Agenda – Executive Policy Committee - June 14, 2006

REPORTS

Item No. 1 Le Cercle Molière - Request for Funding
File FG

The Centre Culturel Franco-Manitobain (CCFM) and the theatre group, Le Cercle Molière, have requested financial assistance from all three levels of government to construct a new theatre and renovate the CCFM at 340 boulevard Provencher.

The Chairperson submits the following motion for consideration:

> WHEREAS Plan Winnipeg 2020 Vision provides that the City recognize the importance of arts, entertainment, and culture to its urban image, quality of life, and economic development by supporting a wide range of arts, entertainment, and cultural facilities to meet the needs of its citizens;
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> WHEREAS the Centre Culturel Franco-Manitobain (the CCFM) and the theatre group, Le Cercle Molière, have requested financial assistance from all three levels of government to construct a new theatre and renovate the CCFM;
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> AND WHEREAS Le Cercle Molière is Canada's oldest theatre company;
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> AND WHEREAS the CCFM has a mandate to promote French-language cultural activities and make them accessible to all residents of Manitoba;
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> AND WHEREAS there are funds in a Commitment Reserve for the New Deal Initiative first created in the 2003 budget;
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> THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that a grant in the amount of $300,000 be approved for Le Cercle Molière, with the source of funding being the unused funds in the Commitment Reserve which were previously allocated for the New Deal Initiative;
>
> BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City's contribution of $300,000 be conditional upon matching funds from the Province of Manitoba and the Government of Canada.

« Agrandir nos espaces culturels »

CREATING NEW CULTURAL SPACES

Presented to The City of Winnipeg

By

Le Cercle Molière
and
Le Centre culturel franco-manitobain

June 2006

Introduction

A performing arts theatre is a venue that places emphasis on interaction and communication. In order to make this a reality, the theatre must be a vibrant meeting place, where audiences and performers congregate to share in the wonder and exhilaration of live performance. Consequently, the design of such a facility must be intimate, warm, and of human scale, and should provide the flexibility and technological capabilities required to fulfill the vision, and the dreams, of the producers, artists and theatre-goers for generations to come.

The goal of the project outlined in this proposal is the construction of a new theatre facility adjacent to the Franco-Manitoban Cultural Centre located at the corner of Provencher Boulevard and Des Meurons Street in St. Boniface. The new theatre will house the oldest theatre in North America, le Cercle Molière, who has just recently celebrated 80 years of existence, a mile-stone for theatre in Canada.

This community endeavour is the result of a thorough consultation process with key stakeholders from the community and franco-manitoban organizations, and in which everyone had the opportunity to make his or her contribution in an open and forthright manner. All these participants worked diligently and in a collaborative spirit toward the development of this project and its eventual realization.

The completion of the proposed facility will also lead to the reuniting of two leading St.à Boniface community organizations, that is to say the Franco-Manitoban Cultural Centre and the Cercle Molière. After moving away from the Centre in the mid- 1990s for logistical reasons, the Cercle has been producing its plays in a small chapel located in North St. Boniface. By creating a renewed synergy between the two, the new venue will allow each organization to once again completely fulfill its respective cultural mandate within the community, the city and the province, as well as lead to a new era of vitality for one of Winnipeg's oldest and most respected cultural organizations.

Project Summary

In 1996, after having staged its theatre productions for 25 years in the Franco-Manitoban Cultural Centre in St. Boniface, Manitoba, the Cercle Molière had to relocate its programming activities to another site for financial and logistical reasons. The existing theatre was an inadequate facility to stage productions, as it had been designed for television productions. The francophone community quickly realized that in the long run, this was a situation that would benefit neither the Cercle Molière or the Cultural Centre, and that a solution must be found to revitalize both organizations and at the same time reunite these two stalwarts of the cultural scene in Winnipeg's French Quarter. After a series of wide-ranging consultations of all the stakeholders, both organizations came to an agreement on a proposed solution to the problem at hand.

The Cercle Molière and the Franco-Manitoban Cultural Centre agreed that the construction of a new performing arts facility adjacent to the Cultural Centre would be the optimal solution. It would provide the Cercle Molière with a new adapted 125-seat facility that met the logistical, creative and innovative needs of the theatre company.

The organizations signed a memorandum of understanding that signaled the willingness of both parties to go forward with this important project. The project has also received the backing of the major organizations in the francophone community, including St. Boniface General Hospital, CDEM, the Société franco-manitobains, St. Boniface College, Festival du Voyageur, CDEM and Entreprises Riel, to name a few.

The total cost of the project as outlined in this proposal has been evaluated at approximately 5.6 million dollars. In addition to government support, the solicitation of funds from various foundations including The Winnipeg Foundation recently confirming a grant in the amount of $125,000 individuals and businesses are being approached, and sponsorship will be secured by way of naming rights and other events. A major fundraising activity to raise $2,000,000 is also underway in order to complete the funding requirements.

Of the total, the Province of Manitoba has announced funding of $1,646,000 and the federal government has confirmed its matching contribution of $1,646,000. A proposal to the City of Winnipeg had been submitted for a $500, 000 contribution, subsequent to discussions with city officials and the mayor.

Challenges

Built in 1972, the **Centre culturel franco-manitobain (CCFM)** has a mandate to maintain, foster and promote all manner of French-language cultural activities, and make Canada's francophone culture accessible to all residents of Manitoba. Through the years, the CCFM has become the epicentre of the artistic and cultural life of Manitoba's francophone community. The present building includes a restaurant area with bar and outdoor patio, an art gallery, the Salle Jean-Paul-Aubry event venue which holds up to 500 people, several meeting rooms, office space which is rented out to various franco-manitoban cultural organizations, the 307-seat multi-purpose amphitheatre Salle Pauline-Boutal, and cultural programming presented throughout the year.

Established as a community association in 1925 by a group of Francophones from St. Boniface, **Le Cercle Molière** is Canada's oldest theatre company. Since the end of the 1960s, the Cercle Molière has produced and presented countless theatrical offerings as a professional theatre group, and its cultural programming reflects its mission statement, "*To promote French-language dramatic arts in Manitoba.*" A few years ago, the Cercle Molière celebrated its 75th anniversary with a series of promotions and special events.

After several years of live performance in the Salle Pauline-Boutal at the Franco-Manitoban Cultural Centre in St. Boniface, the Cercle Molière was forced to make the decision to relocate its stage activities and cultural programming to the Théâtre de la Chapelle in 1996, for financial and logistical reasons. While the 300-plus seat auditorium at the CCFM, the Salle Pauline-Boutal, had greatly satisfied the audience since it was built in the early 1970s, the Cercle Molière considered the facility to be an inappropriate venue as far as its artistic needs were concerned. The large stage, designed for television productions, required costly sets and the layout of the facility was challenging when it came to the designing of major productions. In 1996, an operating deficit served to further complicate the Cercle Molière's already tenuous situation, as grants for the performing arts were also decreasing. As well, the multi-function Salle Pauline-Boutal is used by many groups, such as for choirs and orchestras, television productions and pop groups, and for non-profit francophone organisations' activities. The Cultural Centre must also make this hall available to the community for their various cultural needs. In addition to the francophone community, many French immersion schools use the facility as do groups of all cultural backgrounds.

To avoid facing considerable financial losses during the years that followed, the Cercle Molière moved its theatrical presentations to the Théâtre de la Chapelle in North St. Boniface. This was considered to be a temporary solution from the outset, while allowing the theatre company to reduce its annual production costs and thus to avoid potentially serious operating deficits in the future.

Several studies have shown that the separation of the Cercle Molière from the Centre culturel franco-manitobain has had serious repercussions on the cultural vitality of the francophone community. The Cercle suddenly found itself without a viable, long-term facility and reduced to a limited number of season ticket holders, while the Cultural Centre experienced a decrease in its clientele in direct proportion to the Cercle's erstwhile audience. However, this did allow the Cercle Molière to bring its financial situation under control, as well as the time needed to embark on a process of organizational self-evaluation and strategic long-term planning to address the question of a new, permanent performing arts facility.

In the meantime, and because of the smaller space and limited options available at the Théâtre de la Chapelle, the Cercle Molière has not been able to offer as full a range of activities as it would have liked to during the last six or seven years, a situation that cannot be allowed to go on much longer lest it continue to be a hindrance standing in the way of attaining the company's overall objectives.

Well aware of this problem and its potential ramifications on the ambient culture, Manitoba's francophone community expressed its concerns as well as its desire to arrive at an optimal solution to a growing threat to the Cercle Molière's viability as an arts organization. A feasibility study was thus undertaken in 1998 in order to start on the path to finding a solution to this dilemma. In light of the results obtained through this study, and also following a round of discussions between the Centre culturel and the Cercle Molière, three possible projects were

examined; the one considered to be the best option among these was the construction of a new theatre venue in close proximity to the Centre culturel, that is to say on the same location as the Centre itself. This was also in accordance with the expressed wishes of the francophone community and its major organizations, that a permanent facility be built in St. Boniface on the same site as the Cultural Centre, the provincial hub of francophone culture.

The construction of a performing arts facility on the site of the Cultural Centre will make the Cercle Molière's reintegration into the life of the Centre a reality and at the same time provide a venue that meets the production, creative, and innovative needs of the theatre company. The Franco-Manitoban Cultural Centre has on several occasions indicated its willingness to once again act as a close partner of the Cercle Molière, and to this end a memorandum of understanding between the two organizations has already been signed.

Project Description

A New Performing Arts Facility

The new performing arts venue will first and foremost be dedicated to the theatrical productions of the Cercle Molière. During the low season (spring and summer months), the facility will be made available for other activities such as film and video production, conferences and/or multimedia and audiovisual presentations. The theatre will have two points of access: an interior one leading to the CCFM, and the other leading directly outside via a vestibule located at the entrance. The main entrance will allow clients to use or exchange their tickets, make a reservation or simply to obtain information on events, programming, and activities at the Centre. A coat check service will also be available near this main entrance.

The theatre will have a total area of 3,500 to 4,000 square feet and will accommodate approximately 125 spectators during the cabaret-style productions of the Café théâtre Le Cercle. The configuration of assorted chairs and tables will be modular so the arrangement of seats and stage will be easily modifiable into a multitude of configurations to adapt to the needs of the Cercle or other groups using the facility. The new theater includes a rehearsal hall, workshop, costume/sewing area, green room and underground storage area.

PROJECT COSTS

Theatre Construction - Cercle Molière

Federal Government	$1,646,000
Provincial Government	$1,646,000
City of Winnipeg	$300,000
Community Fundraising	$2,000,000
Total	$5,592,000

Conclusion

The project described in this proposal will undoubtedly lead to a substantial increase in the number and quality of cultural programs and services for the francophone community, the population of Winnipeg and Manitoba, and for people beyond our borders. Canadians as well as visitors from abroad will have more access to performing arts, visual arts, media arts, as well as to heritage displays thanks to improvements and renovations as well as to the creation of new facilities for the arts. A close partnership between the Franco-Manitoban Cultural Centre and the Cercle Molière will allow the two organizations to create, maintain, and promote the francophone cultural heritage of the province, and foster the continuing development of a group identity where the province's French-speaking community is concerned.

The Cercle Molière, as the oldest continuously operating theatre in Canada, and one with an impressive 80 years of artistic excellence, will finally have a permanent performing arts facility to showcase the talent of performers from all across Canada for all in a thriving bilingual community in Western Canada.

With the help of all levels of government, foundations and from individual and corporate donors, this project will help to increase and improve the physical environment in which are expressed the artistic and creative innovations of Canada's francophone community, as well as that of all other cultural groups.