

TO: Community Development Committee

FROM: General Manager Community Life

MEETING DATE: 17 November 2009

SUBJECT: PERFORMING ARTS IN DUNEDIN: OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

SUMMARY

The attached report from Deloitte provides a review of theatre venues as per the request of the Council and builds on previous Council work examining the long standing need for a medium sized theatre facility.

The Deloitte report highlights the importance of upgrading the Regent and altering the Mayfair but notes there is not substantial evidence for an additional new 550-800 seat theatre.

Based on their review Deloitte conclude that the best option to meet the short to medium term needs of Dunedin is to modify an existing Theatre. They suggest an upgrade of the Regent Theatre with an additional provision of an alternative seating configuration of approximately 800 seats; and undertake the proposed major redevelopment of the Mayfair Theatre which will ensure the needs of local and community theatres are met. Ongoing improvements to meet the needs of the Fortune Theatre are also recommended and will need to be considered by Council.

Also contained within the report is a discussion of issues and limitations of the Fortune Theatre Facility which have yet to be formally investigated by Council and issues and constraints identified around Sammy's which also have yet to be formally investigated by Council.

A Touchstone Group has reviewed this report and disagrees with some findings and the conclusion that a new 550-800 seat theatre is not needed. Their views have not been accepted by Deloitte but will be provided to the Council by way of an attachment to this report.

IMPLICATIONS FOR:

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| (i) Policy: | No |
| (ii) Approved Annual Budget: | No |
| (iii) LTCCP/ Funding Policy: | Yes – the Mayfair Theatre may use report to approach the Council for funding and the Fortune Theatre may seek improvements to their building. |
| (iv) Activity Management Plans: | Yes – may need to increase funding as (iii) above. |
| (v) Community Boards: | No |

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 That the report be received.
- 2 That this report be referred to the draft Annual Plan agenda for consideration on the basis that any investment in theatre facility development be considered within future planning of the Council's delivery of its seven community outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

This report is as per request of the Council and builds on previous Council work, examining the long standing need for a medium sized theatre. Deloitte were engaged to provide the Dunedin City Council with a review of the various needs and wants of key stakeholder groups associated with theatre in Dunedin. Their report seeks to address the gaps identified from the previous reports commissioned over the last few years and provide Council with the information required to make an informed decision on future investment in performing arts venues in Dunedin.

BACKGROUND

The Council, through the Community Development Committee on 9 June 2009 resolved a Theatre Facilities Working Party be formed. This Working Party consisted of Crs Hudson, Butcher, Walls and the Mayor. The Working Party met with Deloitte to develop the scope of the work needed to inform future planning for any investment in a new theatre facility.

Deloitte were engaged to prepare a report summarising the current state of the theatre scene in Dunedin, developing an overview with options for future theatre provision. This work included identifying existing performance venues in Dunedin, covering off size; existing use; limitations; and potential options for upgrading.

Within this review consideration was also given to how a new theatre venue would impact on existing venues. We have initiated discussion with the Fortune Theatre Board around their future plans and they have indicated a number of structural issues that 'constrain their ability to provide a professional environment conducive to the presentation of professional theatre'. The needs identified will require further investigation to determine what action is required to address many of the structural issues that have been identified. The need for the Fortune Theatre to be included in any upgrade to Dunedin's current theatres is based on the premise that the DCC would like to retain a professional theatre company in the City.

The former His Majesty's Theatre has also been included within the review and we are awaiting an engineers report on the estimated cost for redevelopment. This theatre has been suggested as a suitable alternative to building a new theatre on a Greenfield site. The theatre has been closed since 1972 and for many years has been used as the well known music venue Sammy's.

Collaboration with the University of Otago has also been discussed however they have indicated any decision on building a new theatre would not happen before 2014 and is dependent on the growth of the University over the next five years. The University also indicated that any potential partnership would include the venue being available as a teaching facility which would limit access and the practicality of a partnership.

DISCUSSION

Based on their review of Dunedin's current performing arts landscape, the venues and facilities available, their consultation with stakeholders, promoters and potential audience Deloitte have presented three future options to be considered by the DCC in relation to the provision of theatre venues in Dunedin.

OPTIONS

Option 1 – Build a new purpose built 550-800 seat theatre and improve existing theatre facilities where required. This option includes the construction of a new purpose built theatre on a green field site as well as continuing with the proposed upgrade of the Regent Theatre. The option of improving the Mayfair Theatre to the extent proposed by the Octa Report would no longer be required as the new purpose built theatre would largely fill the current role of the Mayfair for small touring or large community productions. The ongoing needs of the Fortune Theatre will require investigation to determine what action is required to address many of the structural and sound proofing issues that have been identified within their current venue.

Option 2 – Redevelop or modify existing theatre facilities to meet the technical and performance requirements of promoters, performers and audience. This option includes the major upgrade of the Mayfair Theatre to better meet the needs of promoters, performers and audience for shows with a capacity less than 400. Also included in this option is the proposed upgrade of the Regent Theatre that would incorporate alternative seating configurations to reduce capacity and increase intimacy for shows that are too large for the Mayfair but do not require the full capacity of the Regent Theatre. The ongoing needs of the Fortune Theatre will also require investigation to determine what action will be required to address many of the structural and sound proofing issues that have been identified within their current venue.

Option 3 – Status Quo. This option is to continue with existing theatre venues in their current state with the exception of including Stage 1 of the proposed Mayfair Theatre upgrade to provide the required regulatory and compliance improvements. The ongoing needs of the Fortune Theatre will also require investigation to determine what action will be required to address many of the structural and sound proofing issues that have been identified within their current venue.

The draft report was presented to our Touchstone Group, which included Peter Entwisle, Nicholas McBride, Nicola Robb, Peter Brown and Tom Ross. This group did not agree that Option 2 was the best way forward for the future needs of performing arts in Dunedin. Their feedback included the option of investigating Sammy's as a potential mid-size provider. The group agreed to the investment in the Regent Theatre and the redeveloped Mayfair Theatre, but queried significant investment in the Mayfair if the Council was not committed to rejuvenating the South Dunedin area. Also there was concern around the indication within the Deloitte report that 'a central' location of a theatre development was not an issue.

Clarification was provided around demand from performers rather than demand from potential theatre audience that Deloitte addressed as a gap in previous work. The performance providers consulted in Nikki Robb's report included arts organisations, companies, groups and touring companies. The performance providers were able to provide knowledge and expertise around the nature of existing facilities but also the likelihood of filling different sized venues with audiences.

CONCLUSION

Deloitte conclude the best option to meet the short term needs of Dunedin is Option 2 – Modify Existing Theatres. The pure financial business case for upgrading The Regent, The Mayfair and The Fortune is not strong. However, Deloitte believe the current venues are in need of significant improvements.

Deloitte believe an upgraded Regent Theatre is essential for the City and that improvements to the Mayfair will ensure the needs of local and community theatre are met. Ongoing improvements to meet the needs of the Fortune Theatre are also recommended and will need to be considered by Council.

Deloitte do not believe the construction of a purpose built mid-sized theatre can be justified in Dunedin. Dunedin's population including a greater catchment area is 150,000 people. In addition they were unable to identify a significant number of touring shows that Dunedin was currently missing out on and they therefore believe the 'gap' is not sufficient to warrant constructing an additional theatre. Deloitte also conclude that the construction of a new theatre would have a significant impact on the feasibility of the Regent Theatre and the Mayfair Theatre.

Dunedin City Council commenced formal discussion in 2000 regarding the perceived need for a 550-800 seat theatre facility in Dunedin. Council must decide to either include investment in the LTCCP or not.

Prepared by:

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GENERAL MANAGER COMMUNITY LIFE

Date report prepared: 10 November 2009

Attachments

Attachment One - Draft Theatre Study Report from Deloitte

Attachment Two - Touchstone Group Feedback (to be circulated at the meeting)