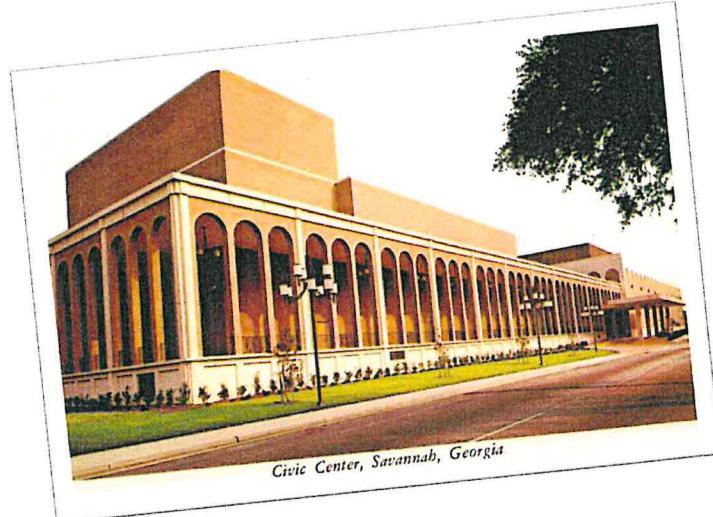




# Civic Legacy Council Workshop Presentation

December 11, 2025



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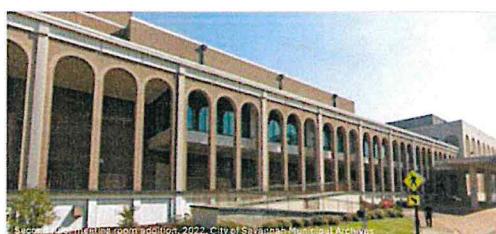
## Savannah Civic Center Development



Arena under construction, 1963. City of Saugus, City Municipal Archives.



The "Chinese Tapestry" in the lobby, 1972, City of Savannah Municipal Archives



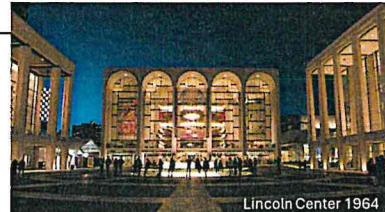
Source: [www.savannahga.org](http://www.savannahga.org), 2022, City of Savannah, Georgia, 14th Mayors



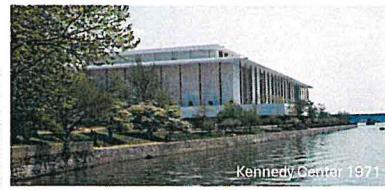
## Architectural Style

### New Formalist:

- Flourished 1960s in high-profile cultural, institutional, and municipal buildings
- Combined traditional building techniques and cutting-edge technology
- Established a contemporary monumentality that embraced ancient precedents such as arches and colonnades
- Commonly featured central plazas with pools and fountains
- Civic Center is in good company!



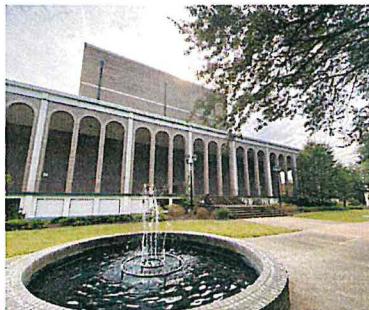
Lincoln Center 1964



Kennedy Center 1971



Atlanta Civic Center 1968

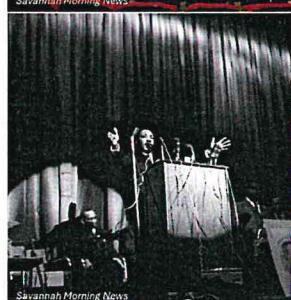


City of Savannah Municipal Archives

Chatham Municipal Association Presentation December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025

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## A Place of Honor



1978: Johnny Mercer Theatre

1984: Martin Luther King, Jr. Arena

Circa 1976 Arena Rooms:

- Lowell Mason
- Cecil Day

Circa 1996 Community Rooms:

- Andrew Bryan
- Jane Deveaux
- Mary Musgrove
- Flannery O'Connor
- James Simms
- Franklin Traub



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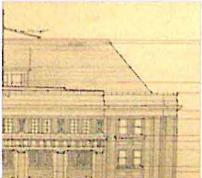
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## Cycles of Transition & Loss



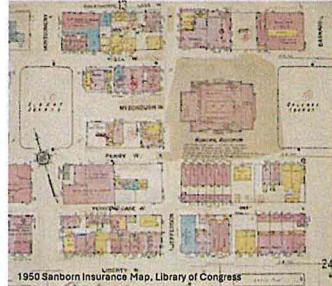
Bulloch House, Atlanta History Center



Municipal Auditorium, Municipal Archives



"White Slums - Area of Auditorium," 1940, Georgia Southern University



1950 Sanborn Insurance Map, Library of Congress

### Past Losses:

- 1914: Archibald Bulloch House
- 1935: Elbert Square (partial); Montgomery Street 2-way traffic
- 1960s Street grid/Oglethorpe Town Plan; Residential neighborhood, and Municipal Auditorium

### Upcoming Loss:

- 2026: Martin Luther King, Jr. Arena

### Lessons Learned From the Past:

- Loss and change is traumatic
- Need to acknowledge and provide space for memories and hurt (past and new)
- Opportunity for restoration and to honor/remember what cannot be restored

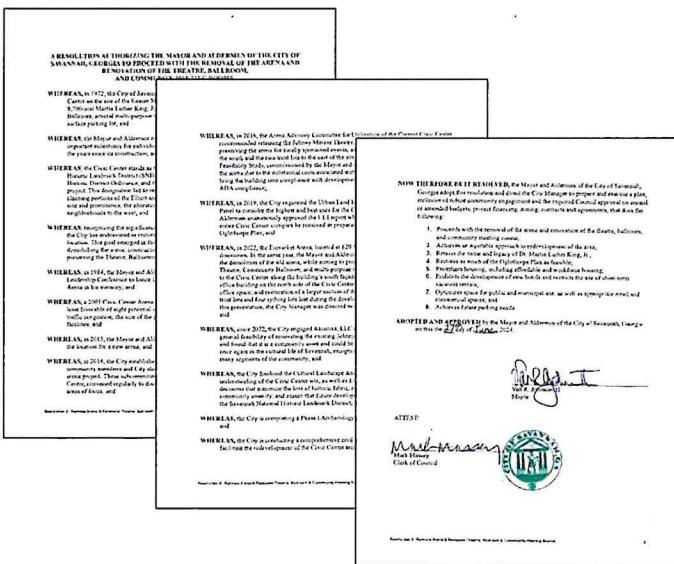


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## Civic Legacy - City Council Resolution



### Council Resolution passed in June 2024

- Proceeds with removal of arena & renovation of theater, ballroom & community rooms;
- Achieves an equitable approach to redevelopment of the area;
- Retains the name & legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.;
- Prioritizes housing, including affordable & workforce housing;
- Prohibits the development of new hotels & restricts the use of STVRs;
- Optimizes space for public and municipal use, as well as appropriate retail and commercial spaces; and
- Achieves future parking needs.



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## Civic Legacy – How Did We Get Here?

*More than 300 participants with nearly 500 comments*

- **Stakeholder Meetings**  
April 25, 2024 (79 participants)
- **Community-wide Open House #1**  
May 7, 2024, Civic Center Ballroom (155 participants)
- **Virtual Meeting**  
May 16, 2024 (23 participants)
- **Community-wide Open House #2**  
May 18, 2024, John Delaware Center (31 participants)
- **Community-wide Open House #3**  
May 20, 2024, Armstrong Center (25 participants)



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## Civic Legacy – Civic Center Redevelopment

*Project Approach*

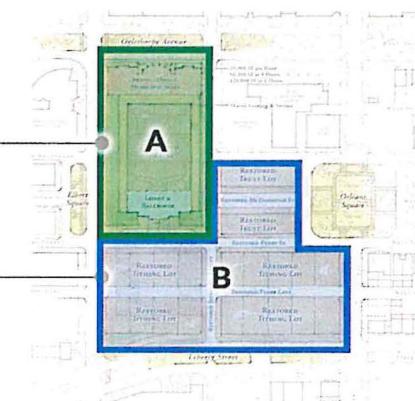
### PROJECT AREAS

#### A. Civic Block

Theatre, Ballroom, Community Meeting Rooms, New Multi-Use Space, Reimagining Elbert Square

#### B. Oglethorpe Plan Blocks

Restoration of Oglethorpe Plan, Blocks & Lots, Streets, and Subgrade Parking



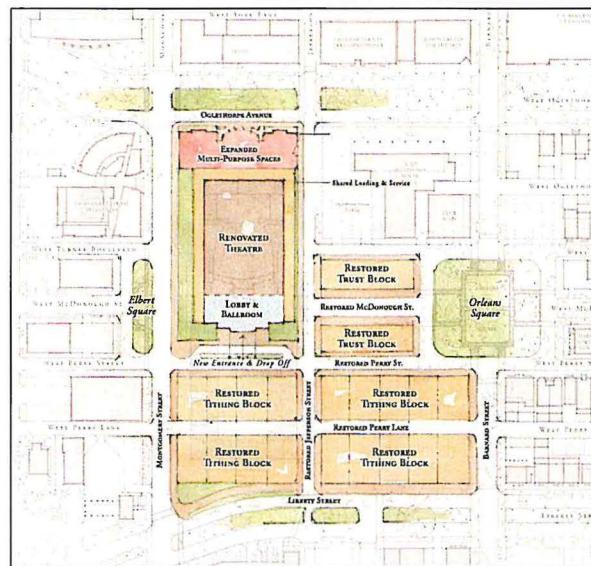
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## Civic Legacy – Civic Center Redevelopment

### Project Approach



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## Civic Legacy – Project Partners

### Roles

Arena Removal Design & Construction	Equity-Driven Public Engagement	Market Study of Theatre	Urban Planning & Architecture



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## Civic Legacy – Arena Removal

### Scope



- Careful, controlled removal of the Arena down to the below-grade slab
  - No wrecking ball, no explosives
  - Hand demolition required within 30' of the existing Civic Center structure
- Installation of a temporary kitchen and lobby vending area
- Chiller replacement
- Construction of a weather-tight temporary enclosure at the south wall of the existing lobby
- All work sequenced to keep the Theatre, Ballroom, Meeting Rooms, and Lobby operational throughout construction



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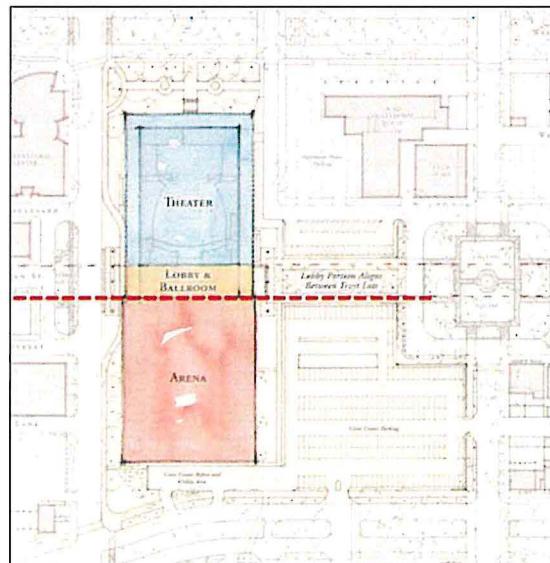
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## Civic Legacy – Arena Removal

### Milestones

- Historic District Board of Review Approval for Arena Removal: November 12, 2025
- Council Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) Consideration: February 12, 2026
- Notice to Proceed / Mobilization: Week of February 16, 2026
- Lead & Asbestos Abatement: Feb./June 2026
- Temporary Kitchen Construction: Feb./Mar. 2026
- Arena Removal Begins: June 2026
- Temporary South Wall Installed: Q1 2027
- Substantial Completion: February 2027
- Final Completion & Site Restoration: Q1 2027

Budget: \$10 million (est.)



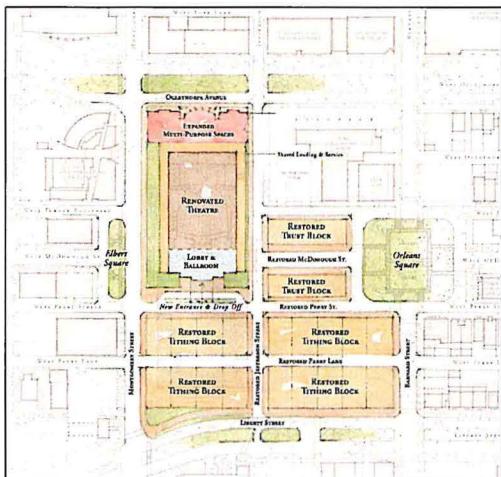
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## Civic Legacy – Economic & Land Use Study

### Currently Underway



### Scope

- Evaluate the redevelopment of ~4.5 acres adjacent to the Civic Center into four tithing blocks and two trust blocks under the Oglethorpe Plan

### Key Findings

- Strong housing demand (rental apartments, for-sale rowhomes and condos)
- High need for workforce/affordable and senior housing
- Retail opportunities for food, beverage & daily-use shops
- Limited office potential (small creative spaces)

### Next Steps

- Prepare a redevelopment strategy that evaluates costs & benefits as well as outlines actionable steps for implementation
- Align program mix with community priorities & market demand
- Build financial models to guide implementation



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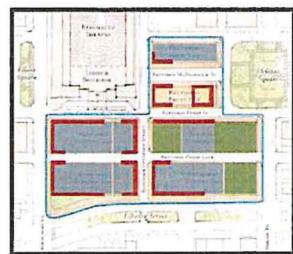
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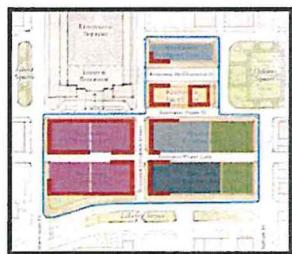
## Civic Legacy – Economic & Land Use Study

### Putting it Together | Residential and Commercial Scenarios

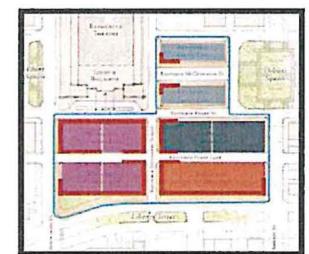
SCENARIO 1 (RESIDENTIAL) + SCENARIO A (COMMERCIAL)



SCENARIO 2 (RESIDENTIAL) + SCENARIO B (COMMERCIAL)



SCENARIO 3 (RESIDENTIAL) + SCENARIO C (COMMERCIAL)



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## Civic Legacy – Equity-Driven Public Engagement

Aligned with Savannah GPS Equity Implementation Framework

### Goals

- Broaden participation to include residents and business owners that reflect Savannah's demographics
- Remove barriers to participation from communities that have been historically marginalized
- Support a meaningful engagement process for all residents



### Activities

- Public Engagement Meetings
- Stakeholder Focus Groups
- Community Survey
- Experience Survey



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## Civic Legacy – Equity-Driven Public Engagement

August 2025 - Present  
Economic & Land Use Study

**2 Public Meetings**  
OCT 28-29, 2025  
Open House + Presentation

**100**  
Sign-Ins

**167**

Feedback Cards Submitted  
61% residents live outside 31401

**4 Stakeholder Focus Groups**  
OCT 28-29, 2025: Housing, Neighborhoods, Business & Economic Development, Community & Faith Leaders

**31**  
Participants

**30**

Experience Surveys Collected  
public meeting attendees + focus group participants

**1 Community Survey**  
Open OCT 28 - DEC 8, 2025  
Follow up & Targeted Strategies

**1,119**  
Responses

**60%**

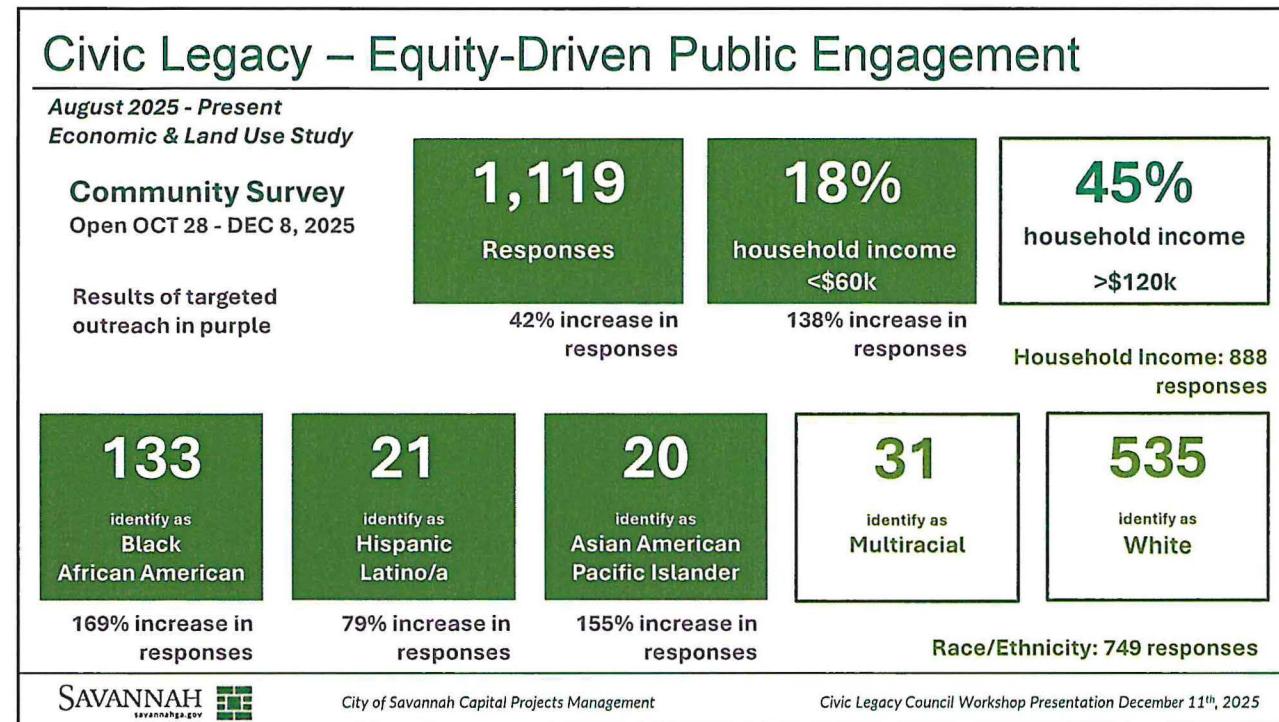
residents live outside 31401



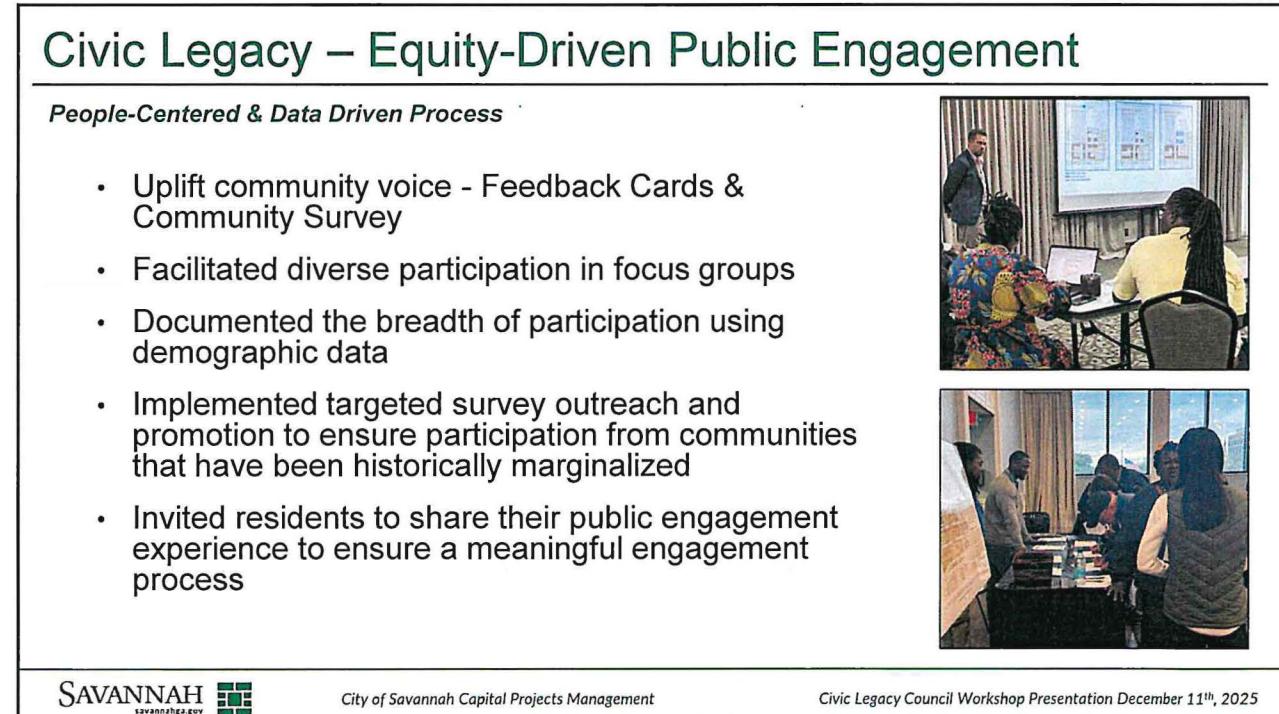
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## Civic Legacy – Market Study of Johnny Mercer Theatre

### *Market Demand, Program Analysis & Operations Study*



- Assessment of the operations, use, and financials of the theatre to inform the design of the renovation

### Preliminary Findings

- The Johnny Mercer Theatre is underutilized (80–100 days/year) and often the last choice for presenters due to outdated quality, high costs, and inflexible operations
- Renovated facility would meet significant demand from local and national users

### Expected Study Outcome

- Recommendations on facility program, operating model, and financial strategy to guide renovation design and long-term sustainability

### Timeline for Completion

- Final activity profile, management and governance recommendations, and operating projections – Q1 2026



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## Civic Legacy – Renovation of Facility

### *Theatre, Community Ballroom, and Community Meeting Rooms*

- Design RFP to be released in 2026
- New lobby addition with entry off restored Perry St.
- Expanded multipurpose building addition on Oglethorpe frontage
- Upgraded back-of-house spaces and modernized patron amenities
- Renovated Community Ballroom and Meeting Rooms
- Connectivity improvements between the Theatre, Ballroom & new civic spaces



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## Civic Legacy – Civic Center Naming Resolution

### *Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Civic Center*

- Resolution to be considered during City Council meeting today
- Formal renaming of the Civic Center to honor Dr. King's legacy
- Alignment with Council's 2024 direction to retain and elevate the MLK, Jr. name
- Naming to be incorporated into all project materials moving forward

### *MLK, Jr. Weekend Celebration – January 2026*

- Hardhat tour of the Arena prior to demolition
- Program in the Ballroom celebrating the Civic Center's history and renaming
- Historical materials curated by Municipal Archives
- Event will highlight community memories and Dr. King's legacy



*From the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum, Frederic Baldwin Collection*



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