



ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: March 7, 2016
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Meeting Date: April 19, 2016

TO: Vancouver City Council
FROM: General Manager of Community Services
SUBJECT: Underutilized Spaces at Vancouver Civic Theatres (VCT) - Community Opportunities

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council authorize Vancouver Civic Theatre (VCT) staff to create a one-year pilot subsidy grant program to animate underused VCT space and enhance their profile while increasing partnerships with the community, subject to:

- i) a maximum expenditure of \$100,000 in 2016;
- ii) funding to come from the net income generated by VCT's 2016 operations, and;
- iii) a staff-driven process to allocate the \$100,000 to community partners in accordance with Cultural and Social Grants guidelines, and subject to the written approval of the City Manager.

REPORT SUMMARY

This report seeks approval for a grant program to fund activation of underused VCT spaces by subsidizing the Council approved rental rates through the proposed grant program. VCT has been looking for ways to ensure the continued relevance of its facilities and find ways to develop new partnerships within the arts and culture and the broader community. At the same time, in reviewing its facilities, VCT has identified spaces that could be used more intensely to the benefit of the theatres and to the community.

Based on information from potential users of spaces such as the Queen Elizabeth Theatre Plaza, Annex and Orpheum's former Granville Street box office, VCT has learned we could attract much greater use if we could subsidize groups and events that will activate the space in a way that encourages City's goals of cultural engagement, health and wellness.

COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS

In 2013, Vancouver's Culture Plan: Strategic Direction for the Next Five Years was presented to Council providing the framework to support a diverse, thriving cultural ecology. The plan identified five key strategic directions: further develop adaptable support programs; support increased community participation and engagement; foster artistic and cultural leadership; optimize investment in civic cultural assets; and invest in our creative economy.

October, 2014: Council adopted the Healthy City for All: Healthy City Strategy 2014-2025, that identifies Feeding Ourselves Well, a key goal to increase access to healthy and nutritious food for all residents.

Council approval of Grant Recommendations requires eight affirmative votes.

CITY MANAGER'S/GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The General Manager of Community Services recommends approval of the foregoing.

REPORT

Background/Context

As a main focus of the Vancouver Civic Theatres (VCT) revitalization project, we have aimed to increase utilization, increase community engagement and animate public VCT spaces. To achieve this goal, VCT proposes to make unused public spaces available at rates below Council approved rental rates to community groups with a focus on arts, culture, local food and wellness. Feedback from possible users of this space has indicated that the rental rates are a financial barrier to them; this report is to request the creation of a grant, for a one year pilot, that will subsidize the gap between Council approved published rental rates (even for not-for-profit) and rates that are affordable for community and arts groups.

Strategic Analysis

We have made significant marketing and communication efforts to attract interest for spaces like the QET Plaza or the Annex, meeting with arts and community groups, and holding information sessions. The obstacle reported by potential users of our spaces is the Council approved published rental rates. Good illustration of this is that the current utilization of the Annex is under 20% while our other theatres are at about 50%. The target for 2016 is 55% utilization rate for our theatres.

Our goal is to successfully negotiate short term rental engagements with arts organizations, not-for-profit local community driven groups (food; fitness, dance, martial arts or similar health and wellness-focused groups) as well as community based festivals/events celebrating diversity within the city. Having a grant will close the gap between the City's rental rates and the ability of a group to pay rent, and result in more use of these important public spaces.

This initiative will also contribute to Vancouver's liveable city status by providing urban space for community engagement focusing on local food, health, wellness and diversity as addressed in the Healthy City strategic goal.

Recommendations informed by consultations with the community and other COV departments:

On the basis of our consultations we have concluded the creation of a one year pilot grant program to subsidize a maximum of \$100,000 which would be managed within the approved 2016 VCT operating budget.

The subsidy would be:

- \$25,000 per quarter
- Each subsidy will be in the amount of published rates for any of VCT spaces with the priority given to:
 - o QET Plaza (average grant would be \$5,000)
 - o Annex (average grant would be \$1,500)
 - o Orpheum Granville Street Box Office (average grant would be \$500)Lobbies of all venues as gallery type spaces for activations of visual and media arts programs (average grant would be \$1,000)
- This initiative will enable cultural, social, healthy city strategies
- Eligibility criteria
 - o Organizations must have cultural, social or other NFP mandate
 - o The intake will be ongoing throughout the year
 - o First come-first served basis
- Cultural (possibly Social Policy) Services to concur
- VCT will track all usage and ask users to report back (attendance; exposure; profitability)
- VCT will report back to Council on the success of this pilot grant program with recommendations for the future.

Having the flexibility to permit community uses at below market rental rates and the ability to waive the rent and charge for expenses incurred only for these underutilized VCT spaces will be a significant benefit to both the public and to community groups. One example of this public benefit would be the Farmers Market site on the QET Plaza once a week during the summer months. Based on the average grant amounts stated above, we expect the impact to be significant for the community - a minimum of 20 organizations in the not-for-profit sector would benefit with the expected attendance well over 100,000.

Financial

VCT is proposing this pilot be managed within the approved VCT 2016 operating budget, using net income from VCT operations to expand access to community groups and increase access to the general public.

The one-year pilot subsidy grant program, with a maximum expenditure of \$100,000 in 2016, will be funded from the net income generated by VCT's 2016 operations. Allocation of the \$100,000 to community partners will be a staff-driven process, in accordance with Cultural and Social Grants guidelines, and subject to the written approval of the City Manager.

CONCLUSION

This report recommends an approval to provide the VCT with authority to run a one year pilot to subsidize the use of some of its underutilized public spaces at below published rental rate to community groups that support arts, culture, diversity, local food and wellness, from its own net revenues.

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