



P.O. BOX 8563 STN. CENTRAL
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March 14, 2021

Dear Mayor Helps and Councilors,

We write with great excitement in regards to a new cultural space in Victoria.

Theatre SKAM is on the verge of signing a lease for a space that will serve as a performance hub for independent artists and for small and medium performance companies. With an offer to lease signed, we seek your support in as timely a fashion as you are able.

We know this matter is of import to council as the past two iterations of the city's strategic plan have made direct mention of a hub for artists.

In the previous strategic plan, the city listed the following outcome for 2017: "A new arts centre serves as a cultural hub."

That same year, we wrote to the city: "Our organization is willing to take the lead on operating a downtown space that can act as a cultural hub. Perhaps the city has an existing space that can house several arts organizations."

The current 2019-22 strategic plan includes: "Continue ongoing support efforts to launch a Creative Hub for Arts"

The Create Victoria Arts and Culture Master Plan includes a cultural policy that firmly values the role of artists and creativity in our society and this is reflected in the Values and Guiding Principles of this plan. There are several other summary points in this plan that this project directly responds to. The "understanding cultural clusters and hubs" section on page 14 speaks to the grassroots emergence of this opportunity.

Having been at the table for the conversations regarding 28 Bastion Square, we remain keen on that project, and we do not think this replaces it. (It's not large enough to accommodate the same number of artists.) So far, the province has yet to resume work to make 28 Bastion happen, and if it does, it will be years before anyone can step inside that space. This project is poised to be confirmed by the end of March, 2021.

We view this remarkable opportunity as a pilot project: a shared performance hub, managed by artists, for artists. The centrepiece of the space will be a versatile black box performance space (approximately 30 feet by 40 feet). A smaller second studio (18 feet by 30 feet) will be used for rehearsals, smaller performances, teaching, and small-scale visual art shows. We envision six offices available to rent by performance companies at below market rates. We'll have hot desks for artists who need a space to work in an encouraging environment. Other ideas emerging include: script library, visual artist painting room for rent by the hour, and storage of shared theatre equipment. This generation and support of the creative industries will fuel the downtown creative economy.

The space we are looking at is at 851 Johnson Street (formerly Ageless Market). The 7200 square foot space was advertised at a monthly rent of \$7500. We have negotiated with the landlord,



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Starlight investments, for monthly support with the rent. (We'll pay the full rent and they will commit to donating \$2500 to SKAM monthly.) The lease is for ten years with an option to renew for another five.

At the moment we inhabit a former retail space on Fort Street, supported by PARC Retirement Living. Even with the future landlord support, this move to Johnson Street means our rent will go from \$0 annually to \$60,000. We have budgeted for that increase.

We're investing in gear that will last beyond this space, and we were recently granted support from BC Arts Council in the amount of \$25,000 for this purpose.

We have an option for first refusal on the space in 851 Johnson currently occupied by the cannabis retailer there.

We have opened the door to working with the developer as they eventually develop that property.

Having conversed with granting officers at the municipal, provincial and federal levels, as well as at foundations, we have identified five infrastructure grants we can apply for to complete the initial phase of construction, which will include: Changes to exits and washrooms to meet the usage as Cultural Facility/ Assembly, constructing walls for two studios, constructing walls for artists' offices and meeting rooms, installation of lighting grids in both spaces, and purchase of sound equipment.

We have conversed with several artist groups who are in a position to rent offices monthly. Our experience operating our studio (former retail store) on Fort Street indicates there is need for space among the independent arts community. We've served visual artists hanging their own work for a weekend sale, a brass band ensemble, rock bands making videos, ad-hoc theatre groups making shows, and teaching-artists running workshops.

Our membership in ProArt Alliance and our conversations around the table regarding 28 Bastion Square have connected us with arts groups from multiple disciplines, and with independent visual artists. To date we have commitments for office space from: Puente Theatre, SNAFU Theatre and Impulse Theatre.

With all the other pieces in place, we come to the city for the final push. Support from the city now will be the move that makes a hub for performing artists possible.

With great respect, we request the city provide a modest first contribution towards the first phase of construction and annual support to assist in operations.

An initial contribution to infrastructure will go a long way to secure matching funds. We have diligently saved and hold in reserve an amount of \$40,000. We have private donors committed to \$20,000. We need to get to \$200,000 in a few short months for the first phase of work.



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Please, will the city consider matching our initial investment of \$40,000 in the infrastructure of this project?

We also know that our resources cannot be stretched thinner than they are. With this in mind, we seek a strategic investment from the city for a yearly contribution of \$20,000, ideally for ten years with the potential for a five-year extension. We appreciate the city generally works in five-year cycles.

We know there are existing programs for support of artists and we access those. We receive operating funding from the CRD Arts Development Fund to which the city contributes. This amount for us is \$39,000 annually. The city has supported our festival with \$10,000 annually. We have accessed strategic plan grants to deliver arts during the pandemic, usually about \$5000 annually. These are drops in an annual budget bucket that has exceeded \$500,000 annually. We have a core staff of four. Managing a shared space is beyond our current revenues.

Naturally the support of a founding partner would be recognized in a significant way. We are adept at recognizing sponsors and supporters. We'd be keen to partner with the city on space for the artist in residence and Indigenous artist in residence programs. We pledge to manage an inclusive, participatory space.

It is our hope that our request is reasonable, and relatively low risk, given that the result will be a new arts space that will serve hundreds of artists and thousands of community members annually.

After almost 30 years as a professional artist in Victoria, I am convinced this moment is a very rare opportunity. Truly, I have never seen an opportunity like this before: a large enough space without posts in the middle of it, a supportive landlord, and a collection of select stakeholders ready to contribute.

We hope the city will join us in meeting a strategic plan goal that we collectively have held since 2016.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Payne'.

Matthew Payne
Artistic and Managing Producer
Theatre SKAM