

Theatre Assessments (to Report Compendium)

Massey Theatre

Status

Massey Theatre will become a civic theatre in 2020. It is a 1260 seat proscenium theatre that has been part of the New Westminster Secondary School (NWSS) since its construction 1949. In 2020, the theatre will be separated from the school and become a stand-alone building complex. Its advocates have lobbied to keep this historic structure, and its rehearsal spaces. The potential exists to make it a local and regional hub for the performing arts with opportunities for collaboration and experimentation, presentation and entertainment.

Massey Theatre is a loved and coveted facility because it has held a very special relationship with the youth of NWSS, especially it's visual and performing arts students. Maintaining and growing that interaction is an important role for the Massey Theatre. The City has a role to play by partnering with School District #40 to make sure all schools continue to have preferential access for their events and assemblies.

When Massey Theatre joins the list of municipal amenities, it will be part of a growing civic precinct at the corner of Eighth Street and Eighth Avenue; the new secondary school will be completed, across the street is Century House Seniors Centre and the Youth Centre, and a new open space/park will be part of Massey Theatres' surroundings.

The Massey Theatre Society has a strong track record of sustained governance, safe and effective facility stewardship, artistic programming and professional artistic staff services. It has typically generated 95% of its annual budget through diversified earned revenues with 5% of its resources derived from grants from local, provincial and federal sources.

History and Background

The Massey Theatre was designed and constructed in 1948 by E. Evans and Son and W.M. Bow Associate Architects of Vancouver. In its original form, the building had a strong modern identity indicative of post-war optimism. The Massey Theatre was named after the first Canadian Governor General Vincent Massey and opened in 1949 as British Columbia's largest theatre. Vincent Massey was the author of the pivotal 1950's "Massey Report" that set Canada's arts and culture policy. The report also created the much-loved CBC and the Canada Council.

The first production was on December 16, 1949. Since then it's lights have shone on thousands of performances and community events. The Massey has become a cherished space to experience the arts and engage the community. The Massey Theatre hosts musical theatre hits, international music and dance performances, children's entertainers, orchestras, choirs and touring stars.

The 1260 seat capacity of the main hall makes it the largest proscenium theatre in the region outside of Vancouver. The main floor seating capacity is 867 plus ten wheelchair positions and the balcony seats 393.

The City of New Westminster will take ownership of the theatre in 2020, when separated from the school and the school programs in the rehearsal rooms, small gym and studios move to the new school. The separation will open up these spaces to be used by the local community following renovations and upgrades to the structure.

Operations

The Massey Theatre is a "road-house" which undertakes several artistic and community programs but does not directly produce professional performances. The theatre is available year-round as a rental facility for non-profit organizations and commercial businesses for a range of activities.

The physical plant and equipment requirements for this professional performing arts centre are highly complex and demanding. All of the theatre's mechanical systems, as well as theatre rigging, lighting and audio systems, require continual maintenance and upgrading. Health and safety and training programs are detailed and require ongoing investment to operate the theatre effectively, skillfully and safely.

As the theatre handles large numbers of performers and audience members regularly, safety and risk management systems are detailed and extensive.

Other programs and services include:

- Ticket Centre – full service
- Food and beverage services
- Marketing support services
- Plaskett Gallery and visual arts engagement programs
- Salon-style gallery concerts, performances and gatherings
- Site-specific activations
- Reception and meeting space rental
- Rehearsal room rental

- Workshops, camps and masterclasses with visiting artists
- Administrative, storage and meeting space for established user groups
- Artists in Residence opportunities
- Development of large-scale productions through residencies on stage
- Social and Community development opportunities
- Theatre technician training programs
- Extensive volunteer program

Governance

The Massey Theatre Society began as the Massey Theatre Preservation Society in 1983 and became a registered charitable non-profit society to fundraise to re-equip the technical needs of the theatre. The school transferred the operations to the Massey Theatre Society in 1993 under an operating agreement. The professional staff was hired, and a sustainable operating model was adopted.

Purpose of Massey Theatre Society

The Massey Theatre Society is governed by a Board of Directors of eight members who provide policy and governance direction to staff. The purposes of the Society are:

- *To advance the knowledge and appreciation of, and to stimulate interest in, and the study of, the visual and performing arts;*
- *To present a variety of performances by recognized local, national and international performing artists and groups at the Massey Theatre and other venues;*
- *To provide facilities for education and instruction in the visual and performing arts;*
- *To receive bequests, legacies, donations gifts, funds and property from all sources and to hold and invest such funds and property and to administer and distribute such funds and property for the purposes of the Society;*
- *To do all such other things as are incidental and ancillary to the attainment of the foregoing purposes and the exercise of the powers of the Society.*

Building Profile and Improvements

The Massey Theatre complex is in need of repair and restoration particularly the exterior and infrastructure. For the past 10 years while a decision was considered for its demolition and replacement only critical repairs were undertaken by the School District. The City of New Westminster was not prepared to lose this

historic building and in accepting the ownership of it, is aware of the enormity of the task ahead. Funds have been reserved for this work. With rising costs the full repurposing of the interior spaces may not be immediately possible.

Massey Theatre and its hallways and rooms have a very utilitarian and dated ambience. The dream for the future includes not only the restoration and renovation of the exterior of the complex but also the interior finishes that will be more attractive and convenient for audiences as well as the performers on stage.

In preparation for the restoration and renovation that will begin when the building is separated from the old school, planning is underway to address the needs of the performing arts during the construction. Review of the Massey Performing Arts Centre Task Force work of 2013 and consultation on the physical attributes at the May 4, 2019 community workshop, reiterated the requirements necessary to make the Massey Theatre a magnet for local performing arts and professional touring entertainment.

Booking Chart Across 7 Seasons

Massey Theatre Overview of Bookings 2012-2019							
July 1 - June 30	30-06-19	30-06-18	30-06-17	30-06-16	30-06-15	30-06-14	30-06-13
Non-Profit	31	28	28	49	21	20	29
Resident	36	29	29	24	23	23	23
Commercial	22	14	14	15	13	13	18
NWSS/SD40	26	35	35	20	23	23	29
Massey Presentations	4	6	6	8	8	8	4
RCTC	3	2	2	0	0	0	0
Production Residency	44	17	17	0	2	0	2
Rehearsals	16	26	26	33	47	17	29
Church/Services	2	1	1	2	2	2	1
Movies	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Booked Days	193	167	181	160	148	115	152
Annual Attendance	TBA	57,086	52,399	54,160	54,163	50,503	60,366
2010-2011, SD#40 eliminated direct support to MTS. Each booking is paid for by the program or school using the theatre. Cost is direct staff cost plus 50% of lowest rental rate.							
The Theatre pays for Hydro and custodian costs for all performances except school use.							

It is clear from the chart that only in the 2018-2019 season is there a significant increase in theatre use by resident and commercial users. With the uncertainty of the previous years, renters and promoters now are confident in making commitments and work to build their audiences at this theatre.

The Society hosts a season of events predominantly from September to June to ensure artistic and cultural diversity on its stage. A booking policy provides priority to historic users and then is open to presenting and other rentals.

The Society curates the Plaskett Gallery and offers a small array of visual arts engagement programs. A focus is placed on delivering programs for children, youth and families, showcasing Indigenous culture, presenting diverse professional performances, engaging Indigenous citizens in cultural programs and performance experiences, audience and community development, and public placemaking.

Massey Theatre Society actively fundraises and applies to foundations and provincial and federal arts programs for specific initiatives. The presenting program directed by the Massey Theatre Society is very prudent with the programming risks so as not to create operating deficits.

The Society receives grants from the City of New Westminster to provide discounted rental rates for local non-profit societies and the development of a youth program.

School District use of the Massey Theatre is open for annual events, and the cost of theatre staff is covered by the using department or elementary school.

The Future for the Massey Theatre Society

The Society has developed a placemaking vision for the facilities as well as activation goals for the multiple rooms and amenities that will be programmable following the upgrades. The Society has raised millions of dollars over the years invest in programming and capital equipment assets and improvements. A high level of community inclusion and participation is essential to the future vision for the facilities with numerous new and different relationships being developed.

Anvil Theatre

Status

In 2014, after many years of planning the Anvil Centre opened in the historic downtown of the City. The building includes the New Westminster Museum and Archives, the New Media Gallery, studios and meeting rooms, as well as a large conference hall and a 360-seat flexible flat floor theatre. The theatre is technically sophisticated with an intimate audience chamber and telescopic seating.

Operated and programmed by the Massey Theatre Society on behalf of the City since 2015 the theatre has developed a reputation for exceptional technical

Anvil Centre Theatre - Performing Arts and Arts Events			
Year	# of Performances	Attendance	Average audience
2016	30	7,183	239
2017	44	10,033	228
2018	48	11,350	236

service and support, the artistic quality of the presentations and innovative programming. Audience attendance has grown annually since its opening.

This chart shows the increase in the number of events and that audience numbers have kept pace. The indication is that a loyal theatre following is developing for the Anvil Theatre.

The theatre is also an important venue for conference and civic use.

Anvil Centre Theatre		
Year	Attendance	# events
Performing Arts events in the theatre		
2018	11,350	48
Conference events that use the theatre		
2018	6,975	37
Anvil Centre		
Total Attendance at conference events and meetings		
2018	29,884	300*
* This number includes every use of the meeting rooms		

This chart compares the use of the theatre for arts events and conference events

Conference use of the theatre in most cases is not singular, but part of a large-scale conference event that also inhabits most if not all available spaces in the

building. The theatre is an important selling feature for Anvil Centre Conference Services.

Under the Conference use category are also civic events that only use the theatre but are booked and jointly serviced by conference services and MTS staff.

The aggregate total of use of meetings rooms, conference spaces and the theatre provides a snapshot of the activity in the building.

Background and history

The need for a small flat floor flexible theatre was first identified in the Theatre Study completed by Proscenium Architecture in 2008. Within two years of this study, the needs of the Museum and Archives were identified as well as a need for a municipal art gallery, and cultural spaces. The Arts Strategy 2008-2013 informed the final requirements of the new space. In designing a multi-use architecturally significant building, the Anvil Centre has become an anchor of the historic downtown. The economic opportunities to provide professional entertainment for the growing downtown population was an appealing prospect.

Operations and Governance

Vision for Anvil Centre and Mandate for the Anvil Theatre

“As a vibrant gathering place for residents and visitors, the Anvil Centre will inspire community pride, cultivate commerce, promote tourism and foster learning and engagement through the celebration of arts, culture and heritage in our theatre, museum and archives, art gallery and studios as well as the hosting of special events and conferences.”

Some of the challenges faced in attaining this vision include accessibility, facility use and building design. When a building-wide conference event is held on the main floor of the Atrium and meeting rooms, a level of security is needed for clients to feel comfortable and to maintain semi-private access. This reduces the welcoming spontaneity that other community facilities have. The building design, particularly the configuration and placement of cultural and conference spaces within the building, creates a challenge, and although not insurmountable, effort is expended to provide facility-wide security and also to avoid a “closed off” feeling or a perception of segregation.

The Anvil Theatre is a civic facility. As part of the Anvil Centre, all the operating staff are municipal employees, except for the contract employees of the Massey Theatre Society, and other services needed in catering and equipment rentals needed by conference services.

The Massey Theatre Society has taken its role as the operator and programmer of the theatre on behalf of the City. The operating contract includes staffing the venue with a full-time Technical Supervisor and three part-time staff that book the theatre for rentals and hire the artistic product that results in the presenting programming.

As the oversight of the Anvil Theatre will be under a Manager, Community Arts and Theatre, the existing focus on presenting, performance rentals and unique developmental projects will remain.

Performing Arts Mandate and Community Access

During the Arts Strategy process, community consultations identified consistent access to the Anvil Theatre as a significant concern. A working group of staff and interested stakeholders was assembled to look at how these concerns could be addressed. This working group was concurrent with the work of the Theatre Strategy.

The Arts Strategy, and also during the Theatre Strategy consultations, the community is expressing a need for the theatre to be more affordable, as well as for more opportunities for indigenous artists and events reflecting the cultural diversity of the city's population. It should be noted that in most cases, these later initiatives will require developmental time to be "audience ready."

The Presenting Program

For purposes of this discussion, these definitions are in use although they are often interchangeable.

Presenting is booking performing arts shows that are audience ready, and the performers are paid a fee. Box office revenue accrues to the theatre.

Programming is a community development process that assists performing arts groups to create and produce works for performance and allows for developmental time to prepare them to be "audience ready." It is common for the cost to be shared between the venue and the company. Depending on the readiness of the work, a grant is obtained to allow the more company developmental time. Ticket revenue is also shared between the venue and the company.

The Anvil Theatre's role is twofold:

1. To **present** events and performances according to audience demand to enrich the lives of the community.
2. To **program** the opportunities for performing arts organizations to perform their creation or chosen discipline. These can be local or touring and

include the disciplines of drama, comedy, dance and music as well as literary readings and multi-media productions.

The presenting of events that are “audience ready” in the theatre occurs on a seasonal basis, which does not match the annual start and end of a municipal budget year. The theatre season is September to June, and the bulk of rentals occur in this period as well. Planning to attract and contract professional performers must be done a full year before the season itself. Performers and agents who have to arrange tours, pay royalties and develop transportation and accommodation, need to confirm dates at least a year in advance. Since the management and programming contract has been renewed annually, it has been challenging for MTS. Further, without a firm commitment to staffing the theatre, it is challenging to encourage local groups who might wish to work towards having a product that is audience ready, without the security of access.

Presenting professional works that complement established series, understanding the market in the region to avoid competitive events and then balancing that with support for the growing local professional performing arts sector are all considerations in programming the Anvil Theatre.

Building Improvements

The Anvil Centre is an outstanding building. It is modern with majesty in its design; it does, however, present some challenges for the Anvil Theatre.

Identified needs are:

1. Permanent box office with access to computers and easy public access for ticket purchase and pick-up.
2. Coat check area for theatre patrons but also for the visitors to the Museum and New Media Gallery
3. Front of House office (gathering place) for the Front of House Manager and the ushers and ticket takers.
4. Exterior signage to indicate what is playing in the theatre.

These needs are identified in the Theatre Strategy. Planning, design and capital funds have been allocated to address them over time.

Future

Under the oversight of the Manager, Community Arts and Theatre, the administrative and logistical challenges will be met. The Anvil Theatre popularity will grow as the presenting program increases. Special events and large community celebrations will help to increase public interest in the activities in the theatre and throughout the building.

Bernie Legge Theatre

Status

Bernie Legge Theatre located in Queens Park is a small 140 seat proscenium theatre that has been the home to the Vagabond Players for 50 years. The membership-based theatrical society leases the theatre from the City of New Westminster. The historic building began as a fish hatchery and was provided to the Vagabond Players in 1949.

Background and History

The Players became a registered charitable society and began the process of fundraising to renovate the building, create a proscenium and equip the theatre. Over the years they have built the stage, installed rigging, lights, sound and purchased the seats. They have set construction tools, a costume and props storage area, as well as a small lobby with a concession.

Operations and governance

The Vagabond Players are a membership society. Membership is open to anyone interested in volunteering to be involved in the theatre activities. In 2018-2019, the Society had 350 members.

The membership elects an Executive at each annual general meeting. They also hold monthly membership meetings to include members in decision-making. The Society has a lease agreement with the City of New Westminster and pays an annual lease fee.

All the participants in theatre productions, as actors or production crews are volunteers. The Executive committee proposes a series of plays to be produced, invites directors to establish their audition schedule. Anyone can audition and become a member of the Players. The Society schedules five productions a season and has tried a variety of youth activities in the summer.

With a simple mission to entertain and work for the love of theatre, the Vagabond Players have a strong and loyal audience, some who have been supporters for 20-30 years. An objective of the Society is to keep the tickets affordable.

The Bernie Legge Theatre is their meeting room, rehearsal space and performance space. Sets are constructed on the stage and costumes and props are also built in the building around rehearsal schedules.

The Vagabond Players are members of Theatre BC (a province-wide alliance of theatrical societies in British Columbia). They have made an effort to participate annually in the Theatre BC play festival.

Mandate and Community Access

The Vagabond Players mission statement is:

“Providing entertainment to the residents of New Westminister and surrounding communities by providing theatrical productions.”

The Vagabond Players believe that by being open to anyone who wishes to be a member and by offering this grassroots opportunity, they are providing community access.

Bernie Legge Attendance Figures			% of house
2016 Season	5 plays	6,670	62.9%
2017 Season	5 plays	8,384	78.6%
2018 Season	5 plays	7,495	70.7%
2019 season	5 plays	TBA	TBA
Summer co-productions			
2016	1 play	720	Alchemy Theatre
2017	1 play	612	Alchemy Theatre
2018	summer youth	n/a	n/a
2019	1 play	TBC	Page Theatre

Vagabond Players Lease Payment with City of New Westminister		
Paid July of each year		
Year	Annual Lease	3% Increase/Year
2012	\$1,200.00	
2013	\$2,400.00	
2014	\$3,600.00	3%
2015	\$3,708.00	
2016	\$3,819.24	
2017	\$3,933.82	
2018	\$4,051.83	

The Vagabond Players as owners of the all the theatre chattels are very careful about opening up the Bernie Legge Theatre to renters. When approached by community groups or other artists’ cooperatives, they have agreed to co-present in the building, which requires Vagabond members to volunteer for these other users. Past experience in handing over access to the building resulted in loss or damage to equipment, props or sets. Afterwards it was impossible to expect compensation or replacement from the renters.

Building Profile and Improvements

The building is small but in good condition overall. The exterior is well maintained by the City which had replaced the roof and made alterations when fire, safety and security required, including improved washrooms, exterior repairs when it was damaged and air conditioning.

Some hopes for improvements include:

- Expansion of the lobby to accommodate the size of the audience
- Improvement of the surrounding landscape with on-site LED lighting
- Additional handicapped parking closer to the theatre for their ageing audience

The Future

The Bernie Legge Theatre is a civic facility. Interest and requests to use the venue are increasing. The Bernie Legge Theatre is a nice size for small actors' cooperatives and student productions. The size allows play royalties to be small.

Members of the Vagabond Players attended the Community Workshop and understood the desire for the Bernie Legge Theatre to be more accessible.

Support will be needed for the Vagabond Players to provide opportunities for additional and varied community access. The volunteers are successful because they have control of their venue as a resident company.

With oversight by the Manager of Community Arts and Theatre, the enthusiasm of the Vagabond Players can be harnessed to broaden access as recommended in the Theatre Strategy.