

Presentation to Council
Monday March 17, 2008

Good evening Mayor Jackson and Council. Performing Arts Burlington is very pleased to speak to you about the proposed Performing Arts Centre. As you will recall, on February 19th at Community and Corporate Services we spoke in favour of Option C, a 718 seat Main Stage Theatre, and 225 seat Studio Theatre for the Performing Arts Centre. I noted that "as this project moves into the detailed design phase we look forward to the opportunity to provide input into aspects that will ensure technical excellence and spacial efficiency for performance and non-performance occasions."

Our Performing Arts Centre Advisory Committee has worked with the City since January 2002 when studies began about the feasibility of this project. Several members of that committee are still active six years later. They are not just interested by-standers but talented people with years of experienced in the design, construction, fitting and practical use and operation of performing arts centres. Through this committee Performing Arts Burlington has endeavoured to fairly and equitably represent the needs of our community and professional entertainers in dance, theatre and music, while at the same time ensuring that the audience will have an inviting, inclusive and memorable experience that will encourage their regular return.

On Monday March 10th, we met with many of our members, in partnership with the Project Management Team to receive their feedback on the proposed Option C. For many, this was their first look at the proposed layout. Everyone agreed that 718 seats in the main theatre and 225 in the studio theatre was the right seating capacity. But several had concerns about the placement of the studio theatre, feeling that it should be located in the back of the centre for accessibility to the main theatre and the loading dock and to enhance security for young performers. There were also concerns that this design did not provide for enough storage and that the hallway in the back of house was too narrow. What perhaps was a surprise to some, was that the studio theatre was now intended to have more uses than just performance. While it is still performance space, it will also be used as green room and marshalling area, and as event and reception space separate and in partnership with the lobby for private, corporate and civic functions.

The following Wednesday, Performing Arts Burlington again met with city staff to address these concerns and find solutions. Those solutions were presented last night to our members, most of whom were in attendance on March 10th. I am pleased to tell you that our members agree that their concerns have been addressed by the solutions outlined in DI 6/08. Our members support:

- The addition of a second floor area above the loading dock. With access through the second floor performers lounge, security for young performers is ensured and

also has greater proximity to the main theatre. This also provides a good sized space, between 1400 and 2000 square feet specifically for marshalling and performance preparation away from the audience and lobby activities, but would also be available for temporary storage. However, it is our opinion that this addition requires the immediate implementation of the freight elevator to accommodate, together with the stairs, the movement of people and equipment.

- Increased width for the back of house hallway between the studio theatre and the main theatre to relieve congestion and allow for easier movement of equipment from the loading dock to the lobby and studio theatre if necessary. While there may not be 100% consensus, we suggest that the equipment being used in the studio theatre can be moved through the loading door accessible from Locust Street, using vans and small trucks.
- Exploring the effect of turning, or adjusting the position of the studio theatre, still on the Locust Street side, to allow for better access to back of house and the main theatre.

It will be of interest to those of you who attended March 10th meeting, that the representative from the dance community who felt that the design would prohibit her from using the PAC, wholeheartedly supports these recommendations and with these changes is absolutely committed to holding performances in the new PAC.

We believe that the Project Management Team has listened. We believe that the Project Management Team has heard and responded to our members concerns and we believe that this is the correct design for the Burlington Performing Arts Centre. We commend the team for their solution oriented approach and their respect for what we, as users and audience, offer. We are all committed to productive ongoing dialogue and input which will result in a true community performing arts centre for all to enjoy. We encourage you to approve Option C, with the appropriate staff direction to include the above considerations and move this project one step closer to completion.

I would be happy to answer any questions you have, and with your permission I would like to ask Lawrie Bonanno, chair of our Performing Arts Centre Advisory Committee to join me to respond to them.

Deb Tymstra, President - Performing Arts Burlington