

Appendix 1: What We Learned Report Wedderburn Theatre Options

Background

Theatre Layout Options at Wedderburn High School Site

The Town of Okotoks was provided preliminary designs and adjacency plans for the Wedderburn High School site. This included three theatre layout options that expanded the theatre scope from solely meeting the high school needs to including a joint-use approach with the community. These designs were submitted with the caveat that the Town would be responsible for bearing the capital cost for such an expansion.

Challenges

This is a time-sensitive process and fulsome consultation with the community and targeted members of the community was limited.

Our Goal

To receive technical feedback on the theatre layout options to help advise Council.

Community Engagement

We are committed (through the Town's Community Engagement Policy) to give the community an opportunity for input into decisions that will affect residents and businesses.

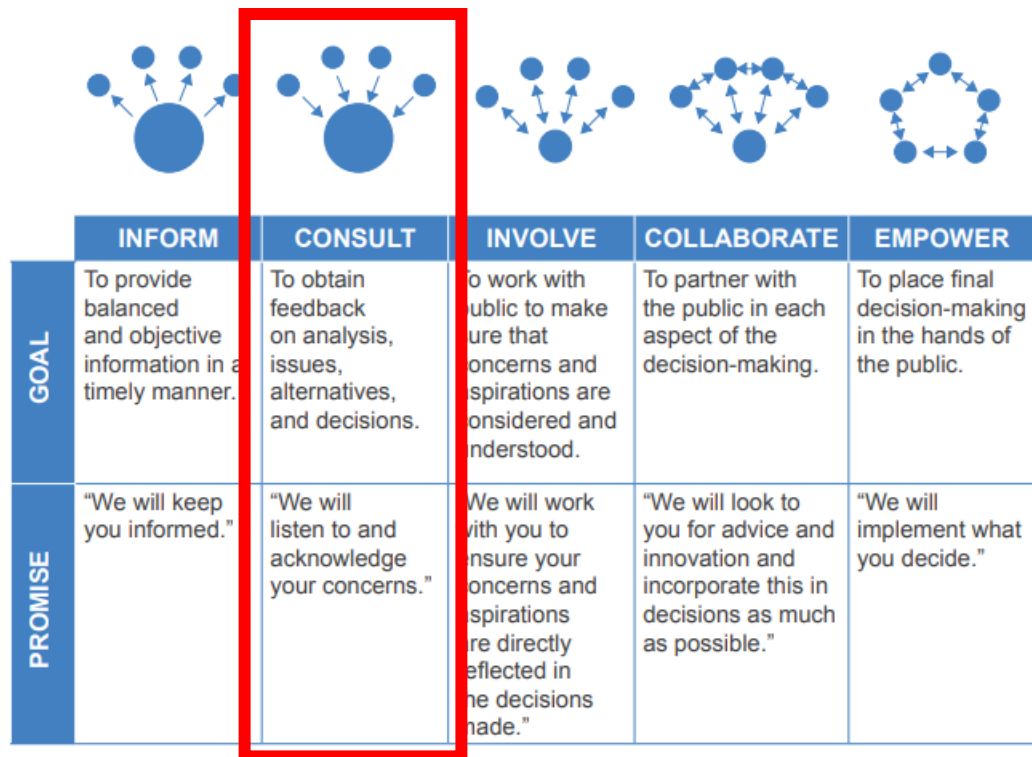
Who did we engage?

Town Administration targeted members of the arts and culture community.

This included: Alberta Dance Academy, Big Rock Singers, Dewdney Players, Feather Pen Theatre, Foothills Philharmonic Society, Okotoks Arts Council, Okotoks Film Festival, The Erratic Players

Level of community engagement

This project falls within the consult level of the International Association of Public Participation's spectrum of public participation.



International Association of Public Participation

What did we ask?

Members of the art and culture community were asked to assess the three theatre options, as well as the current Old Church Theatre, using the following questions:

- How will the theatre layout meet the community's need for performance space?
- What are the limitations of the theatre layout to meet the community's needs for performance space?

Summarized Feedback

Old Church Theatre

There was consensus that the current facility has charm, pleasant acoustics, and is an ideal venue for small-scale productions. The limitations included lack of auxiliary space including dressing rooms, backstage, shared washrooms, and a green room. Other limitations noted included non-performance noises from the building systems and from outside including passing trains.

Meet the need	Limitations
Charm/Character	Lacks loading dock
Location in the downtown	Lacks dressing rooms
Acoustics	Comfort: seating, accessibility

Theatre Amenities: lobby/bar	No backstage or green room
	Noise: Building systems, trains
	Small stage for productions
	Washrooms for performers & public

Theatre Layout #1: Retractable Seating

This layout was appreciated for the size of the stage, seating capacity, and auxiliary spaces such as multiple change rooms and a green room. Overarching concerns for all three theatre layouts included the lack of an identified loading dock, lobby space, and a shared entrance with the high school. More specific to layout #1, the design features of retractable seating and a square box could negatively impact the patron experience due to noise and the impact on the acoustics.

Meet the need	Limitations
Stage size	Lacks loading dock
Seating capacity	Lacks lobby space & separate entrance
Inclusion of changing and green rooms	Limited/no storage spaces
Catwalks	Comfort/Noise: Retractable seats
	Square box will impact acoustics
	Segregated booth design

Theatre Layout #2: Fixed Seating

This layout was the most conventional and members had positive feedback on the size, capacity, layout, auxiliary spaces, and type of seating. Of the three layouts, this was the only one featuring an integrated stage management, light, and sound booth which viewed as a benefit for quality productions. Again, the lack of a loading dock, lobby space, and a separate entrance from the high school were perceived as limitations to meeting the community's need for a performance space.

Meet the need	Limitations
Seating: Fixed and capacity	Lacks loading dock
Stage size larger than layout #1	Lacks lobby space & separate entrance
Layout more conducive for performances	
Inclusion of change and green rooms	
Single booth from stage, lights and sound	

Theatre Layout #3: North Trail High School (Calgary)

This layout did not resonate with members of the arts and culture community. The limitations highlighted the size of the stage, seating capacity, limited auxiliary spaces,

square design that would impact the acoustics, the style of the proposed seating, and the segregation of the technical booths.

Meet the need	Limitations
Inclusion of changing and green rooms	Lacks loading dock
	Lacks lobby space & separate entrance
	Limited/no storage spaces
	Single dressing room
	Stage size limits productions
	Seating capacity
	Comfort/Noise: Retractable seats
	Square box will impact acoustics
	Segregated booth design

Group Consensus

After providing their comments, as well as a group discussion, members from the arts and culture community were asked to vote for their preferred layout. There was unanimous support for #2 with the following comments:

- The lack of a loading dock, for all three designs, was perceived as detrimental to the success of this community performance space. Members voiced concerns about the usage of this space without a loading dock.
- Similarly, the lack of a lobby or gathering space was perceived as a limitation for creating an ambience prior to productions.
- Intentional consideration for the acoustics in this space would be needed to maximize the patron experience.

Recommendations

Based on the feedback received from members of the arts and culture community, considerations for Council include:

- Although it is understood that this is a high school theatre and not a performing arts centre, consider engaging in conversations to explore if a loading dock and lobby space could be included to maximize the community use and benefits of the theatre space at the Wedderburn High School.
- Consider whether the theatre can be designed in a way that is “fit for purpose” including industry standards for acoustics, auxiliary spaces, and technical rooms.
- Consider prioritizing theatre layout #2 with the awareness that the value of this option to the arts and culture community is largely dependant on the inclusion of a loading dock and lobby space.
- That members of the arts and culture community continue to be engaged in this project, pending its continuance.