



Mayor Chris Spearman and Council
Lethbridge City Hall
910 4 Avenue South
Lethbridge, AB T1J 0P6

May 12, 2017

Dear Mayor Spearman and Members of City Council,

As an arts organization supporting the Performing Arts Centre Advocacy Group and working with the City of Lethbridge to develop a new Performing Arts Centre, the Allied Arts Council is compelled to provide a response to the letter and study sent to the City of Lethbridge by the Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber of Commerce is recommending consideration to integrate a convention centre with a performing arts centre and an art gallery to house the University of Lethbridge art collection. The AAC is not in the convention business and has limited expertise to speak to this type of facility. We are, however, experts in arts management and are able to offer informed comment on the arts facilities referred to in the Chamber letter.

Although there are areas of agreement with the opinions expressed by the Board of the Chamber of Commerce, we have serious concerns with the lack of understanding of arts facilities demonstrated in their recommendations.

- We agree that the need to construct a convention centre and new performing arts centre have been topics of discussion for some time.
- We agree a new performing arts space should be a community priority.
- We do not dispute the assertion that civic performing arts centres and public art galleries need public funding subsidies to balance their books.
- We agree a new performing arts centre will have a positive economic impact in our city by attracting and building the 'knowledge class', by retaining and attracting young performance artists and future tax payers to our city, and by capturing audience dollars, thereby reducing audience bleed to other communities such as Calgary and Medicine Hat.
- We agree decisions made today will shape our community for decades.

We unequivocally disagree with the view that a multiplex convention centre, with an integrated performing arts centre and art gallery for the U of L art collection is a solution for our community. Performing arts groups merit an appropriate facility to create and share their work. Lethbridge audiences warrant a state-of-the-art facility to experience those performances. Sacrificing space and design in this proposed multiplex facility to save money is ill considered, unrealistic, and not a long term solution for the community.

We strongly disagree with the statement "Theatre spaces can easily play host to conventions and meeting spaces can easily play host to a wide range of arts-related activities or art exhibitions." This assumption demonstrates a lack of understanding of the complexities of the infrastructure required for both performing and visual arts.

Integrating such diverse buildings under one roof will inevitably lead to compromises to the program requirements of all included facilities. There is no doubt sacrifices will be made in an attempt to save money and space, resulting in what should be a 100-year legacy theatre becoming a watered-down and ultimately inadequate performance space.

In our opinion, if the integrity of the infrastructure for each individual facility in a multiplex are respected, construction costs will be higher in order to address appropriate sound, smell, humidity and temperature control challenges. Land requirements for a facility with this footprint will be enormous, will not be readily available in the downtown core, and will be extremely costly.

We also disagree that applying a corporate business model to a performing arts centre project will totally eliminate the need for operational subsidies. We do believe a performing arts centre, like any other civic asset, be it fire or police stations, parks, recycling centres, leisure centres, ice rinks, ballparks or cemeteries, should be managed in a fiscally responsible manner, but to expect civic assets to be operationally cost neutral is unrealistic. A civic performing arts centre is first and foremost a community building that will enhance our community, provide quality of life opportunities for the citizens of the Lethbridge and our surrounding region, and further contribute to the economic vitality of the City.

We also disagree with the statement, "The extensive operational efficiencies associated with the city having to maintain one set of staff, pay one set of bills and deal with ongoing maintenance issues for only one site are significant." This statement demonstrates a lack of understanding and appreciation for the complexity of operating performing arts theatres and world-class art galleries. The notion of a single staff is simplistic. Operating a multiplex does not mean you can reduce the required number of staff or addressed the type of staff qualified to do specialised technical work.

Unfortunately, the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors did not consult in a meaningful manner with the Allied Arts Council or the Performing Arts Centre Advocacy Group in advance of presenting their recommendation. If they had, they would perhaps have had a better understanding of the complexities of the type of civic performance space needed by our community, and the challenges of integrating it with a large academic art collection owned by the University of Lethbridge and a convention centre.

Members of the arts community and the Allied Arts Council have been working with City administration since 2000 to address civic art facility inadequacies. There have been many conversations, stakeholder consultations and feasibility studies completed. There has not been a rush to a solution with these projects.

The Allied Arts Council would like to express its real concern of the negative impact to the performing arts programming in Lethbridge if a Performing Arts Centre is further delayed while the enormous complexities of a multiplex facility as suggested by the Chamber are resolved.

The Chamber requested their recommendation remain foremost in the minds of City Council as they enter CIP deliberations. The AAC also requests you keep foremost in your minds the strong community support and engagement, extensive work, and studies completed over the last seventeen years as arts facility shortcomings have been systematically addressed. A new performance arts centre is the last critical structure in a long term vision. This CIP presents an opportunity to responsibly continue to move forward towards realizing this goal for all stakeholders in our community.

Respectfully,

Amanda Berg
President, AAC Lethbridge

Cc:
Garth Sherwin, City Manager, City of Lethbridge
Harry Gross, President, Chamber of Commerce
Mike Davis, President, Exhibition Park
Josephine Mills, Curator, University of Lethbridge Art Gallery
Trevor Lewington, Economic Development Lethbridge
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