

## SUMMARY REPORT:

TO ADAM LANGENMEIER – CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER CITY OF COURTENAY

REGARDING:

**REQUEST FOR GRANT TO ASSIST SWTS LIGHTING GRID PROJECT COMPLETION**

### SITUATION OVERVIEW

The Sid Williams Theatre Society completed a major upgrade to the rigging system and roofing structure over the theatre's stage between July and September 2024. This project was a significant and long overdue improvement to the infrastructure of the theatre's "stage house" and **the facility's ability to provide safe and efficient services for a high volume of usage activity**, the majority of which comes from Comox Valley based non-profit performing-arts organizations (and Comox Valley performers, public, youth and Elders).

The SWTS team identified the need for the project well before the pandemic and had been building capital reserves to fund the project. The project was delayed by the massive financial impact of the pandemic on gathering places such as the theatre, and by the aftermath of recovery, which is still affecting the live-performance/event sector in BC and Canada.

Prior to the pandemic the project was budgeted at \$350,000, to be jointly funded by SWTS reserves, provincial funding, and funding from the City of Courtenay. **By the end of the pandemic the estimated cost of the project had risen to half a million.** The higher price tag was driven by steep inflation for specialized technical equipment as well as the fact that the theatre roof structure would need considerable remediation to support the installation.

The SWTS received a **grant of \$250,000 from the BC Arts Council (Arts Infrastructure Fund) in 2022 with the goal of completing the upgrade by the end of 2023. The project was extended to a completion deadline to the end of 2024** (with the approval of the funder). The extra time was needed because sourcing an expert theatre consultant and structural available to lead the project; and blocking off time in the busy theatre calendar required more lead time and preparation than was anticipated at the time of the grant application.

### PROJECT FINANCES

By the summer of 2024, the SWTS still had sufficient funds to complete the project; however, theatre earnings related to operating costs were struggling to keep up with inflation and other regional market pressures (see SWTS 5-Year Financial Plan and Executive Summary for more information). The SWTS finance committee considered borrowing \$100,000 to complete the project without totally depleting the organization's cash reserves. Management and Board felt retaining a prudent reserve to ensure stable operation of the theatre was important. We also discussed the situation with the City's Recreation and Cultural Services Director and Chief Financial Officer to determine whether the City could support the SWTS in funding the completion of this important project.

Both the impact of the pandemic, and staff turnover and leadership transition at the City disrupted the City's involvement in capital development for the theatre, which is one of the City's key cultural assets.

The SWTS is optimistic that new agreements between the theatre society and the City (nearing completion), supported by good guidance from City senior staff and Council, as well as a new Strategic Cultural Plan, will drive solid capital development planning for the future.

The Sid Williams Theatre Society will also be **launching “Share the Limelight” in December, a legacy fundraising campaign** to support theatre improvements both short and long-term. We look forward to working with our primary funding partner, the City of Courtenay, in providing our community with a community theatre they can continue to be proud of and the excellent theatre services so many depend on.

#### REQUEST FOR GRANT

To complete this current and important upgrade project, and to move us forward with future capital planning in a stable situation, **the SWTS is respectfully requesting that the City of Courtenay provide a \$100,000 grant to the SWTS.**

**The remainder of the project has been paid for by \$250,000 from the Province of BC and \$162,000 from SWTS cash reserves.** The entire grid system asset will belong to the City of Courtenay as mandated by the agreement between the SWTS and the City.

#### OTHER INFORMATION

The project consisted of these **key steps**:

- Assessment of stage roof structure and load capability,
- Assessment of electrical requirements,
- Sourcing expert consultant, engineer, installation contractors and local contractors,
- Engineering remediation (including asbestos remediation)
- Electrical upgrades
- Takedown of existing rigging,
- Installation of new rigging system,
- Re-hang of lighting instruments and draperies
- Evaluation of system once in use
- Reporting to funders and stakeholders

**A project synopsis is attached** for more detail on the above steps. Full scope reports from Schick Shiner Theatrical Consultants and Chernenko Engineering are available upon request. A competitive bid system was used for major project components. Approved City Contractors were used for work being completed by local contractors.

Also attached is the Project Budget prior to launch (May 2024) and a recently completed Cost Assessment on the Project (November 2024). **The project was completed both on time and on budget.**



**A note on Safety:**

The Sid Williams Theatre (formerly the Civic Theatre) was renovated twice since its acquisition by the City of Courtenay, in 1970-71, and in 1999-2000.

The latter renovation improved the building's ability to withstand a major earthquake and expanded and improved the public and performer amenities of the theatre. However, the actual stage structure and artistic operational systems were not addressed in the scope of that renovation. The SWTS took over the operation of the theatre (from the Courtenay Recreation Association) when the theatre re-opened in 2000 and has carried out many improvements and equipment upgrades since that time.

Between 2000 and the present, the volume of use of the theatre has grown, as has the community we serve. Workplace safety expectations, public safety requirements and building codes also changed.

**Technical procedures for mounting events and handling changeover between events at the Sid** – which for years required technicians to spend many hours going up and down 16-foot ladders and working at height for hours – **were no longer acceptable (Actsaf BC Safety Audit 2018). The SWTS explored options to resolve this, and the grid upgrade project was selected as the best choice**, because it addressed the operational safety concerns and strengthened the theatre's roof, providing the building's operators and owners with expert guidance on safe operating parameters in the building for many years to come.

Please advise if additional information is required to consider our request for a grant.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "DAR", written over a horizontal line.

**Deborah Renz – General Manager, Sid Williams Theatre Society**

See Attached Project Budget, Project Costs upon Completion, Project Synopsis.

CC. Recreation and Cultural Services – City of Courtenay  
CC. SWTS Finance Committee

\*\* Timing of Grant: The SWTS would need to receive the grant before the end of our current fiscal year on June 30, 2025.