

# Public-Private Partnerships

by Brian Levin-Stankevich  
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Brian Levin-Stankevich spoke about continuing efforts in the Eau Claire community to identify and plan for the construction of major public facilities. To date, the focus has included discussions about a performing arts center, a community arena and convention facilities. Although such planning has occurred in the past, that planning was for public-only facilities that relied exclusively on tax-generated financing for construction. The current dialogue revolves around public-private initiatives that would combine and leverage various sources of public financing with private capital investment and facility business plans to reduce the direct tax-related burden.

He noted that the university is involved because of the need for facilities improvements (particularly in the performing and fine arts areas and in the potential for athletic venue improvement) and the declining ability and willingness of state government to finance the university infrastructure. At present, the university is awaiting Division of State Facility assignment of staff to begin planning the Davies Center construction project that is funded entirely by self-imposed student fees and is awaiting similar assignments to begin planning a state-financed academic building that will house the university's education programs among others. There has not been a new academic building constructed at UW-Eau Claire since 1982. It is likely that future funding will also be a long way off after these projects are completed.

Earlier planning for State Theatre renovation led many to conclude that the community would be best served by the various arts groups trying to come together to plan a common facility that could, along with other venues in town, serve their collective needs. This could also draw on a variety of funding sources. Subsequently, an exploratory group organized by the Convention and Visitors Bureau began to discuss arena and convention facility possibilities.

In January 2008, the community was represented at a public-private partnership conference in Austin, Texas by a team that represented the University, the City of Eau Claire, the Convention and Visitors Bureau and a private developer. Eau Claire was the only community with a team representing public and private interests. The conference particularly focused on communities with significant university presences and the partnerships that have resulted.

On February 28, 2008, the University sponsored a local symposium on public-private partnerships with keynote presenters Steve Semingsen, a UWEC alumnus now working in California on public-private partnerships, and Kirsten Kraig, a Denver-based expert on public-private partnership financing mechanisms. They both stressed the need to think about projects in ways that attracted people through both the venues (arena, arts center) and through residential and retail components that assure a continuous revenue stream. About 70 people attended the symposium that is now airing on public access cable television.

Levin-Stankevich noted that the group engaged in these discussions is broadening its participants to include greater financial expertise and is honing in on the projects that were identified as priorities in the community symposium.



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