

Chautauqua Institution

Summary Report to the Board of Trustees

The Amphitheater: Community Engagement and Communications



**Ricochet Group, LLC
1441 Broadway, Suite 5037
New York, NY 10018
August, 2015**

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Introduction

In January, 2015, Ricochet Group was retained to advise and assist Chautauqua Institution with regard to its strategy and its ongoing communications about the Amphitheater Project. That project had been under increasing attack in the 90 days prior to our engagement. Our assignment was to create a strategic path for communication, process and engagement that was clear, authentic, and true to the Institution's values—a path that would lead to best-practices decision-making by Chautauqua's executives and board.

From the beginning, our strategy has been straightforward: Ensure that the Institution's behaviors with respect to the Amp reflect its overall values. Recommendations and decisions should be based upon the best information and expertise available. Those decisions should be thoughtful and well-considered, and those participating at any point in the process should resist the temptation to rush to judgment about an idea, an opinion, a point of view, or even a person with a particular point of view or opinion. They should listen and be open to what is heard.

In this report, we will outline the 2015 community engagement activities, just concluded, including pre-season and in-season undertakings. We will describe the activities and identify the important themes based upon what we observed.

Our implementation practice uses a variety of methodologies, all aimed at challenging and improving the manner in which successful communication is embedded in every decision.

Pre-Season, January-June, 2015

The Pause. It was in the spirit of the alignment of behaviors and values that, at President Becker's recommendation, the Board decided to delay any decision-making about the Amp until the end of August. Tom Becker sent a well-received letter in January announcing that pause, calling for further community engagement, and offering a re-examination of the Amp project to make sure that the staff and board had the best information possible, particularly with respect to historic preservation matters.

Listening Tour. From February through June, Ricochet conducted formal interviews and held informal discussions with a wide range of stakeholders both for and against the proposed project to better understand their perspectives and see where there might be common ground. We worked with the executive architect to fully comprehend the project, and understand the choices he made and the reasons behind them.

Throughout the listening process, two issues resonated with regularity. First, we came to understand that although there had been substantial efforts in previous seasons to inform Chautauquans about the Amp plans, stakeholders did not truly understand the challenges the current Amp presents nor fully

understand the urgent needs. The case for revamping the Amp—regardless of how it would be done—had not been sufficiently made.

Second, we heard that a significant number of community members felt that their views had not been adequately and authentically heard—or that they believed others' views had not been given a hearing. This was the common perception, even if the Institution had made efforts since 2011 to acquire feedback from various constituents. The belief was that the Institution had been talking *to* the community, instead of talking *with* its members.

In addition, we also were able during this time to discern a number of motives behind some opposition to the proposed Amp plan. These motives fall into three categories:

1. Many opponents of the Amp plan were legitimately motivated by a desire to preserve what they viewed as an historic resource, or by an emotional attachment to their personal experiences inside that structure. Others were motivated by concerns about disruption or damage to their homes and daily routines during construction.
2. Still other opposition, voiced and implied by some long-time/multigenerational Chautauquans, was rooted in an overall fear of evolution and change in Chautauqua. These individuals expressed a sense of loss of tradition, of a way of life passed on to them by parents and grandparents. To them, the Amp plan was a tangible symbol of that loss.
3. Finally, other opponents clearly (and often explicitly) were using opposition to the Amp plan as a proxy for expressing dissatisfaction with the Institution's administration, leadership, or individual leaders—or as a proxy for voicing their resentment of what they perceived as control of the Institution by major donors and their deputies.

Save the Amp Committee and CJS Architects. During the winter, the organized opposition group (Committee to Preserve the Chautauqua Amphitheater, commonly called the "Save the Amp" committee) announced that its retained architectural firm, CJS Architects, was preparing drawings to propose preservation-focused ideas for the Amphitheater.

"Save the Amp" expressed a desire to have the CJS ideas seriously considered by Chautauqua Institution. A meeting between representatives of the committee and the Institution was proposed to discuss those ideas, with the caveat that the parties would avoid taking their positions to the media before having the chance to have a robust discussion in private. Just as this meeting was scheduled, the committee decided to release the CJS suggestions to the press. The clear message to Chautauqua Institution was that the Committee to Save the Amp was not sincere in its desire to have a substantive discussion.

The Institution, however, did indeed consider the CJS "Ten Opportunities," as the suggestions were called. The Amp project's executive architect and the Institution's director of operations met directly with CJS architects and held a collegial, professional discussion. The CJS suggestions were thoroughly vetted by the Institution's design team, and those suggestions were also reviewed by the independent historic preservation design panel (see below)—which, it should be noted, did not include those ideas in its final report. While press reports and Save the Amp materials often referred to the CJS material as "presented as alternatives to the Institution's plans" (Save the Amp e-blast, 4/1/15) or as a "preliminary

plan” for the Amp (Buffalo News, 7/16/15), there was never an ‘alternate design’ as such. CJS confirmed this when asked, and further affirmed they had simply presented ten ideas for consideration.

National Trust. The National Trust for Historic Preservation aligned itself with the Save the Amp committee in both its positioning and tactics. Although the Trust’s president nominally offered advice and assistance to Chautauqua Institution, the sincerity of its offer was belied by its tactics. Trust staff visited the Institution; they were confrontational and did not seek to understand the Institution’s needs and strategic/program objectives. They also used the element of surprise, grandstanded in the press, and used the Amp as a tool for its own fundraising. For example, the Trust twice held press conferences to announce the listing of the Amphitheater as a “national treasure” and “endangered resource.” In both instances, it notified the Institution’s board chair and president of the announcements just one day in advance, by express letter. The Institution took the position that the Trust did not present itself as a credible partner and should not be treated as such. Tom Becker explained this view of the Trust by letter to its president, and by published letter to the Chautauqua community.

National Parks Service. Also during the first half of the year, Chautauqua Institution engaged in a partnership with the Preservation Assistance program at the U.S. National Park Service (NPS). NPS was a logical partner, as they are the designator of Chautauqua Institution’s status as a National Historic Landmark District. NPS staff reached out to the Institution with an offer of technical advice and assistance, and the Institution accepted the offer. The staff visited the grounds, assessed the issues, and made very smart and helpful process recommendations to the Institution—a roadmap, if you will, giving the Institution a pathway and methodology for looking at the historic preservation issues related to the Amp. It should also be noted that the National Parks Service has repeatedly made the point that Chautauqua Institution has been an excellent steward of its Historic District.

The NPS roadmap had three main elements:

1. Obtain a structural analysis of the Amphitheater from an engineering firm with experience in historic buildings;
2. Create a single report documenting the architectural history of the Amp and its structural evolution;
3. Formally document the character defining qualities of the current Amphitheater, and determine how those qualities might be included in a new design.

With respect to the first element, Chautauqua Institution engaged the New York City-based engineering firm, Old Structures, Inc., for what became a two-part analysis. Their first task was to assess the structural integrity of the Amp as it currently stands. The second assignment was to determine the feasibility and method for retaining the central part of the current roof structure.

With regard to the second element, the Institution prepared a report documenting in pictures and narrative the historical changes to the Amp over its history.

Historic Preservation Design Panel. With respect to the third element of the NPS “roadmap,” the administration rightly acknowledged that it did not have the expertise to follow the recommended path. Therefore, in the spring Tom Becker enlisted a panel of preservation experts and preservation-focused architects to help. That group, facilitated by Ricochet and supported by the Institution’s heads of communications and operations, met seven times (twice in person and the others by telephone

conference) and worked to document the Amp's character-defining qualities, assess the application of those qualities to the proposed new design, and make recommendations and suggest ideas with respect to the Amp's place in history.

The panel members decided that its report must be seen as completely independent from any influence by the Institution. They therefore held a final meeting without the facilitator or Institution staff and drafted an independent report which represents a preservation-focused point of view that was part of the Chautauqua Board's considerations with respect to the Amp plan.

The panel's process and methodology revealed important information about the Amp project. First, the panel's documentation of the character defining qualities is a significant work product and should be considered in decisions about the Amp's design. Second, the panel forced the Institution to clearly articulate any rationale for the proposed design, as well as a disciplined approach to documenting that rationale. The creation of the panel and the success with which the Institution engaged the panel's members was crucial to achieving best-practices decision-making by Chautauqua's executives and board. A key outcome of this work was the panel's authentic respect and enhanced understanding of the Institution. It created what is hoped will be an ongoing, positive new relationships between the Institution and preservation leaders.

Summer Season, January-June, 2015

Based upon what was heard from various constituencies, we developed a repeating, three-part community engagement program that had substance and authenticity as its hallmarks. This program was developed in response to the need to make the case for renewing the Amp, and in response to the need for an authentic means of community feedback about the Amp. Total attendance at these events over seven weeks (Week Zero plus Weeks One through Six) of the season was **2,352**. Sessions were held at 8:00 AM to prevent schedule conflicts with Chautauqua programming and allow key staff members to participate.

Amp Tours. Mondays saw an insiders' tour of the Amp. John Shedd and George Murphy led a tour of the back and front of house, explaining the challenges the current Amp presents for presenters and audiences alike. A total of 644 people attended these tours over the seven-week period. Photos of the attic infrastructure were shown, and the tour ended in the Smith Library with a viewing of the model of the proposed new design.

Based upon informal feedback and comments made at the other two weekly sessions, these tours were very useful to participants in helping them understand the challenges presented by the current Amp facility. Participants came to various conclusions as to what should be done about the Amp, but these tours provided a common baseline of information regarding the problems that needed to be solved.

Amp History and Presenters' Challenges. Each Wednesday, Chautauqua Archivist and Historian John Schmitz presented an entertaining and informative history of the Amphitheater. Audiences learned about the evolution of the Amp's program and its architecture. In addition, Vice President for Program Marty Merkley, accompanied by one of the Institution's artistic directors, led a session on the challenges facing presenters in the Amp, as well as a look toward the possibilities a renewed Amp would bring to

the arts at Chautauqua. George Murphy facilitated the sessions. Attendance at these sessions totaled 486.

Facilitated Community Dialogues. Fridays saw several iterations of direct community engagement, in the form of facilitated dialogues. These sessions were a direct response to the need to obtain community feedback and input regarding the Amp plans. A combined total of 1,222 people were in attendance at these sessions. The *Chautauquan Daily* published an extensive report for each Friday session on the following Monday. In addition, a complete audio documentation of each session may be found online at ciweb.org/amp.

During Weeks Zero and One, participants were divided into small groups, each of which was instructed to identify three priority questions or issues. The results were presented to the entire group, the facilitator combined overlapping questions during a short break, and then a panel of Chautauqua senior staff members responded and engaged in conversation with the participants. Panel members included Tom Becker, John Shedd, and Marty Merkley. Participants found the small group sessions valuable for providing an opportunity for expression of opinions and self-education, and the large-group portion of the sessions provided valuable information about the project to all of the participants.

On Week Two, Elliot Fishman interviewed executive architect Marty Serena and consulting preservation architect Ted Lownie, followed by a question-and-answer session. Particularly effective was Marty Serena's presentation on the evolution of the design direction for the Amp, resulting from the 2011 Amphitheater Study Group. The presentation was a reminder that the proposed new design evolved from a community-based process, and that many of the preservation-focused ideas that had recently been generated (e.g. bleachers as a solution for increased capacity) had been studied and ultimately incorporated or rejected in the new design. Ted Lownie's recitation of his role as consulting preservation architect also helped participants understand that the project was originally intended to be an historic rehabilitation, but after a constructability analysis, it became apparent that a rehabilitation was not feasible if the Institution's strategic and program objectives were to be achieved.

Week Three's session focused on construction issues, with a discussion between the audience members and Director of Operations John Shedd and Amp construction project manager Steve Dechert, of Ciminelli, Inc. This was a departure from the originally planned repetition of the format from weeks Zero and One; that change was in response to community requests for information regarding the logistics of the proposed plan. Many participants found the information helpful to gaining understanding of how such a plan might be implemented. However, others criticized the change in format because it did not allow for community-generated prioritization of the discussion. Some also felt that the content created the impression that the proposed plan was a "done deal." In retrospect, a better path might have been to continue with the planned format and create a separate forum for the logistical discussion. Still, the question and answer session was robust, with the expression of diverse opinions and viewpoints.

Week Four again had Marty Serena as the lead presenter. A group of plan opponents packed the meeting and made the session rancorous. In response to the complaint that there had not been a discussion of the suggestions made by CJS Architects, Dirk Schneider, a principal in the

firm who was also in the audience that day, was invited to join the session as a panelist. He and Marty Serena had a civil and informative discussion, driven by the facilitator's questions.

There was some criticism about the absence of a session where a direct comparison could be made between the CJS suggestions and the proposed plan. We view the criticism as inappropriately placed. First, we did have a discussion between the two architects, as has been noted. Second—and most importantly—the CJS suggestions were being considered by the Historic Preservation Panel. Third, the CJS material had received broad public visibility and significant media attention.

Week Five's session was an "open mic" session. There was no presentation, and John Shedd, George Murphy, and Marty Merkley served as panelists who could answer questions. Elliot Fishman moderated a line-up of audience members, who were given a maximum of two minutes to make statements and ask questions. This was a highly successful opportunity for Chautauquans for and against the Amp plan to have their voices heard.

Week Six, the final Friday session, saw presentations by Bonnie Halda of the National Parks Service; Historic Preservation Design Panel member Cal Pifer; Chautauqua President Tom Becker, and Director of Operations John Shedd. Tom Becker, by way of introducing Bonnie Halda, made the case for Chautauqua Institution's commitment to historic preservation. Bonnie Halda described the role she and her office played in providing technical assistance to the institution, and Cal Pifer discussed the process of the Historic Preservation Design Panel and gave some highlights of the panel's report, which had just been submitted the night before. Following the presentations, the facilitator went into the audience and sought commentary from a variety of attendees in the 600+ crowd. There was a wide variety of opinions expressed.

Assessment of the Friday Dialogue Sessions. A significant percentage of each session was populated by opponents to the proposed Amp plan. These individuals were loyal to their position and many attended multiple sessions. Although there was regular attendance by supporters of the proposed plan, there were in the early weeks few statements of overt support from the general population of the audience. Those holding views other than the organized group opposing the plan tended not to speak. By the last session, however, plan supporters had found their voices, and positive comments in total could be defined as greater than 50%—a statistically high number of supporters for a format of this kind.

The behavior in each session included moments of hostility, frustration and attack. Overall, however, there was a civil discourse; those posing questions or making comments were pointed but appropriate and abided by the facilitator's rules.

What follows is a listing of questions generated in the seven sessions, which we categorized. In general, questions followed one of three broad themes:

- Challenge and Trust of Leadership
- Concern and Challenge to Construction
- Challenge or Clarity of Design Proposal and Preservation

The first category contains the subtext that was employed by those in opposition and could be found in many of the questions in the other two categories. The second category is mostly divided between questions of concern and clarity by property owners and questions aggressively challenging all aspects

of the project, many based on either incorrect information or the assumption certain decisions had already been made and intentionally not communicated by leadership.

Challenge and Trust of Leadership

Questions:

- Why hasn't the Save the Amp architect been formally asked for a building proposal?
- What percentage of the operating of Chautauqua Institution is solidified by outside attendance of the Amp?
- Will the most recent engineering reports be released publicly?
- Why the sense of urgency? Is there a real fear of the roof collapsing?
- Why are there two distinct sides to this project? For and against. Do we know about each side's views and differences?
- How has the Amp plan changed since the recent outcry from the community?
- What is it going to take for Chautauqua Institution to say "we need more consensus before we make any permanent decisions?"
- Can we hear from the Amp study group and the Board of Trustees?
- Is the Amp project a "done deal?"
- How are the updates on the Amp project going to be communicated to Chautauquans during the off-season?
- This discussion makes it sound like demolition of the Amp is going to happen regardless. Will there ever be a public dialogue between Chautauqua Institution and people from Save the Amp?
- Is there going to be an opportunity for people from the other side, i.e., Save the Amp and its architects, to be on stage and have questions asked at them?
- Could there be some kind of virtual tour online to experience the feeling of the outside of the new Amp?
- Why were we brought into the Amp discussion at the last minute?
- Will the community be kept in the loop on the building process during the off-season?
- Is it possible to have a balanced presentation of all different building options available to the public?
- Has a building contract been signed for this project already?
- What have we learned regarding transparency and communication?
- Where was this transparency early on in this plan?

- Is the board of trustees signing confidentiality agreements?
- Will these weekly sessions ultimately make any difference to the decision made in August?
- Is there any way we can reach the questions asked at these meetings via email or online?
- Can Chautauqua Institution please put up all the recordings from these weekly meetings?
- Can we have the 10 issues brought up by the Save the Amp people discussed openly and one by one between both organizations?
- I think the bridge behind the Amp is important for the kids in order to keep them out of the traffic circle by the hotel. Also, is there any way for us to get the information of the drift of the columns since 1998?
- Why isn't Tom Becker taking a more active role in these community discussions?
- Can we make the Board of Trustees meetings open to the public?
- How do you provide feedback on the benches at the Hultquist Center?
- Can the August meeting for the Board of Trustees be open to the property owners?
- Can we have more information on why we cannot preserve the Amp? I want the data and engineering reports. I think there is a lack of transparency.
- Has the administration thought about the Amp being named on the 11 most endangered historic places in the U.S. list?
- Is there any possibility that the project will be anything than a tear down and reconstruction of a replica?
- Has the administration thought about the Amp being named on the 11 most endangered historic places in the U.S. list?
- Is there any possibility that the project will be anything than a tear down and reconstruction of a replica?
- The governance of Chautauqua Institution has been very commendable during this whole process.
- In the 80 some odd years I have been here, I have not seen so much stress and negativity on the grounds. I would like to see this healed as quickly as possible. I urge all of you to look up Bill Follansbee's three points to consider. With that in mind, I believe that we should put this project on a one year hold in order to gather more of a consensus.
- I want the value of investment tax credits on the Amp to be taken into consideration.

- The only thing my friends and relatives have disliked about Chautauqua Institution over the years is the uncomfortableness and danger of the current Amp.
- We are a deeply divided community right now. I have never seen anything remotely like this since coming to Chautauqua. If we go forward without addressing the current underlying problem, there will most definitely be harm done to the soul of Chautauqua and this community.
- Let's work together to listen and respect all voice. Where do we agree? We should put a document out there that shows where supporters and dissenters agree.
- Think about the unintended consequences of sending out negative emails and letter to the community. It is making Chautauqua Institution's community look like a negative place.
- Look at the number of 'likes' on the Save the Amp facebook group. The numbers show that people want to save the amp and not demolish it.
- I want everyone to think about the talent and workers within the building. It is unsafe. I want to be safe. I have spent collective years in that building. I haven't seen anything discussed in these emails and letters regarding the human capital that works and performs there on a daily basis.
- I want transparency on both sides. From both Chautauqua administration and the people sending out anonymous emails and letters to the community.

Concern and Challenge to Construction

a. Concern Construction Will Negatively Impact homes and buildings nearby

- How will drilling deeper into the bedrock affect the old architecture surrounding the Amp?
- What are the implications of construction on Pratt Ave?
- What are the safety concerns and repercussions of losing the bridge behind the Amp?
- What is going to happen to Palestine Ave. during construction?
- What is being done to make the attic workable and safe?
- What is going to happen to our homes during construction?
- What are the safety issues being addressed in the current Amp project?
- What are the consequences of construction for the nearby homes, roads and trees?
- What is and isn't safe in the current Amp for both audience and workers? that are the safety concerns for the builder of the Amp?

- The United Methodist House is open year round and has an aging demographic. Will construction of the new Amp serve as a disturbance to their parking spaces/health of its guests?
- Are people's property near the construction site going to be negatively affected?
- What roads will be used as access for construction workers and equipment? What will be the impact of this on the adjacent properties?
- Has there been a study regarding what is going to happen to the infrastructure when you start drilling?

b. Concern and Challenge RE: Accessibility

- Could Chautauqua Institution find a firm that would make the Americans with Disabilities Act improvements without tearing down the Amp?
- Why get rid of the ramps?
- Why does the new Amp project have steps and not ramps?
- Will the new Amp have state of the art hearing technology?
- What is the handicap accessibility going to be like in the new Amp for scooters and wheelchairs?
- How are the sight lines going to be for the handicap accessible areas?
- What is the handicap accessibility for the amp going to be like? Is there going to be a center rail that goes down the aisle?
- Will there be steps aside the ramps? Will the scooters in back be able to see/hear?

c. Concerns Over Construction and Timing

- How can we expect to complete a project of this size without interfering with summer programming?
- What would happen during the spring and summer of 2015?
- What machinery is required for the demolition? Where does the debris go?
- Suppose you didn't expand the capacity. The Amp does not fill up as is. Would we still change the overall design?
- Is there a hydrologist and a soil consultant on staff?

- With global warming, why are we lowering the floor of the Amp into the waterways?
- Is there any thought being given to a better load in/load out process?
- What are the building and timeline issues? How will they be handled?
- Has there been any thought to turning the Amp project into a two-year project
- How long-term is the new Amp looking to last once it is completed?
- What constituencies is Chautauqua Institution trying to address with the building of the new Amp? The next generation? Audience members? Artists? Property owners?
- Where are all the trucks and equipment going to go during construction?
- What roads are the construction companies going to use to get to the site?
- What is going to happen to the roads and access points when construction begins?
- Can the construction of the new Amp be broken up over multiple seasons?
- It gets really hot in the bottom of the Amp. Since it is going deeper, won't it be hotter in the new Amp? Is this being taken into consideration?
- When is the sewage waste treatment plan going to take place? Will that interfere with the building of the Amp?
- Has there been a discussion regarding ventilation within the bowl of the Amp?
- What is the backup plan if the Amp is not finished when scheduled?
- Is there an organized backup plan if any issues arise?
- Is an alternative plan needed?
- Are there any alternative Amp sites being considered?
- Is this plan an "all-or-nothing" type plan?
- Is the risk of not finishing the Amp being taken into account?
- What is the contingency plan if the Amp is not ready by summer 2017?

Challenges or Clarity of Design Proposal and Preservation

a. Preservation

- Is there any way that we can keep the current shape of the Amp? I understand it needs to change, but can we drop the added 400 seats?
- Did the Institution look at preservation opportunities from the perspective of getting code approval from the beginning?

- Should we be taking this opportunity to not just make a replica, but to make a new, modern architectural marvel that will last a long time?
- How often does the Amp receive a sell-out crowd? Is the current design criteria for the current Amp necessary?
- Is there anything in the Amp that makes it weaker than it was, say, 50 years ago?
- Was it your intent for this project to be a rehabilitation?
- What happened in the development process that changed the Amps status from a rehabilitation to a replacement?
- If we knock down the roof, will we lose our National Historic District designation?
- If there is a reconstruction, is there going to be any effect on the district designation by the National Park Service?
- Does the new construction plan for the Amp meet historic standards? How does the National Park Service feel about the proposed destruction?
- Can the structural problems be completed without demolition?
- Are there any parts of the current Amp that can be saved from being demolished and reworked into the new construction?
- Has the administration thought about the Amp being named on the 11 most endangered historic places in the U.S. list?
- Is there any possibility that the project will be anything than a tear down and reconstruction of a replica?

b. Audience Enjoyment

- Is the added orchestra pit necessary?
- Will the added orchestra pit negatively affect the acoustics of the Amp?
- How will the new perimeter of the Amp be devised and how will it facilitate the movement of people inside the Amp?
- Why not do what you have to do with the bowl and re-do the back of the house?
- Are we losing the current shape and feel of the Amp with the new project?
- Will the new project feel unauthentic?
- Can you set out an example of the proposed benches outside the Amp to try out?
- Have you been consulting with acoustic engineers?
- What are the implications of lowering the orchestra pit?

- Why is the addition of the orchestra pit so important to the plan?
- Will lowering the stage alter the sightline of people on the promenade?
- Has the acoustician been actively researching and investigating the Amp?
- What is the standing room like in the new Amp design?

Board Participation. The Chairman made himself available for Ricochet’s inquiries about history, tradition and current Institutional challenges. Throughout the summer engagement program, Chautauqua Institution Board members regularly attended each of the sessions through Week Six. At least six board members—and sometimes twelve or more—were present at every session. They patiently listened and observed the community responses. Their in-person experiences should be recounted during any board discussions regarding the Amp.

The Board also created a special subcommittee on the Amp project; this committee met at least weekly with key Institution staff members, and committee members were regularly in attendance at each of the weekly sessions.

Other Activities. Having heard that concerns about the Amp plan were being expressed by members of the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra (CSO), Ricochet worked with incoming vice president Deborah Sunya Moore and artistic director Rossen Milanov to re-engage the orchestra—leading to a series of three facilitated meetings and culminating in a process by which orchestra feedback can be considered by the design team.

Starting in Week Five, daily e-newsletters were developed which focused on issues such as ADA compliance, design ideas, architectural history of the Amp, and the structural condition of the current Amp. Feedback from each Friday dialogue was used to reframe and sometimes reformat future sessions. Finally, there is now on the Chautauqua website (ciweb.org/amp) a one-stop repository for all documents and information regarding the Amp project.

Assessing the “Facts on the Grounds”

Despite the sometimes rancorous debate and the criticisms of some as to the authenticity of the process, the community largely seems satisfied to have been given a chance to be heard, and also to be provided with important information as to how Amp construction might affect their lives and their properties. We are pleased with the overall level of civility shown by the vast majority of participants, and we are particularly pleased to see that those who were silent about their views now seem to be voicing them—thus providing a more inclusive sense of the community’s opinions.

There is much that Chautauquans agree upon when it comes to the Amphitheater:

- Its location is a primary link to its history, its place, and its purpose as Chautauqua’s home for assembly. Although some have argued for a second amphitheater, nearly everyone agrees that the Amp should stay where it is—just as the Study Group agreed in 2011.

- There is a recognition that substantial “fixes” are needed at the Amp. Safety is a primary concern, and most people agree that, especially given the demographics, improved accessibility (particularly ingress and egress) and ADA compliance is necessary.
- Nearly everyone agrees that the back of house has major problems in terms in terms of respect for artists and presenters, and in many practical aspects such as storage, access, and security. It appears that there is near-unanimous agreement that the back-of-house structure has no historic value and can be replaced.
- There seems to be agreement in principal of the desirability of improved sightlines, more comfortable seating, and other elements of improved audience experience contained in the new design.
- All agree that an ongoing risk assessment is needed regarding the one off-season schedule for construction. The current 18-month plan seems to have allayed many fears and is a good example of Institution responsiveness to community concerns.
- There seems to be a level of increased comfort that the Institution is taking into consideration the concerns of property owners regarding matters such as noise, vibration, utilities, and the like. It will be extremely important to have a comprehensive communication plan—including a method for efficiently handling questions, concerns, and complaints—when project work begins.

Of course, there are areas of disagreement, most of which are well known. Legitimate disagreement exists about the relative priority rankings of historic preservation and the Institution’s strategic and program objectives. Most often mentioned is the objective regarding increasing audience capacity, although (as has been pointed out) no single institutional objective can be discussed in isolation.

A continuing challenge is discerning those with legitimate areas of concern and disagreement about the Amp from those who use the Amp as proxy for a host of other grievances unrelated to the project – things like transparency, governance, and confidence in decision-makers. We urge the board to be vigilant in making this differentiation as it considers input from the community.

We are confident that the community engagement process has accomplished the goals of making the case for renewal (in whatever form) of the Amphitheater, and of ensuring there has been authentic community input.

Ricochet Group, LLC
August, 2015