

RHODE ISLAND CONVENTION CENTER AUTHORITY
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 2025

A meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Rhode Island Convention Center Authority (hereinafter referred to as "Authority" "the CCA" or the "Board" was held on January 30, 2025, pursuant to notice which was posted at the Amica Mutual Pavilion, One LaSalle Square, Providence, RI and the RI Convention Center, One Sabin Street, Providence, RI.

Board members in attendance were Ernest Almonte, George Nee, Paul MacDonald, Jeffrey Hirsh, Peter Mancini, and Jennifer Goodrich Coia, Esq.

Board member not in attendance: Dale Venturini, Oscar Vargas, and Diony Garcia, Esq.

Others participating were Daniel McConaghy, Dana Peltier, Linda Maroun, and Melissa O'Connor Convention Center Authority; Dan Schwartz, Mike Gravison The VETS; Alan Chile PFM/The VETS; Lawrence Lepore, Robert Lauro, Cheryl Cohen, Rebecca Ponder, Christina Montanaro, Robert Gemma, and Tim Sullivan Convention Center and AMP; Tom Riel, PWCVB; Mark Morin, LiRo-Hill; John Velez and Mike McDuffie Sportservice; Bruce Leach, Legal Counsel; Michael Crawley, Citrin Cooperman; Hank Abate, Rebecca Bolton, and Charles Lawrence OVG Corporate; and Debra Polselli, Recording Secretary.

1. Call to Order

Chairman Almonte called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

2. Announcement of Next Board Meeting Date

Chairman Almonte stated that the next meeting will take place on Thursday, February 27, 2025 at 9:00 a.m.

3. Consent Calendar Items

- a. Approval of minutes of the December Board Meeting
- b. Approval of the Marketing Committee Report
- c. Approval of Finance Committee Report

Chairman Almonte requested a motion for the Consent Calendar Items. Upon a motion from **Mr. MacDonald**, which was seconded by **Mr. Mancini**, it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve the minutes of the December Board Meeting, the Marketing Committee Report, and the Finance Committee Report.

Chairman Almonte then requested a motion to move Agenda Item 7(b) Discussion about PC Fan Behavior to Agenda Item 4. Upon a motion from **Mr. Mancini**, which was seconded by **Mr. MacDonald**, it was unanimously

VOTED: to move Agenda Item 7(b) to Agenda Item 4.

4. Discussion about PC Fan Behavior – Daniel McConaghy

Mr. McConaghy stated that this year's PC Men's Basketball season has been very successful, but PC student behavior has been an ongoing challenge, and it has become dangerous. He stated that he would like to discuss what we can do to affect some change and asked what message can be brought to Providence College. Mr. Lepore commented that we expected the bad behavior to escalate with Coach Cooley and we decided to be proactive with affording early entry for students. He expressed the need for better communication with the College and some issues are reactive to bad behavior and the inability to punish or reprimand students has fallen by the wayside. He stated that the Board needs to summon people from Providence College to have a serious conversation on how to discipline those unruly students.

He reminded the Board that there are over 10k people in attendance at a game with most people behaving well with the exception of probably 50 people. Mr. Lepore mentioned another concern which occurred during the last two (2) Late Night Madness events featuring One Republic and the Zac Brown Band. He stated that there were incidents of students throwing debris at the artists on stage and both concerts stopped temporarily because of their behavior. He stated that the State Fire Marshal is now using those incidents to reduce floor capacity at all places of assembly, which is another conversation that is needed with PC. Mr. Abate commented that at other OVG facilities most colleges and universities have ambassadors that deal with student behavior and stated that we do not have this and may be something that is communicated with the College and implemented for the future. **Mr. MacDonald** stated that he feels as a Board of Commissioners representing the State, they need to do something. He witnessed it and was not happy. He stated that it is not acceptable to say, 'oh, it is just another basketball game.' He stated that as a Board they have been very good to Providence College giving them what they needed, and he expects them to take this situation seriously and get these students to be respectable before someone gets hurt. He stated that he loves PC, but it is unacceptable behavior and disrespectful to all the other fans at a game. **Mr. Mancini** mentioned the fake ID situation and asked if we would turn them over to the police and if they would do anything with them. Mr. Lepore replied that the Providence Police do not want to make arrests for a fake ID or throwing a bottle because it will take that police officer out of service. **Mr. Mancini** asked if all the students sit in one area and Mr. Lepore replied that the student section is under the restaurant and the seating is cantilevered down to the floor. He mentioned that when we invested the capital funds to increase capacity for PC games we thought this area would be utilized for general public seating, but it ended up being student seating. He stated that we have now doubled the number of students in the arena. Mr. Lepore further stated that student sections do not have assigned seating and it is a first come first served to get the best seats on the floor. **Ms. Lombardi** and **Vice Chairman Nee** questioned if the level of communication with PC has not gotten them anywhere because the students create an atmosphere where the AMP is a hard place to play basketball, and Mr. Lepore replied that he does not believe that Providence College is encouraging bad behavior. **Vice Chairman Nee** commented that there are a lot of people at these games, and we say it is a family-friendly area, but it is not good that kids are listening to these unruly students. Mr. Lepore stated that it would be a challenge to police foul language. **Vice Chairman Nee** commented that meeting with the President of the College and finding out what kind of information they are receiving and have someone monitor the situation. He suggested posting signs that if a student is caught using a fake ID, they will be turned over to the Providence Police, which may just send a message that this will no longer be tolerated. Mr. Lepore asked Mr. Velez how many fake IDs were confiscated during this past game, and Mr. Velez stated that there were approximately 100 fake IDs confiscated during the last game. **Vice Chairman Nee** also suggested closely monitoring the students before allowing them access into the building. Mr. Lepore stated that he thinks reserved seating in the student sections will stop them from showing up several hours beforehand consuming alcohol during those hours will help the situation. **Ms. Goodrich Coia** stated that while she understood Mr. Lepore's concern about taking a police officer out of commission to make an arrest, she felt that it would only take a few arrests before sending a message to other students who would choose to act more appropriately during a game. She cited an example of the recent protests in Columbus where students were clearly identified, and because of their actions, job offers are being revoked for these students. She stated that if we have good video of the students with face recognition, we can make sure they get the message that they are supposed to act a certain way on or off campus. She stated that she does not agree with putting the onus back on PC to enforce the repercussions. Mr. Lepore stated that help from the Board to work with the City to get Providence Police to engage would be helpful, and **Ms. Goodrich Coia** offered to take that on. **Ms. Lombardi** asked if Providence College is willing to pay for an extra police detail, and Mr. Lepore replied that it might be a part of contract negotiations. **Vice Chairman Nee** questioned how many police officers are positioned inside and outside. Mr. Lauro replied that the detail for Providence College basketball games consists of five (5) officers. **Vice Chairman Nee** suggested having ten (10) officers, which would show a police presence and send a message. Mr. Lepore stated that he asked if Providence College could add campus police to the detail, but they do not want that liability, and Mr. Abate stated that they already have the liability. **Mr. Hirsh** stated that he feels that the student sections should be reserved seating. **Ms. Goodrich Coia** commented about the World Series and how people can be banned for life from attending any future events and asked if we were able to institute that policy. Mr. Lepore replied that when we control the tickets we could ban an individual but all tickets for PC games are issued by PC. **Ms. Goodrich Coia** stated that we could still send message by having a person banned from attending any event at the AMP. **Vice Chairman Nee** questioned if it was possible to move the students to seats in the upper arena, and Mr. Lepore replied that Providence College would need to make that decision. **Vice Chairman Nee** questioned if they could come in tomorrow and say they are going to take these seats, and Mr. Lepore replied yes. Mr. Abate commented that it is a strategic advantage of the schools to have their students at their basketball games close to the floor. **Chairman Almonte** thanked everyone for their input and stated that a meeting will be setup with the President and all the points discussed will be raised and they will report back to the Board. **Vice Chairman Nee** questioned if the meeting will take place prior to the next game, and Mr. Lepore stated that the next game is Wednesday and was unsure if a meeting would be possible beforehand.

5. Finance Committee Report – Chair Jeff Hirsh

a. Financial Highlights

Mr. Hirsh thanked the finance team for working so hard catching up on the financial statements. Mr. McConaghy drew the Board's attention to the single page handout that details the finances of first six (6) months into the fiscal year, as well as the path to the finish. He stated that as an operation we are only about \$30k under and things really pick up in the second half of the fiscal year, which projects \$1.2 million. He stated that it is a great place to be, and he wanted to drill down that from a budget standpoint. He mentioned that there are a lot of moving parts with the buildings. He then reviewed the main events at all the venues and stated that he feels good about where we are this fiscal year. Mr. Lepore commented that this is all going to happen even with renovations taking place at the Convention Center. **Chairman Almonte** stated he knows it has been mentioned that there is a plan to take a deeper dive into expenses, and the Board is looking forward to hearing a report. Mr. McConaghy stated that they are working on it and will report back once complete.

6. Marketing Committee – Chair Dale Venturini

a. Review of RICC Renovation and Sustainability Marketing & Sales Plan

In Ms. Venturini's absence, Mr. McConaghy stated that Ms. Cohen would present the RICC Renovation and Sustainability Marketing & Sales Plan (see attached). He stated that at last month's Board meeting, members heard about renovations and Ms. Montanaro discussed sustainability and he wanted to report back. He stated that Ms. Cohen has put a plan together that is a work in progress but provides a quick overview. Ms. Cohen stated that she will keep her report brief since most members heard the report at the Committee meeting. She stated that this plan will make us more compliant, and we will focus on that together with OVG who are the masters of sustainability. She mentioned attracting new business and new clients that we might not have been able to bring to one of venues prior to instituting this Plan. Ms. Cohen then reviewed the timeline, which is the Strategies page, as well as getting the word out with digital brochures, which will help us sell. She noted that increasing visibility will drive bookings and position the Convention Center as a sustainable venue which benefits the environment and our community. Mr. McConaghy stated that we have a good framework and a good timeline for this Plan.

7. Employee Highlight

a. Mike McDuffie (Premiums Manager - Sportservice)

Mr. Velez introduced Mike McDuffie, Premiums Manager at the AMP. Mr. McDuffie acknowledged those in the room and thanked them for being great role models. He stated that he began his career here while at JWU in 2004 and became the Commissary Manager in 2009. He stated that from 2009-2015 he traveled in the summer months to other facilities to help out during our slow season and during that time he learned what to do and what not to do. He stated that he and Mr. Velez took a lot back from those travel experiences. He noted that anyone who has been an event knows that there is a short window of time to service customers. He noted that we have since set up "grab and go" which allows customers to make their selection and as they approach the cashier, they are able to make a quick transaction. He stated that the speed of service helps us all make more money. He stated that he has recently become the Premium Manager, which encompasses the suites, the restaurant, as well as high end catering for shows that book here. Mr. Lepore commented that Mr. McDuffie was instrumental during Covid. He stated that the State was in a very serious situation at the time and Mike Sabitoni suggested having the laborers come in and make test kits. Mr. McDuffie set up the system and oversaw the test kit making operation. Mr. McDuffie commented that it is one of the better experiences he ever had with the scale of the operation and to see everyone come together for a good cause. Mr. McConaghy asked Mr. McDuffie what he likes to do in his spare time when he is not at the venue, and Mr. McDuffie replied that he enjoys his rooftop garden, and spending quality time with his dog and his family who live in New Jersey. He noted that he is very work driven. **Chairman Almonte** asked Mr. McDuffie how he defines success both personally and professionally, and Mr. McDuffie replied that good core communication and the ability to be ready to react because things change constantly. He stated that being able to stay calm and communicate accordingly is crucial. **Chairman Almonte** joked that typically when an employee speaks to the Board, he usually asks them to sit down so not to be stressed but he thinks that Mr. McDuffie would be more stressed if he did sit down to address the Board, and Mr. McDuffie agreed. **Vice Chairman Nee** asked if we could put together a report on the making of test kits during Covid because it is important for it to be part of the record. Mr. McConaghy stated that back in 2021 the Authority engaged Duffy & Shanley on a PR program to let people know all the good work that happened here during Covid but that he would look into it. Mr. Lepore commented that we are probably the only venue whose staff is HIPPA certified.

8. Executive Director's Report – Daniel McConaghy

a. Overview of Facilities & Operations Committee Meeting

Mr. McConaghy reported that there is an abundance of work going on and a lot of activity. He showed a PowerPoint presentation on the construction projects providing an overview and update to the Board (see attached). Mr. McConaghy reviewed the budget summary noting that \$54 million was budgeted for projects, \$52 million was allocated to projects, which leaves a balance remaining of \$2.7 million. Mr. McConaghy then reviewed the projects at each venue. **Mr. Mancini** asked if the fire marshal was aware of how much money was being spent on the fire alarm replacement system, and Mr. McConaghy replied yes and that there were aspects of the project that were not necessary at this time but there is a trend towards these changes, so we were able to get ahead of it. Mr. McConaghy then reviewed the renovations to the 5th floor of the Convention Center. He noted that there was already a significant transformation to the space. He then reported on the fire alarm replacement system at the Convention Center noting that it is very intricate work to work around the event schedule. He then reported that the next launch would be the Rotunda project in April 2025. He stated that they just received good news on the safe way to remove the artwork. He then reported on the RICC garage renovations which is on hiatus due to winter conditions and will begin again around April 1st. **Vice Chairman Nee** commented on the picture of one of the garage columns. Mr. McConaghy replied that it is a steel beam encased in concrete and there are no structural problems in the garage. Mr. Lepore commented that they chipped away at the concrete and took that picture and Mr. McConaghy stated that the column was not as bad as the picture and looks better now. Mr. McConaghy further reported on the replacement of all 14 sets of exterior doors at the Convention Center, which is much needed and will be completed by the Fall of 2025. Mr. McConaghy then reviewed the list of projects under consideration which total \$6.9 million. **Vice Chairman Nee** asked if this proposal was with the Governor's office, and Mr. McConaghy replied yes it was under façade repairs at the Convention Center. He commented that there are a lot of issues with the façade with caulking, deteriorations, and water leaks. He stated that it is a big-ticket item that needs to be chipped away at and cannot be done all at one time. **Chairman Almonte** commented that he cannot wait to see the renovations of the Rotunda. He commented that every place he travels to there is always one main meeting place and he thinks the Rotunda will be a focal point of the Convention Center in this instance.

b. OVG Update – Hank Abate, Charles Lawrence, Rebecca Bolton

Mr. Abate addressed the Board and stated that their promise to make sure that OVG was very in front of them not only from tertiary staff but also bringing in senior people from OVG and there are two (2) such people here today. He introduced Charles Lawrence from food and beverage. Mr. Lawrence addressed the Board and stated that it was good to see everyone and while he does not have a lot to report, they have been doing a lot. He stated that they may have noticed throughout the venue that they took delivery of new equipment and making this nice equipment visible and bringing our catering to where we want it to be. He stated that they do not shoot for mediocrity but excellence. He stated that equipment is slowly being deployed, and they are excited about the renovations to the structure of the concession stand in Exhibit Hall B and bringing it to become an express market offering hot and cold food and snacks. He commended Ms. Montanaro and the Chef on an excellent job putting it all together. He then reported on utilizing portable equipment, which will be important as they start the Café. He stated that it will give them the opportunity to grill, offer grab and go food choices, as well as curated foods (Italian dishes, Mexican choices) depending on the event. He stated that the Chef is having fun, and they are seeing the results of offering a variety of foods while focusing on quality and sustainability when they bring things in. He stated that they are happy about their partnership and the goal is to listen and be proactive. With there being no questions for Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Abate stated that Joyce Levins, who was very involved in the transition and oversaw the Convention Center division of OVG, took another job at the Javitz Center in New York. He introduced Rebecca Bolton, who replaces Ms. Levins, and will now oversee the Convention Center division. Ms. Bolton stated that it was a pleasure to be there and that she was here during the transition. She stated that she has been in the business for 25 years in several different capacities since 2002. She stated that she likes to make this work fun, and she is a relationship builder. She stated that she loves working with people and continuing to grow the business. She stated that she expects to be here often and is hoping to optimize the operation here. **Vice Chairman Nee** asked what she feels is the biggest challenge at the Complex, and Ms. Bolton replied that she was not sure yet. She stated that she is working with staff here who are very strong. She stated that it is a well-oiled machine, and she looks to enhance the operation continuing to move things forward by looking at something and saying this is great, but how can we do it better. She stated that she will always be transparent with the Board on their operation. Mr. Lepore commented that Ms. Bolton recently was part of a grand opening of a new arena in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida and asked her to tell the Board about it. Ms. Bolton stated that Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy founded TGL, which is an interactive golf league played at the SoFi Center in Palm Beach Gardens offering a 2-hour experience for up to 1500 fans. She stated that it features teams of PGA Tour golfers that compete in prime time matches and is televised on ESPN on Tuesdays.

Ms. Bolton further stated that the league is a mix of simulator and traditional golf. She stated that there is a lot of hype around it and encouraged the Board to check it out. **Chairman Almonte** then asked Ms. Bolton how she defines success, and Ms. Bolton replied that the business is the business and there is no end to this business with there always being something new to learn or apply. She concluded by stating that passing the love of this business onto others is the most meaningful success.

9. Adjournment

With there being no further business to be discussed by the Board of Commissioners, **Chairman Almonte** asked for a motion to adjourn. Upon a motion duly made by **Vice Chairman Nee**, which was seconded by **Mr. Mancini**, it was unanimously

VOTED: to adjourn the January 30, 2025 meeting at 10:12 a.m.