



**City of Kingston
Report to Council
Report Number 21-136**

To: Mayor and Members of Council

From: Peter Huigenbos, Commissioner, Business, Environment & Projects

Resource Staff: Colin Wiginton, Cultural Director, Cultural Services

Date of Meeting: May 18, 2021

Subject: Renewal of the Service Level Agreement between the City of Kingston and the Kingston Theatre Alliance

Council Strategic Plan Alignment:

Theme: 4. Strengthen economic development opportunities

Goal: 4.2 Foster Innovative arts, culture and social enterprises

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to recommend to Council to renew the existing Service Level Agreement between the City of Kingston and the Kingston Theatre Alliance. Since 2016, the City of Kingston has entered into a Service Level Agreement with the Alliance each year to support its continuing development as a professional arts-related umbrella organization that:

- Serves and supports the local theatre sector, including theatre makers and organizations through professional development, advocacy, communications and marketing;
- Produces and presents the Kick & Push Festival, an annual innovative summer theatre festival at the Grand Theatre and other venues in downtown Kingston, featuring original works and an exciting array of local, regional and national theatre artists; and
- Situates Kingston as a centre of innovation related to theatre and the performing arts, promoting artists, theatre, tourism, economic viability, and cultural research and development.

In 2021, the Kingston Theatre Alliance will continue to deliver on its mandate as outlined above, as well as to support the recovery and sustainability of the local theatre community that

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continues to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This will include presenting the Kick & Push Festival in an altered form, as was the case in 2020, and it will also include leveraging the City's investment, along with funding from other levels of government and from tourism partners, to support artists, developing emerging artists, supporting various presentation platforms, engaging Kingston audiences and continuing to pursue broad-based professional and sector development opportunities locally.

The partnership between the City of Kingston and the Kingston Theatre Alliance was initially based on a recommendation identified as part of the Kingston Culture Plan that called for the development of a summer festival to enrich the cultural life of residents, enhance the visitor experience in Kingston and motivates people to come to Kingston. This partnership has been successful in that the City and the Alliance have been able to work together to develop the Kick & Push Festival while at the same time establishing a new organization dedicated to helping local artists, theatre makers and theatre groups to professionalize, grow and connect as a community.

The continuing development of this relationship is now even more important following Council's recent approval of the City's first ever Creative Industries Strategy through [Report Number 21-114](#). That Strategy identifies theatre as one of three subsectors, along with film and music, that have emerged as the leading areas for economic growth potential in Kingston based on trends in current performance, feedback from stakeholder engagement and market research, total community assets and overall business count and workforce momentum. When asked, local stakeholders expressed their belief there is potential to grow the sector and to drive tourism, which is work the Alliance has already been pursuing on behalf of the sector.

In 2021, the intent is to support what has already been achieved by renewing the Service Level Agreement with the Alliance to allow the Organization to continue to pursue its mandate as stated while also working to strengthen its capacity to support the recommendations outlined as part of the Creative Industries Strategy to benefit artists, audiences and the cultural sector as a whole.

Recommendation:

That the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to execute a Service Level Agreement between the City of Kingston and the Kingston Theatre Alliance that identifies the services to be provided by the Kingston Theatre Alliance and the associated funding to be issued by the City of Kingston for those services, in a form acceptable to the Director of Legal Services; and

That Council approve the release of \$47,500 from the Cultural Services Department's 2021 operating budget to support the Kingston Theatre Alliance and the services identified as part of a Service Level Agreement between the City of Kingston and the Kingston Theatre Alliance in 2021.

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Authorizing Signatures:

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY COMMISSIONER

**Peter Huigenbos, Commissioner,
Business, Environment &
Projects**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**Lanie Hurdle, Chief
Administrative Officer**

Consultation with the following Members of the Corporate Management Team:

Paige Agnew, Commissioner, Community Services	Not required
Brad Joyce, Commissioner, Corporate Services	Not required
Jim Keech, President & CEO, Utilities Kingston	Not required
Desirée Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer & City Treasurer	
Sheila Kidd, Commissioner, Transportation & Public Works	Not required

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Options/Discussion:

The history and evolution of The Kick & Push Festival, as well as the Kingston Theatre Alliance, was outlined in 2019 through [Report Number 19-082](#) and Council approved the renewal of the City's Service Level Agreement with the Alliance in 2020 through [Report Number 20-093](#). The presentation of the Kick & Push Festival represents a significant portion of the Service Level Agreement and has now been successfully presented for six years, including in 2020 in a modified form that adhered to public health guidelines while making space to present original works, support artist residencies and provide unique experiences for both Kingston and new online audiences. As in previous years, the Festival paid artists fees and provided critical employment opportunities for area artists, arts professionals and students. In addition, the Alliance delivered professional development opportunities, supported sector-related communications and marketing and offered leadership in navigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector.

The Kingston Theatre Alliance has submitted its 'Year End Report' for 2020 that provides an overview of activities, including the services identified as part of their current Service Level Agreement. That Year End Report is an internal document that is reviewed by staff to ensure compliance with the services outlined each year as part of the Service Level Agreement. Staff have reviewed the 2020 'Year End Report' and have released the final 10% of the funding owed as per the Service Level Agreement and in recognition of the fact that the Alliance has completed their work as required. A summary of selected activities included the following:

- Presented the 2020 Kick & Push Festival that included seven productions and 30 presentations in various venues and public spaces within Kingston as well as online that helped to expand its reach and impact.
- Coordinated and funded eight Kick & Push Festival artist residencies, including two Indigenous residencies on Cedar Island National Park:
 - Ando Giizhik Debajimowin - Seeking Cedar Stories, an exploration of movement by Anishinaabe site responsive movement artist Brian Soloman; and
 - Mosher Island, an interdisciplinary exploration of Indigenous Futurism by Casey Koyczan, a Tlicho Dene interdisciplinary artist from Yellowknife, NT.
- Continued partnership with Waawaate Fobister, an award-winning theatre artist from the Grassy Narrows First Nation, as Indigenous Curator for the Kick & Push Festival.
- Paid \$95,664 to artists for their work, including three paid internships for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) youth from Kingston.
- Formed strategic partnerships with 25 organizations.
- Offered COVID-19 responsive pricing, implementing a "Pay what you can afford" model with an unlimited number of free tickets available and a suggested ticket price of \$10.
- Generated strong audience engagement with 980 tickets sold.
- Launched an online repository for reviews on live performance in Kingston, created in collaboration with local reviewers, including those engaged by the Kingston Whig Standard, and shared resources and information about productions, workshops, employment and funding opportunities for the Kingston theatre community.

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- Held eight digital Artistic Council meetings with representatives of the local theatre sector.
- Provided employment opportunities in Kingston through the creation of 24 contract positions and 37 people in artistic roles.
- Leveraged its municipal funding to secure an additional \$230,806 in grants from provincial and federal funders.
- Continued to professionalize the Kingston Theatre Alliance through the establishment of an organizational brand, a year-round communications strategy and digital presence, enhanced accounting practices established with a bookkeeper and the creation of a volunteer recruitment and retention strategy.

As an organization, the Alliance demonstrated tremendous creativity and adaptability in 2020 so it could continue to fulfill its mandate and deliver its core services despite the COVID-19 pandemic. That was even as provincial and public health guidelines continued to impact the performing arts sector, including the closure of the Grand Theatre, along with numerous other local venues and the need to innovate in terms of how to engage artists and audiences while shifting performances outside and online in relation to the Kick & Push Festival. The Alliance also worked to bring together members of the local theatre sector to engage in conversations through regular Artistic Council meetings and continued to build its organizational capacity and funding sources.

Much was achieved in 2020 despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the Alliance continues to fulfill a vital role within the Kingston community and staff are recommending the City of Kingston renew its Service Level Agreement in 2021. This will enable the Alliance to support the recovery, sustainability and on-going development of the theatre sector in Kingston and to continue to deliver the Kick & Push Festival and other professional development opportunities that are especially important now that Council has approved a Creative Industries Strategy for Kingston.

2021 Service Level Agreement

In April 2021, through [Report Number 21-114](#), Council approved the Creative Industries Strategy that identifies theatre as one of three subsectors for investment and development. Along with film and music, theatre has emerged as an area of economic growth potential in Kingston based on trends in current performance, feedback from stakeholder engagement and market research, total community assets and overall business count and workforce momentum. Staff are currently working with partners to develop an implementation plan based on the recommendations identified and the intent is to strengthen the relationship with and capacity of the Kingston Theatre Alliance as part of that work.

Staff have already been revising the 2021 Service Level Agreement in consultation with Kingston Theatre Alliance staff and taking into account the recommendations identified as part of the Creative Industries Strategy and it is anticipated a renewed Service Level Agreement will include the following services:

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- Deliver a modified and safe Kick & Push Festival in 2021 as a signature event in the City of Kingston that is designed to attract artists and audiences alike who are seeking to present and/or experience innovative performing arts programming.
- Collaborate with theatre artists, theatre companies and other arts organizations within Kingston and beyond to present programming that supports the mandate of the Kick & Push Festival.
- Provide opportunities for artists to be paid for their work and create opportunities for paid employment for students and emerging professionals.
- Work with tourism partners to raise the profile of the Kick & Push Festival and the local theatre sector both within and beyond Kingston.
- Work in partnership with the Cultural Services Department and key economic development, tourism, education and sector-specific partners on the implementation of the Creative Industries Strategy with a focus on theatre as one of three main subsectors. This includes but is not limited to:
 - Participating in the Creative Industries Working Group;
 - Supporting immediate and short-term action items;
 - Continuing to offer skills and training opportunities to Kingston theatre artists and creatives; and
 - Acting as the liaison with the local theatre community.
- Grow the capacity of both the Kingston Theatre Alliance and the performing arts within Kingston through a variety of professional development and promotional activities throughout the year.
- Collaborate with the Cultural Services Department to develop performance measures and indicators appropriate to the Kick & Push Festival as well as the work of the Kingston Theatre Alliance more broadly.
- Research and develop a proposal for a semi-permanent, COVID-19 safe, multi-use outdoor performance space for the local community.

Staff also intend to work with the Board and staff of the Alliance to strengthen the governance, administration and operations of the organization that includes recruiting new Board of Directors; creating a five-year Strategic Plan; pursuing charitable status; securing operational funding to support competitive salaries for year-round staff; and completing website updates for both the Alliance's own [website](#) as well as the [website](#) for the Kick & Push Festival.

The Kingston Theatre Alliance will also be expected to provide quarterly reports along with the Year End Report that is required. It has already been confirmed that the Alliance has been awarded funding from the federal government in 2021 to support programming that includes \$52,650 from Canadian Heritage and \$44,250 through the Canada Summer Jobs program to hire students, along with as much as an additional \$180,000 in applications pending approval.

In support of the Kingston Theatre Alliance, the Cultural Services Department's 2021 operating budget, as approved, includes \$47,500 to be administered through a renewed Service Level Agreement. Annual funding for the Alliance has been reduced year over year in recognition of the Organization's success at leveraging funding from other sources, including higher levels of government and tourism partners (2020 funding from the City was \$50,000). The reduction in

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funding in 2021 also reflects the impacts of the pandemic to help control spending while also recognizing that the Kick & Push Festival and other programming will have to continue to be modified and/or reduced. It is anticipated that this strategy of reduced funding year over year will need to be reviewed as part of the 2022 budget planning process in relation to sector recovery and taking into account the Creative Industries Strategy, the recommendations identified and the implementation plan currently being developed.

Next Steps

With Council's approval, staff will meet with the Kingston Theatre Alliance's Board and staff to finalize revisions to the 2021 Service Level Agreement. Once that work has been completed, the 2021 Service Level Agreement will be approved by the Kingston Theatre Alliance's Board so it can then be executed by the Mayor and Clerk in a form acceptable to the Director of Legal Services.

Existing Policy/By-Law:

None

Notice Provisions:

None

Accessibility Considerations:

None

Financial Considerations:

Funding to support the Kingston Theatre Alliance, in the amount of \$47,500, has been allocated and approved as part of the 2021 operating budget for the Cultural Services Department.

Contacts:

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Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted:

Danika Lochhead, Manager, Arts and Sector Development, Cultural Services

Exhibits Attached:

None