



**City of Kingston
Report to Council
Report Number 16-172**

To: Mayor and Members of Council
From: Cynthia Beach, Commissioner, Corporate & Strategic Initiatives
Resource Staff: Colin Wiginton, Cultural Director
Date of Meeting: May 17, 2016
Subject: Municipal Support for the 2016 Kick & Push Festival

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is share information with Council about the inaugural Kick & Push Festival the City of Kingston helped to establish in 2015 and to secure Council's approval to continue to support this innovative, community-driven cultural offering in 2016 and 2017.

The absence of summer programming at the Grand Theatre had been an issue of concern identified for some years among numerous stakeholders within the community, including City Council, local businesses and tourism providers. The challenge in the past had been that summer programming presented at the Grand Theatre often proved unsustainable because of the high level of risk involved and the fact that it failed to attract the audience numbers needed to make it work.

In response, staff identified that a collaborative effort would be required—involving multiple partners and stakeholders—to come up with a summer programming model that would be viable, sustainable and attractive to audiences. The Kingston Culture Plan also identified the City of Kingston is best positioned to facilitate this kind of undertaking so discussions with various community partners began in 2014 and seed money was allocated as part of the Cultural Services department's 2015 operating budget.

The Kick & Push Festival was the end result of those early discussions that involved the commitment of numerous theatre and tourism groups and organizations to see this vision through to fruition, including the Kingston Theatre Alliance, Single Thread Theatre, Theatre Kingston and Blue Canoe Productions along with tourism partners Downtown Kingston BIA!, The Great Waterway, Kingston Accommodation Partners and Tourism Kingston.

May 17, 2016

Page 2 of 11

The inaugural presentation of the Kick & Push Festival in 2015 ran from July 15 to August 15 and featured the work of six theatre groups that engaged 167 participants who presented over 121 events during the Festival attracting an audience of close to 4,500 people from Kingston, the region and farther afield. Its initial success along with the on-going commitment of the founding partners to see it grow over the next few years has shown the City of Kingston can function as a catalyst to help bring together different sectors to achieve innovative and mutually, beneficial outcomes.

Recommendation

That Council direct staff to negotiated a partnership agreement between the City of Kingston and the Kingston Theatre Alliance for on-going development of the Kick & Push Festival in 2016 and 2017 in a form acceptable to the City Clerk and Director of Legal Service;

That funding to support the Kick & Push Festival in 2016 and 2017 be allocated from the operating budget of the Cultural Services department to cover costs associated with presenting the Kick & Push Festival at the Grand Theatre, including venue rentals, staffing costs, ticket fees and fees connected with the Grand Theatre capital re-investment fund and some related artistic costs to a maximum of \$64,500 in 2016;

That Council also direct and delegate to Cultural Services staff, including in coordination with Recreation & Leisure department, authority to negotiate and direct the entering into of such other agreements with the Kingston Theatre Alliance and others in forms acceptable to the Director of Legal Services required to provide nine-weeks of theatre camps at the Grand Theatre in connection with the Kick & Push Festival and such other programming as deemed appropriate by the Director of Cultural Services;

That Council direct the Mayor and Clerk to enter into such agreements as set out above as directed to by the Director of Cultural Services; and

That the 2017 operating budget for the Cultural Services department incorporate funding to continue the support of the Kick & Push Festival to a maximum of \$64,500.

May 17, 2016

Page 3 of 11

Authorizing Signatures:

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY COMMISSIONER

**Cynthia Beach, Commissioner,
Corporate & Strategic Initiatives**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Gerard Hunt, Chief Administrative Officer

Consultation with the following Members of the Corporate Management Team:

Lanie Hurdle, Community Services

Denis Leger, Transportation, Facilities & Emergency Services

Not required

Jim Keech, President and CEO, Utilities Kingston

Not required

Desiree Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer & City Treasurer

May 17, 2016

Page 4 of 11

Options/Discussion

Since 2010, the Cultural Services department of the City of Kingston has been working to implement the 60 recommendations identified as part of the Kingston Culture Plan. One of those recommendations suggests the Cultural Services department direct resources “to develop a coordinated and complimentary presenting program and some concept options for a summer festival in Kingston” (Kingston Culture Plan, Recommendation number 6). Further, the Kingston Culture Plan states that the Cultural Services department is “best positioned to facilitate community discussion on the subject, analyze the community’s distinct competencies and develop a thematic focus and practical implementation plan for a Summer Arts Festival”. It also indicates that a successful festival should celebrate Kingston’s unique history in an innovative way and support a vision of cultural development focused on providing high-quality products that enriches the cultural life of residents and enhances the visitor experience.

Up until 2015, when the Kick & Push Festival emerged as a response to this recommendation, the absence of summer programming at the Grand Theatre had continued to be identified as an issue of concern among many stakeholders within the community, including City Council, local businesses and tourism providers. The challenge in the past had been that summer programming presented at the Grand Theatre often proved unsustainable because of the high level of risk involved and the fact that it failed to attract the audience numbers needed to make it work. Varying levels of success were achieved but, in many cases, the Grand Theatre itself was used as a rental venue with a singular entity being forced to assume the majority of the creative and financial risk.

In an effort to develop a viable and sustainable model for summer programming, it was identified by staff that a collaborative effort would be required involving multiple partners and stakeholders to come up with a concept that could work. It was also recognized that the success of such an endeavour would depend upon forging a shared vision across sectors along with a willingness to invest resources and expertise to mutual benefit. This work began in 2014 and it was also identified that the City of Kingston would need to invest as well in order for this to work so seed money was allocated within the Cultural Services department’s 2015 operating budget.

Throughout 2014 and into early 2015, staff facilitated a series of discussions with local theatre artists in an effort to devise a concept for summer programming that would meet the recommendations identified as part of the Kingston Culture Plan. The overarching goals proposed at the outset were to celebrate community and instill a sense of civic pride while creating opportunities for creativity and engagement as well as professional and economic development. Stated in more detail, these goals included the following:

1. To animate the Grand Theatre during the summer months and extend programming out into the community;
2. To provide local artists and arts organizations—amateur and professional—with opportunities to present their work, develop new work and nurture their skills;
3. To engage the community through programming that fosters learning, challenges expectations and that is ultimately entertaining;

May 17, 2016

Page 5 of 11

4. To build partnerships across the community and across sectors that result in programming that is truly collaborative and sustainable;
5. To provide local businesses and tourism operators with additional assets to attract visitors; and
6. To celebrate Kingston as a place that values culture, fosters creativity and offers a wide range of offerings that are accessible and interesting to a cross-section of people.

The core aspiration that developed at the time was to position Kingston as a mid-sized Canadian city that values culture and has ambitions of how cultural vitality can be fostered and shared. It was also to leverage the creative talent that exists locally and to work in partnership with a range of stakeholders across sectors to present a sense of confidence, creativity and excitement that has the potential to re-brand a community best known for its history and sense of tradition. The Kick & Push Festival is what emerged from these early discussions along with the commitment of numerous collaborating organizations to see this vision come to fruition, including the Kingston Theatre Alliance, Single Thread Theatre, Theatre Kingston, Blue Canoe Productions along with tourism partners Downtown Kingston BIA!, The Great Waterway, Kingston Accommodation Partners and Tourism Kingston.

The Kingston Theatre Alliance

In an effort to be as inclusive as possible of the local theatre community, staff approved the team behind the Kingston Theatre Alliance to help develop what eventually emerged as the Kick & Push Festival. The Kingston Theatre Alliance itself first garnered attention in October 2012 when five of the city's local theatre companies (Domino Theatre, Single Thread Theatre, Blue Canoe Productions, Theatre Kingston and King's Town Players) came together to create a site-specific production called *The Library Chronicles*. Staged at the Central Branch of the Kingston Frontenac Public Library, *The Library Chronicles* consisted of four commissioned plays performed simultaneously around the halls and stacks during the Library's regular hours of operations.

The Library Chronicles offered Kingston audiences a very unique experience as it offered an introduction to an immersive style of theatre. Each of the plays was specifically commissioned to be performed at close proximity to the audience (as well as regular visitors to the Library) and each play was directed, designed and performed by local theatre practitioners. *The Library Chronicles* was also unique because it was the first time, in recent memory, that a group of local theatre companies banded together to create a single project. The production left a lasting memory for the audience that came to experience this exciting method of storytelling however the real legacy of the production was the collaborative seed that was planted within the city's theatre community.

As a follow-up to *The Library Chronicles*, a number of people from the different groups continued to meet and to organize a series of masterclasses involving a roster of well-known theatre practitioners from across Canada who came to Kingston to share their expertise. These masterclasses attracted a wide variety of local attendees, including everyone from high school students to more experienced local theatre practitioners. What emerged was a desire to continue this endeavour and to find ways to further develop the theatre sector in Kingston. It is

May 17, 2016

Page 6 of 11

also important to note that the work of the Kingston Theatre Alliance was funded by a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation that saw the value of positioning Kingston as a cohesive and vibrant centre for theatre and theatre artists of varying interests and at various stages of personal and professional development.

It was in response to the work being done by the Kingston Theatre Alliance that staff approached the group with the idea to come up with a proposal for a new and innovative summer program to be presented using the Grand Theatre as its base. The result was a proposal for a festival that reflected the mandate for the collective and provided a strategy to build on the momentum that had already been created. As part of their proposal, the members of the Kingston Theatre Alliance mutually agreed on the following core values:

WE BELIEVE ...

- that art has the power to unite a community;
- that innovation and mystery create a common sense of wonder;
- that art is surprising, that it depends of where, when, and how it should be, and that it rethinks the places in which stories can be experienced;
- that an experience is a singular event not to be recreated;
- that diversity is the keystone of uniqueness; and
- that great art is borne out of a vast repository of knowledge, skill, experience, wonder, and love.

Using this list as a jumping off point for the creation of a festival that would be collaborative by nature, the members of the Kingston Theatre Alliance developed the following mandate:

WE WILL ...

- create a community atmosphere in art, where the unique, the new, the innovative, and the unknown share the same space, openly and freely;
- find places for innovation and mystery;
- unlock and throw open the doors of cultural spaces;
- build experiences where people can participate freely; and
- create an emotional and physical infrastructure where everyone in the community can engage fearlessly.

The Inaugural Kick & Push Festival

With this mandate in place, the members of the Kingston Theatre Alliance worked with staff to develop a multi-partner, large-scale summer festival using the Grand Theatre as its base. On the creative side, the impetus for the festival was to showcase and support area artists and to create something collaborative that would celebrate both the history of the city and its vibrant future. The tourism partners came aboard quickly as they recognized the potential of the festival to offer something new and unique and showed their enthusiasm through a combination of financial and in-kind support. It was during this formative phase that the name "The Kick & Push Festival" was devised, both to suggest something that would be unusual creatively but that

May 17, 2016

Page 7 of 11

also referenced local history by asserting a connection to the Kingston and Pembroke Railway that is often referred to more familiarly as the “Kick and Push Railway”.

After much work, the inaugural Kick & Push Festival opened on July 15, 2015 and ran for four weeks until August 15, 2015. Over that period, the Festival featured six independent theatre projects presenting 45 different performances in and around the Grand Theatre as well as spread out around the downtown core. In addition, five masterclasses were hosted along with three late-night panel talks called “Grand Central Chats” that focused on recent trends in theatre nationally and their impact on the local theatre scene in Kingston. Finally, the City of Kingston through the Recreation & Leisure and Cultural Services departments partnered with Theatre Kingston as part of the Festival to present eight-weeks of summer camp for young people interested in theatre based out of the Baby Grand.

The level of interest in the inaugural Kick & Push Festival was significant with word of mouth spreading quickly and tremendous curiosity on the part of local audiences and media. The Festival also received regional media coverage via the CBC and artists associated with the show “Ambrose” were commissioned by The Great Waterway to present an adapted version of the play in Toronto as part of the Celebration Zone put in place by the province in tandem with the PanAm Games.

The Festival broke even financially and, even more significantly, it engaged more than 167 participants during the course of run, including actors, writers, directors, designers, musicians, technicians, panelists, camp staff and masterclass presenters. The Festival also involved the help of an additional 71 volunteers who were engaged to make sure everything ran smoothly. Six local theatre groups also participated as did seven organizational partners—including the City of Kingston—who supported the Festival through a combination of human, financial and in-kind resources. The number of events presented over the course of the Festival totaled 121 and attracted an audience of close to 4,500 people. Of the tickets sold, 27% were purchased by people under the age of 30. The remainder of the audience demographics broke down as follows:

Age	Percentage
18-30	27%
30-50	30%
50-65	29%
65+	14%

Not surprisingly, the audience for the Festival was mostly local totalling 74% while another 19% came from within The Great Waterway, 6% from the rest of Ontario and an additional 1% from outside the Province. The summer camps, co-presented with the help of the City of Kingston’s Recreation & Leisure department, were virtually sold out as well and helped to ensure the Festival engaged children and young people as well as a diversity of theatre practitioners and audiences of varying ages.

May 17, 2016

Page 8 of 11

At the conclusion of the Festival, a follow-up survey was sent out via e-mail to everyone who had purchased tickets through the Grand Theatre Box Office. The majority of the respondents rated their experience as having been “really entertained” or “inspired” and 97% of the respondents said they would recommend the Festival to a friend in the future. Some of the reasons given for having enjoyed the Festival highlighted the following points:

- the use of non-traditional spaces;
- a great addition to the list of local summer activities;
- the variety of options for every taste and age;
- the creative energy and youthful enthusiasm;
- the availability of all-ages events; and
- the reasonable cost.

There was also some helpful criticism that emerged out of the survey that has informed plans for the 2016 iteration of the Festival but, for the most part, the audiences embraced what was trying to be achieved in terms of creativity, setting, scale and risk. They also indicated a desire to see more artists involved as well as more experimentation and especially loved the fact this kind of programming was being offered in the summer.

Building a Long-Range Plan for the Kick & Push Festival

From the outset, the Kick & Push Festival has been conceived of as a multi-year initiative in order to build profile for the brand and to attract a broader range of artists, audiences, supporters and funders. Even as planning was underway for the inaugural presentation of the Festival in 2015, the pieces were already being put in place to develop a long-range plan designed to activate more of the downtown along with other parts of the city with expanded programming being offered both day and night and involving a broader range of artistic disciplines. The intent is that the Festival will eventually offer something for everyone, both artists and audiences alike, and will attract more people to Kingston during the summer months and contribute to the development of Kingston as a thriving arts centre.

2016 (“the night”): Launch a the “Storefront Theatre Festival” featuring as many as 18 productions in four storefront venues over a ten day period; develop the concept of “*Grand Central*” in which the Grand Theatre functions as a Festival hub offering a combination of daytime and late night activities.

2017 (“the day”): The focus in 2017 is to expand the range of activities associated with the Festival to include interactive programming for children during the day along with the addition of other creative media such as film, music and dance to engage a wider cross-section of the local arts community.

2018 (“expanding boundaries”): The ambition in 2018 is to move elements of the Festival outside the downtown core and to work with a broader range of venue partners to establish satellite programs throughout the city.

May 17, 2016

Page 9 of 11

The Grand Theatre and the downtown core will remain the focus for the Kick & Push Festival but the evolving program as described is intended to open up new areas of endeavour that would be attractive to a broader range of artists, audiences, partners, supporters and funders. Success is intended to be based on a model of relationship building that will take time to nurture in order to build profile and increase access to the resources needed to support this kind of expanded programming.

The Kick & Push Festival in 2016

In 2016, the Kick & Push Festival is scheduled to feature six productions, including one lead off event and a series of education programs with a special focus in theatre and arts performance. The festival will begin with an eight day Storefront Theatre Festival opening on July 15 that features a range of productions presented by theatre artists from Kingston and beyond. A Call for Submissions went out earlier this year with May 11 as the deadline date and the lottery scheduled for May 13. The result of this process is expected to be an exciting and eclectic kick-off to the Festival in which each storefront will feature a series of plays, with performances running from 2:00 pm to 10:00 pm each day offering a variety of experiences within the empty storefronts along Princess Street.

The Festival will then continue throughout July until mid-August with performances opening every week across a wide range of venues, all used in interesting and unique ways. The Festival will also be hosting three local and three out-of-town theatre groups, working together to activate familiar spaces in unusual ways as well as new spaces that have never been used as performance venues before. The release date for the full details of the 2016 Kick & Push Festival is set for May 25 with tickets going on sale May 27. This year will also feature a new package deal designed to allow audience members to experience more of the Festival at an even more affordable price.

Earlier this year, the Kingston Theatre Alliance officially incorporated as a not-for-profit arts organization so has made the transition from an informal collective of theatre artists and theatre groups to a more structured organization. A Board has been established to oversee the Kick & Push Festival and the support of existing and new partners is being sought to ensure the viability of this year's endeavour. The City of Kingston is one of the founding partners whose support is needed in 2016 and 2017 in order for the plans as outlined to succeed. In this regard, the Kingston Theatre Alliance is looking to be able to access the Grand Theatre as the Festival hub and to secure a combination of financial and in-kind support from the City of Kingston as it did in its inaugural year through the Cultural Services department.

In support of the Kick & Push Festival, the Cultural Services department has allocated a total of \$64,500 in its 2016 Operating budget already approved by Council to support costs associated with using the Grand Theatre for the duration of the Festival, including venue rentals, staffing costs, ticket fees and fees connected to the Grand Theatre capital re-investment fund as well as support for some related artistic costs. The majority of this funding is not awarded directly to the Kingston Theatre Alliance but is paid on its behalf to the Grand Theatre by the Cultural Services department to cover Festival-related costs. In the event there is some balance remaining once the venue costs have been covered, funding will be directed to support relevant artistic costs

May 17, 2016

Page 10 of 11

where appropriate. This arrangement will be governed by a Partnership Agreement that staff are asking Council to approve in relation to the 2016 iteration of the Festival.

Through this report, staff are also seeking Council's support for Community Services, through the Recreation & Leisure department, to enter into a separate partnership agreement with the Kingston Theatre Alliance under its Delegated Approval and Signing Authority (15-001), and also in a form acceptable to the City Clerk and the Director of Legal Service, to offer nine-weeks of theatre camps in connection with the Kick & Push Festival and based at the Grand Theatre.

At this time, the Kingston Theatre Alliance has already secured the support of the Kingston Accommodation Partners and The Great Waterway as it did last year and the Downtown Kingston! BIA is also supporting the Kick & Push Festival through its membership who are providing venues for the Storefront Theatre Festival. Tourism Kingston has also confirmed its support and grant applications submitted to the Federal government through the Canada Summer Jobs program to support some paid positions were successful as well. Following last year's Festival, a number of grant applications were also submitted in connection with various Provincial and Federal funding programs that unfortunately proved to be unsuccessful. Valuable feedback was provided, however, that will prove helpful in formulating the next round of applications ahead of the Kick & Push Festival in 2017.

Staff within the Cultural Services and Recreation & Leisure departments are committed to working with the organizers of the Kick & Push Festival in 2016 to ensure it is well run and achieves an increased level of success in its second year. Staff will also be offering expertise related to Council's priorities as well as effective measurements to ensure that, through this partnership, the Festival continues to grow and evolve as described and that it achieves the vision as set out for the benefit of artists and audiences alike.

Existing Policy/By-Law

Delegated Approval and Signing Authority, Community Services (15-001)

Delegated Approval and Signing Authority, Cultural Services (15-177)

Notice Provisions

Not applicable

Accessibility Considerations

Not applicable

Financial Considerations

The funding needed to support the 2016 Kick & Push Festival and its use of the Grand Theatre has been allocated as part of the 2016 Operating budget for the Cultural Services department previously approved by Council. This funding will be used primarily to cover venue rentals, staffing costs, ticket fees and fees connected with the Grand Theatre capital re-investment fund to a maximum of \$64,500 with the remaining balance being used to cover some artistic costs

May 17, 2016

Page 11 of 11

where appropriate. As part of the 2016 Operating budget, \$64,500 has been funded from the Working Fund Reserve as a transitional funding strategy. It is anticipated that that this same level of funding will be allocated as part of the 2017 Operating budget for the Cultural Services department with \$32,500 to be funded from the Working Fund Reserve. The Recreation & Leisure department has also allocated funds in their 2016 Operating budget associated with the summer camps to be offered in the Baby Grand in connection with the 2016 Kick & Push Festival. The Recreation & Leisure department will be providing one Camp Supervisor to oversee and coordinate the program, facilitate registration, provide three days of City-led pre-camp training and provide access to their facilities for related recreational activities. In exchange, the Recreation & Leisure department will share in the camp revenues as outlined in their Partnership Agreement between the City of Kingston and the Kingston Theatre Alliance.

Contacts

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Colin Wiginton, Cultural Director, 613-546-4291, extension 1357

Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted

Dianne Zemba, Manager, Grand Theatre

Luke Follwell, Director, Recreation & Leisure

Lynda Breen, Supervisor, Recreation Programs, Recreation & Leisure

Alan McLeod, Senior Legal Counsel

Exhibits Attached

Not applicable