



Stratford Arts & Culture Collective

Stratford Arts and Culture Centre Feasibility Study

November 2019

A report from



TCI Management Consultants

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Executive Summary outlines the key findings and recommendations from this investigation into the feasibility of a community performing arts centre in Stratford. It should be noted that this was a high-level analysis, looking primarily at utilization and operating feasibility, and did not involve design work or any assessment of capital costs.

Background and Need

This study was prompted by an expressed need on the part of mostly performing arts organizations in Stratford for a centre that was primarily for local use. Despite the City being blessed with the top-rated performing arts facilities of the Stratford Festival, these are: a) unavailable for much of the time due to Festival use, and b) too expensive (largely due to the requirement to use relatively expensive unionized labour). Local arts groups are forced to use churches, schools and other spaces which are not purpose-built and, in many cases, sub-optimal. It has long been a dream of these organizations to have a 'place of their own', and the SACC was formed in 2016 to pursue this ambition. In 2019, with the assistance of the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the firm of TCI Management Consultants was retained to undertake a high-level feasibility study of the idea. Their work entailed interviews with key stakeholders; a detailed assessment of utilization and ability-to-pay on the part of arts organizations; an online community survey; benchmarking and 'best practice' review of similar community facilities elsewhere; the development of a financial model and related analysis; and the preparation of this report.

Findings and Analysis

The key findings from the investigation were:

- all of the organizations consulted, and most of the community surveyed, felt there was a clear need for a community-serving performing arts facility and strongly support the concept
- the size parameters of expressed need for a facility were:
 - *range of 150 – 600 seats for the performing arts venue (shared among all users)*
 - *range of 400 – 1,500 sq. ft. for rehearsal space (shared among all users)*
 - *range of 1,200 to 1,500 sq. ft. of studio / workshop space (shared among all users)*
 - *total of 5,300 sq. ft. (rounded) of storage space (dedicated to each potential user)*
 - *total of 2,600 sq. ft. (rounded) of office / administrative space (dedicated to each potential user)*
- the required quality characteristics of the space would be excellent acoustics; a technical booth with a full range of lighting and sound media capabilities; proper backstage facilities (warmup area, washrooms, etc.); proper audience amenities (accessible lobby, washrooms, possible food service) – also desirable would be a large stage area with draperies, front curtain, cyclorama, etc.
- there are a number of organizations (6) who would constitute a core user base for a community performing arts facility with the characteristics outline above; these, plus occasional rentals by other performing arts organizations, would constitute sufficient usage to demonstrate quite reasonable levels of capacity utilization
- in addition, a role for the management of the facility in acting as an impresario in booking various touring performances, is envisaged
- two possibilities for sites have been proposed and were assessed: 1) Knox Presbyterian Church (which is likely 10+ years off) the recommendation is to pursue the Knox Church option at the present time – it is

recognized that a related possibility might be to start with a community performing arts centre in the in the Knox Presbyterian Church and then, if and when the Grand Trunk option becomes available, to explore that option at that time – it is also recognized that the overall local performing arts sector will have likely grown over that time and there may well be demand for two facilities

- it is assumed that there will be one incorporated ‘management entity’ that will be responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Centre; primary responsibilities of this organization will be scheduling use of the facility; relationships with the ‘landlord’ (which may be the City if the Grand Trunk model is ultimately chosen, or the developer if Knox Presbyterian Church emerges as the preferred option); maintenance and security of the space; programming the space by bringing in touring performances to the community at certain times; and financial administration
- a staff of seven positions is envisaged for the facility:

Staff Position	Key Responsibilities
General Manager <i>(full-time position)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overall ‘public face’ of the facility • municipal and other government relations • core tenant relations • fundraising and development • reporting to Board of Directors (may be Advisory Board)
Programmer / Scheduling Coordinator <i>(full-time position)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bookings of space, touring acts and local talent • marketing and promotion activities • volunteer coordination
Technical Director <i>(full-time position)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responsible for technical and equipment aspects of production
Financial Manager / Bookkeeper <i>(part-time)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘keeping the books’
Maintenance and Set Up Crew <i>(one full-time position; 2 part-time positions)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 positions @ \$30,000 average
Total Staffing	4 full-time positions; 3 part-time positions

- sources of revenues will be from core users (who would be permanent tenants of the facility); frequent users (other arts organizations who wish to rent the facility periodically throughout the year); community rentals; touring performances mounted by management; a City of Stratford grant; an annual fundraiser; and various miscellaneous donations
- assuming the capital cost of development of the facility can be dealt with through fundraising and other community contributions (e.g. from the City and from the developer) it appears as though its operation (which is expected to have a \$370,000 operating budget in a typical year) could be sustainable, assuming (as outlined above) that the City was prepared to help subsidize it to some degree (which is no different a situation from the City subsidizing a hockey area, or parks, or the library)

Next Steps

The recommended next steps for SACC in pursuing this initiative are:

1. Formally accept this report as a guiding document asserting that the concept of a community performing arts facility is feasible and desirable, and validates the mission of SACC. ***(should happen immediately)***
2. Seek an agreement in principle from the City that some contribution towards an operating fund for the Centre would be possible. ***(should happen in the first half of 2020)***

3. Recognizing that the Grand Trunk Community Hub will be a longer-term (if ever) option, continue (or re-initiate) dialogue with the developer and representatives of Knox Presbyterian Church regarding the potential for the arts and culture centre to be developed there. ***(should happen in the first half of 2020)***
4. A core user group, consisting of representatives from those organizations that have expressed a desire to have this new facility be a permanent or primary home for their activities, should be assembled to work with the architect in refining the concept further and ensuring that it is optimal to their needs. ***(should happen in the first half of 2020)***
5. SACC should transform itself (or sponsor the formation of a separate group for this purpose) into a not-for-profit charitable foundation, capable of collecting donations and entering into a contractual relationship with a potential employee. ***(should happen in the second half of 2020 if not sooner)***
6. Initial discussions should be held on a non-binding basis with individuals who could potentially take on the job of the General Manager (as outlined previously) in order to develop a roster of capable individuals when the time comes to recruit these. ***(should happen on an ongoing basis throughout 2020)***