



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS *Correcting Misinformation and Myths*

As of June 20, 2024

Who is the group backing The Keller renovation, and why are they promoting it?

The Portland City Council is currently considering whether to renovate the Keller Auditorium—a valuable and beloved performing arts venue it has owned for more than 100 years—or abandon it and build a new venue at either Portland State University or Lloyd Center. If the city council chooses to build a new auditorium elsewhere in Portland, it will require the city and taxpayers to pay the more expensive cost of building a new theater complex and the substantial cost to demolish and/or repurpose The Keller.

Critically important for the future of downtown Portland, if the city abandons The Keller, it will remove 400,000 people a year from the heart of the city. Those 400,000 people attend events at the auditorium each year, support downtown restaurants, hotels, and shops, and activate streets, parks, and the iconic fountain across from the auditorium. If The Keller is abandoned, it will leave a dark hole in the heart of downtown Portland.

Given this urgent concern, the non-profit [Halprin Landscape Conservancy \(HLC\)](#) stepped up to advocate for reimagining and renovating The Keller and to fight for the future of downtown Portland.

The building of Lovejoy Fountain, Pettygrove Park, Keller Fountain, and the Source Fountain, along with the pedestrian pathways that connect them—collectively known as the [Portland Open Space Sequence](#)—profoundly shaped the Portland that emerged from the 1960s. Lawrence Halprin and Associates fused public space, fountains, and sculpture into a new kind of inviting, interactive urban space that made the Portland downtown a place to enjoy and have fun. The Halprin Landscape Conservancy was formed to advance the original vision and revitalize these beloved and internationally recognized parks. Today, our leadership is fostering a bright future for the emerging Fountain District—a dynamic, walkable, mixed-use neighborhood to work, live, and play in downtown Portland.

What is the estimated cost to renovate The Keller and how does it compare with the PSU and Lloyd Center proposals?

The estimated total cost to renovate The Keller is \$286 million, which is significantly less than the estimated \$614 million to build a new theater complex at Portland State University and \$430 million at the Lloyd Center. ***The cost estimates for the PSU and Lloyd Center proposals presented to the city council on May 29, 2024, and widely reported in the***

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media are inaccurate and incomplete. Both new-build estimates fail to include the substantial cost to the city and taxpayers to demolish and/or repurpose The Keller Auditorium, which would be necessary if the city council chooses to build a new theater complex at either PSU or Lloyd Center. You cannot divorce these two costs. Therefore, the actual public cost of the city choosing to abandon The Keller and build something elsewhere is substantially greater than the price tags being advertised.

The least expensive, most sustainable option is for the city to reimagine, reinvest, and renovate The Keller, the public asset it has owned for more than 100 years. Even factoring the costs associated with temporary renovation closures, renovating The Keller is less expensive than building a new theater complex at either PSU or Lloyd Center.

What would happen to The Keller and the surrounding area if a new auditorium was built at either PSU or Lloyd Center?

The Keller serves as a catalyst for downtown activation, while a new auditorium at either PSU or Lloyd Center would draw people away from the heart of the city. If the city council chooses to build a new auditorium elsewhere, it will leave a vacant building and empty block in the heart of downtown with no other use as viable or valuable as The Keller Auditorium is today.

The last renovation of The Keller was in the 1960s, so it needs to be expanded, renovated, and improved to remain a viable performance venue. The 21st Century Keller proposal does that and more. ***If a new auditorium is built elsewhere in Portland, The Keller will need to be demolished and/or repurposed at a significant cost to taxpayers and the city. It will also remove 400,000 people a year from downtown who currently support restaurants, bars, hotels, and shops and who energize and activate the public fountain, parks, and streets, including on evenings and weekends.***

Given the current real estate market in Portland, the likelihood of the city quickly or easily selling or redeveloping the building and block is very low. Repurposing the building for concepts like a children's museum or public market is expensive and has not proven financially feasible elsewhere in the city. Two examples serve as cautionary tales: the County Courthouse and O'Bryant Square. Since Multnomah County moved into the new downtown courthouse, the old courthouse building has sat empty for many years. O'Bryant Square (now Darcelle Plaza), a downtown park, fell into and has been vacant for more than six years while waiting for the city to fund and redevelop the former plaza and park.

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What is the economic impact of closing The Keller for renovations, and what will happen to performances and events when it's temporarily closed?

The proposal to renovate The Keller, as presented to the city council on May 29, 2024, includes construction scheduling options ranging from a 19-month closure to a 37-month construction period that includes two seven-month “performance windows” where construction would pause to allow Broadway shows, the OBT’s Nutcracker, and other performances to continue without missing a season ([see page 57 of the May 2024 Keller Feasibility Study](#)). Since Broadway shows are the largest revenue source for The Keller, this will significantly reduce the negative economic impact of closing the auditorium during renovations. In addition, there will be a positive economic impact from Keller renovations, including construction and other jobs and workers supporting downtown restaurants, hotels, and stores.

The Metro-funded study presented to the city council on May 29, 2024, estimating a \$100 million negative impact of closing The Keller for renovations, is incomplete, inaccurate, and misleading. The study was completed without consulting The Keller renovation team, failed to account for pauses in construction to allow Broadway shows to continue, and failed to include the positive impact of renovation construction. It also assumed that opera and ballet performances could not and would not continue at other locations—a false assumption. Taken together, these factors will reduce the negative economic impact of a temporary Keller closure, especially when weighed against the enormous cost of permanently closing, demolishing, and repurposing the auditorium building and an entire downtown block.

Renovating The Keller over 37 months will only temporarily disrupt performances, shows, and events. Any renovation funding package will include money to support affected workers and organizations. Broadway shows, OBT and Opera performances, and other shows could continue during construction during scheduled performance windows. Additionally, smaller ballet and opera performances and similar events can take place at other local venues, such as Lincoln Hall at PSU, The Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, The Armory, and The Reser.

Many other cities have successfully maintained viable performing arts organizations during periodic renovations of their large venues. As an example, San Francisco did so after the Loma Prieta earthquake, when their War Memorial Opera House required repair and a seismic retrofit. To plan for construction at The Keller, it will be important for the city, Metro, and all impacted arts organizations to enthusiastically collaborate in planning creative and financially balanced ways to keep artists and the supporting labor force busy, viable, and whole.

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What is the environmental impact of renovating The Keller vs. building something new at PSU or Lloyd Center?

The most sustainable building is the one that already exists and can be reimagined, renovated, and improved. That is The Keller Auditorium. Furthermore, parking garages already exist adjacent to The Keller, which would need to be built at the other proposed locations to meet the 1,260 nearby parking stall requirement of Broadway shows.

Construction of a fully new, ground-up auditorium building will require extensive below-grade, steel-reinforced concrete foundations, as well as the likely use of steel to construct clear-spanned roofs of the auditorium and stage. Even if mass-timber solutions are used for part of the proposed structures, as PSU has suggested, The Keller will re-use existing foundations and the existing steel roof of the auditorium, retaining nearly 90% of the concrete and steel that is currently part of the existing structure for a far lower carbon investment. Furthermore, presuming The Keller would be demolished if it's abandoned to build something new, all of the embodied carbon in the current Keller structure would be wasted, creating a double whammy of carbon investment that strongly tilts the environmental scale in favor of renovation.

Both the PSU and Lloyd Center proposals will require the construction of at least 1,260 new parking stalls, constituting an enormous investment of concrete and steel and further increasing the carbon impact of these projects. The Keller already has a fully developed neighborhood where Portlanders live and work, including parking structures, hotels, restaurants, and commercial space. At the other locations, all of these will need to be built, immensely and unnecessarily increasing the carbon investment for PSU and Lloyd Center.

How will renovations to The Keller make the building more seismic resilient?

The renovated Keller will be designed to the code standards for a brand-new building—the same as proposed for the alternate sites—and will perform as a new building would in a seismic event. From a structural and seismic performance perspective, the renovated Keller will be indistinguishable from a new auditorium.

The Keller team contracted soils investigations and materials testing of existing masonry and concrete walls, which yielded very favorable results. Existing walls at The Keller can be reinforced with routine methods to carry necessary seismic loading. Deep pile foundations will not be required to supplement existing foundations, which is a tremendous savings in both cash and carbon.

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With respect to the existing Keller, the 1960s renovation provided significant concrete and steel structural reinforcement. Like most buildings downtown that weren't built in the past few years, the existing Keller wasn't designed to meet the current structural code; its existing structural elements will be relied upon in bringing it up to current standards. ***In 2020, The Keller was improperly categorized as a fragile, unreinforced masonry (URM) building when, in fact, significant structural elements were added in the 1960s renovation that serve to resist seismic forces.***

After renovations, will The Keller audience experience be as good as a new venue or simply an upgrade of an older building?

After renovations, The Keller will be as good or better than a new venue. The Keller's strength as a multipurpose auditorium, hosting musical theatre, opera, dance, contemporary music, and a range of other activities, will be reinforced and enhanced. A full re-crafting of the auditorium space, stage, backstage, and orchestra pit to 21st-century standards will be completed. This work will include universal accessibility in all spaces, safety improvements, improved audience sightlines, state-of-the-art acoustical design, all-new finishes, seating, lighting, and HVAC distribution.

Once renovated, the auditorium at The Keller will be acoustically comparable to any new theater of its type and size. It is important to note that the PSU team, in comparing their proposal to The Keller, stated that the last row of balcony seating at the renovated auditorium is 200 feet from the stage – this is untrue, as the last row of planned seating at the Keller is 145 feet from the stage, similar to PSU's proposed design – making the 21st Century Keller as intimate as any venue of similar capacity.

To date, the Keller team has been tasked with completing a Feasibility Analysis. In this process, the city and Metro needed to limit the operational and programming conversations we had about the Keller project. Design work for the Keller is not finished. Going forward, we will have deeper discussions with the team that operates the facility on a day-to-day basis, labor organizations, performing arts groups and performers, and neighbors to fully program and craft an auditorium to best serve the community for another 100 years.

How will a renovated Keller be a greater catalyst for downtown revitalization and a more inclusive destination for community events?

Today, more than 400,000 people attend events at The Keller each year. ***Once expanded, renovated, and improved, The Keller will be an entirely new destination—inside and out—that will bring even more people downtown to celebrate, participate, and enjoy the arts, culture, and community.***

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Outside, the 21st Century Keller includes a new plaza (where 3rd Street currently exists) connecting the auditorium with the iconic public fountain. This new space will be programmed year-round with performances and community events, much like Pioneer Courthouse Square to the north. Inside, the 21st Century Keller includes a larger, renovated main auditorium along with an intimate new 150-seat performance venue overlooking the fountain and accessible to smaller community and school arts organizations. It will also include an expanded 3,600-square-foot rehearsal hall overlooking Market Street to accommodate performance rehearsals, large and small performances, and community events. The new venue space will also have its own separate entrance on Market Street.

Recognizing the need to make The Keller more accessible and engaging for diverse artists and audiences, a Community Voices Task Force has been established, led by Gale Castillo, to seek input and ideas on future programming and events. The task force began meeting in early 2024 and includes the Black Chamber of Commerce of Oregon, Bravo Youth Orchestra, Caldera Arts, Cascade AIDS Project, Congregation Beth Israel, Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, Northwest Native Chamber of Commerce, Oregon Arts Commission, Philippine American Chamber of Commerce, Portland Art Museum, plus additional voices today and in the future. While these groups are not being asked to officially endorse the Keller renovation project, their contributions are invaluable—providing diverse perspectives, ideas, and leadership to build a more inclusive community that will help revitalize and reenergize our beloved downtown.

How will The Keller renovations be funded, and who will pay for it?

The cost of renovating The Keller is about half the cost of building something new at either PSU or Lloyd Center—even before you factor in the significant cost to demolish and/or repurpose The Keller if another site is chosen. The Keller renovation will be paid for by a combination of public and private funding. ***The Keller renovation team has conducted a fundraising [feasibility study that estimates \\$50-to-\\$100 million could be raised privately to offset public costs.](#)*** Once the city council decides to move ahead with renovating The Keller, more detailed planning of both public and private funding options will be required. In addition to private funding, public funding could include, but not be limited to, a combination of sources, including a public bond, borrowing against a small fee on ticketed events, one-time city, Metro, or state appropriations, and a local improvement district (LID).

Who supports renovating The Keller vs. building a new venue elsewhere?

Renovating The Keller enjoys the strongest public support of the three options currently under consideration. [According to KGW News](#), at the May 29, 2024, city council public hearing, the most-favored option by far, based on public testimony from more than 180

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people, was for renovating The Keller. In addition, [a May 2024 poll conducted by DHM Research](#) revealed that **66% of registered voters in Portland favor renovating The Keller vs. just 10% who want the city to build a new auditorium in a different location. Support jumps to 70% when contrasted with the PSU proposal.** In addition, 43% have attended an event at The Keller in the past two years, and 80% of those hold a positive impression of the auditorium. Finally, 89% believe The Keller is an important asset for downtown, and 80% believe it makes more sense to preserve and improve The Keller rather than build something new at PSU.

In addition to the hundreds of individuals who have offered public testimony and statements supporting The Keller renovation, the following is a list of organizations and neighborhood groups endorsing the 21st Century Keller:

American Plaza Towers	Harrison West
Architectural Heritage Center of Oregon	Neighbors West-Northwest
Converge	Pearl Neighborhood Association
Downtown Neighborhood Association	Portland Plaza
Fountain Plaza	Restore Oregon
Goose Hollow Foothills League	The Cultural Landscape Foundation
Harrison East	Strand

Quotes:

Mike Lindberg, Former City Commissioner

“By preserving and renovating the Keller, which is located adjacent to the internationally recognized Keller Fountain, the City Council will commit to the city’s central core. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested by the private and public sectors because the Keller exists where it does...housing towers, restaurants, office buildings, parking and transit were built based on the Keller’s location. You have a chance to save the Keller but also save a neighborhood. I ask the Council to support the transformative 21st Century Keller project, giving us renewed hope for our downtown cultural district.”

Gale Castillo, Chair, Community Voices Task Force

“The 21st Century Keller offers a unique opportunity to build on Portland’s Cultural District, stimulate downtown’s economic vigor, and create a dynamic urban plaza that attracts and serves our diverse communities.”

Diana Stuart, Downtown Neighborhood Association

“Portland has turned the corner. A commitment from the city to reinvest in The Keller and in downtown is an important part of our comeback story. Likewise, walking away from the

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theater, fountain, and neighborhood will leave a dark hole downtown and fewer people in the heart of the city,” said Diana Stuart with the Downtown Neighborhood Association.

Watch a video of community voices for The Keller [here](#).

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