

SCHOOL CAMPUS THEATRE OPTIONS

Issue

Council direction is requested regarding school campus theatre options.

Motion Proposed by Administration

Option 1 – That the Town's involvement in a theatre expansion at the school campus acknowledging the revised budget of \$6.836M exceeds the approved project budget of \$6.5M be declined.

OR

Option 2 – That the original project construction budget of \$6.5M be increased to \$6.9M to accommodate a 50 m² loading bay with storage space, and retractable seating, as recommended by members of the local arts and culture community.

Report, Analysis and Financial Implications

On April 14, 2025, Town Administration presented a report titled, "Considerations for Wedderburn High School Theatre Option". Following debate, Council made and passed the following motion:

"Administration to bring back theatre options and costing that includes lobby enhancements, a loading dock, and outlines the acoustic and operating differences between theatre option 1 and theatre option 2 for consideration at the April 28, 2025 Regular Council Meeting."

Town Administration re-convened members of the arts and culture community to discuss these considerations in further detail with the project team from Alberta Infrastructure and their consulting team from Stantec. One (1) virtual engagement session was arranged to gather input from the community.

Lobby Enhancements

A theatre lobby is the public entry point of a theatre, typically containing ticket counters, coat check, concessions, and restrooms. It is often a space where audiences gather before or during intermission, serving as a hub for various services.

The project team shared an updated adjacency plan with further theatre layout details. This included emphasizing the economies of scale for shared facilities with the high school such as restrooms and access to classrooms that could support services such as catering.

The majority of the members of the arts and culture community were supportive of a shared lobby with the following caveats:

1. Town Administration will explore the potential of a licensed space in the shared lobby with representatives from Foothills School Division.
2. Futureproof the theatre for a potential segregated lobby space. The project team committed to accommodate this potential expansion into the future building envelope.

Loading Dock

The area used for unloading and preparing materials and equipment, such as scenery, props, and lighting, for a production. This space is typically located backstage, either at stage level or with access to storage areas.

A 25 sqm at grade loading bay with an overhead garage door was included on the updated theatre options. The loading area would be directly adjacent to the stage and at stage level eliminating the need for lifts. Members of the arts and culture community were supportive of this approach.

A request was made to review the size of the doors between the stage and the loading area to ensure they oversized to accommodate props, sets, and equipment. The size of this space will also be reviewed to potentially serve as a temporary storage area as this was noted as a concern. The cost estimate incorporates both the oversized doors and the additional storage space.

Fixed vs. Retractable Seating (Acoustic and Operating Differences)

Fixed and retractable seating offer different benefits for theatre spaces. Fixed seating is generally more economical and requires less maintenance. Retractable seating provides flexibility for multi-purpose spaces by allowing seats to be retracted and stored.

The project team compared various theatres with retractable seating, including those presented to Council on April 14, 2025. The less optimal experience of the local arts and culture community were at a theatre with retractable seating in south Calgary. The design and construction differences between this theatre in south Calgary and the precedent theatres in Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray were presented. This conversation alleviated some concerns regarding the acoustical differences of fixed and retractable seating.

Members of the arts and culture community noted the flexibility of a theatre with retractable seating including for rehearsals, laydown space to prepare for events, and to accommodate various types of productions, including dinner theatre. Concerns were raised regarding non-arts programming in this multi-purpose area.

There was no group consensus regarding the type of seating. Following a vote, the majority (7 out of 9) supported the flexibility and versatility of retractable seating.

Financial Implications

During the April 14, 2025, regular meeting of Council, Council approved the motion to:

“That approval be provided for the addition of a theatre at Wedderburn high school as an addition to the 2027 capital budget for \$6.5M with funding sources of \$4.7M from Arts and Culture Reserve and \$1.8M from Reserves.”

This motion established the project upset limit. Any changes to the design of the theatre options, including the lobby, loading area, or seating, would need to align with the approved project budget.

Scope Change	Feedback from Arts and Culture Community	Additional Cost
Lobby	No changes to the shared lobby design. Futureproof for potential expansion of a segregated lobby space.	\$0
Loading Area	Add-on from the original layout option. This includes a loading area at grade with direct access to the stage. This space has been oversized to XX sqm to accommodate temporary storage.	\$135,000 (25 m2) \$270,000 (50 m2)
Seating	Layout is a hybrid of theatre option 1 and 2 with retractable seating.	\$166,000

The base cost of the theatre, without the modifications in the table above is \$6.4M. This is consistent with theatre option #1.

The revised project budget, incorporating the changes from the arts and culture community including the addition of a loading area with storage capacity and retractable seating, totals \$6.836M.

Strategic Plan Goals

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Responsibly Managed Growth	<input type="checkbox"/>	Demonstrated Environmental Leadership
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strong Local Economy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Enhanced Culture & Community Health
<input type="checkbox"/>	Organizational Excellence		

Equity/Diversity/Inclusivity Impacts and Strategy

The theatre layouts are inclusive and provide equitable access.

Environmental Impacts

This project is in a planning phase. Future construction will be managed by Alberta Infrastructure.

Governing Policies/Bylaws/Legislation or Agreements

n/a

Community Engagement Strategy

Administration applied a consult level of targeted engagement to obtain feedback as directed by motion of Council.

Alternatives for Consideration

1. That Council decline the Town's involvement in a theatre expansion at the school campus acknowledging the revised budget of \$6.836M exceeds the approved project budget of \$6.5M.
2. That Council amend the original project construction budget of \$6.5M to \$6.9M to accommodate a loading bay with storage space (50 m2) and retractable seating, as recommended by members of the local arts and culture community.

CAO Comments

Council direction is requested.

Attachment(s)

1. Revised Foothills School Division Theatre Concept Options

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