



Thelma A. Boltin Center Project Update

Betsy Waite, PE

Director of Wild Spaces & Public Places

City Commission

September 4, 2025



Thelma A. Boltin Center

Outline:

Part 1: Overview of the Thelma Boltin Center & Project Background

Part 2: Site & Building Conditions

Part 3: Project Update & Next Steps



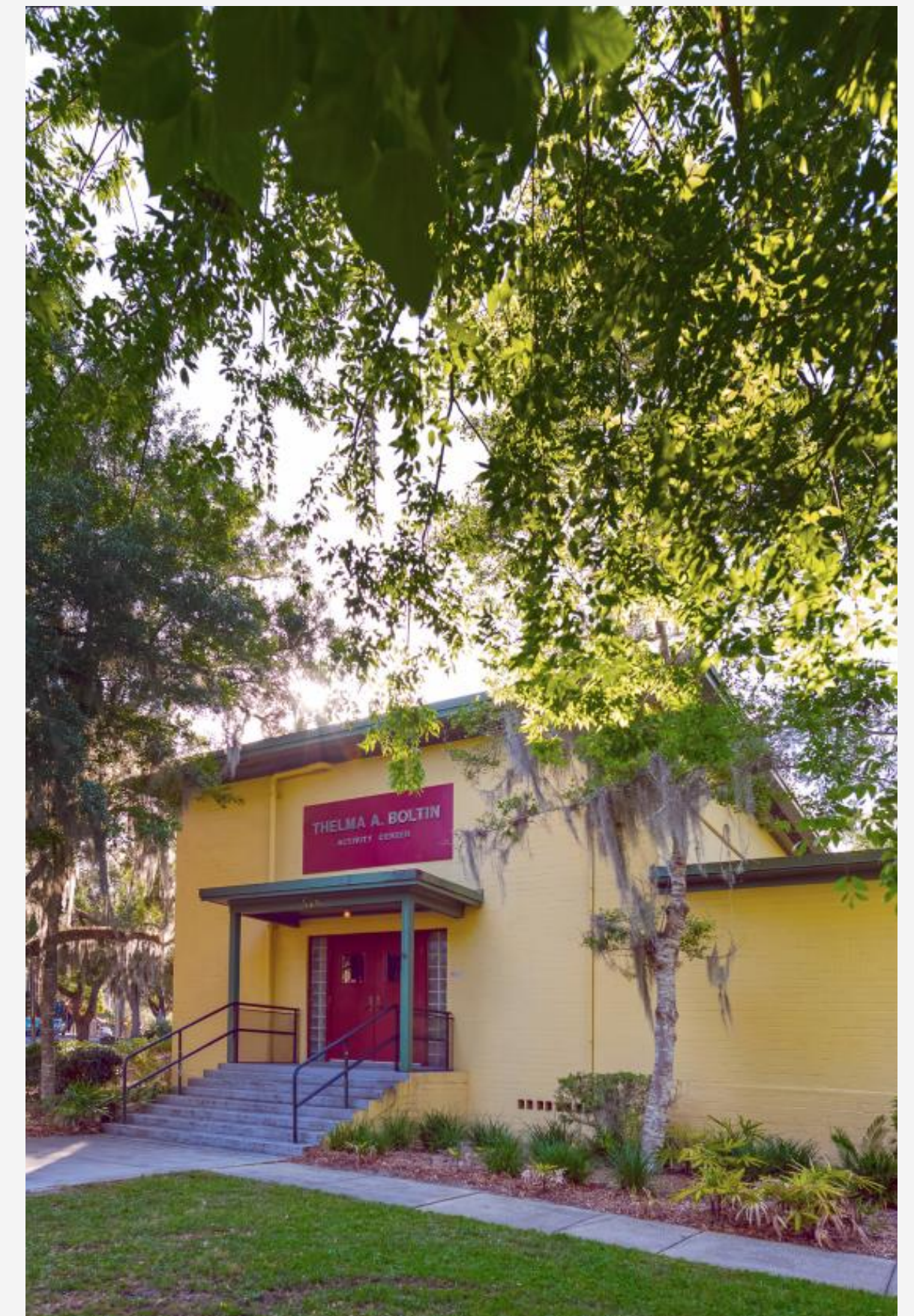
Thelma A. Boltin Center

Overview

Built in 1942, the Thelma A. 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 building sits on a 2-acre site at the corner of NE 2nd Avenue and NE 5th Street in the [Duckpond Neighborhood](#).

The City of Gainesville purchased the facility in 1946 and later converted the building into a [multipurpose facility](#) managed by [the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs](#).





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Programming

Under the management of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs, the Thelma Boltin Center was used for a **wide variety** of events and activities.

- Senior Services
- Dance & Arts Programs
- Civic Events and Services (City Meetings, Voting)
- Special Event Gatherings
- Fitness Classes (Zumba, Yoga)





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Programming

The Thelma Boltin Center last hosted active programming in 2019. In 2020, the facility was **closed to the public** in response to the **COVID-19 pandemic** and has remained closed since that time.

In December 2020, City staff identified a **structural failure** in the building's roof. As a result of the structural concerns and the need for temporary shoring, the building **remained closed** to the public.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Programming

Previous programming has been relocated to other city facilities.

- Senior Services – Relocated to Gainesville/Alachua County Senior Recreation Center
- Dance & Arts Programs – Relocated to Rosa B. Williams/352 Artspace & Oakview Community Center
 - Only one organization, *The Gainesville Old-Time Dance Society*, was unable to be relocated due to their size.
- Civic Events and Services – Relocated.
- Special Event Gatherings – Relocated.
- Fitness Classes – Relocated.



Thelma A. Boltin Center

Project Background

In early 2019, a **feasibility study** was conducted to evaluate the **potential for revitalizing** the Thelma Boltin Center.

In August 2019, the General Policy Committee adopted a motion to proceed with a **building renovation**.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Project Background

Subsequently, in May 2020, the City Commission authorized Wild Spaces & Public Places (WSPP) to negotiate a contract with Wannemacher Jensen Architects, Inc. (WJA), which was formally executed in November 2020.

In June 2021, an internal memorandum noted that renovation plans for the Center were placed on hold pending the completion of a structural assessment related to the roof failure.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Project Background

In mid-November 2021, the City received a structural assessment report from Sputo and Lammert, LLC. The report recommended that the extent of structural damage resulting from the roof failure was significant enough that **complete demolition and replacement** of the auditorium—or the entire facility—represented the most cost-effective options.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Project Background

In April 2022, the General Policy Committee approved a motion directing staff to collaborate with WJA on the design of a new Thelma Boltin Center.

Staff presented to the Historic Preservation Board in May, July, August, September, October and November of 2022 to obtain input prior to applying for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition and reconstruction of the building.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Project Background

Also in August 2022, while the Thelma Boltin Center renovation project was in the design phase, the City’s Code Enforcement Division determined that the building met the criteria of a “**Dangerous Building.**” As a result, the facility was disconnected from utilities for safety reasons and **prepared for demolition.**





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Project Background

In December 2022, The Historic Preservation Board approved the Certificate of Appropriateness for **demolition of the multipurpose wing**, and **restoration of the auditorium**.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Project Background

In April 2023, staff presented **four options** to the City Commission:

- (1) Complete Replacement,
- (2) Partial Restoration,
- (3) Complete Restoration, and
- (4) Repair Existing Facility.

The City Commission adopted a motion to proceed with a **partial restoration** at an estimated cost of **\$5.6 million**.

In September 2023, the City Commission **tabled their April recommendation** and asked for a **community engagement meeting** and county involvement.



Thelma A. Boltin Center

Project Background

In October 2023, staff held a **community engagement** event at the Thomas Center. The event provided an opportunity for the public to **offer input on programming** for the new Thelma Boltin Center, identify **needed improvements** to the facility and floor plan, and share **additional comments**.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Project Background

In December 2023, the City Commission adopted a motion narrowing the scope of work to include **only structural repairs** at the Thelma Boltin Center. The City Commission allocated \$1.5 million, assuming a \$1.5 match from the county (**\$3 million in total**).

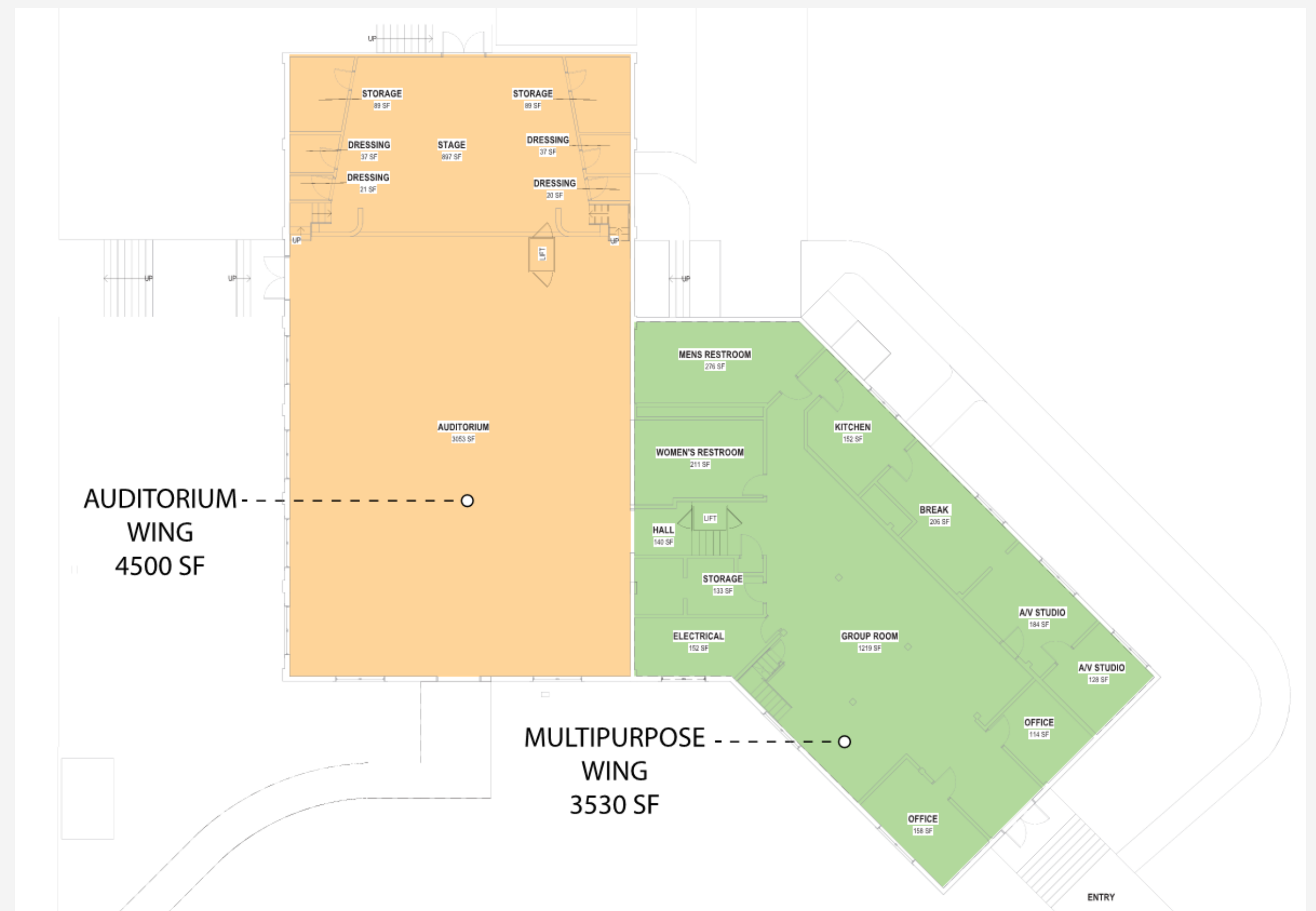
Over the course of the next year, several studies and assessments were conducted to identify the **minimum repairs necessary** for structural restoration.



Thelma A. Boltin Center

Building Overview

The Thelma A. Boltin Center consists of a one-story **4,500 SF auditorium** (including stage and back of house), and a two-story **3,530 SF multipurpose wing** with 1,120 SF storage mezzanine.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Building Construction

The Thelma Boltin Center was constructed in only ~120 days at a cost of \$36,105.

The building reflects characteristics typical of mid-20th-century military construction, including material scarcity due to wartime demand for cement, steel, and lumber.



Gainesville Servicemen's Center - 1940s



Thelma A. Boltin Center

Building Construction

The exterior walls are 4" and 8" painted and unreinforced CMU blocks supported on shallow strip and spread foundations.

The gable roof structure consists of heavy timber roof trusses spaced at approximately 12 feet on center, spanning 49 feet, and supporting wood purlins and wood decking. The roof trusses bear on larger CMU pilasters built integral with the exterior walls.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Building Overview

The Thelma Boltin Center **is not listed** on the national or local register of historic places; However, the building is considered a **contributing structure** in the **Northeast historic district**.

In 2008, the Alachua County Historical Society nominated the property as a **Florida Heritage Site**.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Structural Conditions

- **Foundation Settlement** – The relative floor elevation in the multipurpose wing varies by about 4 inches, with a downward slope from the northwest to the southeast.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Structural Conditions

- **Truss Failure** – The roof over the auditorium stage is in collapse and currently supported by shoring. The exterior walls are leaning outward and bowing at the two pilasters.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Building Systems

HVAC

All units are at or are **beyond their useful life**. The units do not provide mechanical ventilation for the stage area, which is recommended based on occupancy and for positive pressurization. The restrooms are not heated or cooled. Refrigerant was removed from the system in accordance with Code requirements after the building was deemed hazardous. **Full replacement of all HVAC systems is required.**



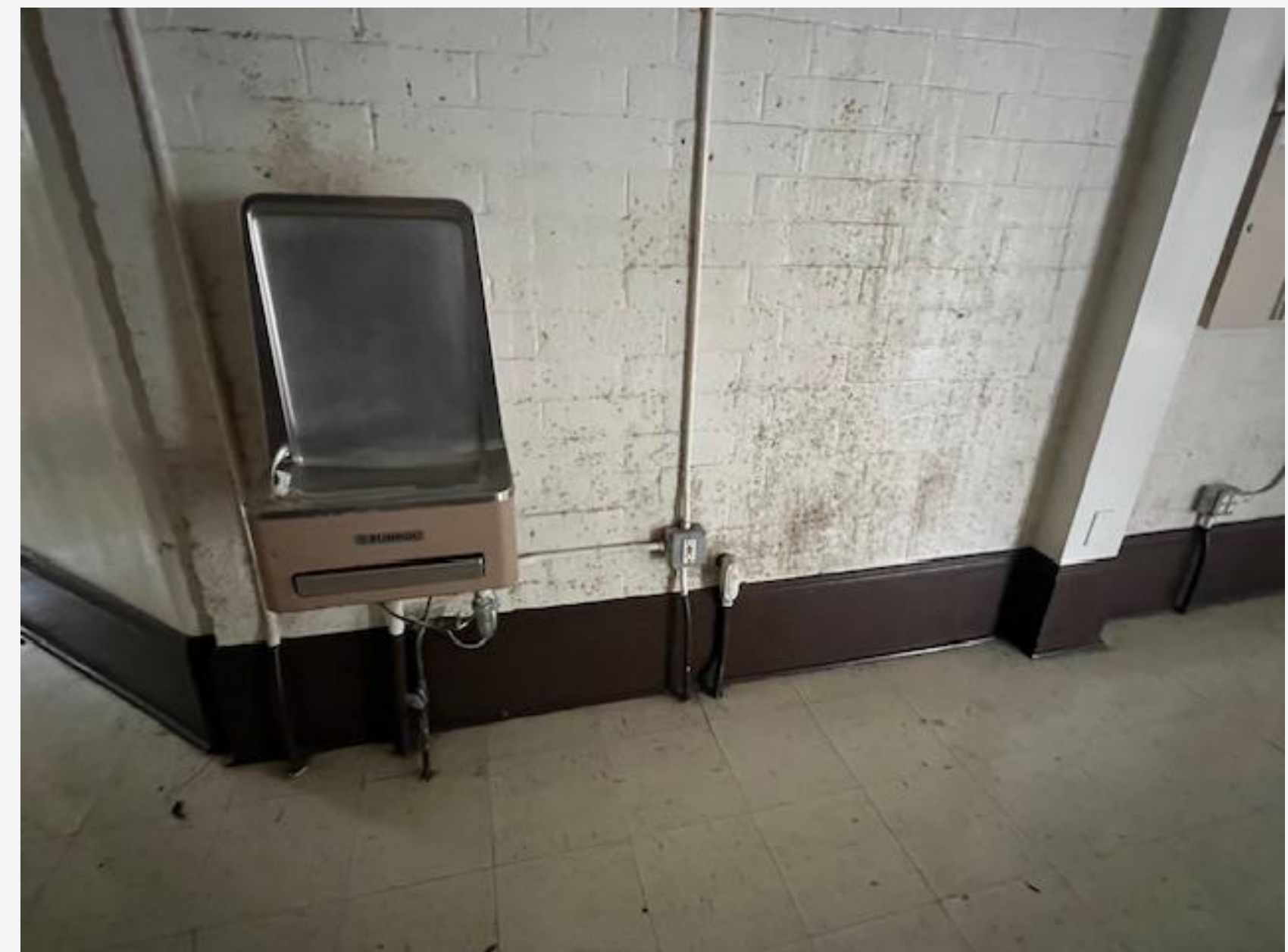


Thelma A. Boltin Center

Building Systems

Plumbing

The existing sanitary waste and vent system is a cast-iron hub and spigot system that will **need to be replaced** with any new renovation to the building. The piping material will fail in select areas and is unlikely to be suited for a new configuration.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Building Systems

Electrical

A new panelboard is needed for additional branch circuits.

However, existing electrical panels and wiring devices are also in good condition.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Site Context

A portion of the site is located within the
100-year FEMA Flood Plain (Zone A).

Sweetwater Branch Creek runs through the
eastern portion of the property.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Site Context

Soil samples from the site indicate the tested soil consists of **poorly graded sand with silt**, some which contain wood and organic material, silty sand with organics, clayey sand, and peat.

The **groundwater table** at the time of the geotechnical investigation was measured at depths of **1 foot 8 inches to 4 feet BLS**.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Project Update

Based on the findings from the studies, reports, and assessments identifying the structural repairs necessary, the design advanced from 50% to 100% Construction Documents (CDs).

A budget estimate based on the 50% CDs indicated the cost of just the Phase 1 structural repairs will consume the entire project budget.



Thelma A. Boltin Center

Cost Overview:

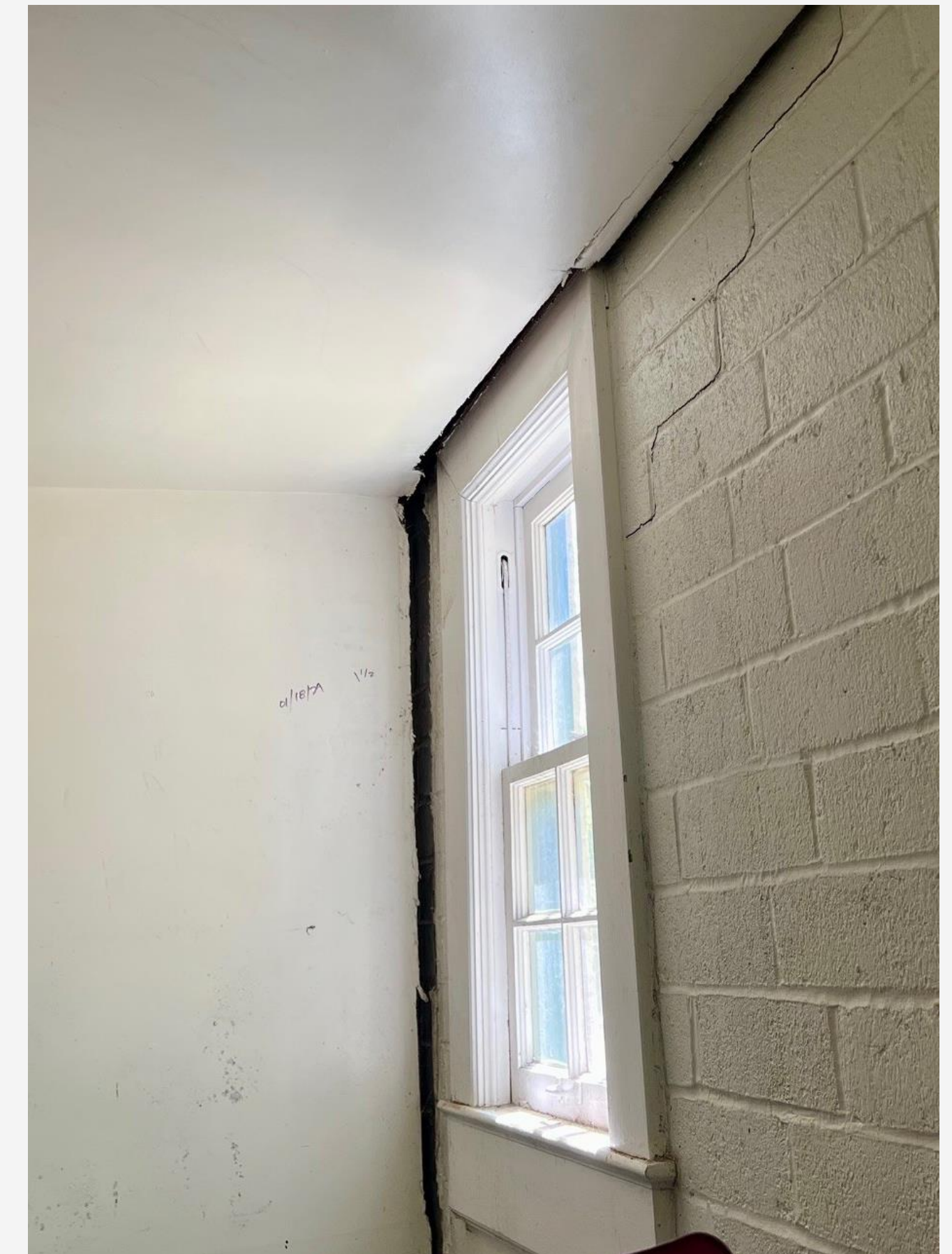
- Current **Funding Allocation: \$3 Million**
 - The project was divided into two phases:
 - Phase 1: Structural Repairs
 - Phase 2: Minimum Requirements to Reopen the Building to Public Use
- Total **Estimated Cost for Phase 1: Structural Repairs = \$2.9 Million**
 - Cost Breakdown:
 - 70% - Stabilize the Auditorium, 25% - Foundation Work, 5% - Site Improvements
 - The combined estimated cost to complete Phase 1 and Phase 2 is **\$6,645,690.**



Thelma A. Boltin Center

Structural Repairs Required:

- **Foundation Settlement** – Underpinning the multipurpose wing by installing helical piles.
- **Roof Failure** – Installing a new roof deck, steel roof trusses, insulation and asphalt shingles.
- **Masonry** – Repair and reinforce the historic windows (install steel lintels) and install new cast-in-place concrete footers in the auditorium.





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Next Steps – 6 Options:

1. Continue with Phase 1: Structural Repairs
 - Additional funding required for Phase 2.
2. Complete Restoration: Preservation of the Exterior of the Existing Building
 - Requires additional funding.
3. Partial Restoration: Partial Preservation of the Auditorium and a New Support Wing
 - Requires additional funding.
4. Complete Replacement: New Building Construction with Replica of the Auditorium
 - Requires additional funding.
5. Building Demolition and Full Floodplain Restoration
6. Building Demolition, Partial Floodplain Restoration, and Affordable Housing
 - Requires additional funding from another source.

*Previously
Presented*



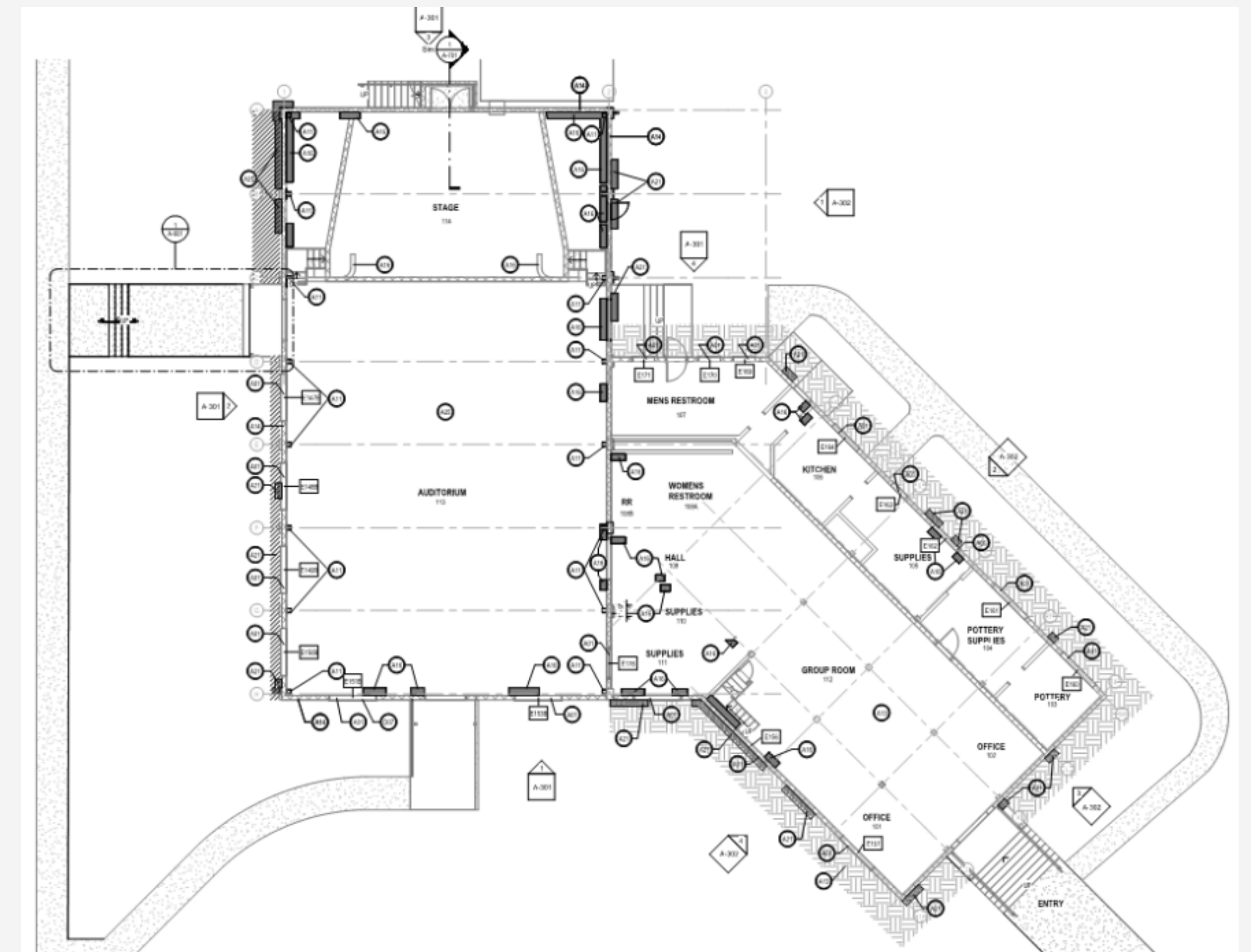
Thelma A. Boltin Center

Complete Restoration (9,170 sf):

This option maintains full historical integrity of the **exterior** of the existing building. The interior will be gutted and renovated to accommodate new HVAC and electrical.

The Interior would be reconfigured for improved access to the bathrooms and placement of ADA lifts.

Estimate: \$7,833,045 or \$854/sf





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Complete Restoration:

Programming and Possible Uses

Large Auditorium

- Small to large dance or exercise groups
- Large meetings or workshops
- Large rentals for special events

Stage Without Enhanced Lighting or Sound

- Theatrical Performances: Low Technical Only
- Awards Events

Lobby

- Small meetings or workshops
- Small rentals for special events
- Small exercise groups

Staffing Estimates

- 0.5 FTE technical support, 4 FTE building attendants, 0.5 FTE rental assistant



Thelma A. Boltin Center

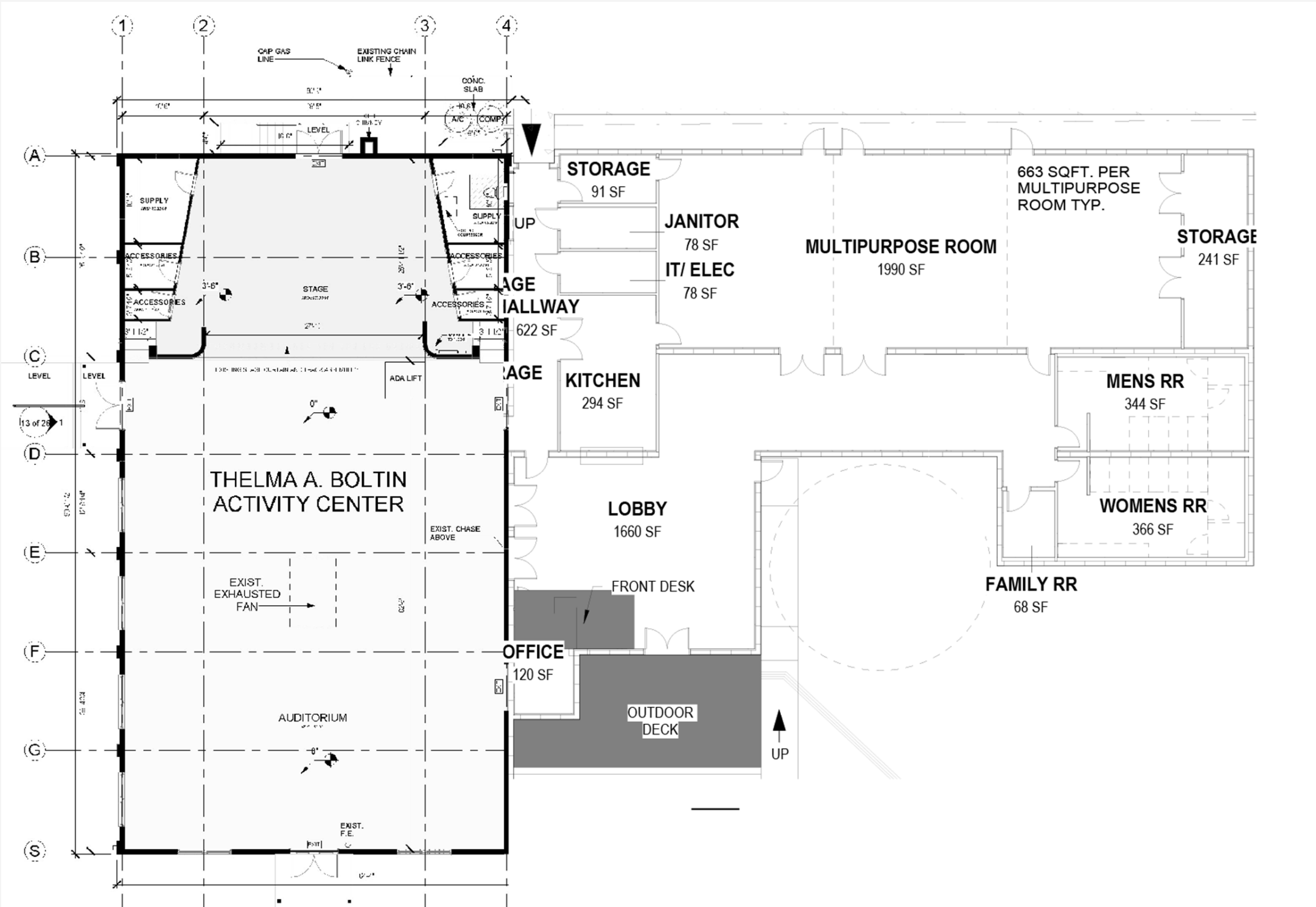
Partial Restoration (11,820 sf):

Per conditions of the Certificate of Appropriateness approved December 2022, this option **demolishes the multipurpose wing and constructs a new support wing east of the auditorium.**

The roof on the auditorium would be replaced and a secondary structural support system would be introduced to bear the weight of the new roof structure.

The removal of a Heritage Pecan Tree is likely required.

Estimate: \$7,245,659 or \$613/sf





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Partial Restoration:

Programming and Possible Uses

Large Auditorium

- Small to large dance or exercise groups
- Large meetings or workshops
- Large rentals for special events

Stage

- Theatrical Performances: Low Technical Only
- Awards Events

Multipurpose Rooms and Lobby

- Small meetings or workshops
- Small rentals for special events
- Small dance or exercise groups
- Small black box performances
- Chorale groups (with risers)
- Small art displays

Staffing Estimates

- 1 FTE technical support, 4 FTE building attendants, 1 FTE rental coordinator



Thelma A. Boltin Center

Complete Replacement (12,240 sf):

This option includes **complete demolition of all existing structures** and walkways and the construction of **entirely new facilities**.

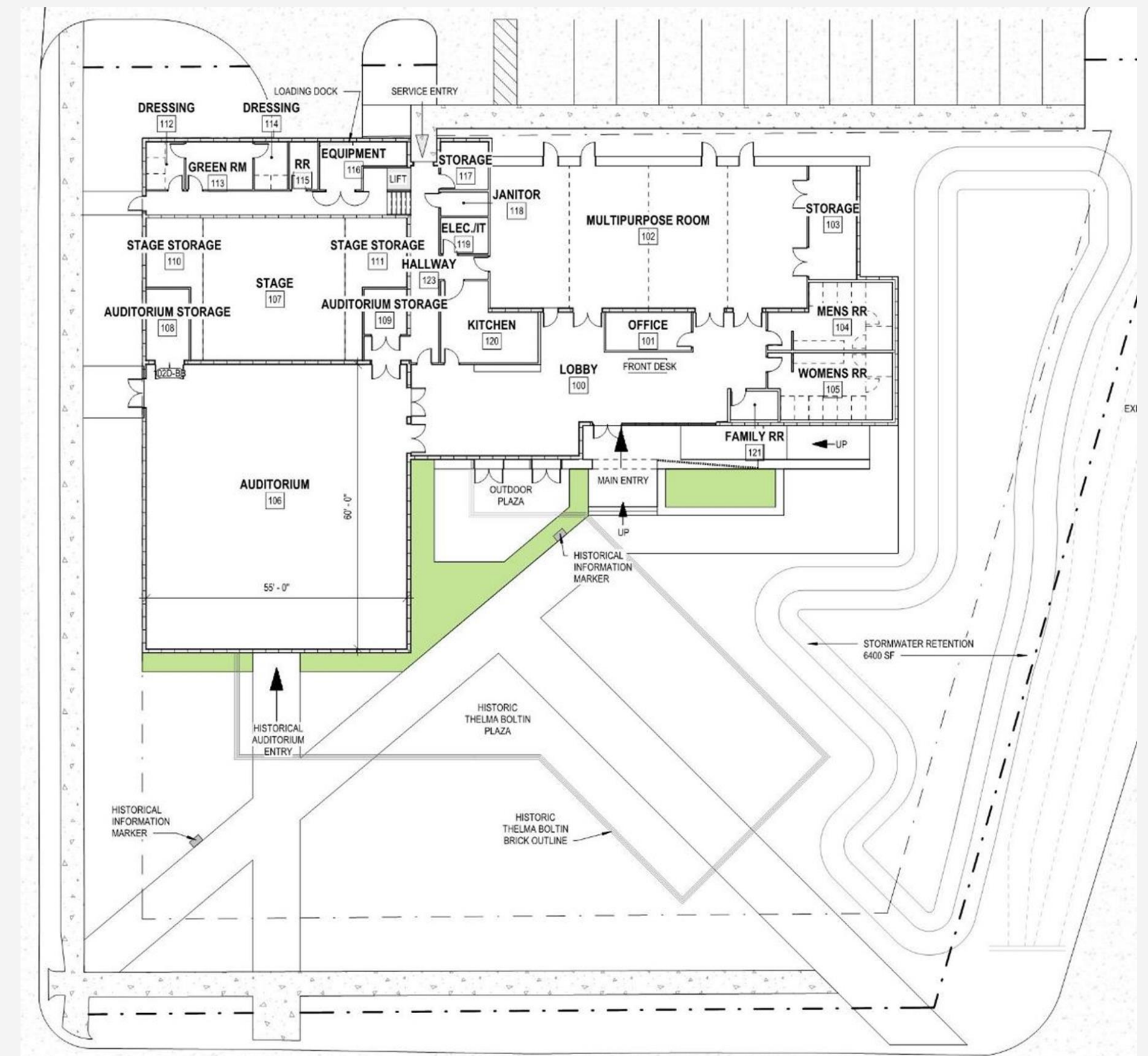
The **auditorium is rebuilt** to match the existing architecture as closely as possible.

The **size increases** by 3,100 SF (34%) to provide **better programming space**.

Significant Stormwater and Floodplain mitigation required.

Requires review by the Historic Preservation Board.

Estimate: \$7,787,940 or \$636/sf





Thelma A. Boltin Center

New Construction:

Programming and Possible Uses

Large Auditorium

- Small to large dance or exercise groups
- Large meetings or workshops
- Large rentals for special events

Stage with Enhanced Lighting and Sound, Green Room, & Dressing Room

- Theatrical Performances
- Awards Events
- Concerts

Multipurpose Rooms and Lobby

- Small meetings or workshops
- Small rentals for special events
- Small dance or exercise groups
- Small black box performances
- Chorale groups (with risers)
- Small art displays

Staffing Estimates

- 1 FTE technical support, 4 FTE building attendants, 1 FTE rental coordinator



Thelma A. Boltin Center

Building Demolition and Full Floodplain Restoration:

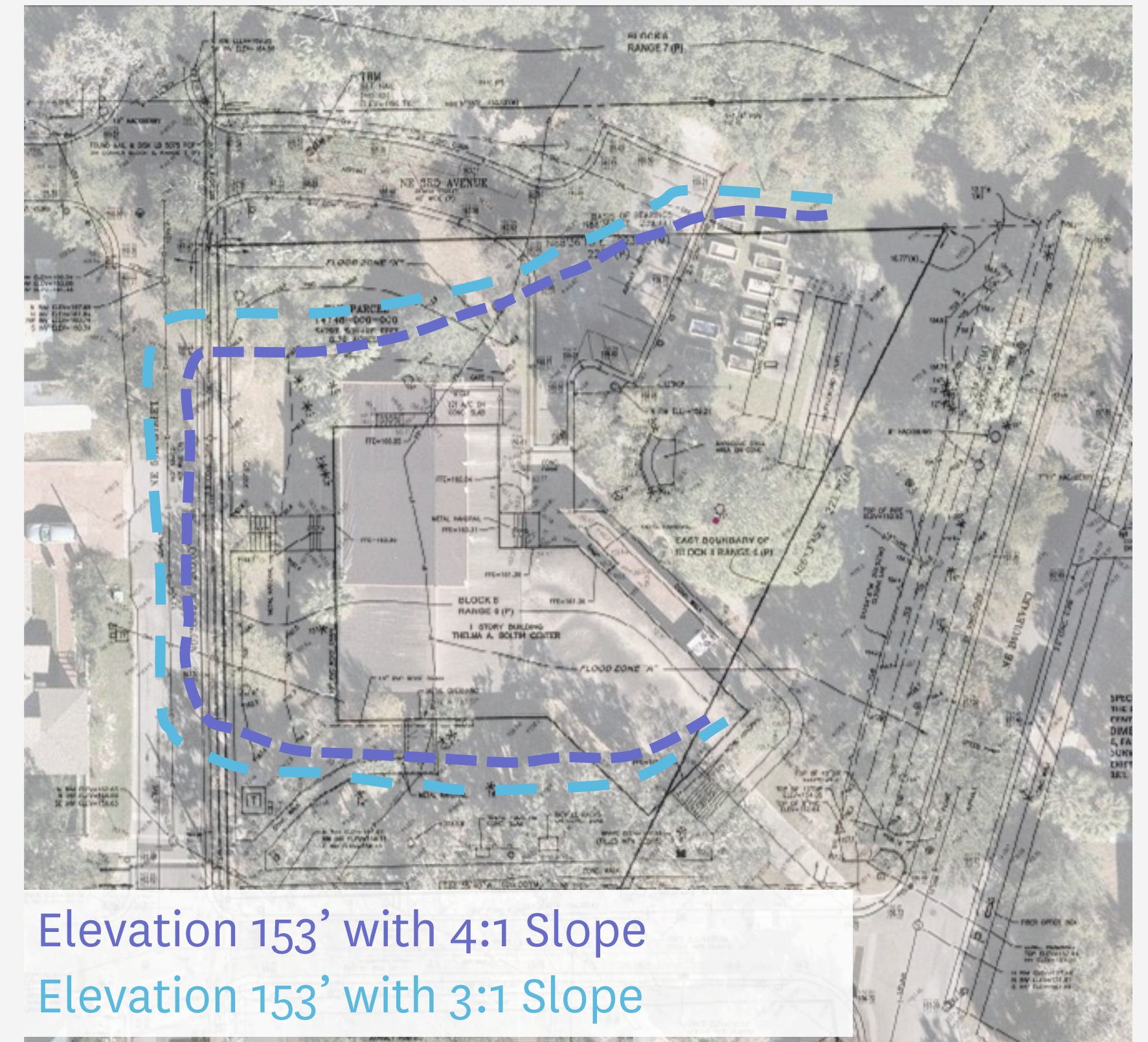
Regrade the site to allow for additional floodplain storage.

Restore with sod and plants.

Retains the community garden.

Review by the Historic Preservation Board Required.

Estimate: \$450,000 - \$650,000





Thelma A. Boltin Center

Building Demolition, Partial Floodplain Restoration, and Affordable Housing

Regrade the site to allow for some floodplain storage, maintaining the community garden and picnic tables.

Review by the Historic Preservation Board Required.

Estimate: \$450,000 - \$650,000*

**Funding for affordable housing would exceed the 650k estimate and would come from other funding sources.*

Note: Rezoning and Future Land Use Amendment Required.



Potential Area for Affordable Housing



Thelma A. Boltin Center

Yes

No

Somewhat

		Cost Estimate	In Budget	Preserves Historic Site	Meets Community Needs		Restores the Floodplain	City Staff Recommendation
1.	Continue with Phase 1&2 Structural Repairs	\$6.6 Million	✗	⚠	⚠	No changes in programming, no ADA improvements	✗	
2.	Complete Restoration	\$7.8 Million	✗	⚠	⚠	No changes in programming	✗	
3.	Partial Restoration (Restore auditorium, Demolish multipurpose wing, and new support wing)	\$7.2 Million	✗	⚠	⚠	No changes in programming	✗	#2
4.	Complete Replacement	\$7.8 Million	✗	✗	✓	Enhanced programming	✗	
5.	Building Demolition and Floodplain Restoration	\$450-\$650k	✓	⚠	✓	Environmental Benefits	✓	#1
6.	Building Demolition, Partial Floodplain Restoration, and Affordable Housing	\$650k+	✓	⚠	✓	Environmental Benefits & Housing	⚠	

39



Thelma A. Boltin Center

Staff Recommendation

The City Commission authorizes the City Manager to:

1. Proceed with Option #5 – Building Demolition and Floodplain Restoration

OR
2. Proceed with Option #3 - Partial Restoration: Restore the auditorium, Demolish the multipurpose wing, and Construct a new support wing.



Thelma A. Boltin Center



Questions?