Centre Wellington

Report to Council

To: Mayor Watters and Members of Council

Report: CS2025-12

Prepared By: Kristen Bettiol, Manager of Community Development

Date: 14 Apr 2025

RE: Final Fergus Grand Theatre Operations and Community Impact Report

Recommendation:

THAT the Council of the Township of Centre Wellington adopt the Fergus Grand Theatre Operation and Community Impact Report dated April 14, 2025 and direct staff to implement the action items in the Report.

Summary:

At the February 24, 2025 Council meeting, Township Council considered Staff Report CS2025-04, along with a presentation on the Draft Fergus Grand Theatre Operations and Community Impact Report. Council endorsed the following recommendation:

THAT the Council of the Township of Centre Wellington receive Fergus Grand Theatre: Operations and Community Impact Report for information.

AND THAT Council directs staff to post the Fergus Grand Theatre: Operations and Community Impact Report on ConnectCW for public feedback and bring the Report to the Economic Prosperity and Growth, Healthy Communities and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committees for feedback before returning to Council for final approval.

AND THAT Council approves the Pre-approvals section outlined in Report CS2025-04 to enable staff to meet 2025 targets.

The Draft Report was on ConnectCW for 6 weeks and Staff presented to each of the Advisory Committees listed throughout the month of March. Following this community consultation, staff are returning for consideration to adopt the Fergus Grand Theatre Operations and Community Impact Report.

Report:

Feedback Opportunities

In accordance to Council's direction, staff created a dedicated ConnectCW webpage to share the Draft Fergus Grand Theatre Operations and Community Impact Report and

allowed community members to review the plan and provide feedback. A press release and social media campaign directed residents to the ConnectCW site resulting in 316 visits and generating several encouraging comments and suggestions.

Throughout March, staff also presented to the Healthy Communities Advisory Committee, Economic Prosperity and Growth Advisory Committee and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee. Each presentation led to active discussions and valuable input from committee members.

Key Themes from Community and Advisory Committee Feedback

Overall, the community responded positively across all engagement platforms. Many recognized the Theatre's growing presence in Centre Wellington expressed appreciation for the increasing quality and diversity of performances.

Youth Programming: There was a strong enthusiasm for expanding you-centred programming, with many community members highlighting its importance.

Supporting the Arts: Feedback emphasized the need to balance support for both the Arts and the Recreation sector, reinforcing the value of cultural investment.

Marketing Efforts: A common theme was the need for improved marketing to increase awareness of upcoming performances. Several respondents noted that they often hear about events through word-of-mouth or social media rather than direct promotions.

Partnerships: The business community expressed interest in collaborating with the Theatre, recognizing opportunities for mutual benefit and economic impact.

The recommendations from the feedback are included in the implementation plan for the Fergus Grand Theatre Operations and Community Impact Report, so for that reason, no changes were made to the Fergus Grand Theatre Operations and Community Impact Report.

Corporate Strategic Plan:

Create the conditions for economic prosperity
Improve the activity, health & wellness of our community

Financial Implications:

Additional funding requirements for 2025 and beyond will be included in future budget deliberations.

Consultation:

Healthy Communities Advisory Committee
DEI Advisory Committee
Economic Prosperity and Growth Advisory Committee

Attachments:

- FGT Report - FINAL (2)

Approved By:
Pat Newson, Managing Director of Community Services, Managing Director of Community Services
Dan Wilson, Chief Administrative Officer





FERGUS GRAND THEATRE

2025 - 2029

FERGUS GRAND THEATRE

OPERATIONS AND COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT

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Executive Summary

The Fergus Grand Theatre (FGT) has a rich history dating back to its opening in 1928. Over the years, it has evolved from a community theatre to a municipally owned facility dedicated to fostering and supporting the performing arts within the community.

In December 2023, Township Council directed staff to investigate the profitability of the Fergus Grand Theatre and report back. This report summarizes the analysis completed over the past year and provides recommendations for moving forward. The FGT will continue to require property tax subsidization to fulfill a community need not supported by the private sector, with key performance indicators like seats sold and number of shows hosted highlighting its role in fostering community engagement and economic development.

The Theatre operates under a hybrid model, combining a presenting-based approach with a rentals-based approach. The Theatre's operations are executed by a small team of staff, volunteers, paid technicians, and third-party contractors; however, the heavy reliance on volunteer support has become unsustainable given the increasing levels of activity.

This report provides a workplan centred around three key recommendations to enhance the Fergus Grand Theatre's operations and community impact. These include improving the fiscal consistency of the Theatre, addressing staffing and resource gaps, and creating program offerings that focus on the community. The workplan spans the next five years and will be reflected in annual budgets and business plans going forward.

Background

The Fergus Grand Theatre (FGT) was the dream of local entrepreneur, Sam Fardella, who turned the site of an old barn on the main street of Fergus into a Theatre and celebrated opening night on August 28, 1928. Throughout the 1930s, 40s and 50s the Grand Theatre presented movies, plays, concerts and other live events. With the rise of drive-ins and television in the late 50s and early 60s the Theatre's popularity started to dwindle, and the property was purchased in the late 60s to house the rapidly growing Fergus-Elora Cable TV, as well as an electronics store.

In the early 1990s, the building was purchased by philanthropists Hugh and Lorraine Drew-Brook and a professional summer theatre started in 1993 as the Theatre on the Grand. Theatre on the Grand came to an end in the summer of 2003 and the building then became the property of the Township of Centre Wellington for financial stability.

Upon the Township assuming operational control, the Theatre primarily served a small number of community theatre groups. Today, the Theatre accommodates dozens of clients representing a broad spectrum of the performing arts, from local community productions to international performances. The FGT operates as a municipal theatre, serving as a publicly owned facility dedicated to fostering, presenting, and supporting the performing arts within the community. The Theatre's strategic focus lies in facilitating a range of activities, including rentals, curated events, and community-engagement initiatives, all aimed at nurturing and expanding the presence of the performing arts in Centre Wellington.

As a municipally-owned entity, the FGT does differ from other performing arts centres such as not-for-profit organizations or municipally owned centres managed through agreements with other cultural organizations. The FGT does not currently produce its own content, meaning it does not write, act in, or present its own shows. Instead, it serves as a venue for external productions and performances.

The Township as well as provincial and federal funders have invested significantly over the years to restore the facility and maintain it to good condition levels; however, without additional amenities commonly found in theatres such as rehearsal space, backstage area, or dressing rooms, the facility operates very much like an auditorium.

Report Context

In December 2023, Township Council passed the following resolution:

> *That the Council of the Township of Centre Wellington direct staff to investigate the profitability of the Fergus Grand Theatre and report back to Council.*

This report summarizes the analysis completed by Township staff over the past year and provides recommendations for moving forward. If a more detailed analysis or "business plan" is required, Council can consider approving funding to hire a consultant.

This report aims to align the Theatre's operations with its new realities by leveraging strategic opportunities and exploring new models to better serve the community. It will also ensure alignment

with Council's Strategic Plan and support the Theatre's continued growth as it enters its second century.

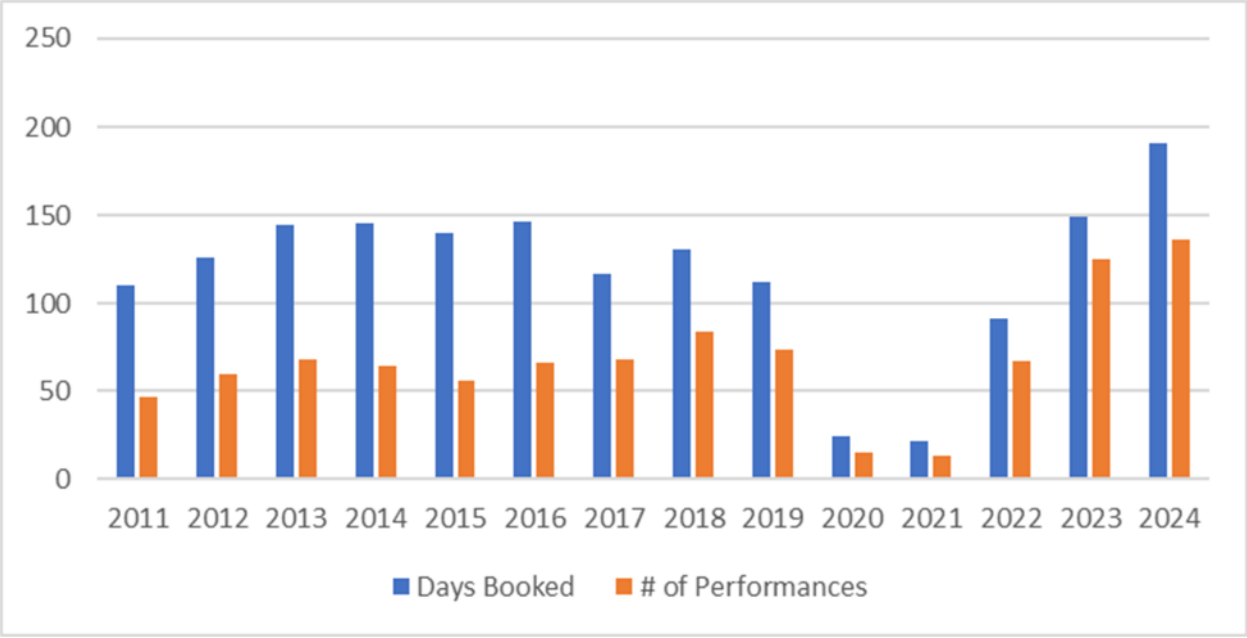
Success for the FGT extends beyond profitability. While fiscal consistency is a focus, there are numerous other success indicators that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the Theatre's performance. Moving forward, evaluation of the Theatre's success will be examined through multiple factors, including the number of shows scheduled during prime and non-prime times, total ticket sales, average ticket sales per event, and the net property tax subsidization of operations. These metrics will provide a holistic view of how the Theatre serves the community, impacts the local economy, , and delivers cultural value, ensuring it thrives as both a creative hub and a well-managed municipal asset.

Situational Analysis

Current State

The FGT operates under a hybrid model that combines a presenting-based approach with a rentals-based approach. The FGT is available for rentals year-round (fees attached as Appendix C), with peak season being September to June. During these months, demand for weekend rentals now exceeds supply. Rentals require less resources from staff compared to a procured performance, and can reach new audiences; however, can be limiting in terms of diversity of content. Figure 1 shows how both the days booked and the number of performances has grown steadily since the pandemic.

Figure 1 - Historical data of days booked and performances



Since 2017, the FGT has incorporated a presenting-series into the annual calendar, showcasing a selection of performances curated by the Township, offering a unique, community-focused arts experience. The Presenting Series runs up to eight events from fall to spring. Since its inception, this

program has operated at an average net loss of $2,000 annually (excluding staff resources allocated to production and promotion). See Figure 2 for further data on the Presenting Series.

Figure 2 - Historical data of Presenting Series

	2017-18	**2018-19**	**2019-20** *partial*	**2020-21**	**2021-22** *partial*	**2022-23**	**2023-24**	**2024-25** *projected*
# of events	3	5	7		3	8	8	8
# of tickets sold	482	259	1086		178	870	654	572 as of Jan 1
# of tickets per event	161	52	155		59	109	82	72
Revenue, $	11,432	10,329	27,621		4,985	30,347	21,804	21,000
Expenses, $	13,138	16,471	18,138		9,506	32,129	29,576	30,000
Profit/Loss, $	-1,706	-6,142	9,483		-4,521	-1,782	-7,129	-9,000

Recommendations discussed later in the report go into detail on how the Presenting Series can be re-developed to continue to strengthen the municipality's cultural fabric and support Council's Strategic Plan, specifically the goal to improve the activity, health, and wellness of the community and the value of equity, diversity and inclusion.

Financial Information

Shown in Figures 3, 4 and 5 are historical and budgeted information on the operating revenue, expenses, and property tax subsidization of the FGT.

Figure 3 demonstrates that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, actual revenue was closely aligning with budgeted revenue. Following the pandemic, particularly in 2023 and 2024, actual revenue has consistently exceeded the budgeted figures. This indicates a positive shift in financial performance. This can also be seen in Figure 1, showing an increase in usage of the Theatre.

Similarly, Figure 4 shows that actual expenses have historically aligned closely with budgeted amounts, and Figure 6 shows that expenses have been increasing at a rate similar to revenue. This indicates a linear relationship, which is common in a theatre business model. Performing arts centres do not typically benefit from economies of scale due to high fixed costs, labour-intensive operations, and capacity constraints.

Municipalities typically provide services to fulfil a community need that is not otherwise supported by, and profitable for, the private sector. This is reflected in Figure 5 showing historical property tax subsidization. Staff anticipate that the Fergus Grand Theatre will continue to require some form of subsidization for the foreseeable future. The amount of property tax support used to subsidize the FGT was at its lowest when the facility was closed as seen in Figure 5. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the subsidization stayed relatively consistent for 2022 to 2024 and is projected to increase to approximately $148,000 in 2025 to support additional part-time staff to alleviate operational challenges. This was approved by Council in the 2025 Staffing Strategy. More details regarding 2025 planned activities are provided in Appendix A.

As previously mentioned, it is not common for a theatre of this size to have revenues at or exceeding expenses. One way to avoid tax property subsidization would be to significantly increase user fees, which would be a barrier for many users of the theatre.

Measuring key performance indicators (KPIs) such as seats sold, and the number of shows hosted provides valuable insight into the Theatre's broader impact. A well-used theatre fosters community engagement by providing cultural experiences that enrich residents' lives and strengthens economic development by attracting visitors and local residents who spend money locally. These metrics not only gauge the Theatre's operational success but also highlight its role in supporting a vibrant and connected community, aligning with Council's strategic goals.

Figure 3 - Historical Revenue

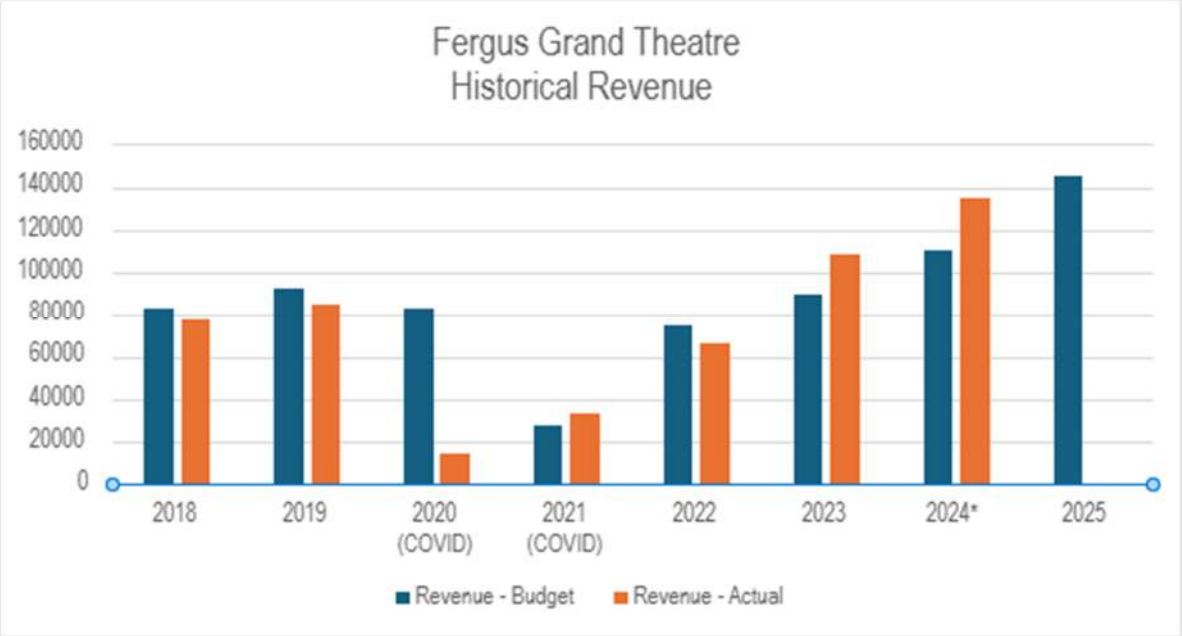


Figure 4 - Historical Expenses

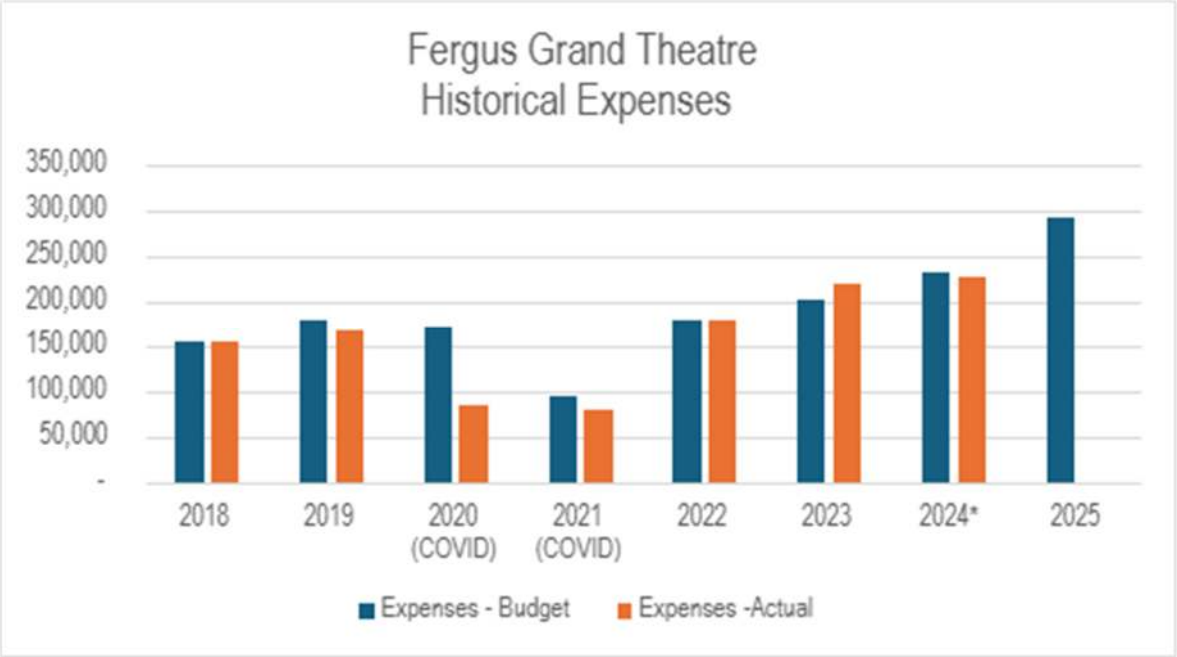


Figure 5 - Historical Property Tax Subsidization

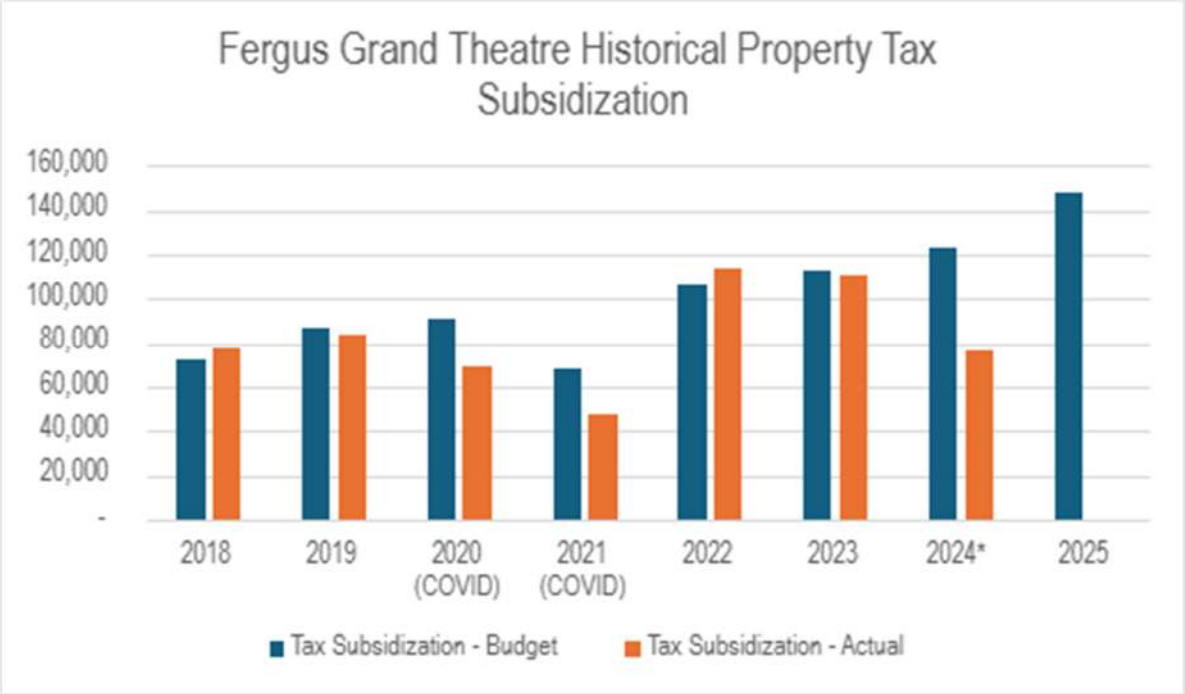
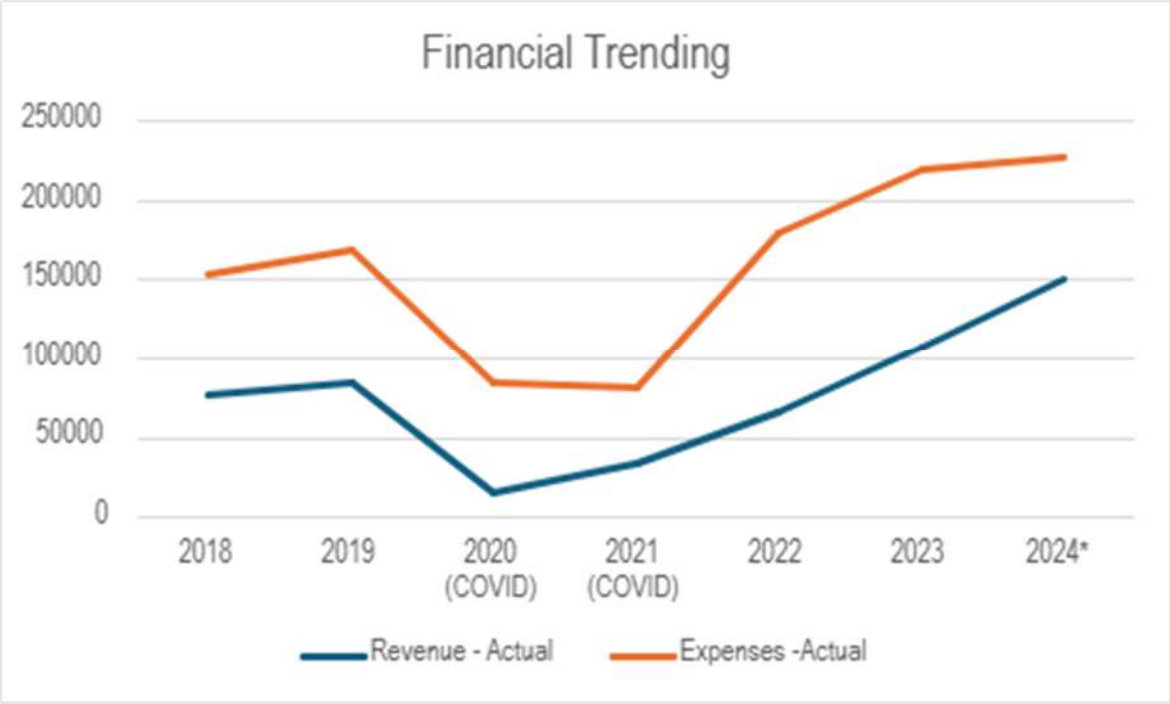


Figure 6 - Financial Trends



Operations

The FGT operates under the Community Development Division, reporting to the Manager of Community Development, as part of the Community Services Department. Supervised by the full-time Theatre Coordinator, the Theatre's operations are executed by a small team of part-time staff, volunteers, paid technicians and third-party contractors. This team receives significant support from other Township divisions, including Parks, Recreation Facilities, Finance, Information Technology, Communications, Buildings and Properties, and others as required. The Theatre Coordinator, with subject matter expertise in Theatre management, production, volunteer management, and technical aspects of Theatre, is responsible for providing effective leadership, and efficiently engaging with personnel and resources across these divisions to ensure day-to-day operational success.

Volunteer Roles

The Theatre is currently operating beyond the capacity of its existing business model. While demand for rental space, particularly on weekends, continues to exceed availability, the Theatre's heavy reliance on volunteer support has become unsustainable given the current levels of activity. Addressing this issue is crucial for maintaining the long-term sustainability of Theatre operations.

When the Township first assumed ownership of the Fergus Grand Theatre, a volunteer board was in place, involved extensively in operations and addressing critical needs such as the building's failing technical capacity. Formalized in 2004, the board raised funds through concession sales and a share of ticket handling fees, enabling the purchase of much-needed equipment. Over the years, their role

evolved, particularly after the 2010 Canada Cultural Spaces Grant and the inclusion of Theatre equipment in the Township's Asset Management Plan, which reduced pressure on the board to meet technical equipment replacement needs. In 2022, recognizing the growing demands of the Theatre's expanded programming, the board redirected their share of ticket handling fees to help fund a paid part-time House Manager position. Volunteers have also been utilized to fill roles such as ushers, box office attendants, and concession staff, but as programming grows and service expectations increase, reliance on volunteer availability has proven unsustainable.

The Theatre has built a strong reputation for exceptional service, due in large part to the dedicated volunteers; as mentioned though, as bookings and programming increase, maintaining this level of service through volunteer support alone has become challenging. Filling gaps in volunteer availability and skills has increasingly fallen to the Theatre Coordinator, pulling them away from essential FGT operational responsibilities.

To maintain consistent service delivery, the Township is exploring ways to supplement volunteer efforts with dedicated part time staff, adapting to the Theatre's evolving needs. This is a direct example of how increased use of the Theatre has resulted in an increase in operating expenses.

Ticketing System

TixHub has been the Theatre's ticketing service provider since 2009. It is a robust and secure system that works well for data management. It should be noted that the client-side user experience could be improved, as new patrons often encounter difficulties during their first online purchase. TixHub also allows the Township to remain PCI compliant (compliance with The Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard) for online ticket sales.

The system also supports compliance with Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation, enabling the Theatre to maintain a valuable marketing database of over 7,000 patrons who have opted-in to the newsletter. This database has become an effective tool for audience engagement and promotion.

TixHub charges a monthly service fee of $386 plus a $1.13 per-ticket fee to the Township, which totalled $12,358 in 2023. This is an expense in the Theatre operating budget. While these costs are significant, the convenience and popularity of online transactions justify the expense. A key advantage of using a professional box office system is centralized control over ticketing for Theatre rentals, ensuring all revenue is managed efficiently and data is tracked accurately. For any show at the Theatre where tickets are being sold, rental or presenting, the sales run through TixHub and the handling fee is retained by the Theatre (see below).

Handling Fee Revenue

The handling fee is a source of revenue generated by the Township on each ticket sold. The handling fee is over and above any rental rates that a user may be paying. As of July 1, 2024 the handling fee increased 12% to $3.00 per ticket. The breakdown is as follows:

Figure 7 - Breakdown of Handling Fee

Service Charge (collected by the Township to partially offset TixHub overhead fees)	$1.49
Transfer to Capital Reserve for Equipment Replacement	$0.56
Collected to offset House Manager Expense	$0.61
HST	$0.34
Total Handling Fee per Ticket	$3.00

Summary of Ticket Sales and Performances

Rental performances, which often bring in productions with larger audiences, tend to see higher ticket sales per show (Figure 8). Meanwhile, the Presenting Series is designed to foster cultural engagement and audience development, introducing diverse programming that may not always draw at the same size audience but is for cultural growth. In this report's recommendations there is a strategy to improve the sustainability of the Theatre by re-focusing the Presenting Series.

Figure 8 - Ticket Sales & Performances

	2018	2019	2022	2023	2024
# of Performances					
Presenting	4	8	6	8	7
Rentals	79	65	61	117	128
Total Performances	83	73	67	125	135
% of Overall Use					
Presenting	5%	11%	9%	6%	5%
Rentals	95%	89%	91%	94%	95%
Tickets Sold					
Presenting	402	998	785	785	670
Rentals	11378	10210	8154	12521	19616
Total Tickets Sold	11780	11208	8939	13306	20286
Average Tickets Per Show (maximum capacity 252)					
Presenting	101	125	131	98	96
Rentals	144	157	134	107	153
Overall	142	154	133	106	150

2023 Report from SPARC

Council allocated $40,000 in the 2023 Community Development budget for a Cultural Action Plan, with $8,400 used to contract SPARC (Supporting the Arts in Rural and Remote Communities) to conduct community consultations and assess the Fergus Grand Theatre's role as a cultural asset in Centre Wellington. SPARC evaluated the Theatre's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges, providing recommendations to inform future strategic decisions.

There were six recommendations from the SPARC Report, Appendix B, all directly linked to action items in the 2023-2026 TCW Strategic Plan. Key points are included in this report's Recommendations section.

Recommendations

Appendix A to this report includes the FGT Work Plan for 2025 to 2029. It outlines key actions designed to maximize the FGT's value to Centre Wellington as a cultural, economic, and historical asset. The workplan includes approximate timing as well as success indicators for each key action. This document is a working document with adjustments that will be made annually as projects progress, feedback is attained, and success is measured. This workplan is and will continue to be reflected in annual budgets and business plans.

Success for the Theatre is measured not only by financial outcomes but also by its ability to engage the community, support local businesses, and enrich the lives of residents. A vibrant and active Theatre drives economic development by attracting visitors, creates employment opportunities, and enhances cultural vitality through diverse programming. By focusing on expanded offerings, strategic collaborations, and operational sustainability, the work plan supports Council's strategic priorities while ensuring the FGT continues to thrive as a unique and historic centerpiece in the heart of the community.

The Work Plan is centred around three main recommendations and includes key actions for each:

- Create more program offerings that focus on, and serve the increasingly diverse community;
- Improve the fiscal sustainability of FGT; and
- Address staffing and resource gaps while minimizing property tax subsidization and ensuring sustainable service delivery based on operational needs.

Recommendation 1 – Create program offerings that focus on the community

The FGT's long-term success depends on its ability to deliver programming that resonates with the community while generating revenue to minimize subsidization and grow community engagement. This recommendation addresses specifically delivering programming that resonates with the community. It is intended to ensure the Theatre remains relevant, dynamic, and more connected to the community.

By prioritizing diverse, inclusive, and strategically aligned offerings, the Theatre can strengthen its position as a cultural cornerstone in Centre Wellington. In 2025, staff will explore opportunities for culturally significant programming, introducing a more DEI focused Presenting Series featuring up to three curated shows, and launching the inaugural Theatre for Young Audiences program. In 2025, an expanded Summer Camp at the FGT is also planned. Summer Camp at the FGT was piloted in 2024 and reached maximum capacity. While revenue and expenses for the Summer Camp are allocated elsewhere in the Township Budget, this program is an important part of building and diversifying the theatre audience. Beginning in 2026, efforts will shift toward building programming, fostering community partnerships, and introducing a March Break camp.

The following action items outline a focused approach to achieving the objectives of Recommendation 1. Timeline and KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) are detailed in Appendix A.

Key Action: Leverage the Presenting Series to Fill Schedule Gaps and Highlight Diverse and Culturally Significant Events

The Presenting Series provides an opportunity to fill the gaps in the Theatre's calendar by featuring events that reflect cultural diversity, innovation, and broad community appeal. Strategic curation of these events in collaboration with community groups will ensure consistent use of the space during slower months and non-prime times, maximize audience attendance, and reinforce the Theatre's reputation as a hub for high-quality, culturally relevant programming.

Key Action: Expand Youth-Focused Offerings

Investing in youth programming is essential to audience development and community engagement. Initiatives such as *Theatre for Young Audiences* productions, youth camps, and school partnerships will not only cultivate the next generation of Theatre patrons but also position the venue as an indispensable resource for educational and creative experiences in Centre Wellington.

Key Action: Collaborate with Business Community

Strategic partnerships with local businesses will align Theatre initiatives with broader economic development goals. Joint efforts such as co-presenting events, festivals, or marketing campaigns will create cross-promotional opportunities that drive attendance and enhance the downtown experience, benefiting both the Theatre and surrounding businesses.

Key Action: Enhance Support for Community Groups Through Co-Presenting Initiatives

Co-presenting would be a collaborative partnership between the Theatre and community groups or arts organizations, where both parties share responsibility and risk associated with organizing and delivering an event. This model leverages the strengths of each partner: the Theatre provides access to its professional resources, such as marketing, ticketing (the only resource accessed by rental clients currently), technical expertise, and performance space, while the community group contributes its creative vision, audience network, and programming ideas.

This collaboration reduces financial risk by sharing costs and revenues, with profits typically split based on an agreed percentage (e.g. 40% to the group, 60% to the Theatre). The model will foster equity, minimize barriers for organizations and groups, and enhance the visibility and impact of local cultural initiatives, creating a mutually beneficial partnership. The implementation of this new strategy must be carefully planned to ensure it increases overall Theatre usage while maintaining the current demand and usage by renters, who provide essential core revenue for the facility's operations.

Key Action: Assess the Viability of a Focused Presenting Series

Carefully curated shows presented by the FGT can serve dual purposes: attracting diverse audiences with compelling programming and addressing schedule gaps to maximize Theatre usage. This initiative will position the Theatre as a leading presenter of high-quality performances, further solidifying its cultural and economic value.

Recommendation 2 – Improve the fiscal sustainability of the Fergus Grand Theatre

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the FGT requires a strategic focus on financial resilience and operational efficiency. By optimizing revenue streams, refining rates and fees structures, and enhancing visibility, the Theatre can continue to serve as a vital cultural asset while maintaining fiscal responsibility. The following action items outline a proactive approach to achieving these goals and enhancing fiscal sustainability. It is through this improved fiscal sustainability that the shifts in programming outlined in recommendations.

In 2025, the financial focus will be on reviewing rates and fees to gradually align client charges more closely with performance costs and exploring options for concession operations. Efforts will also centre on enhancing marketing strategies and continuing to prioritize the capital asset management plan recommendations.

From 2026 onward, priorities will include developing new revenue streams, expanding culturally diverse programming throughout the year, and establishing a community partnership program. Defining clear key performance indicators to measure the Theatre's success will remain an ongoing objective.

Key Action: Review and Update Rental Rates and Fee Structures

A thorough review of the Theatre's rental rates and fee structures is necessary to ensure operational costs are more equitably shared with clients. Introducing phased adjustments will help minimize financial impact on user groups while aligning fees with industry standards and the Theatre's long-term goals to reduce tax subsidization and remain sustainable.

Key Action: Maximize Rental Revenue

Rentals remain a key revenue stream, and prioritizing this aspect of the Theatre's operations will contribute to fiscal consistency. By marketing the Theatre's facilities, professional services, and accessibility, the venue can attract a wide range of clients, from community organizations to corporate events, ensuring a stable income source.

Key Action: Introduce New Revenue Streams

Diversifying revenue sources will reduce dependence on traditional rental income and create new financial opportunities. Initiatives such as co-presenting agreements, alcohol licensing for events, strategic partnerships with local businesses, and technician training programs can generate additional income while enhancing the Theatre's offerings and community connections. As discussed earlier, these revenue streams will not be without associated expenses.

Key Action: Maximize Marketing Efforts

Strengthening the Theatre's marketing strategies will increase its visibility and grow audiences. Enhanced digital campaigns, targeted outreach, and collaborations with community partners can drive ticket sales, boost rentals, and position the Theatre as a premier cultural destination in the region. As with all marketing, the goal is for additional expenses to be offset by resulting revenue.

Key Action: Asset Management Planning

Asset management planning is an integrated set of processes and practices that attempts to minimize the lifecycle costs of owning, operating, and maintaining assets, at an appropriate level of risk, while delivering services at established levels. The Theatre is an asset without exception, and it is critical to continue prioritizing its long-term sustainability.

While property tax-subsidized, the recommendations detailed in this report aim to control this subsidization and ensure the asset is owned, operated, and maintained to deliver a specific level of service. Following the recommendations outlined in the Township's Asset Management Plan is a key action to achieve this, ensuring that service delivery is supported through a combination of operating budget contributions, building and equipment replacements, and long-term capital planning for reinvestment and rehabilitation requirements.

The Building Replacement (Figure 9) and Equipment Replacement (Figure 10) forecasts are from the Theatre's Capital Budget. The most recent Building Condition Audit identified areas of the Theatre building requiring improvement, which have been incorporated into the budget. As an example, the 10-Year Capital Forecast consists of an upstairs renovation in 2025, contingent on a Federal grant, and a renovation to the outdoor stairs on the east side of the building. The planned upstairs renovations would improve client amenities and increase rental appeal, further supporting the Theatre's financial sustainability.

Regularly updating the Building Condition Audit will be essential to preserving the integrity of the building and proactively addressing future capital needs. These efforts reinforce the importance of a structured, long-term approach to asset management and investment in the Theatre's continued viability.

Figure 9 - Building Replacement Forecast

	2025	2026	2027	2028
Building Exterior		$10,000		
Building Interior	$19,200			$31,800
Mechanical		$50,000	$50,000	$1,300
Other	$1,000			
Total	$20,200	$60,000	$50,000	$33,100

Figure 10 - Equipment Replacement Forecast

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	Total
Building Interior	-	3,100	-	-	-	55,200	-	-	-	39,500	**97,800**
Digital Signs										12,000	**12,000**
Lighting	-	-	20,800	-	-	-	5,600	-	-	-	**26,400**
A/V	-	-	-	-	16,200	-	-	-	-	12,000	**28,200**
Sound	5,000	-	-	5,300	-	-	-	-	-	-	**10,300**
Communications	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,300	-	**2,300**
Ladders	-	-	5,200	-	-	-	-	5,700	-	-	**10,900**
Other Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,600	**3,600**
Total	**5,000**	**3,100**	**26,000**	**5,300**	**16,200**	**55,200**	**5,600**	**5,700**	**2,300**	**67,100**	**191,500**

Figure 11 - Operations Budget

Operating Summary

	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024		2025	
	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual
Revenues																
Fergus Grand Theatre - Revenue	-83500	-77105	-92750	-85186	-82,750	-14,939	-27,310	-33,494	-74,250	-66,678	-90,100	-108,400	-110,150	-151,244	-144,800	
Total Revenues	-83,500	-77,105	-92,750	-85,186	-82,750	-14,939	-27,310	-33,494	-74,250	-66,678	-90,100	-108,400	-110,150	-151,244	-144,800	
Expenses																
Fergus Grand Theatre - Wages & Benefits	88855	88791	100653	97204	105,014	45,263	57,051	49,242	112,827	105,977	124,203	124,080	138,237	121,913	178,085	
Fergus Grand Theatre - Administration	9300	10492	10300	12063	11,250	2,508	4,900	4,105	10,500	11,325	11,200	15,682	16,200	16,406	19,900	
Fergus Grand Theatre - Operations & Maintenance	53350	49085	63600	53810	51,976	35,513	32,075	27,257	52,951	58,051	61,601	72,225	71,375	79,781	85,381	
Fergus Grand Theatre - Transfers to Reserves	4500	6198	5500	5715	5,800	711	1,900	666	4,900	4,669	5,900	7,222	7,200	9,432	9,600	
Total Expenses	156,005	154,566	180,053	168,792	174,040	83,995	95,926	81,270	181,178	180,022	202,904	219,209	233,012	227,532	292,966	
Net Budget (Property Tax Subsidization) Fergus Grand Theatre	72,505	77,461	87,303	83,606	91,290	69,056	68,616	47,776	106,928	113,344	112,804	110,809	122,862	76,288	148,166	

Recommendation 3 – Address Staffing and Resource Gaps for Growth and Service Management

To support the continued growth and operational demands of the FGT, it is essential to address current staffing and resource gaps. By enhancing staffing capacity, developing a sustainable operating model, and leveraging volunteer engagement, the Theatre can ensure high-quality service delivery and position itself for future success. The following action items outline a strategic approach to achieving this goal starting in 2025 with immediate staff coverage of the Box Office and moving to volunteer roles in 2026 and beyond. Staffing changes for 2025 were approved by Council as part of the 2025 Budget and staffing strategy. The costs are reflected in the Operating Budget shown in Figure 11, with comparisons to past years.

With plans to complete a review of volunteer roles by the end of 2025, plans for subsequent years can be made in early 2026 and beyond. Some focus directed to volunteer management and volunteer engagement can start this year and can improve and continue in future years.

Key Action: Enhance Staffing Levels to Meet Growing Service Demands

As Theatre usage and programming expand, increasing staffing levels is critical to maintain operational safety, efficiency and high service standards. Adding roles or reallocating existing resources will ensure the Theatre can meet the needs of diverse clients, audiences, and events effectively.

Additionally, cross-training customer service staff from other divisions will optimize coverage, enabling team members to be able to handle a variety of tasks such as ticketing, front-of-house operations, and event support. This flexible approach maximizes resource utilization, enhances service delivery, and ensures staff can adapt to the dynamic demands of the Theatre and other Customer Service desks.

Key Action: Develop a Sustainable Staffing Model and Integrate with Volunteer Support

A sustainable long-term staffing plan is essential to support the Theatre's ongoing growth. This plan should incorporate a financially responsible approach, balancing full-time and part-time roles to maintain flexibility and adapt to changing demands. Additionally, staff and volunteers must be equipped with the skills and training needed to excel in their positions, ensuring operational efficiency and exceptional service delivery

Key Action: Evaluate and Clarify the Role of the Volunteer Board and Enhance Volunteer Engagement

Volunteers provide a key resource in the Theatre’s success. Conducting a review of the volunteer board’s structure and responsibilities will clarify its strategic role and ensure alignment with the Theatre’s goals. Simultaneously, improving volunteer recruitment, training, and recognition programs will increase engagement, providing vital support for Theatre activities and foster a strong sense of community involvement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Fergus Grand Theatre is a culturally significant asset that accommodates dozens of clients representing a broad spectrum of the performing arts, from local community productions to international performances. The FGT operates as a municipal theatre, serving as a publicly owned facility dedicated to fostering, presenting, and supporting the performing arts within the community. The Township's Strategic Plan supports the continued maintenance and enhancement of this vital asset. While the Theatre will remain property tax subsidized for the foreseeable future in order to fulfill a community need not serviced by the private sector, by continuously improving programming and its impact, the goal is to strike a balance between increasing revenue (controlling subsidization) and meeting other key performance indicators such as the impact and reach of programming. This approach will ensure that the Theatre not only remains a hub for cultural engagement but also contributes to the economic development of the community.

Appendix A - Fergus Grand Theatre Work Plan 2025-2029

Key Action	Task Details	Timeline & KPIs
Recommendation 1: Create program offerings that focus on the community		
Key Action: Leverage the Presenting Series to fill schedule gaps and highlight diverse, culturally significant events.		
Collaborate for culturally significant programming	Work with DEI Advisory Committee and Community Groups of Interest to ensure programming takes place during culturally significant times.	2025 Present 1 to 3 events in 2025 while staying within budget and plan schedule for 2026 to 2029
Key Action: Develop youth-focused programming, such as Theatre for Young Audiences and camps.		
Introduce Theatre for Young Audience	Add a Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) presenting function for school children, growing to offer at least two shows per school year.	2025 Schedule 1 Spring event and build on 2 in 2026 and beyond while securing a Community Partner for one or both programs in 2027 and beyond.
Expand Summer Camp	Build summer camp program, from 5 weeks and 75 campers in 2024 to 8 weeks and over 120 campers by 2026.	2025/2026 5 weeks and 75 campers in 2024 to 8 weeks and over 120 campers by 2026.
Add a March Break Camp	Pilot a March Break Camp in collaboration with Programming	2026 1 week and 16 campers
Key Action: Collaborate with the business community for mutually beneficial initiatives		
Collaborate with Local Businesses	Partner with local businesses for cross-promotions, such as discounts for patrons who show theatre tickets.	2026 Secure a community partner for each Township presented event.

		Package one experience related to each event with a local business Track number of shows with business related involvement tied to themes
Key Action: Enhance Support for Community Groups Through Co-Presenting Initiative		
Implement co-presenting opportunities	Evaluate and if opportunistic, implement co-presenting shows	2026 Aiming to increase non-peak time usage, community participation and cost efficiency vs revenue generated
Key Action: Assess the Viability of a Focused Presenting Series		
Data analysis and viability assessment	Gather and analyze data from pilot sessions	2027 Complete by July 2027 to be completed by budget deliberations for 2028 and the 100th anniversary of the theatre
Recommendation 2: Improve the Fiscal Sustainability of the Fergus Grand Theatre		
Key Action: Review and update rental rates and fee structures.		
Implement cleaning fee	Add a show and between show cleaning fee to the 2025 rates and fees.	2025 To be implemented for the 2025 change over date
Review base rental rates annually	Evaluate annually the base rate against rental expenses and consider implementing community rates for culturally significant events or community interest events, school rates etc. during non-prime times.	2025-2029 Evaluate in winter to be discussed at preliminary summer budget discussions

Remove half day rental	Adjust fee structure for sustainability, including eliminating the half day rental rate.	2025 Has been approved by Council will apply in 2025
Assess impact of higher rental rates	Evaluate the impact of increasing the cost-recovery percentage (per seat) on commercial rentals considering the Ontario Presents 2024 rental rate survey	2025 Review completed in the Fall to be ready for budget discussions in the Spring
Non-Peak time Bookings	Explore ways to address bookings for non-peak times (summer, daytime, etc.)	2025 Explore in 2025 and create a plan to implement in 2026.
Incorporate user pay fees for services	Consider impact of adding fees for services such as cleaning, house managers, ushers, concessions, alcohol service etc.	2026-2029 Research and compare in 2025 to propose additions in subsequent years.
Key Action: Maximize Rental Revenue		
Establish Prime Time and Non-Prime Time for Theatre rentals, Develop policies for rates, and priority rentals to charge higher fees and attract greater audiences in Prime Time.	Evaluate annually the base rate against rental expenses, and consider implementing community rates for culturally significant events or community interest events, school rates etc. during non-prime times.	2026-2029 Explore in 2025 Evaluate and create plan in 2026 Roll out in 2027
Establish key performance indicators and track annually.	Track indicators annually to confirm ongoing success of the theatre for revenues, rentals, ticket sales, and community impact.	2025-2029 Establish a base line and way to share in 2025 and refine as new initiatives are introduced
Key Action: Introduce new revenue streams		

Explore additional revenue streams	Explore other revenue streams like licensing alcohol sales and technician training.	2026 Conduct a comprehensive review in 2026 and develop an actionable plan for implementation in 2027
Develop Community Partnership Plan	Create a Community Partnership plan for opportunities for corporate naming in the theatre.	2027 Create a plan by November 2026. Reach out to at least 10 potential corporate partners in 2027 and secure at least 3
Investigate Concession opportunities	Explore ways to optimize the concession by assessing current offerings and identifying popular items and evaluating competitive pricing and payment methods.	2025 Conduct full evaluation with at least 3 actionable recommendations by August 2025.
Key Action: Maximize marketing efforts		
Maximize Township marketing strategies	Including the website, digital signage, e-newsletter, and lobby displays. The Theatre also shares client-generated content on social media and encourages clients to share their press releases and marketing materials	2025 Review current marketing and communications plan by end of Q1 and make any required changes
Leverage Email Marketing	Intentionally send regular newsletters highlighting upcoming events, special promotions, and community partnerships.	2025 Review with Communications team to see if any improvements can be made to the current strategy by end of Q1
Key Action: Capital Asset Management		
Complete renovations to enhance client amenities	Complete planned upstairs renovations to improve client amenities and increase rental appeal. Maintain the building Asset Management Strategy and Building Condition Audit to maintain the integrity of the building.	2025 Execute the renovation if the Canada Cultural Spaces grant is received, by Q4

Recommendation 3: Address Staffing and Resource Gaps for Growth and Service Management		
Key Action: Enhance staffing levels to meet growing service demands		
Optimize staffing for coverage needs	Enhance staffing for coverage needs by increasing Customer Service Representative and House Manager hours.	2026 Aim for full coverage, 6 days a week, by hired positions, within budget
Cross-train Customer Service Representatives	Cross train Community Services Customer Service Representatives to optimize coverage support.	2025 Track number of shifts covered by other Customer Service Reps and the challenges and successes
Key Action: Develop a sustainable staffing model		
Establish optimal staffing levels	Annually evaluate the staffing and volunteer structure to continue to provide sustainable level of service based operating needs.	2025-2029 Complete a first annual review by December 2025.
Key Action: Evaluate the role of the volunteer board and enhance volunteer engagement		
Review volunteer roles and prioritize best match of needs, skill, time, interest, and priority.	Collaborate with current volunteers and workshop ideas and strategies to maximize the enjoyment, impact, and investment by volunteers.	2026 Aim to get 75% participation rate in a feedback mechanism to improve volunteer enjoyment and implement several ideas by the following year.

Appendix B

Fergus Grand Theatre SWOC Report

A snapshot of current strengths, weaknesses, challenges, opportunities, and recommendations for the Fergus Grand Theatre.



December 27, 2023
Prepared By: Rachel Marks & Bridget MacIntosh on behalf of SPARC.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The lands we know today as the Township of Centre Wellington have been home to Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. We acknowledge that we are on the treaty lands and traditional territory of the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee.

With increasing encroachment by non-Indigenous settlers in the Township of Centre Wellington, the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee could not continue their traditional lifestyle and settled in their villages along the Credit River and in the Grand River Valley.

These Indigenous nations uphold their Treaty Rights within our jurisdiction.

Today, the township remains home to Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island. We are grateful to have the opportunity to share and respect Mother Earth and are committed to building constructive and cooperative relationships with Indigenous nations.

ABOUT THE FERGUS GRAND THEATRE

From About Us - Centre Wellington

The Fergus Grand Theatre was the dream of Sam Fardella, who turned the site of an old barn into a theatre on the main street of Fergus. On August 28, 1928, Louis B. Mayer, the head of MGM in Hollywood, sent Sam best wishes by telegram on the Grand Theatre's opening night.

Throughout the 1930's, 40's and 50's the Grand Theatre presented not only movies but also plays, concerts and other live events. With the rise of drive-ins and television in the late 50's and early 60's the theatre's popularity started to dwindle.

Cable television pioneer Jake Milligan bought the building in the late 1960's to house the rapidly growing Fergus-Elora Cable TV, as well as an electronics store. Live performances returned in the early 1980's with shows produced by the Elora Community Theatre and other local and regional theatre companies.

Hugh and Lorraine Drew-Brook bought the building in the early 1990's and a professional summer theatre started in 1993. Theatre on the Grand came to an end in the summer of 2003 and the building then became the property of the Township of Centre Wellington.

Today the Fergus Grand Theatre is owned by the township of Centre Wellington, has one full-time staff member and a small army of volunteers. It is rented out year-round to a large and growing list of individuals and organizations that use it for a wide variety of artistic, cultural and corporate events.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a current snapshot of the strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities specifically for the Fergus Grand Theatre within the larger context of Fergus' cultural community. This report is not intended to serve as a strategic plan for the Fergus Grand Theatre or as the recommended update on the Cultural Action Plan, but rather represents a starting point with recommendations where the collected data and insights can be leveraged to support further analysis, investment and development of Fergus Grand Theatre to best serve the needs of the community and align with the strategic goals of the Township of Centre Wellington.

The recommendations include:

1. Investments in Staffing
2. Investments in Marketing, Communications and Brand Identity
3. Developing Effective Partnerships and Improve Community Engagement
4. Enhancing Programming
5. Improving Theatre Amenities and Operations
6. Future Forward

Additional information and alignment to Centre Wellington's 2024 Corporate business plan is provided further in the report.

The Fergus Grand Theatre holds immense potential to be the thriving community meeting place stakeholders want it to be. By addressing the identified weaknesses, capitalizing on opportunities, and investing resources to implement the recommended actions, the theatre can retain and enhance its status as a vibrant hub for artistic and cultural expression in Centre Wellington.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In October 2023, Réseau SPARC Network (Supporting Performing Arts in Rural Communities) was hired by the Township of Centre Wellington to conduct a study on the strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities of and for the Fergus Grand Theatre in Centre Wellington.

Prior to SPARC's work, Centre Wellington Council approved the report *Culture Matters, Centre Wellington Cultural Action Plan, 2013*. The outcomes of that report included:

- Engagement with the community about culture
- The development of a cultural map
- A plan to guide Centre Wellington's economic and cultural growth
    - The plan outlined three theme areas - People, Places, and Potential and provided details on 7 goals with 33 recommendations to develop the vision of culture in Fergus.

In 2019, the *Centre Wellington Parks, Recreation & Culture Master Plan* was developed. The recommendations included in that report were:

- #13. Continue to implement the Centre Wellington Cultural Action Plan, and annually report to Township Council and the public to inform them of progress and achievements.
- #14. An Update of the Centre Wellington Cultural Action Plan should be undertaken by the year 2021. An economic analysis quantifying the benefits and costs of the local arts, culture and heritage sector should be integrated within the Update to the Cultural Action Plan.
- #15. Continue to create opportunities for Centre Wellington to provide direct and indirect support to cultural programs, services and festivals/events through allocation of resources (including the development of a sustainable Funding Strategy), marketing and communications, volunteer development and/or the provision of space.

On December 7th, 2024, the Fergus Grand Theatre and the specific action item “Expand Fergus Grand Theatre program offerings and participation” was also included in the 2024 Corporate Business Plan under the Strategic Goals of: “Economic Prosperity: Create the conditions for economic prosperity” and “Activity, Health & Wellness: Improve the activity, health and wellness of our community.”

METHODOLOGY

The report was developed through a combination of surveying, public consultation, interviews, review of Centre Wellington Township strategic documents and high-level review of other municipally owned and managed performing arts venues strategic plans. This methodology is a foundational first step in establishing the Fergus Grand Theatre’s strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities. It is intended that these findings and recommendations will spur additional, solution-oriented action to support the Fergus Grand Theatre’s operations in Centre-Wellington.

Survey

Two surveys were created to gather data for this project. One was designed for the general public to provide feedback and the second designed for theatre stakeholders. The questions for both surveys were developed by Fergus Grand Theatre Coordinator, Eric Goudie.

The public facing survey was available on the ConnectCW from October 3rd to November 3rd, 2023. A total of 129 anonymized responses were received.

The stakeholder facing survey was emailed by Mr.Goudie to various stakeholder contacts and was open for responses during the same period of time. A total of 30 anonymized responses were received.

SPARC provided an analysis of the data collected. Findings from both surveys have been incorporated into the SWOC findings detailed further in this report.

For reference, questions from both surveys are attached as appendices to this report.

In-Person Consultation

On November 18th, 2023, a community consultation was facilitated by SPARC at the Fergus Grand Theatre. The purpose of this community consultation was to begin a conversation about the role the Fergus Grand Theatre plays in Centre Wellington. The goal was to seek broad input from all stakeholders, what people loved about the theatre, and the future for the theatre they envisioned. Invitations were sent to a variety of stakeholders, and a total of 15 people attended, representing a diverse cross-section of individuals and organizations such as:

- Township of Centre Wellington staff
- Fergus Grand Theatre staff and volunteers
- Elora Community Theatre
- Elora & Fergus Tourism
- Freelance artists and musicians
- Local Arts Presenters
- Downtown Fergus Business Improvement Area (BIA)
- Dance + Heart
- Local businesses

The format of the consultation prompted attendees to answer the following questions:

- Successes
    - What have been some of your successes creating/presenting/curating work in this region? Or as someone who may not create or present in the theatre, what do you think are the successes that members of your group share? Are there any?

- Challenges
    - What have been some of your challenges creating/presenting/curating work in this region? Or as someone who may not create or present in the theatre, what do you think are the challenges that members of your group share? Are there any?

- Solutions
    - How can we work together? How can we support each other? How can we ensure mutual success?

- A Big Pitch for the Community
    - Exploring ideas that could take Fergus' Performing Arts Scene to the next level.

The SPARC team ensured that notes were taken during the meeting and that all documentation was collected at the completion of the consultation to inform the analysis and recommendations. Discoveries from the in-person consultation have been incorporated into the SWOC findings detailed further in this report.

Interviews

In November and early December 2023, SPARC held 14 one-on-one in-depth interviews with stakeholders to provide insights on the Fergus Grand Theatre's strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities. Stakeholders included township staff, Council, local artists and community leaders, as well as performing arts sector experts with familiarity in presenting and the operation of municipally owned performing arts venues. The mix of both Centre Wellington based and performing arts sector interviewees allowed SPARC to capture insights that were both locally and sector informed. This was key in helping to identify industry best practices that could be of benefit to the Fergus Grand Theatre's operations. To create an environment where accurate and honest could be shared, interviewees were informed that their insights would remain anonymous. The interview questions remained similar with minor edits made to ensure that questions were relevant and applicable to the interviewee. A list of the type of interview questions is attached as an appendix to this report.

Township Strategic Document Review

The following Township documents were reviewed as part of this project.

- 2023-2026 Strategic Plan Overview
- Center Wellington Economic Development Strategic Action Plan (2019)
- 2024 Corporate Business Plan
- Culture Matters, Centre Wellington Cultural Action Plan, 2013
- Centre Wellington Parks, Recreation & Culture Master Plan (2019)

In the recommendation section of this report, SPARC has highlighted where certain recommendations directly align with the Township's 2024 Corporate Business Plan.

Sector Review

The following strategic plans from other Ontario based municipally owned and managed theatres were reviewed to provide high-level insights to best practices, challenges and opportunities within the municipally owned and managed performing arts venues.

- City of Brampton Performing Art Division Strategic Plan 2022-2027
- Flato Markham Theatre 2016-2020 Strategic Plan
- First Ontario Performing Arts Centre Strategic Recovery Plan 2022-2024

FINDINGS

Strengths

Strengths are internal factors that provide a competitive advantage or contribute positively to the Fergus Grand Theatre's success. These are attributes, resources, or capabilities within the Fergus Grand Theatre's control that set it apart from others or enhance its performance.

The Theatre Itself

The existence of the Fergus Grand Theatre in Centre Wellington was noted as a strength. In particular, its size, location in downtown Fergus, history, historic charm, comfortable seating, customer service, excellent acoustics and amenities (i.e. sound and lighting system, box office infrastructure) and ownership by the Township of Centre Wellington were identified as contributing to the theatre's reputation as a cultural and community asset.

The theatre's current audience and rental client base is strongly supportive. There is a deep appreciation for and sense of pride in the Fergus Grand Theatre, with some highlighting the fact that theatre's continued support by Council is an indication of its value to Centre Wellington. Many respondents appreciated the community feel of the theater, including interactions with casts, and the opportunity to support local talent and productions. Long standing partnerships with groups such as Elora Community Theatre were also indicative of the trust and mutual respect the theatre has built with its clients. There is a strong desire to see the theatre thrive and succeed as its loss would be devastating to Centre Wellington's growing creative community and population.

Volunteers and Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteers, along with theatre staff, were identified as contributing to creating a well-managed, welcoming, positive and inclusive experience at the Fergus Grand Theatre. The volunteer opportunities at the theater were also identified as a means of building relationships and reducing isolation within the community.

Contributions to the Local Economy

Attending a production at the Fergus Grand Theatre provides the local public and visitors with a reason to travel downtown. As a result, many downtown Fergus businesses generate sales from the theatre's attendees. Interviewees noted that people attending shows at the theatre typically enjoy a meal and/or drinks before and/or after the show. Family and friends also purchase flower bouquets, sweets and other goods from local shops as traditional curtain call gifts for individuals performing in the theatre's productions.

Current Programming

Some respondents identified the current programming at the theatre as a strength. There is a mix of professional and community-driven performances throughout the year that cater to all ages that provides opportunities for local artists and various behind-the-scenes roles. Respondents recognized the value of community theater in providing entertainment, fostering local talent, and contributing to a sense of community. Tribute shows, family friendly events , plays, magic shows, musicals, and comedy acts also contributed to a sense that the theatre brings high quality entertainment and performances to the small town that lacks other events.

Theatre Operations Manager, Eric Goudie

Eric was repeatedly identified by name as one of the Fergus Grand Theatre's strongest assets. In particular, he was commended by both local stakeholders and performing arts network colleagues from Ontario Presents and the Community Presenters Network for his leadership, professionalism, helpfulness, dedication, and knowledge. He was also noted as having deep roots in Fergus and knowledge of Centre Wellington. Through his work, the theatre is described as well-maintained, effectively managed and welcoming to artists.

Weaknesses

Weaknesses are internal factors that hinder or limit the Fergus Grand Theatre's performance, growth, or success. Weaknesses are typically aspects within the Fergus Grand Theatre's control that may be detrimental to its objectives. These factors are often related to internal processes, resources, skills, or structural aspects that may need improvement.

Inadequate Staffing Levels

Inadequate staffing was consistently identified as a significant weakness of the Fergus Grand Theatre. The theatre's current operations and positive reputation are the result of significant invisible and unpaid labour from the Theatre Coordinator and volunteers at a level that is not healthy nor sustainable. The lack of investment in adequate staffing levels has created a situation that hinders the ability of the Fergus Grand Theatre to take the strategic actions needed to build relationships to achieve success and strengthen itself as a community hub.

Lack of Marketing, Communication and Promotion

Many respondents express the need for more effective advertising and marketing for Fergus Grand Theatre events, both in terms of variety and frequency. Many people are simply not aware of what the Fergus Grand Theatre is, what its mission and goals are nor what shows are playing, and how to purchase tickets, resulting in poor attendance figures. The fact that the theatre is a township owned and operated community asset is also not effectively communicated. There was a strong call for more effective use of social media.

Inadequate Space (Front of House and Backstage), Equipment, Storage and Limited Accessibility Features

There is a limited amount of space available backstage for performers as well as limited accessibility features. This includes an inadequate amount of dressing room space, storage space, lack of all gender restrooms and absence of railings on the steps leading to the stage making it difficult for cast members with mobility issues to access the stage.

Better load-in conditions with more light were also mentioned as was a need to change the theatre's entrance and exit procedures to better manage crowd flow.

The size of the theatre, 252 seats, was also noted as a weakness, as it cannot accommodate the growing capacity needs of certain local rental clients, nor the needs of culturally diverse productions, who sometimes require much larger venues to meet their needs.

Theatre Availability and Affordability

The increasing cost of renting the theater was identified as a barrier for community groups. Even though the theatre currently offers significant rental discounts for non-profit community groups, there is a lack of clarity around how much the theatre's standard rental rate is discounted and ultimately the discounted rate is still considered to be cost-prohibitive. The requirement to use the theatre's box office system and to pay a handling fee for every ticket sold also poses a financial burden on community groups who wish to rent the space. The theatre is also too understaffed to be open for phone-in and walk-in box office sales for enough hours to meet modern customer service expectations.

It is becoming more difficult for long time renters to secure booking dates and to secure more time to rehearse shows in the space as the theatre is becoming busier most evenings.

Ticket discounts for seniors, non-profit organizations are also not offered, nor is there a subscription option in place to provide lower cost tickets to multiple events.

Concession Stand Offerings

Respondents suggest providing more food options at the concession. Suggestions also included serving alcohol during shows and intermission, potentially with the option of adding a licensed outdoor patio during the summer.

Lack of Technical Volunteers and Diverse Volunteer Opportunities

A general lack of volunteers within the community to fulfill technical (sound and lighting operation) and set-building roles for community theatre productions was noted. Respondents also mentioned that the same people are being used to fill ushering roles that limit the opportunities for other volunteers to participate.

Current Programming and Audience Demographics

There is a lack of accessible and inclusive programming at the theatre. Programming is primarily in English, with a heavy reliance on tribute shows that draw mainly retired and elderly patrons, and that do not reflect the changing demographics or local talent of Centre Wellington.

The programming is also relatively “safe,” and lacks a variety of artistic disciplines and genres that might cater to a more diverse audience. Alternatively, though, a need for more popular, well-known shows that will draw larger audiences was also expressed.

There is a lack of daytime programming available for retirees, children and other potential audiences. The 8:00 p.m. standard curtain time was also noted as a barrier to attending. The theater is also underutilized in the summer months with very little programming available.

Partnerships

The theatre lacks effective partnerships with diverse communities, local businesses and community groups. Downtown business could be doing more to promote the theatre as a community asset which could be achieved via an established partnership. There is also a lack of clarity with respect to the theatre’s role in community engagement, as there is no strategic plan or identified resources in place to guide and implement partnership development.

Opportunities

Opportunities are external factors that the Fergus Grand Theatre can leverage to its advantage for growth, improvement, or success. These are external conditions, trends, or situations that the Fergus Grand Theatre can leverage or benefit from to achieve its objectives.

A Growing Arts Community

As has been the case for decades, Centre Wellington continues to be home to a growing number of artists, and ever-increasing creative activity. There are many new and established arts-based groups and festivals based in the area including: the Fiber Festival, Medieval Faire, Twilight in Templin, the Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games, Cogs & Clockwork Steampunk Festival, the Elora Festival Singers, Riverfest Elora, the Elora Centre for the Arts, Elora Community Theatre’s Shakespeare in the Park, and many others. There also continues to be a strong desire amongst the local artistic community to thrive, to support one another and to do things together, with groups like The Elora-Fergus Arts Council, Sensational Elora, and the Sparrow’s Nest Maker Space at the Elora Centre for the Arts, and many others. The Centre Welling arts community is an opportunity for the Fergus Grand Theater to seek alignments and partnerships with these events and organizations to enhance its relevance and appeal, and to firmly position itself as a supportive hub and resource for this evolving, peer supported creative community.

Tourism and Out of Town Visitors Market

There is a strong tourist market in Centre Wellington, with Elora and Fergus both being marketed to attract visitors. Many tourist destinations such as the Elora Gorge Conservation Area, Elora Mill & Spa and the Wellington County Museum & Archives attract attendees that Fergus Grand Theatre can access via strong partnerships, cross promotions, and programming.

There are also theatre audiences in nearby centres such as Guelph, Kitchener-Waterloo, Cambridge, etc., as well as places like Orangeville, Shelburne, Erin, Georgetown, and beyond that can be encouraged to visit the Fergus Grand Theatre through targeted communication strategies and programming. The theatre's sales data indicates that there are already some patrons coming to shows from all these communities.

Regional Tourism Organization 4 is in place to build and support a competitive tourism region through marketing and destination management and provides an opportunity for the Fergus Grand Theatre to deepen their alignment and operations with the RTO 4 initiatives.

A Growing and Diverse Population

From 2016 to 2021 Centre Wellington's population increased from 29,855 to 35,800 (16%). This trend is expected to continue as more people move from urban centres to Centre Wellington with anticipated population increases of 26.2% to 48,520 in 2036 and 31.6% to 52,310 by 2041 (Centre Wellington, Growth Management Strategy Land Use, 2017). As immigration rates increase across Ontario, Centre Wellington is also expected to see a continued increase in the number of newcomers from diverse communities. This provides the Fergus Grand Theatre with potential new audiences and users if the right outreach and programming tactics are utilized.

Local Businesses, Community Groups and Schools

Local businesses, community groups and schools all provide potential partnership and cross promotion opportunities for the Fergus Grand Theatre to leverage. Each group also provides potential allies that the Fergus Grand Theatre can partner with to strengthen connections to Centre Wellington based youth, business owners and diverse communities, and to confidently make the theatre an open, safe space for marginalized groups and other community members to use and enjoy.

Performing Arts Touring Networks and Arts Service Organizations

Presenting networks such as Ontario Presents provide performing arts touring and presenting organizations such as the Fergus Grand Theatre with opportunities to work collaboratively to facilitate an equitable distribution of live, diverse performing arts shows – and their engagement with all citizens – into communities across Ontario. In particular, through Theatre Coordinator Eric Goudie's leadership and vision, the Community Presenters Network was developed. These networks provide the Fergus Grand Theatre with an opportunity to connect to other presenters to further strengthen its operations and programming via knowledge sharing, cross promotion, and block booking.

Challenges

Challenges refer to external factors that pose difficulties or obstacles to the Fergus Grand Theatre. Challenges are external forces or circumstances that the Fergus Grand Theatre may not have direct control over but must navigate or overcome. These factors may include market conditions, competition, economic trends, regulatory changes, or any other external elements that impact the theatre.

Funding and Sustainable Revenue Streams

Funding for the theatre and in the performing arts sector in general is lacking and not keeping pace with inflation. There have been cutbacks in funding at various levels while competition for existing funds has increased. For example, in 2023 the Ontario government reduced Ontario Arts Council funding by $5,000,000 reducing support for diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives; to Indigenous arts organizations and other marginalized or minority groups; and for innovative artistic approaches. The OAC’s baseline grant from the province, excluding some one-time programs, has sat at $59,937,400 for each of the past three fiscal years, according to its audited financial statements. ("Ford government to drop $5-million one-time arts grants but maintain Ontario Arts Council base funding", Globe & Mail, March 17, 2023). Federally, the Building Communities Through Arts and Heritage grant program has not had any permanent increases in its core funding since its creation in 2007. There is also an anticipated 8-million-dollar reduction in Canadian Heritage's Arts Presentation Fund budget in March 2024. (Canadian Association for the Performing Arts, #FutureofLIVE Investing in the Future of Live Performance)

Sponsorships have also become increasingly competitive and require dedicated time and resources to prospect, research and pitch.

Knowledge of and/or a central database of all available funding opportunities is also not readily available, up to date and takes resources to research, write, and manage.

Performing arts venues and organizations are also experiencing inconsistent revenue streams as tickets sales fluctuate due to shifting demands on leisure time and other recreational options.

The lack of funding and sustainable revenue streams hinders the ability of the theatre to develop programming and develop diverse, meaningful community relationships.

Inflation and Increased Costs

Rising inflation has increased the costs of various goods and services needed to operate the theatre and include utilities, marketing, staffing, and equipment (maintenance and new purchases). It has also increased the costs of touring shows from one theatre to another.

Inflation, post COVID-19 recovery, housing affordability and economic challenges have also reduced the amount of disposable income potential audience members have to spend, while the

rising costs of travel (gas, hotel rooms etc.) can all impact how people choose to spend their leisure time.

Artists also cannot afford to rent the theatre due to increased costs and rising inflation. The inability to experience and participate in art due to inflation is detrimental to building a community that values arts.

There have also been shifts in the performing arts sector to adequately compensate artists for their labour, which has historically been underpaid and undervalued. This shift is now placing increased demands on arts presenting budgets.

Audience Development

Audience development in the performing arts sector has been challenging as organizations navigate the impacts of COVID-19. These include competition from digital and other forms of entertainment that took prominence during pandemic isolation, and lingering health concerns related to indoor public gatherings that have hindered theatre attendance and socialization. Even before COVID-19, the rapid rise of social media and on-demand entertainment and communication options cultivated a generation that has many more leisure activities to choose from.

The detrimental effects of the isolation of the pandemic and increased social media use are now manifesting in declining high school drama class enrollment and decreased interest in collective drama activities. Both of which have impacts on the development of audience and relationships amongst members of the Centre Wellington community. We have anecdotally heard that there are increased difficulties at local schools to schedule and book buses to take students to the theatre.

Engaging diverse audiences is also challenging in the absence of programming and relationships that position performing arts organizations as safe, welcoming and relevant spaces where diverse community members see themselves and their stories reflected.

Increased demands on time and trends to plan activities at the last minute also affect the development of performing arts audiences.

Political Landscape and Valuing of the Arts

As a township owned and operated asset, its operations and purpose are dependent on Township priorities. When such priorities and success metrics are established and informed solely on quantitative data, this puts the arts in general, and the theatre in particular, at a disadvantage. The success and benefits of many performing arts venues, and the arts in general, is often best demonstrated through qualitative data. When only facts and figures are used as success metrics, and not contextualized alongside qualitative measures like audience engagement, fostering creative expression, or enriching the cultural life of the community it can lead to a mischaracterization by Council of the actual value of a municipal performing arts

centre as a non-core service. This creates a perception that the arts are not as valuable or successful as other activities and community assets (i.e., libraries, sports etc.)

As a taxpayer funded entity, there is also pressure to deliver immediate and quantifiable results with limited resources when it takes time and resources to build the relationships, programming and processes needed to deliver successful and inclusive services. The pressure to quickly deliver against a limited scope of metrics creates an environment that discourages innovation and risk-taking for fear that it will result in poor quantitative data and ultimately reinforce the lack of understanding and perceptions of the value of the arts as described above. Alongside this, the rise of cancel culture in our society poses challenges to programming and requires thoughtful approaches, considerations, research and relationship-building to ensure that programming can skillfully balance innovation, taste, entertainment and sensibilities.

The performing arts sector and by extension, the Fergus Grand Theatre are also susceptible to the changing political landscapes on the provincial and federal levels and their respective platforms with respect to arts and culture. Burnout, inadequate funding and staffing supports in the performing arts have created a scarcity mindset that has forced arts organizations to do more with less. This has led to significant human resources burnout and decreased morale across the sector, with many artists, arts leaders and volunteers leaving the sector entirely to focus on their mental health, well-being, and financial stability. In these times of instability and fluctuations on provincial and federal levels, it is ultimately municipal governments who need to address these gaps to sustain the creative economy and cultural infrastructures in their communities.

Limited Local Business Hours

Many local restaurants and businesses are not open after an evening show at the theatre concludes which impacts the experience patrons have at the theatre.

Downtown Parking

Parking in the downtown core was noted as a challenge as it can be difficult to secure parking close to the theatre which poses a barrier for theatre attendees with mobility issues. Even though timed parking downtown ends at 7:00 p.m. there is a perception that parking on the street to attend a show and enjoy dinner will result in a parking infraction as the stay will exceed 3 hours. This, coupled with the limited amount of parking downtown is enough of a barrier to discourage ticket sales and attendance.

Winter Maintenance

Some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the township's winter services for people with special needs, such as snow removal.

Space Needs

The lack of affordable and accessible performance, rehearsal, building/production and storage space is also a challenge facing the Fergus Grand Theatre and the Centre Wellington creative community.

Lack of Arts Based Training and Arts Education

There is a lack of arts-based training and arts education that are crucial in sustaining the performing arts sector for future generations. Literacy about money management in the arts grant writing, producing, set building and other technical skills are not prevalent in the Centre Wellington area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the data collected during this project, it is clear that a shared goal for the Fergus Grand Theatre is to see it thrive as a cultural hub where both locals and visitors can gather to experience great art, see themselves reflected in the work onstage, be challenged, entertained, and grow. It is a unique and beloved treasure that has served the community for over 95 years and has enormous potential to continue to serve for decades to come. The following recommendations have been informed by community consultation and present immediate actions that can be taken to help the Fergus Grand Theatre grow as a successful cultural hub and community asset.

As a municipal asset it's also important to indicate where strategic alignments exist between these recommendations and the Township’s strategic priorities. Each recommendation supports elements of the Centre Wellington Economic Development Strategic Action Plan and the 2024 Corporate Business Plan.

1.Investments in Staffing

The impetus for this recommendation came through loud and clear - the theatre is significantly understaffed. Even with the joint Theatre-Tourism 0.41FTE position allocated in the 2024 staffing strategy there are inadequate staff to effectively meet the needs of all rental clients and other community stakeholders, and limited capacity to increase the theatre’s profitability. A fundamental action to be taken is to invest in staffing to implement the recommendations of this report and meet the needs expressed by the community. There is currently no capacity to do the extensive community engagement and programming development needed to unlock the theatre’s potential and position it for success. A meaningful investment in staffing would allow the Theatre Coordinator to shift his focus from operational duties to more strategic priorities, better leverage his existing reputation and strong connections in the community and performing arts sector, and, crucially, have the time to nurture genuine relationships with community stakeholders. This time spent on programming and relationship building is needed to develop organizational resilience, bolster grant applications, and cultivate sponsorship opportunities.

KEY ALIGNMENTS TO 2024 CORPORATE BUSINESS PLAN:

Strategic Goal: Economic Prosperity: Create the conditions for economic prosperity.

Strategic Initiative: Make our Downtowns Vibrant

- Action #1: Expand Fergus Grand Theatre program offerings and participation

Strategic Initiative: Welcome and accommodate tourism/tourists.

- Action #1: Initiate developing a joint Economic Development & Tourism Strategy

Strategic Goal: Activity, Health & Wellness: Improve the activity, health and wellness of our community.

Strategic Initiative: Encourage Arts and Culture

- Action #3: Expand Fergus Grand Theatre program offerings and participation

Strategic Initiative: Create an inclusive and accessible community.

- Action #4: Expand Fergus Grand Theatre program offerings and participation

Strategic Goal: Governance: Provide innovative and sustainable Governance.

Strategic Initiative: Become an employer of choice.

- Staffing Strategy - 2024 Recruitment

2. Investments in Marketing, Communications and Brand Identity

A second key action is to invest in marketing and communication resources (including additional marketing staff resources) to support the Fergus Grand Theatre. This investment would include the development and implementation of both a comprehensive marketing and communications strategy to enhance the Fergus Grand Theatre's brand identity, and outreach efforts in the community.

A marketing strategy would Include a large range of actions linked to the promotion and sale of events at the Fergus Grand Theatre. Product development, price, distribution, and customer satisfaction would all be factors to consider in developing this strategy.

A communications strategy would serve the marketing strategy in that it would specifically address how the Fergus Grand Theatre delivers its messages to diverse stakeholders. It is a component of the overall marketing strategy that focuses on message production and delivery to build and sustain connections with stakeholders and audiences.

Fergus Grand Theatre events need to be promoted on various channels to address the existing awareness gap, starting with an enhanced social media presence that actively engages with local businesses and events. An increased and consistent social media presence with effective

use of account handles, hashtags and creation of original content, would also help the Fergus Grand Theatre connect with the “Zoomer / Gen Z” generation that is a potential future audience base.

It should also be communicated more strongly to the public that the Fergus Grand Theatre is owned and operated by the Township, and as such is a community asset that is welcoming to all.

Surveys, options for stakeholders to provide feedback and social media monitoring can also be used to assess quality, performance, and relevance.

To foster community engagement, the Fergus Grand Theatre should ensure the timely inclusion of website links, program information and social media handles for all rentals and third-party events taking place at the theatre.

Other tactics that mentioned during this project include:

- Continuing the distribution of The Grand Fan, the theatre’s e-newsletter
- Marketing that includes promotion to AirBnBs, tourism information racks, bed and breakfasts, handouts distributed at the theatre, QR codes posted in theatre windows and website upgrades
- Incorporating buskers and theatrical street promotions on performance days to enhance visibility and draw in audiences

A multifaceted approach incorporating improved online and offline visibility will significantly increase the Fergus Grand Theatre’s brand presence, audience development and community engagement efforts.

KEY ALIGNMENTS TO 2024 CORPORATE BUSINESS PLAN:

Strategic Goal: Economic Prosperity: Create the conditions for economic prosperity.

Strategic Initiative: Make our Downtowns Vibrant

- Action #1: Expand Fergus Grand Theatre program offerings and participation
- Action #2: Celebrate local businesses through Township Social Media objectives (LinkedIn Campaigns, etc.)

Strategic Initiative: Welcome and accommodate tourism/tourists.

- Action #1: Initiate developing a joint Economic Development & Tourism Strategy

Strategic Goal: Activity, Health & Wellness: Improve the activity, health and wellness of our community.

Strategic Initiative: Encourage Arts and Culture

- Action #3: Expand Fergus Grand Theatre program offerings and participation

Strategic Initiative: Create an inclusive and accessible community.

- Action #4: Expand Fergus Grand Theatre program offerings and participation

Strategic Goal: Governance: Provide innovative and sustainable Governance.

Strategic Initiative: Provide innovative and efficient service delivery.

- Action #1: Create Township Branding Policies/Procedures
- Action #2: Complete a website review and update
- Action #4: Initiate a Communications and Community Engagement Plan

3. Developing Effective Partnerships and Improve Community Engagement

Developing partnerships and improved community engagement will help strengthen the Fergus Grand's Theatre's value proposition as a cultural hub for all to enjoy. The aforementioned recommendations of increased staffing and marketing and communications support are crucial to supporting partnership development and improving community engagement.

Specific recommendations include:

- Collaborating with the Centre Wellington Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Advisory Committee and community groups. These connections can help the Fergus Grand Theatre identify opportunities to serve as a resource and potential gathering place for the community. It can also be a way for the theatre to cultivate new volunteers and identify communities that could benefit from strategic ticket comping to introduce new audiences to the theatre.

- Working with local businesses to develop cross-promotional campaigns and other pilot programs such as "after-show" menus that could be offered by local businesses to provide a culinary experience for theatre patrons after a show concludes that are easy to manage and are cost effective for businesses.

- Connecting with local school and school boards can provide a myriad of opportunities for the Fergus Grand Theatre. Not only could school field trips be facilitated but a deeper partnership could explore co-op like training and workshop programs for youth to expose them to all facets of theatre production from technical (sound and lighting design and operation), set design and carpentry, arts administration, front of house / box office / customer service management and performance. This would also provide youth with an opportunity to build their confidence and develop transferable skills.

- Creating and managing a cohort of local arts administrators, festival and event producers and other artists who are actively creating live performances and experiences.

The cohort can explore cross-promotion and communication among each individual member/groups via a communal email group, virtual hub and/or Facebook page. The cohort can also be used to share grant information, physical resources, and contacts for mutual benefit The cohort can also be a way to co-design and implement performing arts specific peer learning, upskilling and mentorship opportunities with the shared goal of nurturing Centre Wellington's creative sector, which would be of benefit to the Fergus Grand Theatre.

- Collaborating with Regional Tourism Office 4 and other local tourism partners in Centre Wellington provides an opportunity for the Fergus Grand Theatre to cross-promote its activities with other organizations and to attract visitors from further away.

- With all partnership development and community engagement, a commitment to collecting both quantitative and qualitative data must be embedded in the process. This information is fundamental in providing Council and stakeholders with a more robust narrative of the Fergus Grand Theatre's journey. It also provides foundational benchmarking that can be used to identify trends, gaps, successes, areas for improvement and to build trust and accountability with partners and the community.

KEY ALIGNMENTS TO 2024 CORPORATE BUSINESS PLAN:

Strategic Goal: Economic Prosperity: Create the conditions for economic prosperity.

Strategic Initiative: Make our Downtowns Vibrant
- Action #1: Expand Fergus Grand Theatre program offerings and participation

Strategic Initiative: Welcome and accommodate tourism/tourists.
- Action #1: Initiate developing a joint Economic Development & Tourism Strategy

Strategic Goal: Activity, Health & Wellness: Improve the activity, health and wellness of our community.

Strategic Initiative: Encourage Arts and Culture
- Action #3: Expand Fergus Grand Theatre program offerings and participation

Strategic Initiative: Create an inclusive and accessible community.
- Action #4: Expand Fergus Grand Theatre program offerings and participation
- Action #8: Continue to support, coordinate, and implement recommendations from the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee

Strategic Initiative: Foster youth safety and voice.
- Action #1: Encourage youth engagement on Council Advisory Committees and/or working groups

- Action #3: Facilitate co-op placements with local University, College and High Schools to encourage youth participation in local government

Strategic Goal: Governance: Provide innovative and sustainable Governance.

Strategic Initiative: Generate sustainable revenue for our future needs.

- Action #6: Continue to expand the Community Partnership Program

4. Enhance Programming

Enhancing programming at the Fergus Grand Theatre is key to retaining and attracting audiences. It also positions the theatre for success with partnership development, grant applications and investment via sponsorship when the theatre can demonstrate that the programs and experiences it offers are having a positive impact on the Centre Wellington community. Programming and experiences that are inclusive and accessible for all and that provide opportunities for local talent are fundamental to building the Fergus Grand Theatre's value proposition as a cultural hub for all to enjoy.

The aforementioned recommendations of increased staffing, marketing and communications support are crucial to supporting enhanced programming and experiences development.

Specific recommendations include:

- Increasing daytime programming to provide additional opportunities for seniors and others to attend performances. Daytime slots could also be used to provide seniors, school groups and other community groups with lunchtime theatre and a place to gather and hold activities, workshops such as the NTS Drama Fest Awards.

- Exploring earlier evening start times (6:00 - 7:30 p.m.) instead of the standard 8:00 p.m. This can provide opportunities for audiences to attend who may otherwise find a late start time difficult to navigate due to other commitments and responsibilities.

- Invest in and develop more youth-centric programming and experiences. This can include, but is not limited to, drama camps, workshops, classes in partnership with local schools and developing a resident young company. This programming approach is necessary to expose youth to live performance and to have them physically experience the theatre.

- Movie nights/afternoons that show a variety of classics, independent, foreign, and second-run movies at a price lower than regular theatres.

- Comedy open mic nights and drop in improv nights.

- Ensure quality of performances by investing in a solid curation process that leverages the Theatre Coordinator's existing expertise and connections in the performing art sector. A rigorous commitment to quality curation helps the Fergus Grand Theatre build integrity, experience, and connections as a presenter.

- Develop a more flexible operational structure to allow for co-presenting opportunities and other programs to support local producers/artists. These can include programs that provide local artists with theatre residencies that provide them with free resources to create, in return for hosting masterclasses or workshops. It can also include providing reduced and/or in-kind rental rates to reduce barriers to creation, in return for a share of the box office receipts. A co-presenting model could also be used to support collaborations and thematic programming and would be an ideal model to support local events such as The Fergus Scottish Festival, Monster Month, or Medieval Fair.

- Capping the number of tribute shows at the theatre in a given week/month/year, in order to encourage more local and original artists, many of whom are eligible for grant funding programs.

- Expand diverse programming offerings as partnerships and relationships continue to be built between Fergus and the community. This programming can include more voices that challenge audiences and share untold stories. More diversity in performances then better reflect Fergus' evolving community diversity. This approach recognizes that audience development efforts need to be collaborative rather than just expecting audiences to show up.

KEY ALIGNMENTS TO 2024 CORPORATE BUSINESS PLAN:

<u>Strategic Goal: Economic Prosperity: Create the conditions for economic prosperity.</u>

Strategic Initiative: Make our Downtowns Vibrant
- Action #1: Expand Fergus Grand Theatre program offerings and participation

Strategic Initiative: Welcome and accommodate tourism/tourists.
- Action #1: Initiate developing a joint Economic Development & Tourism Strategy

<u>Strategic Goal: Activity, Health & Wellness: Improve the activity, health and wellness of our community.</u>

Strategic Initiative: Encourage Arts and Culture
- Action #3: Expand Fergus Grand Theatre program offerings and participation

Strategic Initiative: Create an inclusive and accessible community.
- Action #4: Expand Fergus Grand Theatre program offerings and participation

- Action #8: Continue to support, coordinate, and implement recommendations from the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee

Strategic Initiative: Foster youth safety and voice.

- Action #1: Encourage youth engagement on Council Advisory Committees and/or working groups
- Action #3: Facilitate co-op placements with local University, College and High Schools to encourage youth participation in local government

Strategic Goal: Governance: Provide innovative and sustainable Governance.

Strategic Initiative: Generate sustainable revenue for our future needs.

- Action #6: Continue to expand the Community Partnership Program

5. Improving Theatre Amenities and Operations

The following recommendations pertain to various theatre amenities and operations.

Accessibility

An in-depth Accessibility audit of the theatre should be conducted by an expert to identify the improvements needed to make the entire theatre (front of house and backstage) accessible to people with disabilities and other marginalized groups. Once these improvements are identified, it is recommended that capital budget expenditures and other funding opportunities be explored to strategically and effectively implement these improvements.

As the creative needs of the Centre Wellington creative community grow, the Fergus Grand Theatre, due to its size, will not be able to accommodate the needs of all its stakeholders. As a proactive step, the township of Centre Wellington should identify other township owned assets, such as the Jefferson Elora Community Centre, the Belwood Hall, as well as various parks and open spaces, that the Fergus Grand Theatre can use to host rental client events that are too big, too small, or otherwise ill-suited to the theatre's existing footprint. It is also recommended that the Township take the first steps to explore the creation of a new performing arts centre.

Parking

A designated load-in/drop-off zone should be implemented outside the Fergus Grand Theatre to provide ease of access for artists loading in equipment to the theater and to theatre patrons with mobility issues. In the winter, this load-in area should be promptly cleared of snow, especially on weekends. Courtesy shuttle service from municipal parking lots to the theatre should also be explored.

As there is a Downtown Municipal Parking Strategy in development, it is recommended that the Fergus Grand Theatre closely monitor the development of this strategy and to communicate developments to their customers.

Concession Stand

The expansion of food offerings at the concession stand as well as alcohol sales should be explored to improve the Fergus Grand Theatre experience and provide another revenue stream to support theatre operations. Partnerships with local restaurants, breweries, wineries, and distilleries could also be explored to feature local culinary products.

Volunteers

To address the volunteer needs, the Fergus Grand Theatre can participate in the annual community volunteer recruitment fair that is schedule to take place. As part of the volunteer intake process, potential volunteers can be asked what type of volunteer opportunities they're interested in to ensure that scheduling takes these interests into account.

KEY ALIGNMENTS TO 2024 CORPORATE BUSINESS PLAN:

Strategic Goal: Economic Prosperity: Create the conditions for economic prosperity.

Strategic Initiative: Make our Downtowns Vibrant

- Action #1: Expand Fergus Grand Theatre program offerings and participation
- Action #5: Begin Implementation of the Downtown Parking Strategy

Strategic Initiative: Welcome and accommodate tourism/tourists.

- Action #1: Initiate developing a joint Economic Development & Tourism Strategy

Strategic Goal: Activity, Health & Wellness: Improve the activity, health and wellness of our community.

Strategic Initiative: Encourage Arts and Culture

- Action #3: Expand Fergus Grand Theatre program offerings and participation

Strategic Initiative: Create an inclusive and accessible community.

- Action #4: Expand Fergus Grand Theatre program offerings and participation
- Action #6: Continue working towards making Township facilities accessible
- Action #8: Continue to support, coordinate, and implement recommendations from the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee

Strategic Initiative: Encourage and appreciate volunteerism.

- Action #: Host an annual community volunteer recruitment event

6. Future Forward

This report represents a starting point with immediate recommendations to support further analysis, investment, and development of Fergus Grand Theatre to best serve the needs of the community and align with the strategic goals of the Township of Centre Wellington. As such, it is

recommended that to best prepare for the future, a more in-depth analysis, robust public consultation, and strategic plan development process take place to confirm the mission, vision, and values of the theatre and to provide a strategic and actionable path forward. This work can take place alongside the development of other anticipated township led strategies including the 2013 Centre Wellington Cultural Action Plan update and Economic Development & Tourism Strategy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SPARC would like to thank the many people who contributed to the development of this report including Centre Wellington Township staff, including Fergus Grand Theatre Coordinator Eric Goudie and Manager of Community Development Kristen Drexler. Appreciation is also extended to all the community leaders and stakeholders who generously donated their time to be interviewed and to those who attended and shared their insights at the community consultation.

Description	Unit	HST Status	Prev Year Total	Current Year Subtotal	Major R&M Reserve 5.3%	HST 13.0%	Current Year Total	% Change
FERGUS GRAND THEATRE								
Regular Theatre Rental Fees and Charges								
Rehearsal Rental:								
Rental Fee	Per Day	T	382.30	328.39	18.38	45.08	391.85	2.5%
Half Day (10am-4pm or 5pm-11pm)	Per Half Day	T	228.10	-	-	-	-	-100.0%
Performance Rental:								
Rental Fee	Per Day	T	636.15	546.46	30.58	75.01	652.05	2.5%
Half Day (10am-4pm or 5pm-11pm)	Per Half Day	T	446.55	-	-	-	-	-100.0%
Notes to Regular Theatre Rental Fees and Charges								
1. If rental set up remains in theatre/stage area, rental rates apply.								
Community Group Rental Fees and Charges								
Rehearsal Rental:								
Rental Fee	Per Day	T	320.90	275.63	15.43	37.84	328.90	2.5%
Half Day (10am-4pm or 5pm-11pm)	Per Half Day	T	193.80	-	-	-	-	-100.0%
Performance Rental:								
Rental Fee	Per Day	T	537.05	461.35	25.82	63.33	550.50	2.5%
Half Day (10am-4pm or 5pm-11pm)	Per Half Day	T	377.00	-	-	-	-	-100.0%
Notes to Community Group Rental Fees and Charges								
1. If rental set up remains in theatre/stage area, rental rates apply.								
Other Theatre Fees and Charges								
Booking Deposit		E	150.00	150.00	-	-	150.00	0.0%
Hourly Rental Rate (Minimum 3 Hours)	Per Hour	T	75.80	65.12	3.64	8.94	77.70	2.5%
School Theatre Rental Rate	Per Rental	T	250.55	-	-	-	-	-100.0%
Projector & Screen		T	165.10	141.84	7.94	19.47	169.25	2.5%
Technician Training Program	Per Course		cost recovery	284.10	15.90	39.00	339.00	
Cleaning Fee	Per Public Event				Vendor cost			
Technical Support	Per Public Event				Vendor cost			
Ticketing Fees								
Box Office Fee	Per Ticket	T	3.00	1.89	0.50	0.35	3.00	0.0%
Non-Ticketed Public Event Fee	Flat Fee	T	167.05	158.48	8.87	21.75	189.10	13.2%
OTHER PARKS & RECREATION FEES								
Refunds - Administration Fee	Per Refund	T/E		Administration Fee of $20.00 will be deducted from all refunds. No refunds will be issued within one (1) week of program start date.				

Notes to Parks & Recreation Fees and Charges
1. Parks & Recreation,Cultural Resource Centre and Film Permit fees effective April 1, 2025, Ice Rental fees effective August 1, 2025, Victoria Park Seniors Centre fees effective June 1, 2025 and Fergus Grand Theatre fees effective July 1, 2025.