

## **EDITORIAL: APRIL 2015**

The great news for downtown Louisville is that the Kentucky International Convention Center will undergo a \$180 million expansion, beginning in Summer 2016 that, when completed in 2018, will allow Louisville to recapture its competitive stance as a major meeting, convention, and events city. The planned expansion of the Kentucky International Convention Center will add a minimum 50,000 square feet of exhibit space bringing the total to more than 200,000 square feet of exhibit space and a 40,000 square foot ballroom without expanding the outer walls of the building. This expansion will potentially bring up to 25 percent more business to the convention center, bringing \$53 million in annual economic impact to the downtown area.

As with any major construction project - especially when it involves an existing building without enlarging its footprint - the process of expansion is complicated and causes disruption.

It is quite difficult, if not impossible, to provide a quality experience when you're meeting in a construction zone. Attempting to remain open during construction would severely compromise the client safety, service and experience, which in turn would seriously compromise and jeopardize long-term client relationships.

After months of meeting with the team of architects from EOP/HOK and other consultants working on the project, the Kentucky Finance and Administration Cabinet and the Kentucky State Fair Board made the decision that the building should be closed entirely in order to expedite the construction phase and keep the project on budget. This was a decision made after great deliberation and consideration, but it is the only decision that allows for the expansion to take place as quickly and safely as possible, and with the current and future clients' satisfaction in mind.

Once it became clear that closing for two years was really the only option, we began meeting with key downtown hoteliers and traveled across the country to meet with affected clients in person. We received their support and immediately started to work on a relocation plan.

Much work has been done with existing clients to retain the business that was booked during the construction dates. Of the 17 convention clients that are being relocated during the closure, 10 have elected to remain in the downtown Louisville corridor, in hotels and other venues, and five additional groups are tentatively reviewing future years in Louisville. We are still working with the remaining two clients affected to schedule new dates for their events.

Louisville is a unique city with two major convention centers, as well as a multi-purpose downtown arena. Venues including the KFC Yum! Center and the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts, as well as area hotels, are working in partnership with the Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau and Kentucky State Fair Board to provide meeting space for the relocated business being displaced by the expansion project. Other smaller events, such as meetings, banquets, and public shows, will also be

moved to other venues within the community. Thus, during the building's closure, there will still be conventions, meetings and events happening in downtown and throughout the community.

Additionally, staff at both the Fair Board and the Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau are aggressively working to relocate standalone public shows and events and to recruit additional events into the downtown area during the building's closure. Downtown Louisville will be open for business throughout the construction phase and business will be occurring throughout the two year construction phase.

The importance of the Kentucky International Convention Center to the economy of downtown Louisville, the entire city and the Commonwealth is not underestimated, and it's exactly because of its importance that we worked diligently and intelligently with all of our local partners on a plan to move forward. Every project of this magnitude has been and should be scrutinized.

The decision to close is as much about our current and future clients as it is the future of Louisville, our downtown corridor and the businesses that call it home.

Our top priority is to keep this project within budget and on time to better serve the city and region as an economic driver for decades to come. And we are confident that the renovation and expansion of the convention center mirrors the values that underpin Louisville's tourism and development. It will strengthen our city's position as a center of regional and nationwide travel and provide the foundation for a dynamic section of downtown that will accommodate more than 1,800 new hotel rooms by 2018.

With ongoing smart planning and teamwork, the renovation and expansion of the Kentucky International Convention Center will be a win now and a win later, boosting citywide partnership now and attracting greater and new business later.

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Kentucky State Fair Board

**Karen Williams, President & CEO**

Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau

**Lori Flanery, Secretary Kentucky**

Finance & Administration Cabinet

**Kent Oyler, President & CEO**

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**Rebecca Matheny, Executive Director**

Louisville Downtown Development Corp.

**Dennis Petruzzo, General Manager**

KFC Yum! Center

**Kim Baker**

Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts

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