



City of Gainesville

Office of the City Manager

City Manager Memorandum No. 250050

To: The Honorable Mayor and City Commission

From: Cynthia W. Curry, City Manager

Date: June 10, 2025

Re: **Thelma Boltin Center – Project Update**

The attached memorandum provides an update on the Wild Spaces & Public Places (WSPP) project at the Thelma Boltin Center. During my one-on-one meetings with some members of the Commission, concern has been expressed about the project status. The attached memorandum provides a very thorough up to date review of the project timeline and the current status of the project.

Both Betsy Waite, WSPP Director and Brian Singleton, Special Advisor for Capital Projects and Infrastructure, are available if further discussion is required.

Attachments:

1. City of Gainesville – Memorandum Thelma Boltin Center – Project Update – Wild Spaces & Public Places – Regional Transit System – June 10, 2025.

cc: Andrew Persons, Chief Operating Officer
Brian Singleton, Special Advisor to the City Manager
Betsy Waite, Director of Wild Spaces & Public Places



CITY OF GAINESVILLE

Wild Spaces & Public Places

Memo

To: Cynthia W. Curry, City Manager

Via: Brian M. Singleton, P.E., Special Advisor to the City Manager *BS*

From: Elizabeth (Betsy) Waite, P.E., Director, Wild Spaces & Public Places *EW*

Date: June 10, 2025

Re: Thelma Boltin Center - Project Update - Wild Spaces & Public Places

This memorandum provides an update on the Wild Spaces & Public Places (WSPP) project at the Thelma Boltin Center.

Built in 1942, the Thelma Boltin Center—originally known as the Gainesville Servicemen's Center—served as an entertainment venue for U.S. service members stationed at nearby military bases. The City of Gainesville purchased the facility in 1946 and later renamed it in honor of its first director, Thelma A. Boltin.

The facility includes a 4,500SF auditorium and a 3,530SF multipurpose wing. While the building is a contributing structure within the Northeast Residential Historic District, it is not individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The structure is composed of high-wall concrete masonry unit (CMU) construction supported by conventional shallow strip and spread foundations. Both the auditorium and multipurpose wing feature wood floor systems supported by individual piers. Based on the era of construction, the CMU walls are assumed to be unreinforced. The building reflects characteristics typical of mid-20th-century military construction, including material scarcity due to wartime demand for cement, steel, and lumber. This influence is particularly evident in the auditorium's truss system and the absence of prominent architectural style or period-defining features.

The building is also located within the FEMA-designated 100-year floodplain.

Project timeline:

Background and Initial Closure

- 2000 – The Thelma A. Boltin Center was last renovated.
- August 22, 2019 – The City Commission adopted a motion at the General Policy Committee (GPC) meeting directing staff to proceed with Design Option 2: a renovation and minor addition.

- **March 2020** – The Center closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **December 2020** – City staff discovered a partial collapse of the auditorium roof and hired a structural engineering firm to assess and secure the structure.
- **June 2021** – Hazardous material testing was performed and asbestos tile was removed.
- **November 2021** – The engineering firm identified significant structural damage and recommended either the demolition and reconstruction of the auditorium, or demolition of the entire building.
- **December 2021** – The project was placed on hold following the departure of the City Manager.

2022 – Working with the Historic Preservation Board

- **April 14, 2022** – The City Commission adopted a motion at a GPC meeting directing staff to place the project on a Historic Preservation Board (HPB) meeting agenda for feedback and to engage the Duckpond Neighborhood. Staff were also directed to work with Wannemacher Jensen Architects, Inc. (WJA) on a building replacement plan that incorporates multi-use trail improvements and key architectural elements from the old structure while determining the best use for the facility.
- **Spring–Summer 2022** – Staff provided monthly updates at HPB meetings (May 3, July 5, August 8) and collected stakeholder input.
- **August 8, 2022** – Staff met with Rick Gonzalez of REG Architects, Inc. to discuss a feasibility study for full restoration.
- **August 2022** – *Code Enforcement designated the Center as a “Dangerous Building,” and disconnected utilities.*
- **September 6, 2022** – City staff and WJA presented new facility reconstruction options to the HPB.
- **September 27, 2022** – *Florida Concrete Recycling, Inc. removed the fluorescent lamps and recovered the refrigerant from the HVAC systems in the building under their continuing services agreement.*
- **October 18, 2022** – Staff provided an additional project update to the HPB.
- **November 1, 2022** – REG Architects presented a full restoration option to the HPB.
- **November 8, 2022** – Staff submitted a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application for partial demolition.
- **December 6, 2022** – The HPB approved the COA for demolition of the east wing and restoration of the historic auditorium.

2023 – New Directive

- **Spring 2023** – Staff worked with a consultant to prepare detailed cost estimates for four scenarios.

- **April 27, 2023** – At a GPC meeting, the City Commission was presented four options: (1) Complete Replacement, (2) Partial Restoration, (3) Complete Restoration, and (4) Repair Existing Facility. The Commission adopted a motion approving staff's recommendation to proceed with Option 2, a partial restoration, at an estimated cost of \$5.6 million.
- **Summer 2023** – Staff worked with WJA to develop a design services proposal for the partial restoration.
- **August 2023** – A building material salvage assessment was conducted by Resource Management Group, Inc.
- **Fall 2023** – A Construction Manager at Risk (CMAR) solicitation was issued.
- **September 21, 2023** – At a regular City Commission meeting, staff requested approval of a design task assignment amendment with WJA to finalize design and permitting for the partial restoration of the center pursuant to the April 2023 direction. The Commission adopted the following motions: (1) Table the current recommendation, hold a community engagement meeting and return to the City Commission on November 2, and (2) Mitigate further deterioration of the building, request county participation in the community meeting, and identify supplemental funding sources.
- **October 17, 2023** – Staff hosted a community engagement session.
- **December 7, 2023** – At a regular City Commission meeting, staff requested approval of a design task amendment with WJA to finalize design and permitting for the partial restoration of the center pursuant to the April 2023 direction, and also requested approval to award a CMAR solicitation to D.E Scorpio Corporation for the construction phase of the project. The Commission adopted the following motions: (1) Rescind earlier (funding) allocation, allocate \$1.5 million in City funding for structural repairs, pursue historic preservation funding options, and send a letter to the Alachua County Board of Commission requesting matching funds, and (2) Approved the Request of Proposal award to D.E. Scorpio Corporation and authorized the City Manager to execute a contract (for the construction phase) subject to approval by the City Attorney.

2024-2025 - Progress

- **February 6, 2024** – WSPP, WJA, and Scorpio conducted an on-site walkthrough to identify minimum repairs needed to reopen the Center.
- **February 21, 2024** – WJA began work on the Existing Conditions & Remediation Report.
- **March–May 2025** – Design progresses from 50% to 100% Construction Documents (CDs).

Current Status and Funding Limitations

The current budget for the construction phase of the project is \$3 million, comprised of \$1.5 million from City funds and \$1.5 million in County funding. Scorpio submitted a budget estimate based on the 50% CDs of \$2,931,192. The estimate includes site drainage improvements and building structural improvements, including replacing the auditorium roof structure, masonry repairs and reinforcement, and helical piles (foundation stabilization) at the south wing. The existing windows have been identified as the most

critical item to preserve. They will be removed, abated, restored, refinished and reinstalled to best preserve them. Approximately 70% of the cost is to stabilize the auditorium, including the installation of a new roof and roof trusses. Work at the service wing addition is approximately 25% of the cost, and the site drainage improvements are about 5% of the cost.

Please note the current construction estimate depletes the Phase I structural stabilization funding allocation, only includes structural repairs and would not reopen the building for programming.

To reopen the building, additional improvements beyond the Phase 1 structural stabilization will be required. These include upgrades and replacements to mechanical systems, installation of new flooring, new lights and code-required modifications. The combined cost of Phase 1 structural repairs and Phase 2 interior and systems upgrades is estimated to exceed \$6 million. Currently, the City is conducting microbial testing and x-ray analysis to inform the final design and cost estimates for Phase 1. Final pricing for the structural repairs, along with a preliminary estimate for the full scope of work needed to reopen the facility, is expected by the end of the calendar year following the completion of testing.

Projected Timeline

Design and permitting for the Phase 1 structural repairs are expected to be completed by the end of 2025. Construction could begin in early 2026 and is anticipated to take approximately 12 months. It is important to note that the current project budget covers only Phase 1, which includes structural stabilization. As such, the building will not be operational or have power restored upon completion of this phase.

Cc: Andrew Persons, Chief Operating Officer
Roxana Gonzalez, Director Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs