

Massey Performing Arts Centre Task Force

Thursday, April 18, 2013 – 5:00 pm
Committee Room No. 2 – City Hall

NOTES

VOTING MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillor Jaimie McEvoy	Chair
Vance McFadyen	Community Member at Large (departed at 6:30 pm)
Bob Osterman	Community Member at Large (departed at 6:45 pm)
Jessica Schneider	Executive Director, Massey Theatre Society
Charles Lester	Arts Council Representative
Margaret Ross	Community Member at Large

REGRETS:

Valerie Easton	Community/Amateur Performing Arts Sector – Artistic Representative
Dolores Kirkwood	Community/Amateur Performing Arts Sector – Artistic Representative
Don Parman	Technical (sound/lighting) Director or Production Manager
Eric Pattison	Architect at Large Representative
Kelly Proznik	NWSS Performance Arts Department
Camilla Tibbs	Professional Performing Arts Community Representative
Jim Alkins	School Board Representative (Non-Voting Staff)

NON-VOTING PRESENT

Stan Watchorn	School Board Representative (Non-Voting Staff)
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NON-VOTING ADVISORS/STAFF:

Lisa Spitale	Acting Chief Administrative Officer
Greg Magirescu	Manager, Arts & Cultural Development
Terry Dunlop	Recording Clerk

The meeting was called to order at 5:20 p.m.

1.0 QUORUM

The Chair called the meeting to order following information that an absent member had previously advised he would be in attendance. With arrival of that member, there would be quorum. [Several members were unable



to attend because of their involvement in a local musical theatre production] Also, due to circumstances of inclement weather and traffic disruptions causing significant delays, it was agreed that pending arrival of the missing member when quorum would be obtained, the meeting would proceed. Once quorum was obtained, regular business, including adoption of the minutes, would continue. In the meantime, leave was given to begin the meeting and to subsequently hear the scheduled presentation on theatre funding.

2.0 ADOPTION OF MINUTES

2.1 Adoption of the Minutes of February 21, 2013

Due to the lack of quorum, the minutes could not be considered for adoption at this time. However, in the absence of Mr. Jim Alkins, Stan Watchorn brought forward proposed corrections to the text of the previously circulated draft minutes. The Chair allowed the corrections proposed by Mr. Alkins to be read into the record and tabled, pending quorum. For the record, Mr. Watchorn then read out the following proposed corrected text; the yellow-highlighted portion shown in the draft minutes under item 7.1- New Westminster School District Update on page 3, would be **deleted** and replaced with wording shown in Italics below:

7.1 New Westminster School District Update

Jim Alkins, School Board representative, updated the Task Force on the design plans and development of the new Massey Theatre and schools. Mr. Alkins noted it was anticipated that the elementary school would be occupied in 2013 and that a designer would be selected for the middle school in the next month Other details regarding the development of the school and new Massey Theatre were noted, and included the following points:

- Construction on the elementary school was delayed due to its location over an archeological site;
- The School Board's hesitation to approve funding on the middle school, and that it would not be completed until 2016/2017;
- The new Massey Theatre would not be completed until 2017/2018.

The following corrected wording would be substituted for the proposed deleted text shown above:

elementary school would be occupied in September 2014. The process for selection of the design build team for the new middle school on the John Robson site will begin next month. The middle school is scheduled to be occupied in September 2015. Constructing of the new secondary school is scheduled to begin at

that time. The secondary school schedule will be confirmed once the design team is selected. It may involve phased demolition and construction. There may be a 24-month disruption in the operation of the Massey Theatre due to construction activity.

Procedural Note:

The members present agreed to accept the proposed corrected text; however, in the absence of quorum, the corrected draft minutes remained **tabled** until quorum was obtained or for later consideration at the next regular meeting of the Task Force.

3.0 PRESENTATIONS

3.1 Theatre Gap Analysis presentation

Christopher Wootten reviewed an illustrated presentation that highlighted demographics, including population and regional growth, covering a timeframe between 1991 and 2021. An electronic copy of the presentation is on file in the Legislative Services office.

The following is a synopsis of significant highlights of the presentation, which suggested justification for a possible larger theatre in New Westminister. Key findings included major regional growth that now places New Westminister in the centre of Metro Vancouver. Other factors noted were:

- 2021 population growth in New Westminister project at 84% versus 52% for Metro Vancouver
- Neighbouring municipalities (Burnaby, Coquitlam, Surrey) projected to grow even more rapidly
- 1992-2010 shows 76% growth in participation in Arts, Culture and Heritage (double the amount spent on live sports events)
- Education levels strongly determine attendance in Arts, Culture and Heritage events
- New Westminister should expect steady future growth in audiences for the arts
- Postwar boom in theatre construction – in 1949 only 7 other theatres had seating capacity more than 1,000; now 8 theatres in BC seat more than 1,000; 50 in Canada seat more than 1,000
- Average seating capacity in Lower Mainland/Fraser Valley (excluding Vancouver) is 717 versus 768 in Toronto areas; Massey Theatre is therefore larger than the average
- Size of theatres now being built (excluding Vancouver) averages 750 seats

- Headcount for attendance at Massey Theatre indicates a downward trend [a significant factor was the 2005/6 disruption when the theatre was unavailable]
- Large drop in commercial bookings and public events due to uncertainties surrounding future of theatre
- The Royal City Musical Theatre Company, Royal City Youth Ballet, New Westminster Symphony and Maple Leaf Singers all remain strong with solid annual attendance.

Municipal subsidies to arts centres:

1. Massey with 1260 seats and 149 uses – annual subsidy is \$78,500
 2. 1000 seat Bell Theatre in Surrey operates on break-even basis without subsidy but is supported by School District
 3. Surrey Arts Centre has annual subsidy of \$1.6 million
 4. Michael J Fox Theatre in Burnaby has 600 seats and is highly used (400 uses) booked 300 days per year. Draws audiences from lower mainland and is walking distance from SkyTrain. It has had consistent management for 20 years – operates on a break-even basis with zero funding from the City and School District
 5. Evergreen Centre, Coquitlam operated by Board of Directors – receives \$700,000 from the City. There is proposed construction of a 600 – 800 seat new theatre
 6. Centennial Theatre in North Vancouver has 705 seats with a \$500,000 subsidy
 7. Port Theatre in Nanaimo – 802 seats, contracted out by the City with \$450,000 management fee.
- Considerations in theatre sizing are competition aspects (70 performing arts centres in BC – not including casino theatres)
 - Impact of increasingly sophisticated home entertainment equipment
 - Increasing costs of transportation, fuel, traffic, tolls, etc.
 - Trend towards reduced funding for the arts impacting arts production and touring performances
 - Future competition:
 - state of the art theatre planned for Surrey (1250 seats)
 - A 600-800 theatre planned in Coquitlam
 - National trend is towards purpose-built halls that heighten the live experience
 - Consideration of size versus intimacy underscores the trend towards smaller facilities but with excellent facilities



Some recommendations and conclusions:

- Acknowledge overall growth in attendance of performing arts
- Recognize that the demographics predict continued growth
- Assess the impact of the new (2014) Anvil Centre
- Consider joint management of the Anvil and Massey Theatre to coordinate and maximize use of both facilities; management is a critical factor in achieving success
- Massey Theatre can be a regional “flagship” theatre. Consider a theatre size of 800-1,000 seats, technically advanced and with prominent street visibility (ensure school access is separate)
- Address the factors in the design/build approach
- Explore a possible one-time 3-5 year municipal “stimulus” package to bring both the Anvil and Massey Theatre to their full potential
- Undertake a study to measure the effects of closing and reopening the Massey Theatre

Vance McFadyen departed at 6:30 pm

In ensuing discussion, members offered the following comments, questions and input:

- In order to respond to the impacts of home electronics (theatres, tablets etc.) ensure that audiences enjoy a terrific experience – provide enhanced experiences to get people out of their homes
- The changed demographic of core-users in the local area was acknowledged but the 50-70,000 annual attendees are not locally based. The significance of connection to the school/education system serves to bring children to experience the arts
- Suggest that the presentation be made available with the notes of the meeting. There are two perceived sets of responses; one is the School District’s which views the design/build approach as an effective cost management structure. Changing this midstream might be problematic (School District funding is based on a 650-seat facility). A second perspective is the desire to create an intimate experience that cannot be reproduced elsewhere.
- The ability to close off areas of a larger venue can enhance intimacy. Consider ways in which with application of technology and foresight it might be possible to create a shell with a proscenium arch that could be changed to create a unique experience without being totally “married” to the traditional proscenium concept. In response, the presenter suggested it was ultimately a question of money. A perfect example was the *Red Robinson Theatre* [at the Coquitlam Casino] that can be adapted as suggested, but the cost per seat is \$7,000. Alternatively, one could look at fixed seating and doing it well.

- There was comment that while a 700+ seat theatre was understandable based on demographics etc., but another recommendation proposes a 1,000 seat venue because New Westminster should continue its role as a regional destination. This conclusion was challenged on the basis it is solely a value consideration. It was contended that the presenter might have been influenced by history in the community. A 750-seat venue was likely the “sweet spot” but there is an aspiration in the community for more and this seems to have led to a recommendation for an 850-seat theatre.

Bob Osterman departed at 6:45 pm

- The “black box” theatre at the SFU downtown [Vancouver] campus was cited as an example that could accommodate both adaptable ramps and a proscenium arch-type theatre.
- The presentation could be strengthened to support the final goal of a larger venue. It should lay out the context of the community factor, address specific trends, e.g. a more intimate experience.
- In purpose built facilities, the ecology is not singular. For example, ballet, musicals and diverse school uses all have their own needs. That link should be made in any final recommendation.
- The average of some of the statistics is problematic – there is a need to make links to the project out into the future, by types of activity. The question should be posed as to what are the realistic aspirations?
- The presenter suggested that Massey Theatre use should be in the range of 225 uses per year. Members were cautioned to remain mindful of all the things that could go wrong.
- For musical theatre, ballet, symphony, etc., 1000 seats **is** intimate.
- Amenities and lobby quality issues are valid issues; all the amenities, e.g., orchestra pit, wings, flytower etc., are equally important. Intimacy aspects are also valid. The Task Force has to recommend to Council and this centres on the overall experience to be achieved.
- Some very good backstage components are needed so there is a permanently available benefit.
- Although there might be some initial reservations with the design/build (d/b) concept, the contractor is in overall control and the architect then designs what the builder needs to do. The question to be considered is whether more funds should be devoted to architects’ fees or to the actual building. Upfront work is much greater in d/b. If the space, electronics, flyspace etc are already known, every bidder then has a common field in which to compete. D/b can deliver more facility for the money than the traditional method of construction. On cost per seat,

- this should be based on significant incremental leaps – it may not be that much more but it needs further analysis.
- The Chair observed that he hoped the Task Force would get past a heavily personalized approach to the decision-making process towards a more objective understanding. The presentation appears to bring the process part way. However, there remains a need to identify elements that have an effect on the total theatre experience. Any evidence to support the notion that New Westminster is the centre of the lower mainland should be more clearly articulated. At present, the Massey Theatre appears to be under-marketed and needs to change its feeling towards the City. Quite often, the future does not turn out to be what is anticipated and there is therefore a need to look at the evidence and what is actually happening. The presentation did not link the future of performing arts in terms of future theatre audiences. Ultimately, the final recommendation of an 800-1000 seat venue is where the debate lies. The big step remaining is the costing. The critical issue is the situation that the real difference is the cost and value of the proposed additional seats enhancing the quality experience.

Next Steps:

- ❖ The members present proposed that the staff work more closely with the presenter to further finesse the recommendations stemming specifically from the research, rather than the aspirational approach. Costs need to be more clearly defined. The recommendations could be split between the baseline and the “what ifs?”
- ❖ Decision-makers will require strong justifications to support the option for a more attractive and technically advanced venue. More development of the options is needed in this area.
- ❖ All the information gathered to date must be strongly articulated for the decision-makers. The deadline for submission to the province is now October, 2013, which allows some extra time to hone the recommendations. The Chair proposed that staff and the presenter meet with the Chief Administrative Officer to develop follow-up actions.
- ❖ At the next meeting, there should be consideration of some interim reporting-out to the community and stakeholders on the Task Force’s progress to date.

3.2 Massey Theatre Fundraising Strategy – Jessica Schneider

No report was presented.

4.0 UNFINISHED BUSINESS

4.1 Site development update – Jim Alkins

No report was presented.

5.0 NEW BUSINESS

No items.

6.0 REPORTS AND INFORMATION

No items.

7.0 NEW BUSSINESS

No items.

8.0 CORRESPONDENCE

No items.

9.0 NEXT MEETING

9.1 Thursday, May 16, 2013 at 5:00 pm – Committee Room No. 2 – City Hall

10.0 ADJOURNMENT

The meeting concluded at 7:25 p.m.

Councillor Jaimie McEvoy
Chair

Terry Dunlop
Recording Clerk