

# **Reinventing the Hollywood A City-owned/non-profit Arts and Culture Hub on Vancouver's Westside**



**Prepared by:  
The Save the Hollywood Theatre Coalition**

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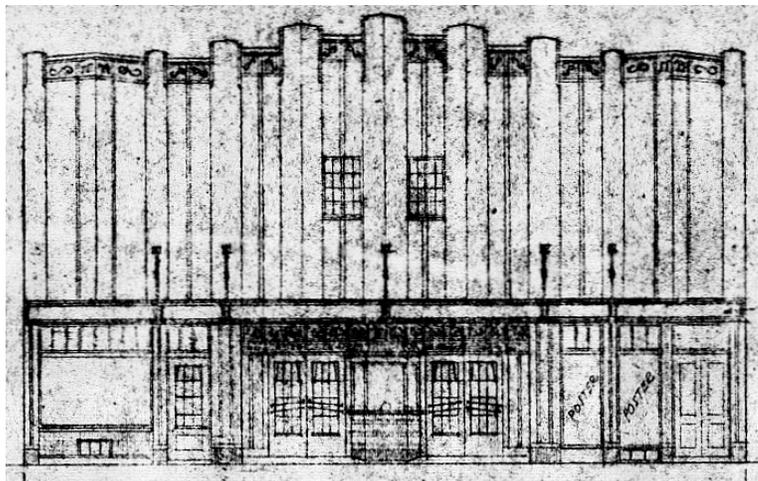
## The Hollywood's Heritage

The Hollywood Theatre was conceived by Margret and Reginald Fairleigh in the midst of the Great Depression. Cinemas offered a popular escape from the grim reality of the time and a future for the Fairleigh family in an uncertain economy. Vancouver suffered through the depression as thousands of unemployed from across Canada flocked to the west coast, “the only place in Canada where you can starve to death before you freeze to death”. Long bread lines and relief camps were common by 1931 and labour unrest was growing. While cinemas were not immune from the economic plight, they remained profitable and new “movie houses” opened while other businesses failed. And so it was that the Hollywood was born out of the Great Depression and one Vancouver family’s determination to rise above it.



Reginald and Margret Fairleigh

In August of 1932, the Fairleighs traded their home on Dundee Street, for a vacant lot on West Broadway, and set to work with Vancouver architect Harold Cullerne to design and build the family’s future.



Hollywood Theatre façade from original 1935 plan.



West Broadway – looking east from Waterloo Street in 1931

### Hollywood Theatre – Historic Context

Wall Street Crash – 1929  
 Vancouver amalgamates with municipalities of Point Grey and South Vancouver – 1929  
 Vancouver Art Gallery established – 1931  
 City of Burnaby enters receivership – 1932  
 Province considers closure of UBC - 1932  
 District and City of North Vancouver enter receivership - 1932  
 “Red Riots” – 1931 - 1935  
 Burrard Bridge opens – 1932  
 Inaugural performance of the Vancouver Symphony at Malkin Bowl - 1934  
 Vancouver’s electoral ward system ends – 1935  
 Hollywood Theatre opens doors - 1935  
 Battle of Ballantyne Pier - 1935  
 New Vancouver City Hall opens doors – 1936  
 Hotel Vancouver III completed – 1937  
 “Bloody Sunday” - 1938  
 Lions Gate Bridge completed – 1940

The Hollywood Theatre opened its doors on October 24, 1935 with a screening of Will Roger’s “*Life Begins at 40*”, a film typical of depression era cinema, portraying the triumph of principled citizen over wealth and influence.



Harold Cullerne’s Art Deco design for the Hollywood’s façade and interior decoration are also emblematic of period cinemas and a fine example of the style. In fact, while the Vancouver Heritage Register currently lists the theatre as a Category B heritage building that “represents a good example(s) of a particular style or type, either individually or collectively”, it’s arguable that the Hollywood is deserving of a Category A listing as “the best example(s) of a style or type of building”. But, what’s beyond argument, is that the Hollywood’s iconic Art Deco façade has been an enduring element of the Broadway streetscape for more than 75 years.

The Hollywood’s heritage, however, transcends its historical and architectural significance. As one of North America’s longer running, family-owned neighbourhood cinemas, the Hollywood has simultaneously shaped and been shaped by our popular culture. The Hollywood, as an ever-evolving point of cultural reference, and the shared experiences within it, are woven into the cultural fabric of generations of Vancouverites. It’s an integral part of our common heritage as a community, through the worst of times and the best of times, both individually and collectively.

The Save the Hollywood Theatre Coalition appreciates the City’s recent recognition of the Hollywood’s very significant heritage value and City Council’s related actions, including adoption of a Temporary Protection Order on November 6, 2013 and subsequent specific direction in connection with adoption of a Heritage Action Plan to update the City’s existing Heritage Conservation Program on December 4, 2013.

Further, we appreciate the City’s subsequent and ongoing efforts to work collaboratively with the Coalition and the Hollywood’s present owner to secure a

development-related solution to preserve the Hollywood's heritage and retain the theatre as a cultural venue.

In connection with the latter initiative, it is our present aim to clarify the Coalition's vision for the Hollywood's future as a City-owned/non-profit operated arts and culture hub on Vancouver's westside.

## Reinventing the Hollywood

The Hollywood Theatre operated largely as a mainstream cinema for more than 75 years. In the wake of evolving home entertainment alternatives, from television and the VCR to high-speed internet and Netflix, it is no small wonder that the Fairleigh's managed to keep the family business afloat for as long as they did. And, as a result of their determination and persistence, the Hollywood is still with us today and arguably with greater potential than ever. But, to realize that potential, the Hollywood must now become more than a cinema.



Our aim is to reinvent the Hollywood as a vibrant, community-based arts and culture hub on the city's westside. Heritage-sensitive upgrades to washrooms, stage and lobby areas of the theatre will allow the Hollywood to become a more inclusive and versatile performance venue while retaining a focus on cinema. By accommodating a greater diversity of uses, from theatrical productions to jazz, the Hollywood will attract a broader audience and build a more stable fiscal foundation. As a not-for-profit enterprise, revenues from in-house and rental programming will support broader community use.

True to its heritage, cinema will remain the foundation of the Hollywood's programming. Building on Vancouver's tradition of well-crafted repertory cinema that gave root to the Vancouver International Film Festival, the Hollywood will once again screen the best of Hollywood classics, vintage foreign and independent film on a year-round basis. Not since the heydays of revival and art-house cinema at the Ridge Theatre, in the 80s and 90s, has the Westside seen anything like it and the Coalition is determined to bring it back.

Simultaneously, the Hollywood will seek to become a westside venue for Vancouver's ever expanding wealth of creative and engaging film festivals, now numbering more than fifty and reflecting Vancouver's vibrant cultural diversity. Contacts have also been established with UBC's Film Program and with VIVO Media Arts Centre (western Canada's largest public reference library and archive of media art and independent video) with an aim to explore future potential for film-related outreach, education and public engagement at the Hollywood.

Beyond cinema, the Hollywood will host a wide array of performing arts, from theatrical productions and early music to jazz and blues. Cultural events, including lectures, public forums and symposia will also have a home at the Hollywood. Finally, as a community-based arts and culture hub, our aim is for the Hollywood to establish a productive relationship with westside schools and community centres to see that the Hollywood develops in a way that is deeply rooted in the community and central to its cultural life and shared experience.

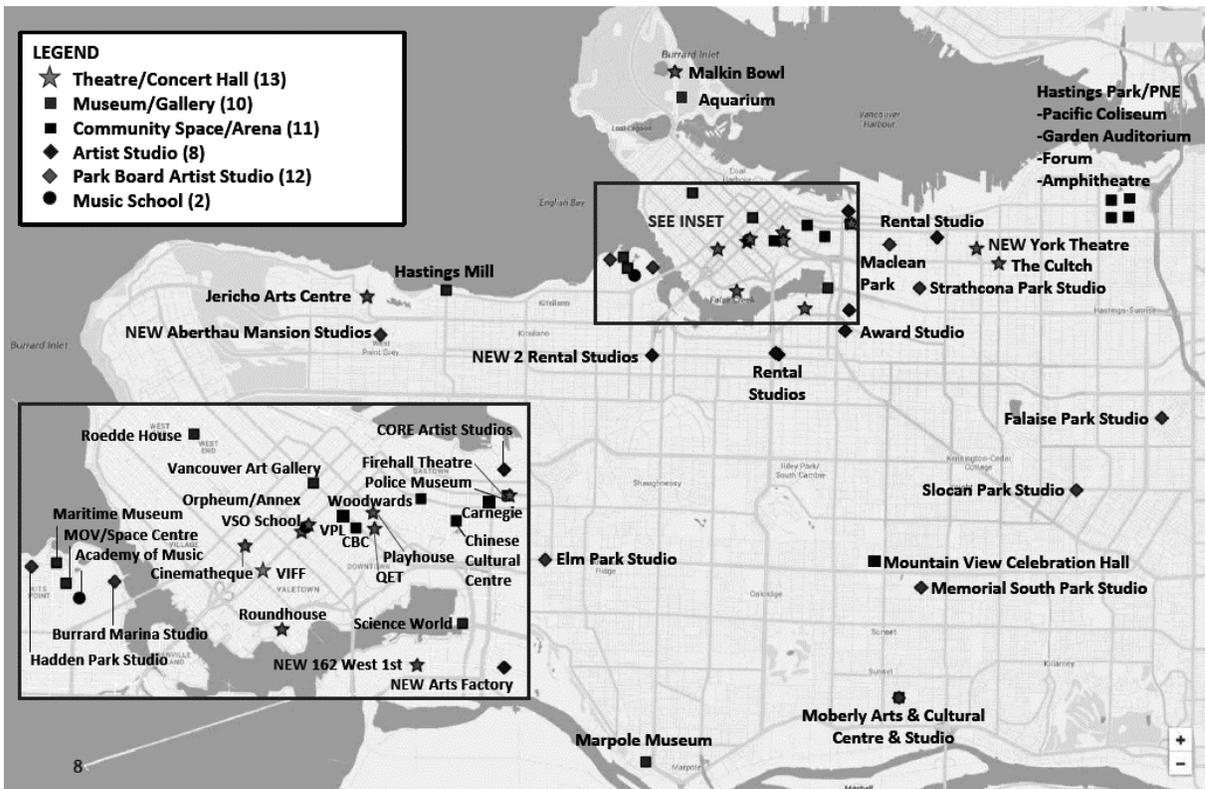
While remaining actively engaged in the city's broader cultural life, Vancouver's westside neighbourhoods have embraced the notion of "complete community", where the full range of day to day needs, from shops and services to arts and culture are met locally, thereby reducing dependence on motorized transportation. Establishing the Hollywood Theatre as a local arts and culture hub is key to further encouraging and reinforcing this progressive trend, not only by providing a fuller range of local artistic and cultural entertainment, but also by bringing renewed economic vitality to West Broadway.

### **The Case for a City-owned/non-profit Venue**

As the City has observed "cultural spaces are vital to communities and neighbourhoods, and are essential for thriving economic and social well-being. But they can become vulnerable in surging real estate markets". The Coalition's view is that the Hollywood is a "poster child" for this dilemma.

In 2008, City Council affirmed its commitment to a diverse and healthy creative sector through the adoption of a new Culture Plan for Vancouver 2008 – 2018. The Plan seeks to "increase public participation and community engagement in arts and culture" by "promoting local arts and culture" and by "improving arts access for new and under-served communities", including new facilities.

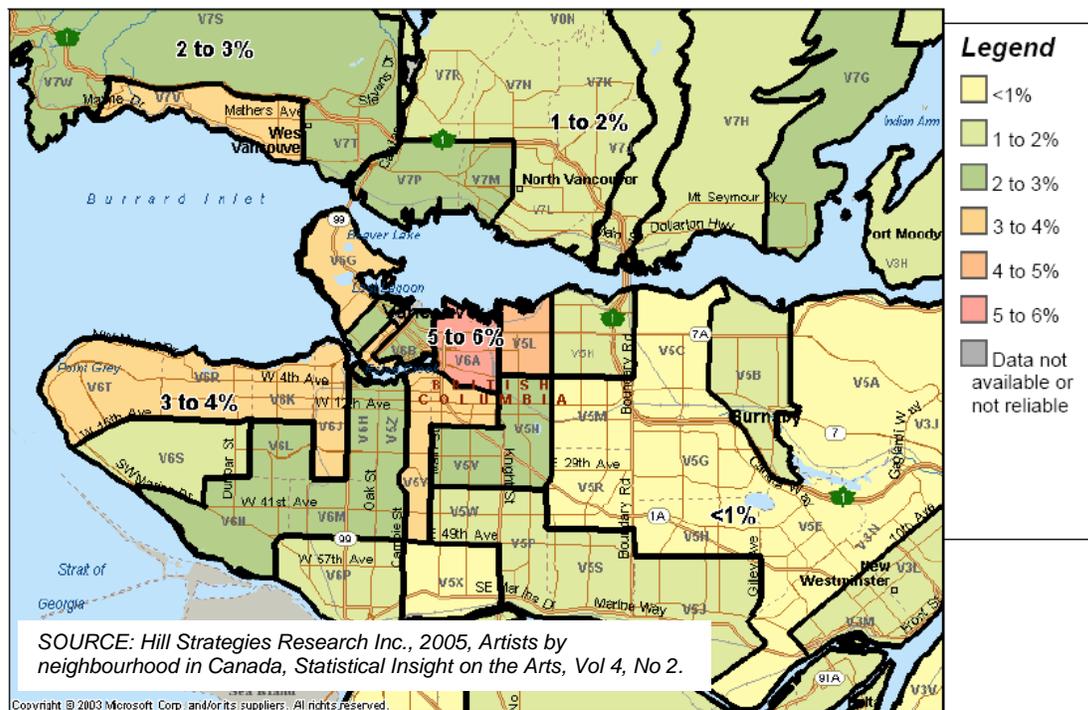
The following map provides a general indication of the distribution of public (city-owned) arts and culture spaces across Vancouver. Notably, these resources are primarily focused in and around the City’s downtown core, and the concentration is even more pronounced if the all-important focus of public/non-profit arts and culture on Granville Island is included. Beyond contributing to a vibrant and engaging city centre



for Vancouverites and visitors alike, the central focus of arts and culture is justified in many other respects, including population density and accessibility by local and regional public transit.

Notably, however, Vancouver’s Creative City Task Force also emphasised the importance of local arts and culture, highlighting “Vancouver as a city of vibrant creative neighbourhoods”. And the question is whether this view aligns with the current distribution of public arts and culture venues?

Of course the reality, as a matter of demographics, is that some neighbourhoods are more creative than others, and this is reflected in the following plan, depicting “the artistic geography of Vancouver”. Vancouverites are well aware and appreciate that the city’s eastside is crawling with culture, and thousands come from all points across the city to witness the outpouring of it each year.



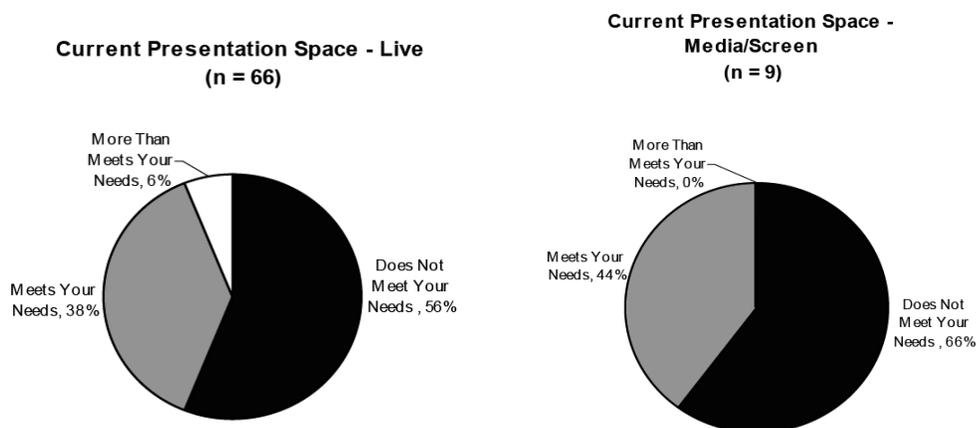
As the plan reveals, Strathcona and Downtown East Side neighbourhoods are the heart of Vancouver's artistic community, which also extends to Grandview Woodlands. This concentration of artistic and cultural creativity has understandably given root to a thriving network of studios, galleries and performance venues as evidenced by the significant number of public facilities outside the city's core area (see previous map of public/non-profit arts and culture facilities).

What appears to be less appreciated, however, are the very significant concentrations of artists residing in other neighbourhoods, including Kitsilano and Point Grey on the city's westside. Unfortunately, though, as the result of steady decline in the viability of private-sector cinemas and live performance venues (e.g. Soft Rock Cafe, Varsity, Rossini's, Ridge, Cellar Jazz Club, etc.), the artistic inclinations of these neighbourhoods are currently undernourished. Where arthouse cinema once flourished and gave rise to the Vancouver International Film Festival, and where the Vancouver Jazz Festival once had multiple westside venues, there is nothing left of it. And as the map above suggests, there is also a shortage of public arts and culture capacity.

The Creative City Task Force's view that neighbourhoods are the organizing focus of artistic and cultural activity is reflected in the resulting Culture Plan for Vancouver 2008 – 2018, concluding that "cultural spaces are vital to communities and neighbourhoods" and seeking to "increase public participation and community engagement in arts and culture" by "promoting local arts and culture" and by "improving arts access for new and under-served communities".

The City's Cultural Facilities Priorities Plan (CFPP) adopted in 2008, responds to the Culture Plan and includes a supply-demand assessment of current facilities capacity, a range of funding and enabling mechanisms for development/delivery of cultural facilities and an objective process for evaluating the merits and viability of competing initiatives.

A comprehensive analysis of the City's inventory of cultural facilities and related capacity, as determined through stakeholder consultation with more than 500 individual artists and cultural organizations, established demand for increased capacity in a range of categories. In particular, as regards the Hollywood Theatre, a full two-thirds (66%) of media and screen arts organizations using public presentation facilities, identified a shortfall of capacity. Moreover, 90% of stakeholders predicted substantial future growth in audience, and all of this before recent loss of the Ridge, Hollywood and Empire Granville theatres.

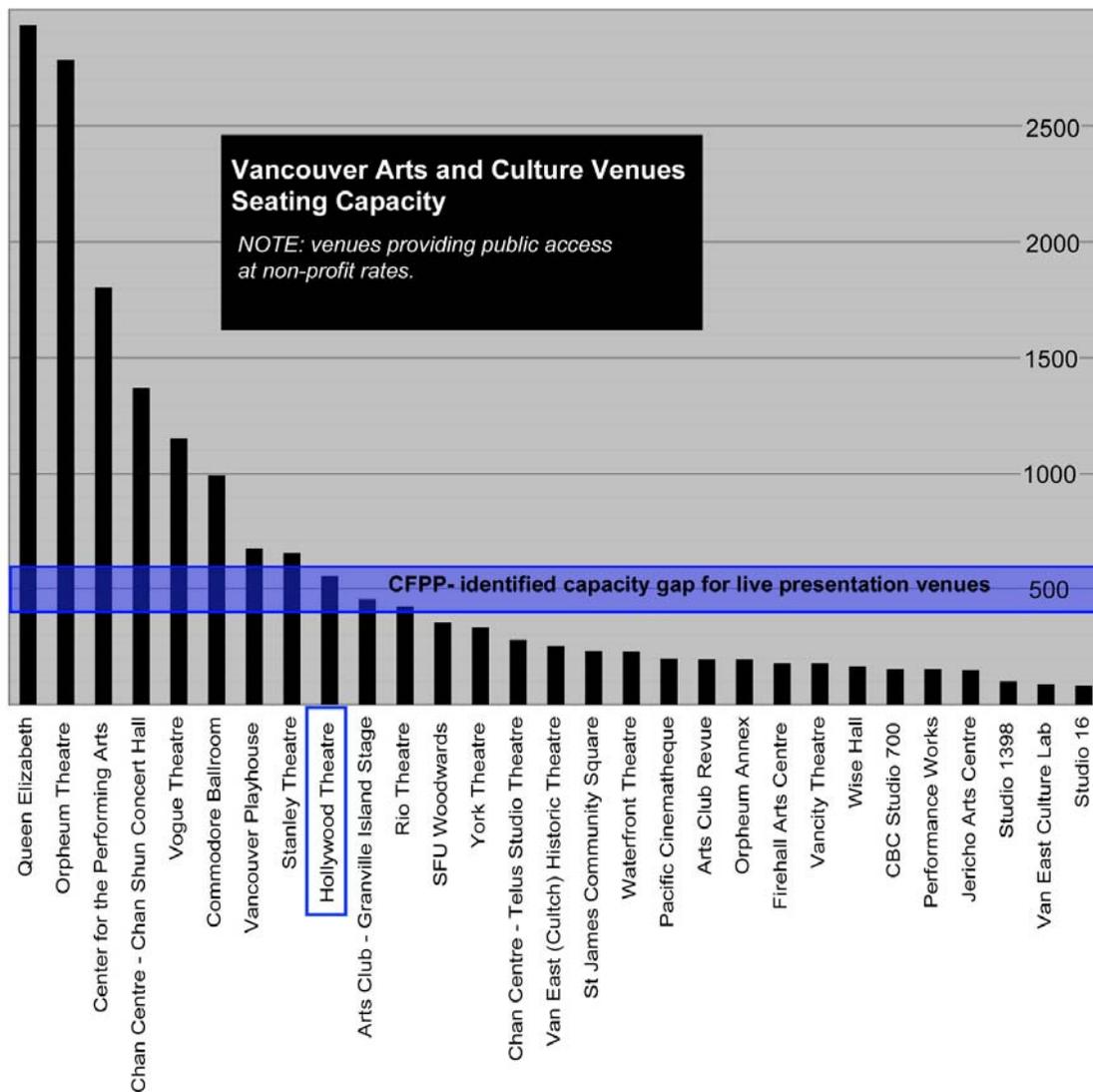


SOURCE: Artscape, 2008, City of Vancouver – Cultural Facilities Priority Plan.

Similarly, of 68 performing arts (theatre, dance or music) organizations using live performance spaces, a clear majority (56%) indicated that the current inventory of venues was not sufficient to meet their needs.

Significantly, at the top of a resulting short list of priorities for facilities development was the need for live performance venues having capacity in the 400-600 seat range. Notably, the chart below, depicting capacity for a wide range of public presentation facilities across Vancouver, confirms a lack of performance spaces in the identified range and suggests that the Hollywood is well positioned to fill the gap.

With the Hollywood's iconic heritage status already established, the Save the Hollywood Theatre Coalition believes that the City's Culture Plan and related Cultural Facilities Priorities Plan make a very compelling case for the Hollywood's future as a public arts and culture venue on the city's westside. In addition to "improving arts access for.. under-served communities", the City's acquisition of the Hollywood would address established city-wide need for public presentation spaces serving both media/screen and live performance and address a key capacity gap for venues in the 400-600 seat range.



The Coalition has already formed a non-profit society to direct the management and operations of the Hollywood and has conducted extensive market research, through direct contacts with arts and culture organizations across Vancouver, to establish the Hollywood’s viability as a multipurpose theatre/performance venue. In fact, our research suggests that city-owned cultural spaces are uniquely viable and productive, and offer unmatched long-term stability in the context of Vancouver’s rapidly evolving property market.

There is no shortage of precedents to confirm the success of the City-owned/not-profit model and no evidence to suggest that any other model is capable of delivering similar public-use capacity. According to a 2012 report by Hill Strategies Research<sup>1</sup>, the City

<sup>1</sup> Hill Strategies Research, 2012, Municipal cultural development in five large Canadian cities. Note: study prepared in part for the City of Vancouver.

of Vancouver “owns and leases to independent not-for-profit cultural societies over 27 facilities for a nominal rent of \$1 per year and tax-free occupancy”. The same model, with CMHC as owner, is in large part responsible for sustainability of the thriving arts and culture environment on Granville Island. Notably, apart from larger capacity civic theatres that are City-owned and operated, the vast majority of venues identified in the chart above are publicly-owned and non-profit operated.

The Coalition is confident that a City-owned outcome is achievable for Hollywood and is the only outcome that will enable the theatre to realize its fullest potential as an arts and culture hub for the Vancouver’s westside. While we recognize and respect the practical constraints of the City’s finances, we expect the theatre’s residual value in context of heritage density transfer and related development of adjacent properties (within established 6-storey limit) to be a manageable sum and reasonably accommodated within City’s capital budget for cultural facilities.

We are certainly prepared to do our part and are confident that the cost of planned renovation and upgrades to the Hollywood’s washrooms, lobby and stage can be managed through a vigorous fundraising campaign, with significant commitments already made. To the extent that it is required, however, these upgrades could be delayed, with proceeds of initial fundraising directed toward the City’s capital acquisition of the theatre, and with temporary financing under a loan guarantee from the City (as contemplated by the Cultural Facilities Priority Plan).

The Coalition has reviewed the City’s Self-Assessment Check List for Cultural Facilities Development and believe we have a very strong case. We are currently working with a heritage architect on final aspects of a comprehensive business plan for the Hollywood’s future and look forward to sharing it with the City in due course.

## Save the Hollywood Theatre Coalition

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