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WHEN ALLEN, FRISCO AND PLANO DECIDED TO JOIN FORCES to form a Regional Performing Arts Center, it became more of a creative vision than your average project. Everything about this project has been designed on a grand scale. Instead of designing a Center that would accommodate Collin County communities now, every aspect of the project has been about forward thinking to better meet present and future needs. More than 100 community leaders have come together to offer input on the Performing Arts Center. Four public forums were held in Allen, Frisco, McKinney, (who later backed out as a sponsoring city), and Plano to solicit input from residents about the plan. It has been this feedback that has shaped the vision.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION From the very beginning, "We had a set of criteria that we looked at including proximity to Custer and Hwy 121, approximately 100 acre sites, topography that was attractive for an arts district, cost and other factors and Frisco and Allen met these criteria," stated Robbie Robinson, president of the Arts of Collin County Commission Board of Directors.

The Commission reviewed all sites based on the 12-point criteria, including natural characteristics, infrastructure, location and ease of access. The site-selection committee announced last month that the Allen location was better suited to meet the needs of the Arts Center and the public. Located just south of Hwy 121 where Ridgeview Drive and Exchange Parkway intersect, the 118.6-acre site is valued at \$12 million. Briar Ridge Investments Inc., a subsidiary of the Twin Creeks Development in Allen, generously donated the property. Robinson expressed how grateful the committee was for the donation, stating, "It sets a wonderful precedent for charitable donations in Collin County." Board members say the land donation will help in the group's efforts to raise the remaining dollars needed.

FUNDING

The Collin County Performing Arts Center will be a spectacular facility that a single city could not afford individually. This will also be the first time three cities have come together to build a project like this in the country, making it truly unique. The funding is ongoing, but together the cities have a combined total of \$57 million in voter-approved bonds plus the land donation.

Mr. Robinson adds, "The donation would add to the \$10 million in private donations the arts commission hopes to raise from its Bravo! Fund-raising arm." Maher Maso, Commission vice president and Frisco Mayor Pro Tem is confident that businesses will see the benefit of investing in the Arts Center. "In our attempt to attract larger corporations we learned that employers highly value strong cultural arts in the communities they locate to for many reasons including quality of life for their employees and families and a healthy work environment."



Site map for the Performing Arts Center graphic courtesy of Arts of Collin County Commission

a vision in the making

by jackie beynaerts

FUTURE PROJECTION: 2008

The Arts Center is expected to be fully functional in 2008. The public can look forward to having a 2100 seat multi-use theater for local arts and touring shows. Another possible resident of the complex might be the Junior League of Plano's Sci-Tech Discovery Center. It may also include a 600 - 800 seat theater, visual arts gallery and classrooms, Robinson said. Renowned architect BOORA has been chosen to design the Arts Center. When completed, the Collin County Arts Center will be home to hike and bike trails, an amphitheater, sculpture gardens and more as the facility evolves. For updated information about the Collin County Arts Center, log on to www.artsofcollincounty.org.

Jackie Beynaerts is a freelance writer living in Plano.