \$100,000 needed in the most pessimistic projection. If the Discovery Center achieves the high attendance projections, no operating subsidy would be necessary and the additional bed tax support could be transferred to support debt service retirement on the exhibits instead.

The original capital budget described in the STAR Bond application was approximately \$18.5 million. The Master Plan includes a capital budget of \$22.9 million which accounts for inflation in construction costs and the refined program plan. In order to leverage the investment of STAR Bonds, the City has committed \$5 million toward the capital budget for the Exhibit Development/Fabrication, Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment of the Discovery Center. It is anticipated that the \$4.4 million funding gap would be closed by a capital campaign to raise private/non profit funds in support of the project as well as seeking corporate sponsors for exhibits and other facilities. The Director will also seek operating and other support grants for the facility. The capital budget is comprehensive and includes all anticipated consulting fees for architectural and exhibit design, exhibit fabrication, construction management, engineering, landscape architecture, etc.

ALTERNATIVES

It appears the Commission has the following alternatives concerning the issue at hand. The Commission may:

1. Adopt the Master Plan and authorize City Administration to negotiate with Verner Johnson, Inc. and Hilferty and Associates for the building and exhibit design phase.
2. Do not adopt the Master Plan and do not authorize City Administration to negotiate with VJI and Hilferty.
3. Direct City Administration to work with the Steering Committee to make modifications to the Master Plan.
4. Table the issue.

RECOMMENDATION

City Administration recommends adoption of the Master Plan and authorization to negotiate a contract and scope of work with Verner Johnson, Inc. and Hilferty and Associates for the building and exhibit design phase of the project.

POSSIBLE MOTION

Adopt the Flint Hills Discovery Center Comprehensive Master Plan and authorize City Administration to negotiate with Verner Johnson, Inc. and Hilferty and Associates for the building and exhibit design phases of the project.

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Attachment:

1. Flint Hills Discovery Center Master Plan Executive Summary



Executive Summary

The EVJA team worked with the Steering Committee, Advisory Group, and members of the public to provide clear programmatic and financial guidelines that ensure that the new Discovery Center is sustainable and meets the needs of the community.

The team developed a **Comprehensive Master Plan**, which includes a Program Plan, Architectural Concept, Interpretive Concept, and Operating and Capital Budget Projections. This Master Plan is intended to be used as a basis for the architectural and exhibit design.

This Executive Summary provides an overview of that work.

Mission

The Flint Hills Discovery Center inspires people to celebrate, explore, and care for the Flint Hills.

Vision

The Flint Hills Discovery Center will not only function as a catalyst for the South End development of Manhattan, it will also be a significant public amenity that serves the community and gives the city and Flint Hills region a sense of place and identity. As a place that inspires people to celebrate, explore, and care for the Flint Hills, the Discovery Center is part of a broader vision for preserving the very landscape that makes the Flint Hills unique and helps the region to establish a community identity that is grounded in the ecology, history, and culture of the region.

Audiences

The Discovery Center will have four primary audience groups:

- **Flint Hills Tourists** who come to learn about the Flint Hills and are looking for an unusual experience.
- **Flint Hills Residents** who have many motivations for coming to the Discovery Center and will appreciate a wide range of programming.
- **Children in Groups** who enjoy programs that combine fun and learning.
- **Short-term Residents** who will use the Discovery Center as a way to discover and connect with the local community.

The other group that is critical to engage are the **Owners and Stewards of the Story**. These are the people who know the Flint Hills best and whose help is critical for the Discovery Center to create an authentic experience of the Flint Hills.

Each of these groups is important to the long-term success and sustainability of the Discovery Center. The Center's programming will be planned to meet the unique and shared needs of each audience group.

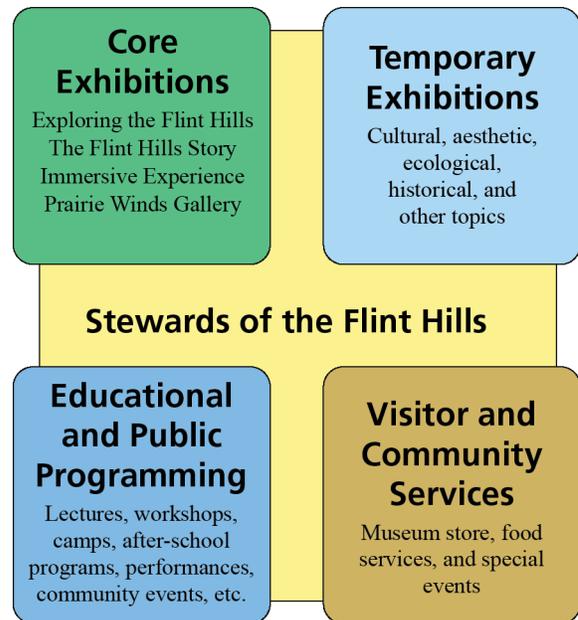


Program Components

The Flint Hills Discovery Center will offer a wide range of programming designed to meet the needs and expectations of each of its potential audiences to help accomplish the Discovery Center’s Goals. The major components include Core Exhibitions, Temporary Exhibitions, Education and other Public Programming, and Visitor and Community Services and Special Events, as illustrated in the table at the right.

The audience group referred to as the Stewards of the Flint Hills are the historians, scientists, researchers, ranchers, long-term residents, and others who understand the Flint Hills and care deeply about them. Their expertise and passion will underpin all of the work of the Discovery Center.

The relationship of each of these program areas to the Discovery Center’s audiences is illustrated in the table below.



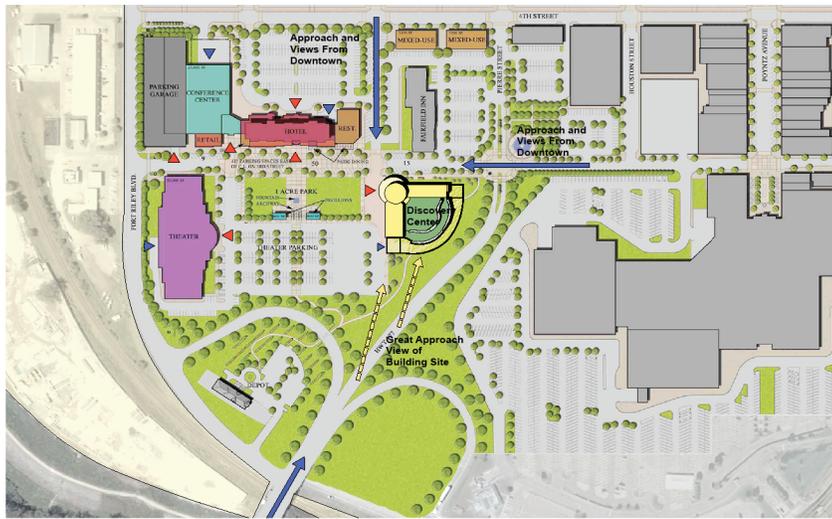
Audience	Interests	Programs	Outcomes
Flint Hills Tourists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience and learn • Get orientated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core exhibits • FH Information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation and understanding of the FH • Earned revenue
Flint Hills Residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An interesting outing • A good place for visitors • A good place for kids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A variety of programs and activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community identity and pride • Ongoing support
Children in Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fun place • Curriculum-based learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core exhibits • School and other programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of FH ecology and history • Inspiration to learn more
Short-term Residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A connection to the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core exhibits • Events and programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambassadors to the world
Stewards of the Flint Hills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserve the Flint Hills’ history, culture, and ecology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships • Education • Outreach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation and Preservation of the FH • Authenticity and integrity • Ongoing support

Architectural Concept

The building concept is designed to reflect the over-arching idea that the people and the land shape each other. The two building wings, which create an urban edge along Third Street and the Public Park Area, seemingly embrace the green roof and central exhibit areas of the building. The undulating roof forms recall the prairie landscape and create an exciting space for special events and environmental education opportunities. The curvilinear, stepped green roof and ramps lead to an outdoor exhibit park and cafe on the top floor of the building. Visible from the highway 177 bridge and ramp, the building and outdoor exhibit components are designed to capture the imagination and attention of visitors arriving to Manhattan.

Visitors enter a tall, cylindrical lobby space, accessible on multiple levels, with natural light streaming through the perimeter glass. From the lobby, where visitors can orient themselves to the Center and learn of other destinations in the Flint Hills, guests can explore the core and temporary galleries, Discovery Center Gift Shop, Cafe, Immersive Experience, and take a glass enclosed elevator up to an Observation Area that provides 360 degree views of the prairie and City of Manhattan.

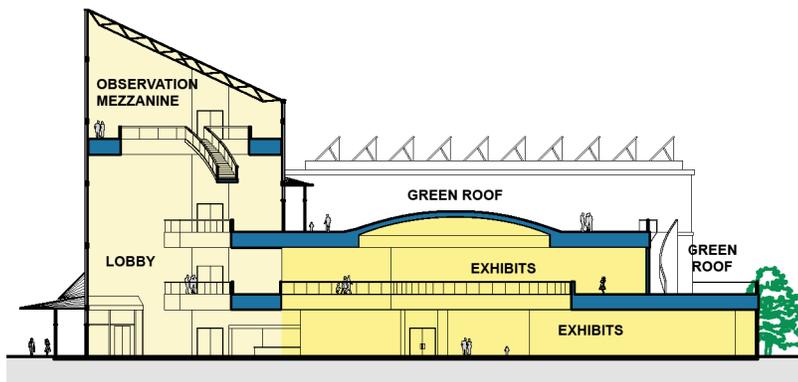
As the sketches and model indicate, the concept accommodates a range of activities from exhibits to programming activities to Special Events, and includes room for expansion.



Site Plan



Concept Model



Building Section

Executive Summary

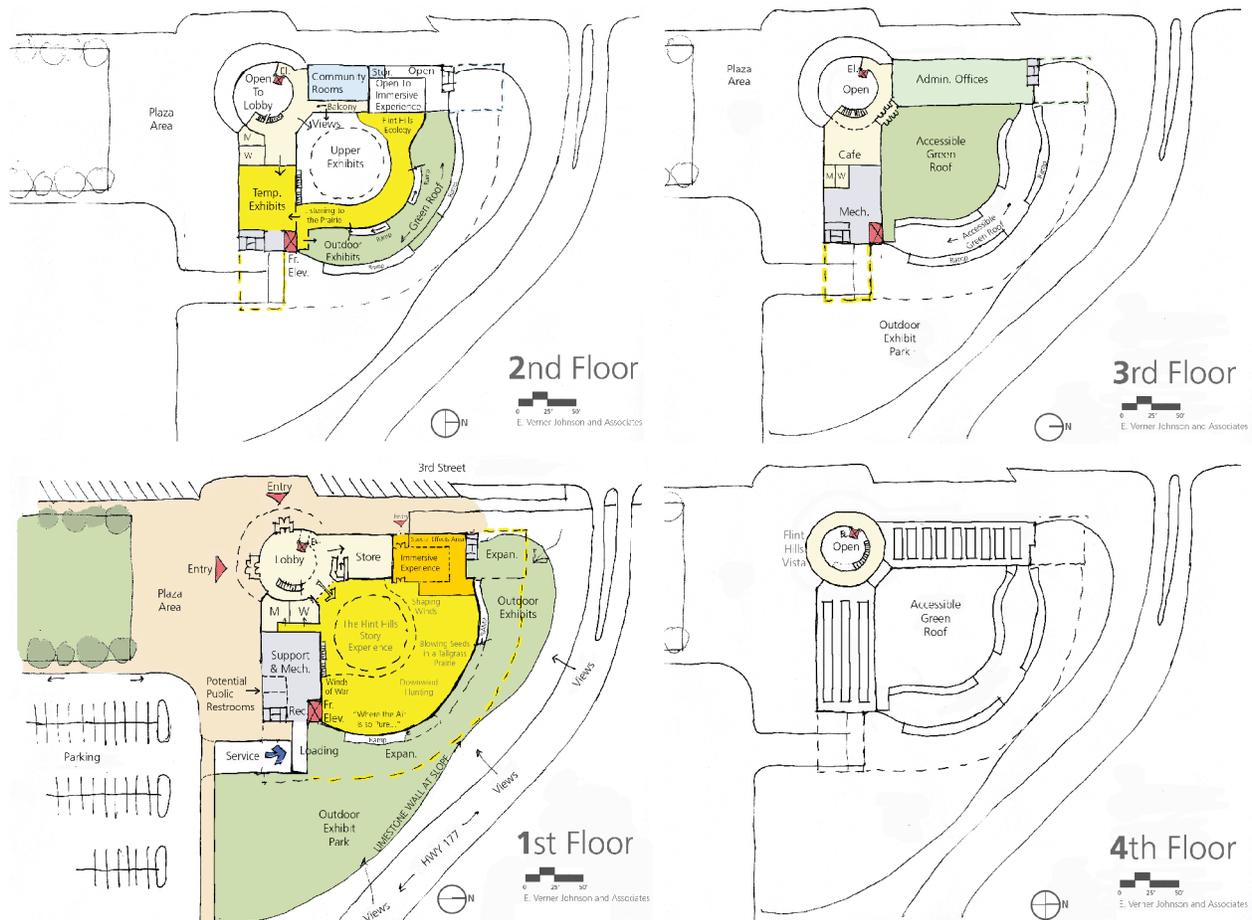


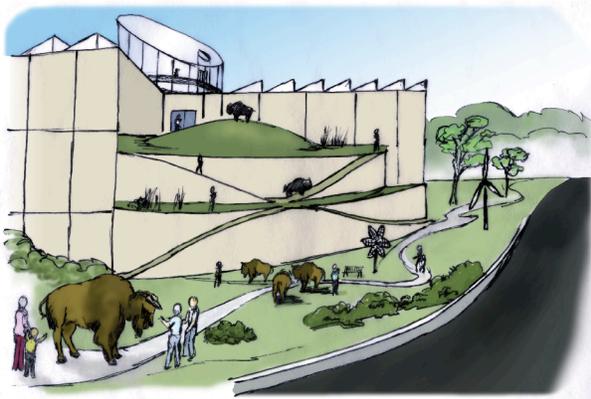
Proposed Building Concept

Features of the proposed Discovery Center Building include:

- Discovery Center forms strong urban edges along 3rd St. and Public Park Area
- Curvilinear, stepped accessible green roof forms with connecting ramps, outdoor exhibit and activity areas (rock climbing walls, play areas, etc.)
- Vertical glass volume forms iconic main entrance at corner
- Circular lobby connects exhibit entry and store on 1st Floor, with direct connections to temporary exhibits, cafe and community rooms on the upper floors
- Exhibits on the 1st and 2nd floors organized around central domed exhibit space
- Central domed space, cafe and green roof suited for special events
- Observation Deck on the 4th floor provides 360 degree views of Flint Hills and City of Manhattan
- Immersive Experience accessed from exhibit area and from direct exterior entrance
- Cafe opens onto accessible green roof at 3rd floor
- 3rd floor roof suitable for photovoltaic solar panels
- Silver or Gold LEED certification incorporated into the design

Proposed Floor Plans





The Discovery Center and its Outdoor Exhibit Area welcome visitors to Manhattan as they approach the city from Highway 177.



Visitors enter the Flint Hills Discovery Center Lobby where visitors can "Explore the Flint Hills" at an interactive kiosk.



"The Flint Hills Story" exhibition reveals geologic, natural, geographic, and cultural elements of the Flint Hills in a multi-story, domed space adjacent to the Lobby.

Interpretive Plan

The Discovery Center's Core Exhibitions, as developed in concept by Hilferty and Associates, will be at the heart of the Discovery Center experience. The core exhibitions will instill a strong sense of place to connect visitors with the physical environment of the Flint Hills. They will explore the geological, ecological, and ethnological history of the people and land of the Flint Hills. The Core Exhibits will have four primary components: the Exploring the Flint Hills; the Flint Hills Story; the Prairie Winds Immersive Experience; and the Prairie Winds Gallery.

Main messages conveyed throughout the exhibits include the following themes:

- People and the land shape each other in this dramatic landscape.
- Prairie winds play upon the landscape and transport us to the Flint Hills of yesterday and today.
- The Flint Hills were formed by millions of years of deposition and erosion by wind and water.
- Prairie grasses came to dominate the land by adapting themselves to windswept landscapes and seasonal cycles of the Flint Hills.
- Great herds of bison attracted the Kaw and other Native American groups to the region.
- European American settlers migrated here to farm but found the rocky Flint Hills better suited to fattening cattle.
- Scientists travel here from around the world to study the Konza Prairie and understand its implications for global climate change and grasslands around the world.
- Some 650 species of wildflowers blossom and grow in the tall grass prairie.



Attendance and Operating Budget

The Operating Budget Projections in this report are based on a wide variety of factors including the size and nature of the facility; the scope and focus of its exhibits, activities, and programs; and the number of people who will visit the Discovery Center or take part in other activities and events there. These attendance estimates are in turn based on the programs and activities outlined in the Program Plan, on comparisons to museums with similar programming and communities, and on the consultant team’s direct experience with other museum and discovery center projects.

Because this is a new museum, these projections are preliminary and are designed to give the Discovery Center’s Steering Committee a sense of the scope of operating funding that will be necessary for the kind of place envisioned in this Master Plan. Because of the many variables involved, the preliminary Operating Budget has three scenarios:

- **Projected**, a moderate and realistic baseline operating budget for the Discovery Center.
- **Potential**, a more optimistic projection that assumes the same investment in the building as the Projected budget, but a greater investment in staffing, marketing, and programming.
- **Possible**, a very optimistic projection that depends on substantially greater investment in the building and exhibits in order to create a more compelling and memorable visitor experience.

	Projected	Potential	Possible	Sunset Zoo
Paid Attendance	40,000	60,000	90,000	57,000
Other Visitor Contacts	30,000	50,000	65,000	45,000
Total Attendance	70,000	110,000	155,000	102,000
Average Ticket Revenue per Visitor	\$ 4.70	\$ 6.00	\$ 7.29	\$ 1.70
FTE Staff	10.5	12.6	15.8	Approx. 20
Revenues	\$ 660,000	\$ 810,000	\$ 1,090,000	\$ 800,000
Expenses	630,000	790,000	1,062,650	800,000
Portion of revenues derived from city bed tax , sales tax, or other city sources.	300,000	150,000	None	510,000



Capital Budget

The Capital Budget of \$22.9M includes all of the costs necessary to design and build the Discovery Center itself, to design and fabricate the exhibits, and to raise the additional funding needed to supplement the STAR Bonds.

The Discovery Center includes an architecturally distinctive building, core and temporary exhibits, an immersive experience, a welcoming lobby with an LED sculpture, community activity areas, a cafe and store, an observation deck, a green roof, and outdoor exhibits.

In our professional opinion, this budget is the minimum investment needed to create the visitor experience described in this Master Plan. In order to achieve the “Potential” attendance projection for the Discovery Center, significant additional capital investment will be required to enhance the visitor experience. An enhanced Capital Budget is included as an Appendix.

Capital Budget	2009 Dollars
Construction including site development, fees, and expenses	14,287,000
Exhibits and Visitor Experiences	6,045,000
Construction and Exhibition Contingency	2,068,000
Endowment	100,000
Fundraising Costs	390,000
Total Capital Cost in 2009 Dollars	\$ 22,890,000

Funding Sources	
STAR Bonds and City Support	\$ 18,500,000
Capital Campaign	4,390,000
Total Funding	\$ 22,890,000

About the Capital Campaign

A capital campaign of this scale is consistent with amounts similar communities have raised for similar projects. This goal is particularly achievable because the core costs of the project are already funded, which will give donors confidence that the project will succeed.

Please Note: The 2006 budget for this project was \$18.5 million. Since that budget was created, construction costs have increased substantially. The nature of the project has also changed so that the Discovery Center now includes additional facilities designed to allow for programming for the local community, rather than focusing primarily on visitors to Manhattan.