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Guest writer

## OPINION | PATRICIA M. BLICK: Center in limbo

What is in future for Curran Hall? *by Patricia M. Blick Special to the Democrat-Gazette | May 18, 2022 at 4:03 a.m.*

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Twenty years ago today, the official Little Rock Visitor Information Center at Curran Hall was opened with great pomp, circumstance, and celebration. Today, as we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the opening, the future use of this significant site is in question.

Originally, the Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) managed day-to-day operations, but in 2006 decided to cut ties. The city then put out a request for proposals to find a new manager for the Visitor Information Center and the Quapaw Quarter Association won the contract with the commitment of support from the city and the CVB totaling \$100,000.

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The association was required to close the center when the pandemic hit, and as a result, the city and the CVB suspended their management fees until we were authorized to reopen. The Visitor Information Center was reopened in June 2021, and the city reinstated its portion of the management fee; the CVB did not. This cut represents a 60 percent drop in the operations budget.

The Quapaw Quarter Association continues to operate the center in accordance with the management agreement that was adopted by the city in 2010. But even with reducing expenses as much as possible,

the fee from the city doesn't cover the cost to keep the Visitor Information Center open. The association is not in a financial position to cover the losses to operate the center indefinitely.

We have shared our concerns with the city and have asked if it is feasible to modify the management agreement or to increase its allocation. The city said it would get back to us.

We've also talked with the CVB. The new CEO, Gina Gemberling, met with me and Little Rock Visitor Foundation board president Wally Nixon, and shared that the CVB is undergoing a strategic planning exercise right now and would not be able to give us a definitive answer about promoting the center or restoring financial support to keep it open. Its consultants preparing the strategic plan did reach out to me last week to conduct an interview.

We believe that our state capital should have a great visitor center with easy parking, accessible entry, and public restrooms. The Visitor Information Center at Curran Hall fulfills all of these requirements.

As we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the opening and dedication of the center at Curran Hall, we look to the future. We hope that includes not only maintaining the Visitor Information Center at Curran Hall, but its promotion, preservation, and appropriate financial support from the city and the CVB.

The Little Rock Visitor Foundation invites the public to Curran Hall, 615 E. Capitol Ave., from 5-6 this afternoon. We will have cake, champagne and lemonade to celebrate this milestone. RSVP: [curranhallvic@quapaw.com](mailto:curranhallvic@quapaw.com).

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Patricia M. Blick is executive director of the Quapaw Quarter Association.

*Print Headline: Center in limbo*

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