

Summary: Empire Theatre Closing Meeting

KAC Office Tuesday April 10th 2012

Facilitators: Rob Wood, Karen Dolan

Attendees: Blaine Allan, Kaitlyn Byrick, Michael Davidge, Joan Heaton, Wendy Huot, Rob Hutchison, Dave Jackson, Susan Lord, Clarke Mackey, Marney McDiarmid, Alison Migneault, Karen Peperkorn, Matt Salton, Justine Scala, Ed Smith, Rob Tamblyn, Linda Whitfield, Ted Worth.

Regrets: Leigh Ann Bellamy, Brett Christopher

What we know:

- There was a conference call between city and Empire Theatres, to discuss concerns about the closing of downtown facility
- The downtown facility is to close when multiplex is up and running, likely late June/July 2012
- Sale of Empire has a clause, we do not know the specific details, according to media report (newspaper article on January 30th), it is a non-competition cause
- No listing with local realtors for property

Questions:

- Need to know details of clause
- What role of control does city have?
- Who can purchase downtown property?
- What kind of market research has been done, and if it has, is the research appropriate for Kingston?
- Can pressure from public influence them to keep downtown theatre open (as well as opening new theatre)?
- Can the big screen experience continue by retrofitting the downtown theatre?
- Create an arts/cultural hub within the structure?

Implications to Community:

- Kingston Canadian Film Festival (KCFF) has moved downtown, Empire has worked well for KCFF, patrons and community, easy access to multiple screens and venues, if Empire is gone, festival dynamic is negatively affected, what happens to KCFF? KCFF has shown at 2 screens at downtown Empire, loss of economic revenue from people enjoying evening or day out
- Less evening traffic, lots of people traffic enhances safety for public
- Empire Theatre has wheelchair access
- Accessibility to new multiplex a problem for non-drivers, bus routes/times are problematic especially in evenings and on weekends
- Blockbuster's not appropriate for Screening Room, need larger theatre screens
- If clause were lifted, consider issues running another first run theatre in downtown

- Impact on student demographic, Film students, downtown theatre part of curriculum
- Decrease in number of people attending movies if downtown closes
- Impact on uniqueness of Kingston and our downtown, if theatre leaves
- Added costs to elderly, retired, fixed income, to travel to new multiplex

Ideas to move forward:

- If Empire can't be a film theatre, what do we propose?
- Can we repurpose this downtown building as a new cultural arts hub?
- Could the city be an intermediary?
- What kind of partnerships are possible?
- Partnership with Empire, 2 main screens, other organizations share rest of the venue
- Could Empire theatre be a live theatre space?
- New media workspace, performance/visual art space, office space, storage
- Art House independent movie theatre (250 seat theatre like a mainstream experience)
- Kingston Centre for Art and Design, accessible arts centre, natural fit for arts hub
- Petition, aim for 25,000 signatures
- We want to keep KCFF downtown
- What other affordable downtown theatre venues would be available for other NFP organizations, new space affordable, perhaps time share for screenings?
- Arts hub fits in with Cultural Plan
- For economy of our downtown need to consider importance of first run downtown theatre
- **We need to demonstrate a need - How do we start a feasibility study to determine who might be a part of this arts hub, what would the objectives be for each individual arts hub organization, identify target audience**

Next steps:

- Downtown Business Association, (Ed Smith, Rob Tamblyn) will contact Empire Theatre and report back to Rob and Karen
- Kingston Arts Council, (Karen Dolan) will organize another meeting to discuss information received from Downtown Business Association
- Next steps will be dependent on what we find out, may include information on sale (cost, clause), range of options, how is city involved, what is negotiable
- Need to remain optimistic but realistic
- Look at petition as statement of community interest that would be presented to city and broaden our target audience and recipient list.
- Without losing momentum and results gained from first petition, think about reworking and increased accessibility, easier online access and paper copies?
- Establish working group