

A Vision Plan for
JEMS Space

The aim of this Vision Plan is to help implement the mission of JEMS Space and set policy for programming and community use of the theater and building.

1. Mission

The mission of JEMS Space should be several-fold:

- o To be a center of excellence for the performing arts, visual arts, readings, lectures, workshops, and other cultural activities and pursuits:
- o To showcase the best of locally produced arts as well as to be a magnet for productions and events from around the region and beyond;
- o To encourage members of the community—adults and children—to actively participate in the arts and culture and to provide programs and activities to help accomplish that aim.

2. Implementing the mission

The best way to ensure effective implementation of the mission may be to set policy that reflects the mission and then develop a plan for carrying out that policy.

Because JEMS is currently a volunteer organization with no paid staffers, a clear, consistent policy is vital to the success of JEMS Space. While the aim of this Vision Plan is to help draft policy as a starting point, the policy will need to evolve and expand as time progresses. Policy regarding the building should be overseen by a Building committee, and policy regarding programming should be overseen by a JEMS Space Programming committee. These two committees should work hand in hand but be separate as well as separate from the JEMS board of directors, but report to the board of directors. All recommendations and decisions coming out of these two committees should be ratified by the JEMS board.

3. The Building committee

This committee should be responsible for overseeing the care and maintenance of JEMS Space as a whole. It should oversee the work of contractors handling such aspects as plumbing and heating, and the committee should be responsible for such

aspects as cleaning and maintenance; repairs; and ongoing maintenance of sound, lighting, and other equipment; use of the kitchen area and bathrooms; etc.

4. The Programming committee

This committee should be responsible for planning and overseeing all programming and use of the theater space, community room, and the building overall for productions, events, and activities. The Programming committee should meet on a frequent and regular basis, apart from the main monthly meeting of JEMS. It may make sense to make it separate from any committee that programs the summer JEMS concert seasons. Above all, the Programming committee should be responsible for setting and/or amending policy for all programming in and use of JEMS Space. No programming or building-use decisions should be made without first being approved by the committee and then ratified by the JEMS board.

Programming policy will need to address three main areas: programming and use by JEMS and JEMS-affiliated groups (such as the Jay Towne Players); programming and use by other community groups and members; programming and use by outside groups, whether sponsored by JEMS or via rental of the space.

In developing a programming plan for a given season, careful attention should be paid to creating a diverse mix of performances and programs while also giving priority based on such factors as affiliation to JEMS, being locally produced, and benefit to JEMS Space and the community as a whole.

5. Programming and use by JEMS and JEMS-affiliated groups

Because JEMS Space began as a quest for providing a space near the Jay Village Green for JEMS concert rainouts, priority should always be given in the schedule for providing shelter Saturday evenings in July and August in case the outdoor concert is rained on. This means that productions extending over several evenings will not be able to perform on Saturday nights those two months. The Programming committee might consider slating a cabaret or film for, say, 9 or 9:30 pm, to follow the indoor concert. Plays running in the summer might then be performed Wednesday through Friday evenings, Saturday matinee, and Sunday matinee and/or evenings.

Priority should also be given in the schedule to JEMS affiliated groups such as the Jay Towne Players (JTP), which is under the aegis JEMS and has helped raise funds for JEMS Space through such productions as “Goodbye, City Life” and “The Merry Knights of the Rad Table,” and JTP’s “sister” company, Brooklyn Family Theatre, which originated and co-produced the 2005 benefit for JEMS, “Revusical” and its 2006 follow-up, “Revusical Part-Twosical.”

Once JEMS Space appears to be close to opening, JTP should be invited to set its season for the coming year in JEMS Space. For example, it could consist of a musical in the spring, one or two summer productions (e.g., a comedy and a musical), a fall classic, and a holiday show. Initially, shows might run over 2 weeks (3-5 performances each week) and require 6 to 8 weeks of rehearsal. Rehearsals generally will be in the evenings on weeknights and mornings-afternoons on Saturdays and perhaps some Sundays. Programming of other events during those times will need to factor in the rehearsal time for JTP shows (as well as any other scheduled groups).

6. Programming and use by non-JEMS groups and performers

A very important aspect of programming policy is how to handle non-JEMS groups, whether they are from the Jay or nearby community or brought in from beyond the region. Such decisions should be made carefully because JEMS will have to supervise any and all non-JEMS activity in the building. The Programming committee will need to appoint or find JEMS individual members willing and available to be on the premises for non-JEMS events. Policy will need to be developed for community groups using the building on a regular basis, for groups performing or conducting activities under “JEMS presents,” and for rental groups. Fees charged to rental groups should include an hourly fee for the JEMS representative on the premises. This person will need to be responsible for opening and closing the building as well as overseeing the use of any sound or lighting equipment.

Thought should also be given by the Programming committee on what kind of fees should be charged for community groups seeking to use the building on a regular basis, particularly if such groups were not actively involved in raising funds for the theater space or other benefits for JEMS.

The policy should also address whether it makes economic sense to pay groups to come in and perform (as we do with outdoor concerts) or to sponsor groups that would split the house once basic costs were covered.

Toward a Vision Plan for JEMS Space

Definition

JEMS Space is a building, but it is also a concept, an idea.

A Vision Plan is as important to the idea of JEMS Space as architectural plans are important to the building.

What should the vision of JEMS Space be about?

The vision should reflect several aspects:

- 1) First and foremost, it should reflect the mission of JEMS Space.
- 2) The vision should be developed out of the collective wisdom and consensus-based deliberations of JEMS members, their colleagues in the arts, and the community at large.
- 3) It should be based on what “works” but also on the pursuit of higher, more ambitious goals and the desire to make them work.
- 4) The vision should be “organic”—growing out from locally planted “roots” and evolving naturally, rather than forced to go in a certain direction based on outside influences.

Mission

What is the mission of JEMS Space?

We need to “dialogue” and, working together, write a Mission Statement. We know JEMS has an overall Mission Statement. Perhaps we should start here and work on amending it to include the mission of JEMS Space.

Basic questions

Beyond the mission, the Vision Plan starts by asking some basic questions:

- *How do we “see” JEMS Space being used, by whom, and in what priority?
- *What kind of programs and activities do we envision taking place there? What do we want to achieve by those programs?
- *What are the most effective ways to implement those programs and make the end-results happen?
- *What is the ultimate dream for JEMS Space that we can currently envision, and should we start planning for it now?
- *What is the best balance of “art versus commerce” that will enable JEMS Space to remain self-sustaining?

Start thinking about long- as well as short-term planning now.

These basic questions are, obviously, not all for immediate discussion, but we should keep them in mind as we begin to develop our Vision Plan.

We will need to think in terms of (1) a short-term operating plan; (2) a medium term plan; and (3) a long-range plan.

Programming

Let’s talk about “programming.” For want of a better word, this is, after all, what much of the vision for JEMS Space will be about.

To begin with, let’s consider what kind of programs JEMS itself is all about:

- 1) First and still foremost, music concerts, whether by locally grown groups such as Mountain Drum or performers who come to Jay from as far away as Nashville (even if via Redford!)—i.e., Roy Hurd.
- 2) Special events such as the Memorial Day service and holiday tree-trimming
- 3) Theater, via JEMS Resident Theatre Company: The Jay Towne Players

A framework for deciding programming policy

Next would come a discussion about how much and what type of music, theater, special events, fine arts, and community activities the group envisions in JEMS Space and how to best work the program out.

Prior even to that discussion, however, a framework should be put into place for making decisions about programming that are broadly based in terms of overall policy (be it determined by JEMS as a whole or its appointed surrogate such as the Vision Planning or Programming committee, with approval by JEMS) and then carried out by designees such as JEMS officers and members or, down the road perhaps, some kind of staff.

Even early in the game, we're talking about a building with several thousand dollars of equipment in it that cannot be "turned loose." This equipment is highly sensitive and can be damaged by simply using it the wrong way, or become hopelessly muddled by someone flipping a switch that no one knew about. Whenever sound and lighting are in use, a trained JEMS person has to be on hand to "run the building" and run the booth.

Included in this framework should be the format for how the theatre draws in the money it needs to maintain itself. Who should have to pay for building use?

Locally, groups who wish to use the building at no charge should be logging in donation hours: hours spent fund-raising for the building space and working at other JEMS fund-raising events. By doing this they will be earning free hours in the new building space, be it for art classes, workshops, whatever. Managed correctly and with a "cap" on the amount of hours (restricting them to small events, art shows, a workshop), this might work.

Guided by standards

Before we can consider what kinds of programs to create and solicit for JEMS Space, we should determine the standards those programs have to meet. Should they be primarily for entertainment? For education? High-brow? Low-brow? Middle-brow? What effect do we want the programs to have? How will we measure their effectiveness and even—*gulp!*—their success?

For example, with respect to theater, we now know from the experience of the Jay Towne Players that it is possible to "sell out" an intimate, 75-plus-seat space such as Upper Jay Upholstery but what will it take to fill a 160-seat theater over multiple performances? What happens when a new or more experimental piece draws 20 people? Will it be judged a failure by the old standard, and will that kind of show be discouraged in the future?

Ultimately, seasons should be planned to allow more "commercial" projects to take up the slack for projects that should be done, but we know will not be big money makers.

Theater program beyond the Jay Towne Players

Establish affiliations with other theaters and companies to bring their shows and co-productions to JEMS Space and tour Jay Towne Players' productions to their venues.

Example: LPCA offers a set of rental two options – they do a “split” or you rent the theatre outright. A few theoretical rental & other company scenarios -

1. Let’s say the rental for outside groups for JEMS Space is \$600 for a week of evenings (which is very generous, given the comparative dollars and cents at LPCA and otherwise) – Rehearsals Mon, Tues, Wed, Thur eves, and performances Fri, Sat, Sun. They ask if JEMS could consider a “split.” Probably 50/50. The deciding factor should be – Can JEMS make the educated guess that this company will bring in \$1200 or more in Jay, so the basic \$600 (or more) is made?

2. Let’s say it’s a “one shot” thing. Like a concert coming and going the same day. Say \$200 per performance, with 4 to five hours of time in the building. Additional time in the building (with a technician) can be scheduled at JEMS discretion for \$25 an hour.

3. The one rehearsal / one performance scenario (as with LPCA) could be the same sort of deal, maybe \$300 for a rehearsal and a performance, 4 to 5 hours each. Additional time in the building (with a technician) can be scheduled at JEMS digression for \$25 an hour.

4. Co-productions should really be just that--a group actually working on a show together with JEMS, with artistic input and producing hours put in on both ends. A co-production is not just a company coming in to merely use the space or split the door.

The theatrical season

What might a typical performance season or year look like at JEMS Space?

At the outset, it might be a mix of:

- 1) Homegrown productions by the Jay Towne Players featuring local performers and technical crew as well as any guest artists we can attract.
- 2) Productions by other theatrical groups under the auspices of “JEMS Presents”
- 3) Productions by other theatrical groups in which the space is rented, but under the supervision of JEMS

A governing policy and standard procedures will need to be developed, particularly for items #2 and #3.

The Jay Towne Players' Season

Directorial Team: Kathy Recchia, Fred Balzac, Paul Johnson, Bob Andrews, Phill Greenland

Propose a big Summer Musical mid July – mid August—10 performances?

Fall Show—mid to late October—6 performances

Holiday Show—Early December—6 performances

Spring Show—April/May—6 performances

Plus small “one weekenders” scattered throughout the seasons such as a Revusical-type thing, a small experimental play, a weekend of Becket, whatever.

During summer JEMS season, we suggest our Saturday matinee begin on the late side to end just as the JEMS concert would be beginning. Then, after the concert, there would be a cabaret coffee house, maybe open mike back in the theatre space—all to work together to promote the JEMS concert season as well as the indoor programs.

A reminder: plays mean a lot of hours in rehearsal, which needs to be scheduled into the building calendar. As an example, Phill G. typically rehearses Mon through Thurs eves and a weekend afternoon, so the “prime times” in the building are left open for rentals. And really, programs give and take as needed, within reason.

Also, it is important not to compare the existence of our own programs with dollars and cents. If someone wants a week rental for \$600, but dress week of a JEMS play is scheduled for that week, the rental space is not available.

Perhaps there could be after school dance programs in the space as well, all coordinated thru the JEMS program committee. JEMS would actually hire the teacher and collect the money, basically manage the business of the classes. Reason being: so JEMS can stay in control of coordinating the building space and move people and classes around on an as-needed basis. Phill G. cautions to go slow here and leave space for things to grow.