Auditorium Renovation Report

Introduction

The Capital Expenditure budget proposals for 2026 submitted by the Finance Committee included a proposal to renovate the Charlestown Auditorium. This proposal was incorporated into the approved Charlestown capital budget for 2026. It was understood by residents that 2026 would focus on planning for the eventual renovation and that no construction would begin during this year. The Residents' Council created a special committee on November 10, 2025, to make recommendations to the Charlestown Administration regarding the planned renovation of the Charlestown Auditorium, with June 2026 established as the target date for the committee's final report. However, the committee later learned that the Charlestown Administration planned to begin preliminary discussions with Erickson Senior Living earlier than residents had expected. As a result, the committee has worked to produce this report much earlier than planned.

The Committee gratefully acknowledges the advice and support provided by Charlestown Administration, particularly Jason Dennis, who served as the committee's primary contact, as well as the Transportation Department and other staff members. To determine needed improvements to the Auditorium and to address related concerns, the committee sought input from the principal user organizations and from others with relevant technical expertise in the areas of infrastructure, safety, and accessibility. In addition, a subgroup of the committee visited Oak Crest to tour its auditorium, which underwent renovation approximately three years ago.

The Committee hopes that the Charlestown Administration will continue to include residents in its planning and discussions with Erickson Senior Living and that the observations and recommendations of this report will become a significant element of Charlestown’s ongoing planning and decision-making. In fact, we believe that continued resident participation will be critical for a successful project outcome.

Committee Membership
The project committee membership included two representatives each from the principal organizational users of the auditorium and the chairpersons of the Resident Life Committee and the Maintenance-Engineering Committee:
• ELLIC
• Little Theater Company
• Harmonizers
• Movietime at Charlestown
• Charlestown Ballroom Dance Club (1 representative)
• Community Concert Committee (1 representative)
• Resident Life Committee, Co-Chair
• Maintenance-Engineering Committee, Chair

A Steering Committee (Art Johnson, Connie Cooney, Wayne Smith, Hope Tillman, Brian McGill) oversaw the project and authored this report. Brian McGill and Hope Tillman led two sub-groups that developed the recommendations that make up most of this report. The Steering Committee held three general meetings with the project committee to report the work being done and to solicit feedback and suggestions. A draft of this report was shared with the entire committee and approved. In addition, Committee Chair Art Johnson provided monthly progress reports to the Finance Committee.

Constraints
The Charlestown Administration provided the committee with two constraints:

1. No exterior or load-bearing walls may be removed.
   Comment: Certain interior walls within the Auditorium, particularly the wall adjacent to the Control Room, may be non-load bearing and should be evaluated to determine whether they are structurally required or otherwise essential. If they are not, the potential removal of one or more of these walls should be considered to allow more space for rollators or for the Control Room to be expanded, modernized to accommodate up-to-date equipment, and configured to provide a safe working environment for Control Room personnel.

2. The current audience capacity of approximately 200 seats is to be maintained as a minimum.
   Comment: This requirement may be in tension with other key project objectives, especially maximizing safety and accessibility, which are priorities for the committee. It is likely that efforts to improve accessible seating will reduce overall audience capacity. Thus, maintaining the current capacity will either necessitate innovative design solutions or require reconsideration of this constraint.

General Considerations

1. Ensuring that residents can move safely into, out of, and within the auditorium is of critical importance. Safety requirements can be complex, and associated costs can be minimized if those requirements are clearly defined prior to the start of construction. The Committee considers accessibility and safety prime values for this project.

2. Provide automated door openers for all doors in the Auditorium to provide greater accessibility. Currently, only the door from the outside has an automated door opener. Install a locking/unlocking mechanism to the outside door to facilitate loading and unloading of equipment by visiting performers. The door has a force closure setting currently so that someone cannot hold it open for unloading.

3. The control booth directly affects nearly every aspect of the attendee experience once a resident enters the auditorium and until they depart. Effective management of lighting, sound, and temperature is essential to ensuring a comfortable and enjoyable experience.

4. The redesign of the stage is a primary driver of the overall experience. The configuration and shape of the stage will determine the seating layout and, consequently, the placement of accessible aisles. The front of the stage with its current step configuration needs to be changed because it is not safe.

5. Renovation of the lighting and sound systems, and curtains will provide a better experience for both audience and presenters.

6. The renovation is a good time to reconfigure the current backstage area to meet the needs of the diverse groups making use of the auditorium, especially large groups like the Little Theatre Company, the Charlestown Harmonizers, ELLIC, and the outside groups brought in by the Concert Committee.

Specific Proposals

Audience

1. Obtain and install emergency communication devices that are connected to the security office, at a minimum from the Control Booth and from Backstage.

2. Install and connect two flat-screen monitors—one on each side wall—to provide clear stage visibility for audience members seated at oblique angles or farther from the center.

3. Install and connect a digital sign screen on the exterior wall left of the main entrance to promote the activities in the Auditorium.

4. Ensure that the carpet is not striped, as that pattern hides slopes and may put attendees off balance. Color should be light for better visibility.

Seating

1. Increase the space between seating aisles to eliminate a safety hazard and increase the comfort of seated residents. Current seating is not designed for senior citizens. New seating is needed that is specifically designed with seniors in mind. For example, automatically closing seats are difficult to use for some physically challenged users. Seats that snap down and can easily be raised up should be considered to overcome that issue.

2. Provide safe ramping.

3. Allocate and designate sufficient space (i.e., depth and width) for attendees who remain in electric or wheelchairs during events. Any area reserved for EMVs should be flat.

4. A question was raised whether the underused storage area just beyond the current front entrance of the Auditorium could be part of the space solution for EMVs/rollators.

Stage

1. Provide a straighter front stage with steps on both sides supported by railings for safety reasons. The revised front will make it safer for those who leave their seats to speak from the stage and then return to their seats. A straighter stage would at least provide more space on the sides. Consider redesigning the side walls to enlarge the stage area.

2. Provide a dark colored hardwood flat floor appropriate for dancing and performances.

3. Remove the ceiling vents near the projector screen to protect the screen from blowing air, which caused slime buildup in the current configuration.

4. Provide ample outlets for AV/stage use to avoid extension cords—preferably on the apron of the stage and on the grid over the stage with pull-down power cords. Outlets are also needed at the rear of the stage for the Harmonizers.

Backstage

1. Duplicate (1) the input control panel and (2) screen elevation control behind the stage and in the Control Room (like Oak Crest)
2. Create a partition sliding door rather than a flimsy curtain at the backstage outside entrance to control temperature for performers.
3. Provide adequate wing and storage space for equipment.
4. Review and change the layout of rooms behind the backstage. Increase the size of the women's changing area by incorporating the space of the current Little Theatre office, keeping the gender-neutral restroom as is, and move the Little Theatre office into the area formerly reserved for church groups but no longer in use. One suggested creative option was the conversion of an existing apartment into a nearby "green room," like other Erickson communities.
5. Change handling of backstage chairs used by performers to wall-mounted flip-up seating to allow more space.

Curtains

1. Remove the permanent front curtains located on each side to address the issue of current curtain configurations that obscure large portions of the stage. These curtains serve no functional purpose and block approximately twelve feet of stage space. Their removal will improve the audience's view of the entire stage, especially for those seated on the sides of the auditorium. (Currently, the Harmonizers must tie these curtains back to accommodate their full group on stage.)

2. Replace the existing straight curtain tracks with curved rails to allow the curtains to open wider and effectively conceal backstage areas from audience view.

3. Remove and replace the electrically operated curtains, as they are unnecessary and no longer functional.

Lighting and Visual Comfort

1. Replace the current stage lighting system to address the following lighting problems:

    a. Current low-hanging lights along the back wall can be blinding to performers.
    b. Ceiling lights on the stage do not provide full coverage or good visibility.
    c. Current lighting in front of the stage blocks the ceiling speakers.

    Proposed solution:
    a. Replace the multiple rows of spotlights with one row (similar to the system installed at Oak Crest). Install flat LED lights above the stage and extend coverage to cover the entire stage.
    b. Move the valance to the outermost edge of the stage to reduce glare for the audience.

2. Obtain and install an adjustable lighting system to illuminate the seating area, entry and exit paths, and pathways to the restrooms.

3. Obtain and install low-level, downward-focused lights on row-end seats to provide a visible path during darkened events.

Audio Visual and Acoustics

1. Update the current sound system. To solve the problem that current speakers located behind the edge of the stage can cause feedback if a performer or speaker uses the front of the stage, replace the current speakers with ones mounted beyond the front of the stage.

2. Install overhead-mounted microphones for auditorium singers. We need an adequate number of headset microphones to meet the needs of stage productions and concerts. Floor microphones have been a safety hazard for performers on stage.

3. Obtain and install an assistive listening system that transmits audio directly to hearing aids or cochlear implants (T-coil and Auracast), keeping in mind the changing technology landscape.

4. Obtain and install a closed-caption system for use during video presentations.

Controls and Infrastructure

1. Provide adequate ventilation for the Control Room equipment.
2. Ensure that the Control Room light panel for houselights is accessible.
3. Duplicate (1) the input control panel and (2) screen elevation control behind the stage and in the Control Room
4. Update Control Room equipment. Equipment in Oak Crest looks good. All our equipment is more than ten years old and needs replacement.
5. Provide robust Wi-Fi and wired network drops for both AV and stage. Ensure that cell phone and Internet access is available to event attendees and presenters.
6. Integrate the system with campus systems (resident TV channel) to enable streaming of certain Charlestown live events via Channel 972 or other method from the Auditorium to reach those residents whose mobility may be restricted and to expand the audience size for certain events beyond that of the Auditorium's seating capacity.
7. The sliding glass panel at the front of the control booth needs to have simpler and safer access management, or it should be replaced. Right now, it is a safety hazard.
8. Provide clearly labeled control interfaces with preset scenes in the Control Room.

Other Planning Considerations

1. Resident representation should be included throughout the duration of the project. The auditorium design effort would be strengthened by designation of an administrative representative to serve as a primary point of contact for questions and feedback.

2. Regarding the bidding process, the Committee recommends that Charlestown require competitive bids from multiple contractors, in addition to the firm historically engaged by Erickson Senior Living for auditorium renovations, to enable meaningful price comparisons and to confirm that all bidders possess the technical expertise necessary to provide the most current technology for Charlestown. We ask that Charlestown ensure that the chosen contractor's plans comply with agreed-upon recommendations.

3. Because the Auditorium will be unavailable during the construction phase, planning for next year’s events should begin promptly and no later than July 2026. The conference room will likely host some events, and in many

cases a temporary movable stage will be helpful. Since resident organizations may not be able to offer as many programs as usual, all user groups should be informed and actively involved in planning. User groups should be encouraged to think creatively and adjust past practices, for example by scheduling programs in the early evening instead of daytime or designing events for smaller audiences.

4. The Committee is particularly concerned about the complexity of this project, with specific attention to the scheduling and coordination of the audio/visual systems, theatrical lighting, and stage curtains. It is essential that our planning process includes a realistic timeline for both the commencement and completion of the project, considering vendor selection, contracting, and performance milestones. The Committee appreciates that Charlestown has initiated the planning process in 2026.

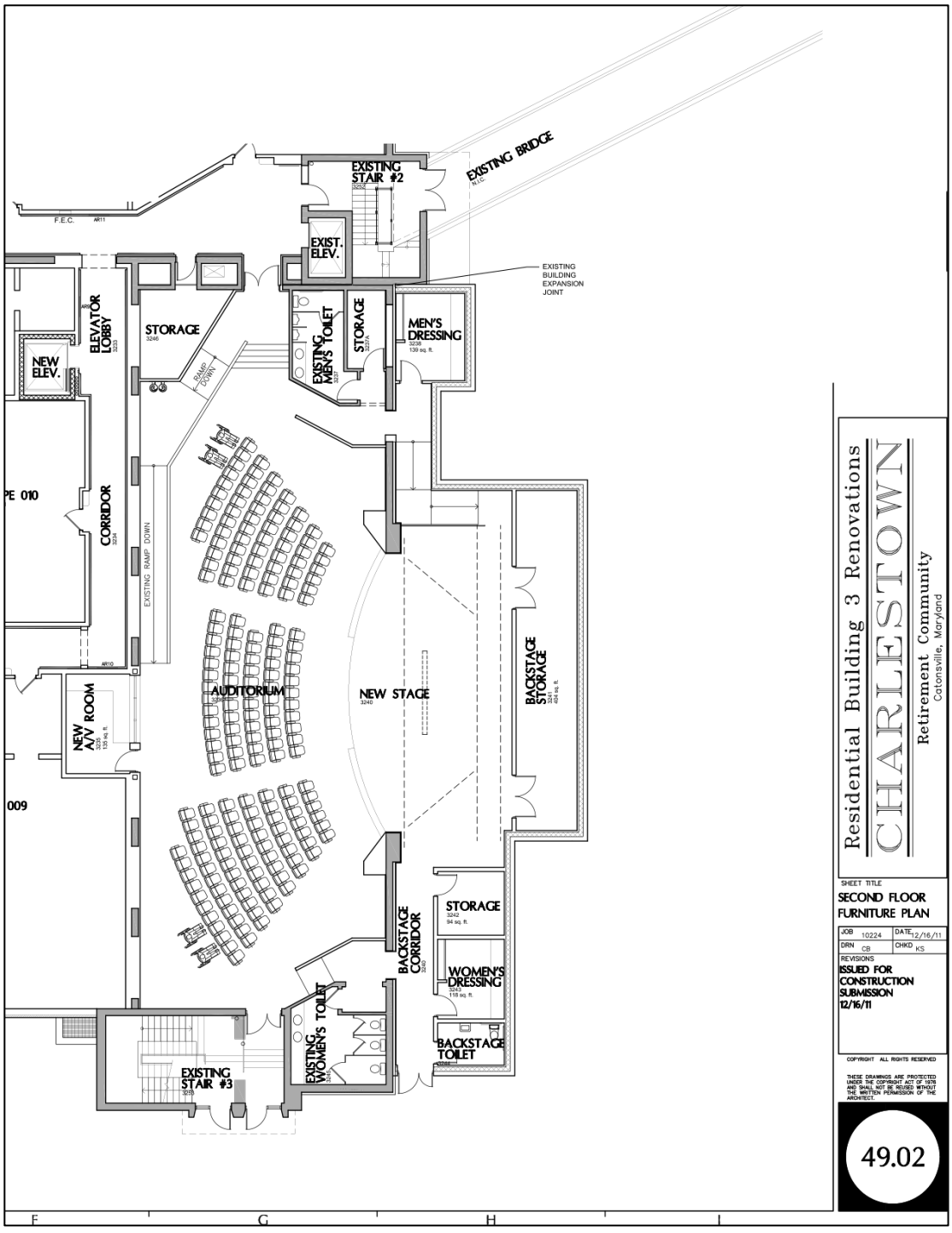
5. To maintain functionality and currency, we recommend that Charlestown conduct a formal review and update of all new audio and technology systems at least every five years and allocate an appropriate budget within the annual budgeting process to implement recommended upgrades.

Appendices

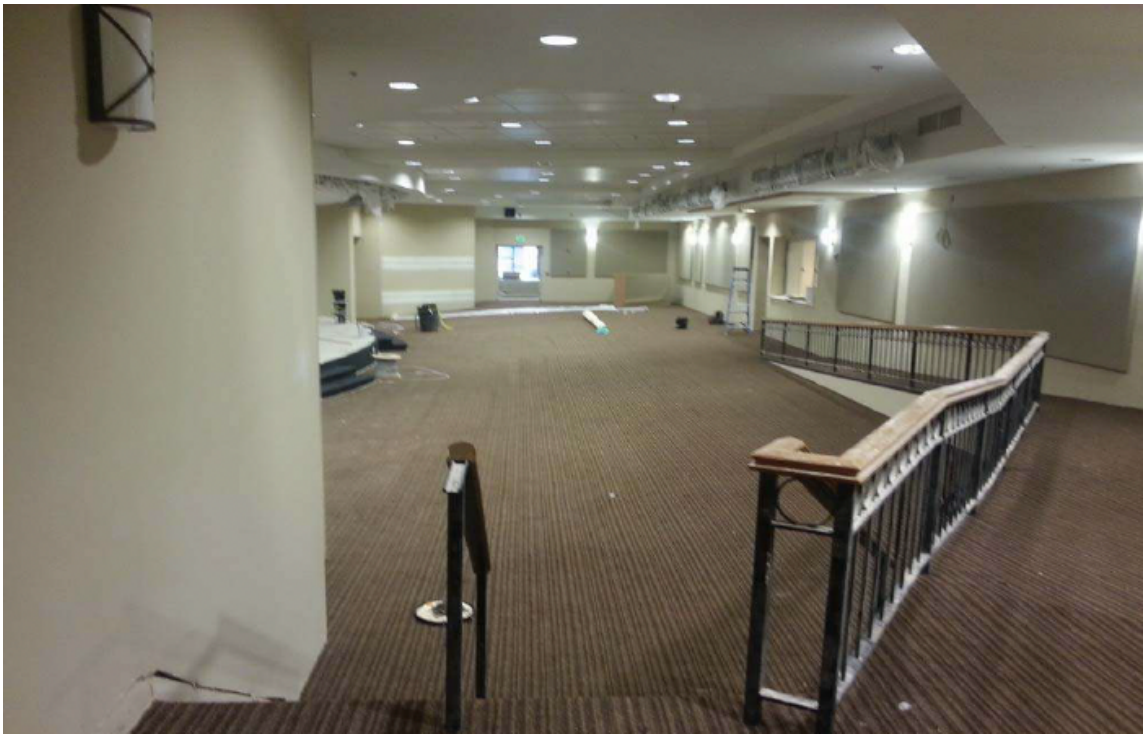
1. Picture of entrance to Muriel Caulfield Auditorium
2. Auditorium Schematics 2013
3. Construction of Auditorium in 2013
4. Picture from Oak Crest showing seating and carpet color

1. Picture of Muriel Caulfield Auditorium Entrance

2. Auditorium Schematic



3. Construction of the Auditorium in 2013



4. Oak Crest Picture 2026