

| Executive Summary

Miller Outdoor Theatre (MOT) is the premier performing arts venue where Houstonians can congregate and enjoy world class productions in a casual, open park setting. The spirit of this special place is appropriately captured in the phrase “the best of the performing arts without the tux.” Its location in Houston’s iconic Hermann Park, in the expanding Museum District and the Texas Medical Center (TMC) makes it an exceptional venue of unequalled stature. As with any institution of this caliber, there is an ongoing necessity to protect and sustain the timeless heritage while promoting a promising future. As MOT looks ahead to the start of its second centennial, it is appropriate

and necessary to take a forward look and identify strategies and actions that should be undertaken to strengthen the institution and its facilities.

This report, MILLER OUTDOOR THEATRE 2035 MASTER PLAN, is the result of a year-long effort by key stakeholders. The research and results look broadly, but also specifically at the MOT’s physical environment and facilities. The report documents detailed processes, systems/factors to be considered, and key recommendations. Plans for all future improvements will involve the participation and approval of all stakeholders.



HOUSTON SYMPHONY | FREE SUMMER CONCERTS AT MOT

Key Recommendations

- MOT's history and its future is tightly bound to the other institutions in its "urban neighborhood". MOT must work jointly to expand the visitor experience and address shared challenges, primarily focusing on vehicular and pedestrian access and parking.
- There are also significant opportunities through partnerships with the Museums and the TMC to showcase MOT to a broader, international patronage.
- Maintaining the traditional format of being free and open to the public is vital to the identity of MOT. As this open format poses certain public safety issues (due to attendance of very large groups under moderate to little control), facility improvements must address measures to ensure public safety while promoting the enjoyment that comes from being a casual venue.
- The open format also poses challenges to MOT being economically self-sustaining. Future facility improvements should integrate new, revenue producing amenities. These might include expanded concessions that are more convenient to the patrons and also expand the food and beverage selections. Event space for private functions will also be revenue-contributing, yet temporary to not diminish parkland that is currently free and open for public use.
- Expanded, fixed seating provides more convenience and enjoyment for patrons whether or not fixed seating is associated with a nominal charge.
- Currently, MOT does not operate under a business plan. Preparing a plan as a platform for decision-making and building a firm economic foundation for MOT will sustain it well into the future.
- MOT's facilities and technologies are becoming, or have already become, dated and inadequate. These will require a combination of renovation, replacement and expansion. While the costs of upgrading MOT's facilities is significant, the Master Plan proposes a phased program of improvements that supports incremental capital expenditures based on priority needs over a twenty year timeframe.

“Major producers such as the Houston Symphony, Ballet, Opera, and Shakespeare seek premier venues to introduce performing arts and inspire patrons to grow and develop talents within their community.”

01 | Introduction

The MILLER OUTDOOR THEATRE 2035 MASTER PLAN is an initiative of Houston First Corporation. Developed through a twelve month process that involved multiple primary and secondary stakeholders tours, workshops, meetings and interviews, the Master Plan document provides a framework for discussing improvements at MOT through 2035. The Master Plan is organized into seven sections following the Executive Summary. Sections 1 - 3 provide pertinent background information that formulate the basis for the Master Plan. Sections 4 – 5 set out the key concepts and recommendations for the Master Plan. Section 6 identifies the next steps in implementing the Master Plan including associated costs. Section 7 Appendices provide useful reference and background information.

MOT Snap Shot

The following chronology summarizes noteworthy milestones through MOT's history.

1922

The original theatre was designed by William Ward Watkin as an amphitheater surrounded by twenty Corinthian-style limestone columns and built by Tom Tellepsen.

1938

Weekly programming by civic and community groups was developed by the Parks And Recreation Department.

1968

The City built a new theatre with bonds voted by the public. The new theatre, designed by Eugene Werlin and Associates, won several awards. Columns from the original building were moved to the Mecom-Rockwell Colonnade Fountain in front of the Warwick Towers between Fannin and San Jacinto at Hermann Drive.

1970

The City began providing general revenue funding for productions at MOT allocated by the Parks Director and the Miller Theatre Advisory Board (MTAB).

MTAB was incorporated as a non-profit organization to "act as a sounding board for activities in the theatre, channel money from bequests, gift and grants to specific organizations for productions in the theatre."

1971

The City Council accepted the services of the Miller Theatre Advisory Board to assist the City in selecting performances for the season and in sharing the costs for these performances. To expand financial resources, MTAB agreed to acquire property by gift, devise, bequest, or otherwise.

1972

In Greek mythology, Atropos and her sisters, Clotho and Lachesis were responsible for human destiny. Sculpted by Hanna Stewart, Atropos Key sits atop the Miller hill and was donated to the City of Houston by Patricia S. Woodard. Atropos Key is a polished, tool-surface, cast bronze sculpture mounted on a concrete trapezoidal base faced with black slate.

1977

The Texas Legislature authorized cities to allocate a portion of an increased hotel/motel occupancy tax to promote tourism.

1978

Cultural Arts Council of Houston was created to allocate 1% hotel/motel occupancy taxes for arts in support of tourism with a 20% allocation for programming at Miller Outdoor Theatre.

1997

The “1968 Miller Outdoor Theatre” was refurbished in 1996. A \$6 million expansion and renovation was planned and funded jointly by the City of Houston and Friends of Hermann Park. Roof and siding were replaced, and additional restrooms and office areas were installed. A small stage was added to the east end of the facility, playing to a newly incorporated open plaza area. Additional work and storage space, and a life safety package were installed in the theatre’s backstage area. The renovated MOT building opened in Spring of 1998.

1999

The Theatre Board, with the help of other civic organizations and the approval of the City Parks And Recreation Department, embarked on an ambitious plan to upgrade the concessions at MOT in order to enhance the theatre experience.

2005

The Miller Theatre Advisory Board launched its own programming initiative, raising funds to present outstanding, international performers.

2008

Improvements were undertaken to:

- Increase accessibility and seating options for people with disabilities
- Enhance pedestrian flow of traffic
- Reconstruction of the walkway around the hill, decreasing the incline and making it wider
- Add new aisle lighting
- Add new overhead industrial-sized fans for air circulation
- Add new landscaping

2009

Improvements were undertaken to:

- Raise the hill’s seating area, add new irrigation and new sod
- Install a new permanent booth for controlling stage lights and sound
- Install 6 new light poles at the back of the hill to light the pedestrian walkway that goes around the hill
- All 1,581 of the aluminum seats under the canopy were removed and 1,705 new seats were installed
- Concrete in seating area was resurfaced
- Hill drainage was improved

MOT Snap Shot (continued)

2010

Miller Outdoor Theatre opened the 2010 season with a new \$1.5 million sound system, the latest upgrade in a set of \$3.9 million in improvements since 2008.

“In addition to being a performing arts venue, leverage the identity of MOT to become an attraction for families, young professionals, and the creative class that surround the Park.”

2013

Improvements were undertaken to add:

- Irrigation improvements including irrigation at the hill seating and surrounding area
- Underground water tank and pump to support the irrigation system, sod and turf aeration
- Decomposed granite top dressing, grading and drainage modifications

2014

In addition to a new roof and mezzanine, other projects of a maintenance nature included:

- Center cluster replacement
- Concessions area concrete and window repairs
- Dimming panel upgrade
- Added spot lights on catwalk to illuminate the hill
- Replacement glass and light bulbs in the dressing rooms

“MOT takes the arts out of a tuxedo and expensive car. It is open, friendly and relaxed!”

Regional Site Conditions

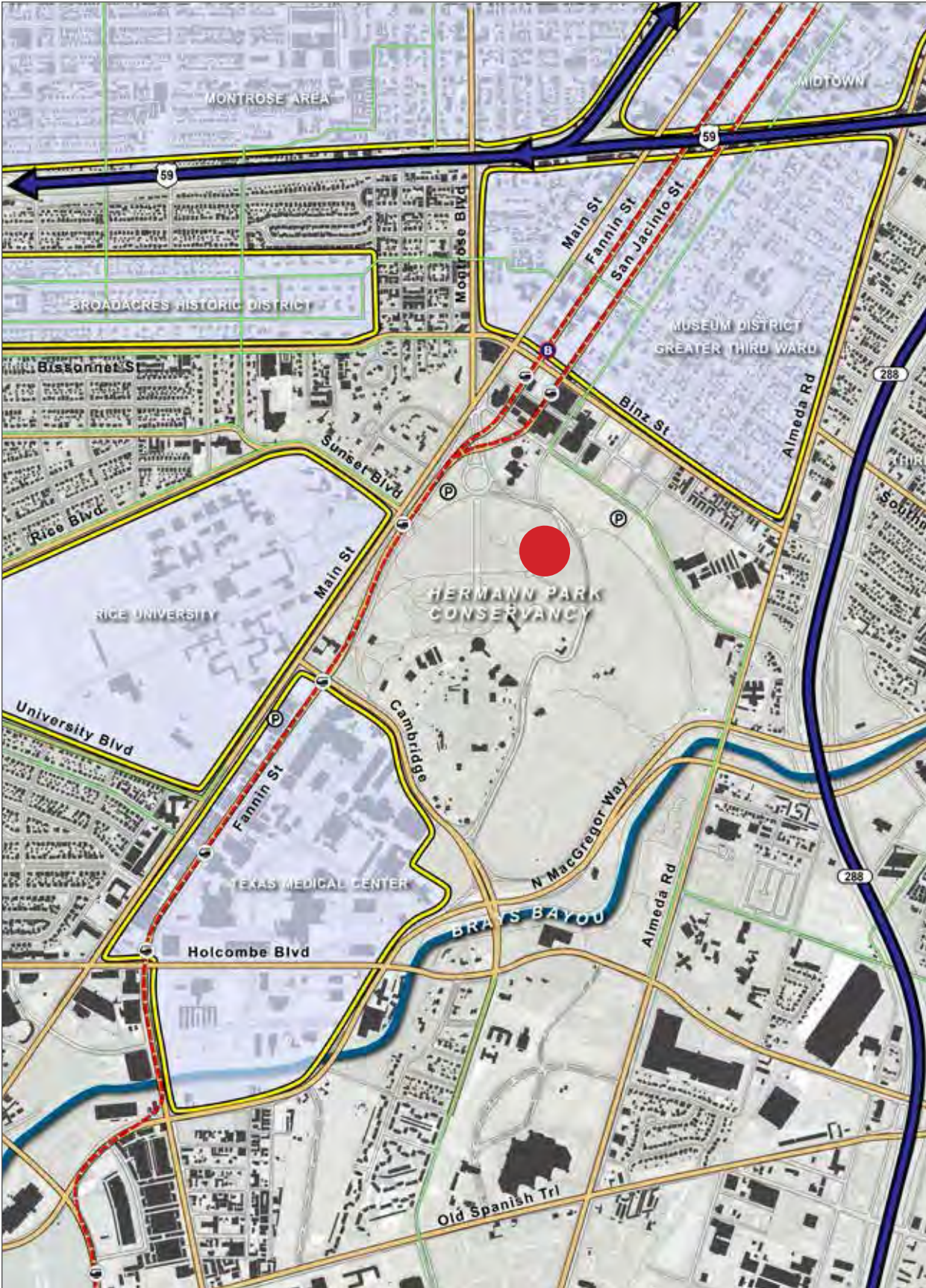


MILLER OUTDOOR THEATRE WITH THE GALLERIA BEYOND

















Miller Outdoor Theatre is located south of Downtown Houston and less than four miles from the city’s hub of performing arts venues in the Houston Theater District. MOT occupies one of Houston’s most vibrant urban districts. Included are Houston world-class museums to the north, the world’s largest medical center – TMC – to the south, the historical Third Ward to the east and venerable Rice University to the west. These institutions have long defined the local context





and in the last decade have begun to drive strong demand as a highly-desirable residential area. The theatre consistently ranks among Houston’s top destination venues and is likewise popular with neighboring communities, too.

“Maintain a balance between local cultural arts and high quality performances.”

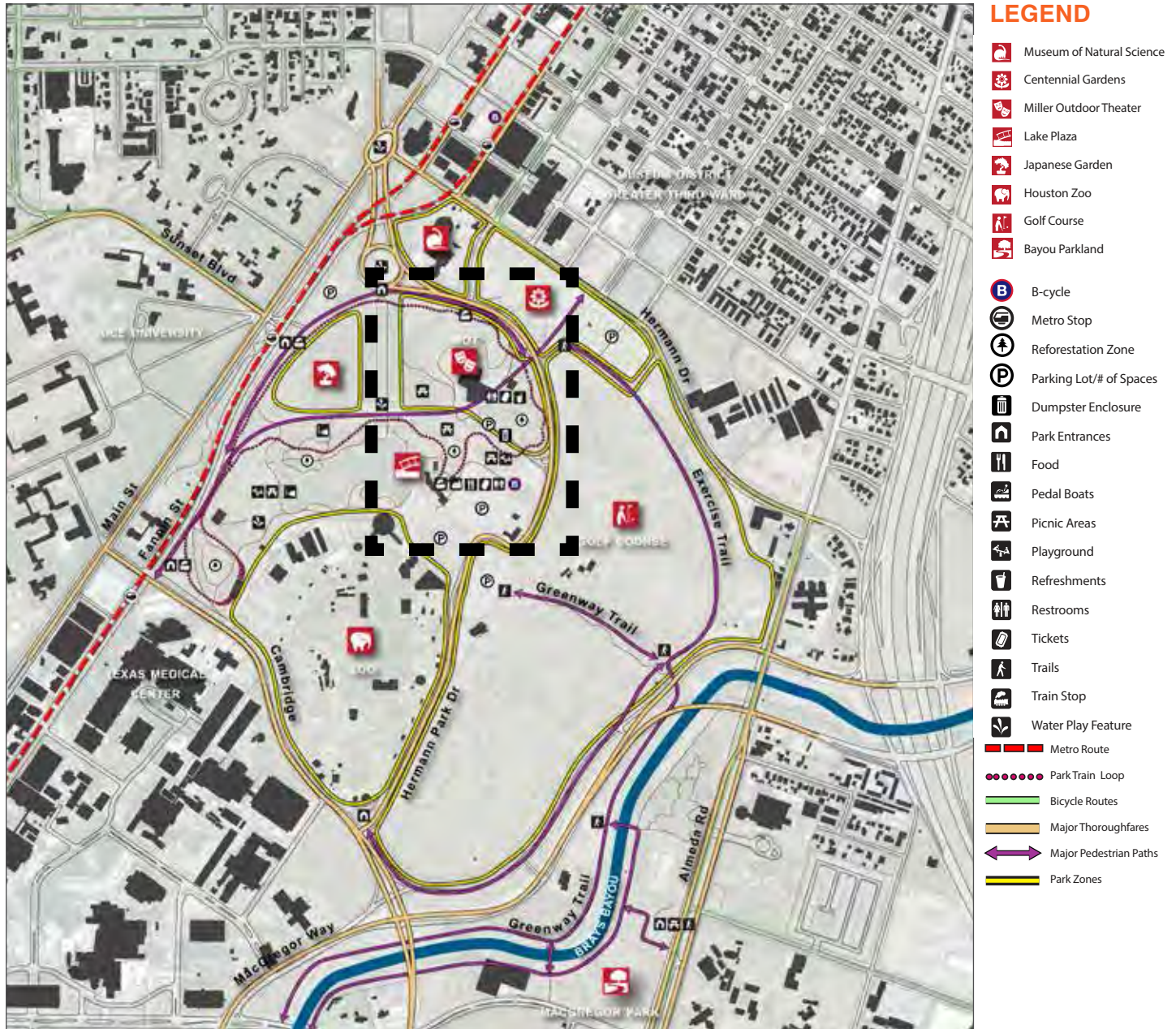


LEGEND

-  B-cycle
-  Metro Stop
-  Reforestation Zone
-  Parking Lot/# of Spaces
-  Dumpster Enclosure
-  Park Entrances
-  Food
-  Pedal Boats
-  Picnic Areas
-  Playground
-  Refreshments
-  Restrooms
-  Tickets
-  Trails
-  Train Stop
-  Water Play Feature

-  Metro Route
-  Bicycle Routes
-  Major Thoroughfares
-  Miller Outdoor Theatre

Contextual Site Conditions



HERMANN PARK AND ITS SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS

Patrons attending performances may come from any direction in the City and surrounding metropolitan area. Major freeways providing regional access include US 59 from the north and south, US 288 from the south and Main Street from Loop 610 to the south and Downtown from the north. METRO's Red Line provides transit

service with local stops both at the Hermann Park Station and the Museum Station. The local street network includes Hermann Drive to the north and Cambridge Drive to the south which are connected by Hermann Park Drive. Public parking is available in a number of lots at Hermann Park and on-street. The primary parking lots are shared with



AERIAL IMAGE OF HERMANN PARK 2012

the Houston Zoo and Centennial Gardens. Both access and parking capacities can be severely constrained when MOT has a major performance and/or when simultaneous events are held at Hermann Park. Details related to access and parking are provided in the next Section 3.

“The Zoo and MOT are sufficiently remote from each other such that there is little opportunity for shared facilities such as restrooms, food services and giftshops.”

Local Site Conditions



PARK AMENITIES

Programmatic Elements

MOT is situated in the northeast quadrant of Hermann Park, which it shares with the Houston Museum of Natural Science and the recently opened Centennial Gardens (previously the Garden Center). The Houston Zoo is located to the south, the Reflection Pool and Japanese Garden to the west and the Hermann Park Golf Course to the east. It is located on approximately 7.5 acres of triangularly-shaped land.

“The METRO light rail is at capacity, but it is not possible to increase service frequency without impacting access in the TMC particularly for emergency vehicles.”



CIRCULATION ROUTES

Circulation

The Hermann Park Train, a popular miniature train ride, traverses the most public side of the theatre property. Staff parking and loading are afforded by a controlled cul-de-sac from Hermann Park Drive.

“Being open air is by far a plus, rather than a liability.”

- Major Pedestrian Travel
- Secondary Pedestrian Travel
- Pedestrian Paths
- MOT Entries
- Vehicular Access Route
- Park Train Loop
- MOT Activity Boundary

Theatre Conditions

What was once “a permanent bandstand” in Hermann Park is today a “first-class proscenium theatre, professionally operated and committed to providing quality and diverse performances worthy of the great international city that Houston has become.” Today, the theatre is principally comprised of the hill and sloping lawn with open seating, covered fixed seating, the stage and back of house functions. The theatre’s “hill” was created with dirt from Fannin Street excavations to accommodate the growing Texas Medical Center. A freestanding concession building completes the built facilities. Patrons arrive primarily from the Zoo Parking lot to the south and via the plaza at Stage Right.

Seating is provided for 1,705 patrons and 20 wheelchair spaces, plus a sloping lawn that accommodates approximately 4,500 more patrons on blankets or lawn chairs.

This facility is the only outdoor proscenium theatre in the country that offers more than 130 artistically excellent and culturally diverse performances in an annual season of events, totally free of charge to the public. It is unique, a Houston treasure and a cultural tourism destination. Since 2009, more than 2.97 million Houstonians and visitors attended 925+ performances and films, making MOT the most attended amphitheater in the country.

Theatre Structure

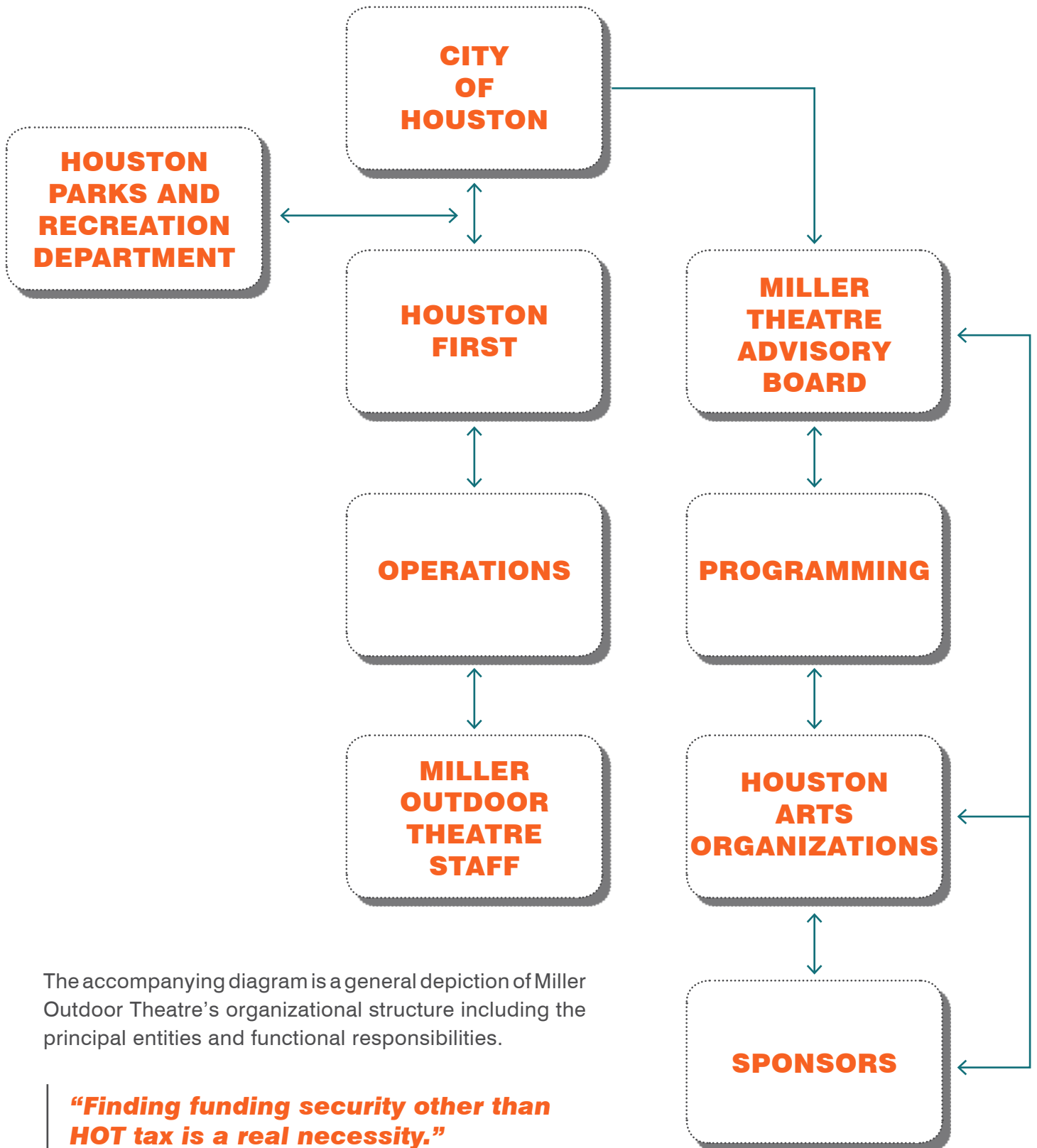
- 64 x 41 foot stage
- 54 line sets for hanging lights, curtains and scenery
- An orchestra pit which can be raised and lowered
- Dressing rooms
- Offices
- Full complement of theatrical equipment
- 100-ton air conditioning system to cool the performance area

Theatre Attributes

- 8 month season
- Professional entertainment that is artistically excellent
- Cultural diversity
- Always free of charge to the public
- Largest “always free” program of its kind in the country

“Loading occurs at the south plaza via MOT’s driveway and cul-de-sac. Considering leveling the loading berth which will ease loading and unloading of equipment.”

MOT Organization Chart



The accompanying diagram is a general depiction of Miller Outdoor Theatre’s organizational structure including the principal entities and functional responsibilities.

“Finding funding security other than HOT tax is a real necessity.”