

**Thelma A. Boltin Center  
Community Engagement Session Feedback  
10/17/2023**

**STATION 2: Programming Opportunities**

**Questions asked:**

**Have you or members of your household/group used the Thelma A. Boltin Center in the past?  
If so, what activities did you engage in? How often?**

**What activities or programs would you like to see be offered at the Center?**

Past

- Yoga, Zumba
- Enjoyed looking at gardens on walks
- Dancing
- Voting, Exercise classes, Dances
- Dancing
- Voting; Dancing, music
- Voting (was stationed there as a poll worker, floor was large enough for a smooth flow of voters)
- Only for voting (the prior programming offered was not very relevant- Zumba, etc.)
- Contra Dance at Thelma for 30 years (give us our hall back)
- Voting, concerts
- Cultural and art events
- Contra dance (it was charming, a very special place-it should be returned(?) with the feeling of past and giving \_\_\_\_ through history and culture)
- Square dance (occasionally)
- Annual lesbian variety for many years starting mid 90's to 2013 (largest event for Gainesville lesbians and people traveled from other states sometimes)
- Only voting (and sometimes mail delivered there on accident)
- Health classes to senior citizens (organizer by Cynthia Chestnut when she worked at Shands)
- Family voting, Halloween party (for the whole neighborhood adults and kids)
- Voting, neighborhood get togethers, yoga
- Zumba- was truly a community, we grew to love and support one another, it was so much more than a fitness class
- Art festival, holiday sale, voting
- Swearing in ceremony of city officials, performed with Annasemble Community Orchestra in March 2019 along with Caring and Sharing Learning Center, Young Annasemble and Star Theater. The room was fully staged was used, beautiful bathrooms and treat bags for the performers (March 2020 was cancelled due to the pandemic)
- Events
- As a young girl: Dance classes, violin recitals, ballroom dancing (with Mrs. Levitz in 6<sup>th</sup> grade), teen time dances on Friday nights (with older brother and sister)

- Voted, aerobics class, community meetings and events
- Voting, city plan board election party
- Vote, social events
- Contra Dance (2x a month)
- Zumba, swing dance
- Public meeting
- Historical lectures by friends groups, dancing classes (in auditorium only)
- Contra Dance
- Dances, concerts, group meetings, kids summer programs (theater)- for 50 years
- Contra dancing, swing dancing
- Community events, contra dance, swearing in ceremony
- Voting- every election, inauguration, classes and lectures

### Current

- Open Boltin ASAP for Dance Community

### Future

- More fitness programs, community talks, programming for seniors (bingo, etc.)
- Stop on Duckpond Tours
- Activities for Kids, mommy time classes, fitness classes, lectures, meetings
- More dancing programs
- Programs and museum on Thelma Boltin and the Center's use during WWII; Voting; community meetings; restore the historical marker, Halloween ball (again)
- Community meeting, addressing underserved, art programs, dance, music, community garden, outdoor seating in shade
- Open Space for community use: dojo, dance, music, concerts, events, day care, art, etc.
- Love to see more classes and events, opportunities for shows or music, possibly lessons (e.g. guitar) and events like family movies, etc.; maintain and grow community garden; opportunities for summer camps or programs for children; diversified health offerings; community organization meeting space
- History info in building
- Halloween parties, classes, meetings
- Outdoor activities, neighborhood party, voting, community education, movie nights
- Botanical park (native plants); open pavilion for weddings/dancing/meetings/commerative/history info; storm water management
- Family histories, events and club events
- Yoga, youth programming
- WWII museum for students to see and learn.
- Zumba, fitness classes, dance classes and events, yoga, community events (art and craft shows), small business networking.
- Zumba, yoga
- Museum, cultural events, music events, walking tours, public meetings for non-profit groups
- Halloween party, Dances with maybe WWII actors, voting, classes or other community events
- Yoga, more gardening and gardening classes, kids classes
- Community garden, connect with path from Matheson Museum with appropriate crosswalk of University Ave.
- Plays, performances
- Voting, programs on crafting, gardening, movies with popcorn

- Small meetings areas (wing restored) for Zumba, yoga, music groups, lesson, etc.
- Meetings, education, dances, performances
- Senior center
- Duckpond Neighborhood Assoc. meetings, dances, Veterans Day events, LGBTQ events
- Keep rental price for dance reasonable
- Zumba, swing dance
- Keep rental price for dance groups in town affordable
- Dances, concerts, group meetings, kids summer programs (theater)
- Contra dancing, swing dancing
- Music events, local groups and students
- Music activities, dancing, presentations
- Price low enough for: family reunions, weddings, etc. Many people are priced out of expensive and larger wedding venues, believe this could be provided in the current building.
- Neighborhood events, music, weddings, dojo/karate, dance, after school
- Music, theater, art, lectures, community garden, after school, weekend teen programs
- Voting, community planning activities

Structure comments:

- Have it represent the original structure, repaired but not demolished
- Leave entire existing structure
- Keep building open in original form
- Keep all of original building; do not need extra space (many meeting and classroom spaces nearby at SFC Blount Center, hotels, library, Matheson Museum, Thomas Center; no enlargements \_\_\_ redesign interior.
- Wants a restored building
- Complete restoration and preservation, no destruction
- Restore wing
- Keep building, repair roof, renovate wing to make more usable for events

## STATION 3: Existing Floor Plan

**Questions asked:**

**What improvements at the Thelma A. Boltin Center would better serve your groups' needs?**

**Please describe the size and type of space that you would like to utilize. Describe needs related to room sizes, rental rates, kitchen usage, audio visual equipment, flooring, lighting, acoustics, technology, etc. Indicate which needs are required to utilize the Thelma A. Boltin Center versus amenities that would be nice to have.**

**How large is your group? What frequency do you anticipate utilizing the future Center? When would you be interested in utilizing the facility—weekday, weekend, evening or daytime?**

- Adding a backstage space to make the stage more useful. Repurposing the add on wing to have spaced that include tech for meetings. Possibly lessons, etc. – a functional space that promotes different uses. Large updated auditorium space with backstage space. Various sized rooms and

spaces equip with technology for multiple purposes – consider sound barriers and makes spaces suited for multiple users at different volumes. I think there are multiple groups who will use it – from the DNA for general and board meetings to activities like a family dance or movie.

- It serves my group the way it is – fabulous space. Please preserve & restore it with its special features intact. (see other charts-ran out of time!
- Please save, renovate accurately (like Thomas Center & old Post Office). Keep the historic district historic.
- You could use a Green Room for dance performers to dress. Lightweight but comfortable chairs for dancers to rest. Tables to surround the edges of the dance floor. My Argentine Tango Dance group regularly has 20-50 Dancers, once or twice a month for 4 hour dances on Saturday or Friday nights. If possible could use a Sunday afternoon. Possibly a weekday night for 2-3 hour classes. \$5.00 a head [SL@stevellittler.com](mailto:SL@stevellittler.com) Steve Littler
- Retain the historic stages auditorium. Restore flood plain. Create terrace @ area of former wing, with pervious pavers. Historic info can be on exterior panels around the terrace. Artifacts displayer inside, for tours at schedule of friends group.
- Keep the building authentic & do a full restoration.
- Use the concrete from any demo to build a bike trail. \_\_\_has a trail built or recycled materials
- Fix the Building as it is with modest remodel, e.g. stage for greater utility. But do not demolish any of it. It has great significance for people in town who used it in their use and heard about the “Rec Center” from their parents. Bill Harlan
- Please consider removing later-added walls from the wing to open it up and allow it to be used for medium-sized classes
- I would love to see a modernized, updated building that preserves the west & south walls of the auditorium & the southeast entry wall. Everything else should be replaced to make a better, modernized venue.
- Uses: Theater→ green room→ deeper walls. Meetings, Dances. Good AV setup. Bathrooms- better for women. Movie nights! Classrooms
- The dance community misses the Boltin and dancing! This history of dance is documented! Please keep! The history!
- Dance floor & stage. Functional kitchen
- Overhead fans for dancers comfort. Sprung dance floors
- More accessible storage space. Green Room for plays-change. ADA Accessibility
- We would like to host neighborhood parties (20-50 people) weeknight/end. Ability to open up facility to various sizes of groups, at same time. Option to rent facility as private group.
- The outdoor space around building feels unplanned/undersigned. Need outdoor amenities ☺
- Modernize the interior and update way building addresses the overall site.
- All new lighting and material palette indoors
- Meeting rooms for 10-20 people. For 50+ people. A/V for rooms (TV/sound)
- Fix what needs to be fixed and leave everything intact as much as possible
- Fix the roof. Stabilize the building
- Better dance floor area. Updated look.
- SPRUNG Dance Floors!
- Existing wing can be renoed to allow more open areas and maybe a couple of larger rooms for groups
- Just restore the existing building. It’s the right size!
- I would like to reserve the current floor plan- improve the kitchen. Restore- do not demolish.
- More music & dance events would be nice. Kitcn. Would be nice to help with rental for events.

- Open up office area for better usage. Keep the auditorium & stage. Get more input in usage of existing space.
- Improved kitchen, rest rooms
- Fix the roof. Keep the footprint. Get a specialist in historic preserv. Who can give another quote & input.
- Outdoor playground for kids. Better kitchen & Bigger restrooms. Dressing rooms back stage
- Renovate & keep the exterior as is- historic
- Please do not tear down. Restore and fix what needs to be updated to meet ADA requirements.
- Preserve – do not tear down. It is an official historic property
- Kitchen. Fans. Keep as close to original as possible. Repair not rebuild
- I like the patch-it-up option. And use it as a multi-purpose community center.
- Thanks for facilitating discussion on behalf of the Thelma Boltin Center renovation proposals.
- I would like to recommend the following actions: 1. The City cap all renovation construction costs. Cost overruns should be borne by a public/private partnership between the City and The Friends of the Boltin Center and allies.2. Functionality of the old building was mediocre at best. I feel it is important in terms of generating revenue from events and public programs to include a commercial kitchen, such as at the Cotton Club and Senior Center, in the planning. This would be better for the congregate meal site as well as revenue producing events such as receptions, reunions and dance events. Additionally, seating in the ell needs vast improvement.3. In the future, routine maintenance (cleaning, lighting, minor repairs) should be borne by the City, typical of most of our public buildings. Future major structural upgrades/updates would be borne by public/private partnership. Friends could be invited to create an endowment or fund. The City could pitch in with grant writing support. Sincerely *Isabel Burdett Coutts* Accordion and concertina for dance

## Station 4: Open Comments

- Please restore or repair the current building, many people have noted the current wing configuration does not work. Please remove the 1999-era walls + partitions from the wing to open it up.
- Please note that new sound or lighting can be installed in the current building.
- Please make sure that consultants have a preservation background and are familiar with the 1940's era construction.
- If someone had a 1940's vintage car, they would take it to a mechanic that specializes in cars from that time period.
- If WSPP funding does not allow for maintenance, please consider putting a referendum before voters to allow recreation funds to be used for maintenance.
- Please retain the beautiful auditorium with its lovely wood floors & ambient light. It is a beautiful, inviting space to perform & attend events. Please speak to the Star Theater, Acrosstown Rep. & H. S. to see how they were able to put on professional quality performances w/ the sound & lighting effects, etc. I just attended The Color Purple at the Star Theater & have also played the violin w/ group there. I'm very aware of the back of stage area! Please keep the back wall of the building with its original chimney & parking spaces. It is perfect for handicapped spaces & an ADA ramp, but would not be available if current configuration was not retained.

- Remove the partitions in the wing so that it can be used for smaller group activities than the auditorium – classes such as small group music rehearsals & lessons, Zumba, Yoga, community instruction, CPR, etc.
- Loved the bathrooms after 1999 restoration!
- Love the entrance areas. Please retain historical character & style.
- No modern monstrosity
- Preserve the building. Save History. Like all these comments.
- History, once destroyed, cannot be rebuilt. That is a replica, not a historic building.
- Save the Thelma Boltin Center. Don't demolish any of it. Restore it, keeping the history aspects intact. Local history is important.
- How is the city going to take care of the Boltin Center once it is completed?
- Does it require a famous person in the history of a bldg. to make us value its history? Everyday folks (e.g. soldiers & city residents) should have their structures preserved, too – and not with disregard for the average (not fancy) building.
- We must preserve history.
- Save the building. We want to dance again!
- This was not posted on the City's website – all response is through word of mouth.
- The proposal under consideration is silly. 2 walls??? The city is derelict in its duties to preserve City-owned properties.
- Please don't destroy history!
- ASAP Keep this gem! We want dancing back in this wonderful building.
- Do not destroy historic building. Only restore and preserve. Building is in a floodplain – enlarging its footprint will not improve percolation.
- Keep the building as much intact as possible.
- I attended events at Thelma Bolt.
- I don't care as much about preserving the building as I do about a functional, affordable space to accommodate future generations.
- Ask the City Floodplain Manager if retaining any building area in the floodplain will impact the Community Rating System (and thereby insurance – of the building as well as rates to others in the city.)
- Perhaps UF FIBER could model flood scenarios, to determine if leaving the east wing could impact other public buildings downstream (Matheson, Library Headquarters).
- I support only restoring the auditorium & stage. Create a terrace with pervious pavers and exterior amenities.
- No more money to negligent agencies. 2000 bldg rehabbed. 2020 building condemned. No \$ until need/purpose for building is demonstrated.
- Restore the existing historic bldg. (approx. \$500K) put it back to use as a neighborhood rec. center w/ small community events.
- Forget the overblown/oversized proposed project (for \$5 mil) that the city can't afford to staff or maintain!
- Choices! By using the low-cost roof fix on Thelma Bolton, other projects can be funded with the \$4M saved!
- Thumbs up for these comments
- No destruction, only restoration & preservation. Not vandalism funded by public money.

- This state heritage site must be preserved in full. It is an asset the community in that preserves military history, women's history & rock musician history.
- Save entire original building. This unique building – do not demolish.
- Do not enlarge the footprint of the existing building. It is in balance with the community and the Sweetwater Branch Greenway.
- The building cannot be all things to everyone. Restore the exterior and original footprint and modernize the interior. The community loves this space!
- I attended many events at Thelma Boltin. There was room for everyone. Loved the stage in particular.
- T.B. is a beautiful bldg. It fits with the neighborhood. It has history.
- I want any & all repairs done in behalf of are city bldgs.
- Please consider as many “green” features as you can – solar panels, low flow toilets, etc.
- Green room for performances!
- Bigger kitchen so can be used by caterers when rented.
- Balancing the past with the present & future requires a full site analysis and willingness to evaluate the historic building with a true need for a fresh perspective on how this site and building integrates within the duckpond and downtown community. The site topography, adjacent creek, neighboring houses, and proximity to downtown create a huge opportunity. This is a 50+ year opportunity to make a change.
- I endorse all comments DITTO

#### Site notes

- Topography/slope – take advantage!
- Creek is a huge asset
- Adjacent parking lot needs to be incorporated into overall site plan (consider closing street bi-secting two lots)
- Landscape architect scope should include site layout, shade structures, creek tie-in and potential upgrades all the way from site to University Ave.
- Day & night activities, as well as seasonal activities should be supported ☺

#### Building notes

- Historic elements of the original bldg. are the “value add” portion. Interior elements should likely not control the design.
- Mixed Regeneration / Adaptive reuse is an ideal path forward
- The previous design studies show an option to move the original bldg. and demo the “wing” – to allow for a better site plan/uplot parking scheme. This is the best outcome and allows for a new building wing and vast site layout improvement.
- Need to incorporate site design and building spaces to create outdoor covered areas.
- Many issues are unclear with this building. Cost of demolishing and erecting a new structure. Why is this not being handled as a historic structure by the city? What are the exact costs of restoration?
- Let underage kids have non-alcohol shows for their bands to play.

- Please get additional plans and proposals from another firm that specifically specializes in historic preservation.
- Make sure any added / redesigned “new” or replacement structures are in keeping with the historic building.
- Restoration should be considered but only to the degree that the space will be useful in a contemporary context – the current “wing” configuration should not be kept just for the sake of nostalgia.
- The Boltin Center is a historic building for a variety of reasons. It is a structure that contributes to the historic district in which it resides and therefore like the other buildings should be restored to its original state.
- The Thelma Boltin Center is an extremely unique place which so much history and so many lives that it touched through the activities that took place there. Our history lives through spaces such as this very special place – let us continue to maintain the building and do the necessary restoration only – this building is a historic building.
- There should be a pro-sound system for dancing. Have a sound engineer design it so there are suspended speakers hanging from the ceiling and pointed down at the dancers in the center of the floor (not the edges). The speakers and amplifiers should be dance club quality/strength. DJs should be able to plug into the mixer with just a 1/8” jack with their laptop/iPad.
- Keep our historic building looking the same! Do NOT add big modern square additions that are not needed and not wanted. Why didn’t you ask the citizens before making a deal (or deals) with architects?
- Replace all this with LEED Platinum structure with a great auditorium, concession stand, classrooms/meeting rooms. Keep the auditorium’s west and south façade. Keep the wing’s southeast façade.
- Keep the historic building and restore it. There are many other venues in town for group meetings. The history of this site makes it a great location as is with a restoration. I’ve been to meetings and art sales presentations, walking tours at the Thelma Boltin Center and all were fine.
- Leave entire structure. Release photos of any elements claimed to be unsound...if there actually are any.
- Please keep as much as the original structure as possible. It will be impossible to replace history.
- Keep the historic building intact – it has great significance to the community.
- We only have a few buildings with such history and culture. Save the feeling and save the building. Restore.
- Keep the whole building – I want the landscaping to be no smaller than it is now so we can have our community garden and greenway visible. Keep current building, full restoration, old materials are better than new materials, keep its historical connection, enhance Sweetwater Creek trajectory.

Where do you live?



↑  
Highway



City of  
**Gainesville**

**Thelma Boltin Center – Community Engagement Session**

Tuesday, October 17, 2023, 6-7:30 p.m.

302 NE 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Gainesville, FL

PLEASE SIGN IN

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Kathleen W. Pagan		
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## Save The Historic Thelma Boltin Recreation Center

Dear Gainesville City Commissioners and Staff:

The Gainesville Woman's Club appreciates the Gainesville City Commission's vote at the September 21 meeting to table the contract and to receive more community input. We hope that this vote will be a step towards preserving this building.

The Gainesville Woman's Club continues to respectfully ask that the City of Gainesville preserve the historic Thelma Boltin Recreation Center in its entirety, as follows:

- 1) We request that the city rescind the "Partial Restoration" plan that would demolish all but two walls.
- 2) We ask that the city repair the existing facility or do a full restoration or repair the existing facility plus remove newer partitions from the wing. Either of these options will save the historic building.
- 3) We ask that all consultants have a background in historic preservation.

### Revisiting Prior Decisions

Many of our historic buildings were saved in part because elected officials were willing to change prior votes. For example, the Thomas Center was saved from demolition in the 1970's after the City Commission changed an earlier vote.

Please vote to save this historic building. We have included the following background information below from our prior letter.

### Historic Preservation

Historic buildings give our community an authentic sense of place. Gainesville is fortunate to have other historic icons such as the Thomas Center, the Hippodrome, and the Matheson Center. The Thelma Boltin Center is a contributing structure in the Nationally Registered Northeast Historic District. The Boltin Center's history was commemorated in a State Historic Marker, unveiled in 2009 by the Mayor and County Commission Chair. The Florida Trust for Historic Preservation recently placed the Boltin center on their annual "11 to Save" list..

Both the City of Gainesville and the Gainesville Woman's Club have a long history of advocacy for saving historic buildings. For example, in the 1970's, the Gainesville Woman's Club joined with a coalition of community groups and the City of Gainesville to save the Thomas Center from a demolition plan. Most recently, The Gainesville Woman's Club saved their own clubhouse building during the challenging pandemic economic times in 2020.

#### Community Use

Music recitals, concerts, dance groups, family reunions, weddings, and political swearing-in ceremonies were frequently held at the Boltin center until it closed for the March 2020 pandemic response.

Please continue the City's tradition of preserving our community treasures. The Gainesville Woman's Club is asking that you preserve the entire building, and remove from further consideration any option that would demolish any part of the building.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Renae Clement". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Gainesville Woman's Club President

**From:** [McNiece, Peter R](#)  
**To:** [Waite, Betsy D](#)  
**Subject:** Fwd: [EXTERNAL] Thelma A. Boltin Center renovation recommendations  
**Date:** Wednesday, October 18, 2023 5:07:11 AM

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FYSA

- Pete  
Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** "Chestnut, Cynthia M" <CHESTNUTCM@cityofgainesville.org>  
**Date:** October 17, 2023 at 9:46:47 PM EDT  
**To:** Isabel Coutts <izzybarten@gmail.com>, "McNiece, Peter R" <mcniecepr@gainesvillefl.gov>  
**Cc:** citycomm <citycomm@gainesvillefl.gov>  
**Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Thelma A. Boltin Center renovation recommendations**

Isabell,  
Thank you for your thoughtful and excellent recommendations! I am in total agreement with you on the kitchen suggestions.  
Great to hear from you!  
Cynthia

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**From:** Isabel Coutts <izzybarten@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 17, 2023 1:05:56 PM  
**To:** McNiece, Peter R <mcniecepr@gainesvillefl.gov>  
**Cc:** citycomm <citycomm@gainesvillefl.gov>  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Thelma A. Boltin Center renovation recommendations

Dear Mr. McNiece

Thanks for facilitating discussion on behalf of the Thelma Boltin Center renovation proposals.

I would like to recommend the following actions:

1. The City cap all renovation construction costs. Cost overruns should be borne by a public/private partnership between the City and The Friends of the Boltin Center and allies.
2. Functionality of the old building was mediocre at best. I feel it is important in terms of generating revenue from events and public programs to include a commercial kitchen, such as at the Cotton Club and Senior Center, in the planning. This would be better for the congregate meal site as well as revenue producing events such as receptions, reunions and dance events. Additionally, seating in the ell needs vast improvement.

3. In the future, routine maintenance (cleaning, lighting, minor repairs) should be borne by the City, typical of most of our public buildings. Future major structural upgrades/updates would be borne by public/private partnership. Friends could be invited to create an endowment or fund. The City could pitch in with grant writing support.

Sincerely

*Isabel Burdett Coutts*

Accordion and concertina for dance